OTHERWISE, ELSEWHERE:
INTERNATIONAL DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN GLOBALIZED TRANSNATIONAL SPACES

by

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ABSTRACT

This study asked broad questions about how and why talented individuals from around the world imagine and choose to pursue doctoral education in a particular location (the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada), their experiences as international doctoral students in constructing and navigating their lives and studies in place and space, and their imagined careers, accomplishments, responsibilities and locations as they emerge from formal education with its apex of achievement. These trajectories into, through and beyond doctoral education were viewed through the lens of globalization theory and theories of capital with the purpose of understanding further how the phenomena associated with globalizing and networked social fields (including higher education, research, policy, work and migration) are reflected in student purposes, imaginations, choices and experiences. A case-study design focusing on a single institution and a multiple, embedded case research method which analyzed personal narratives were used.

The study found that international doctoral students pursue PhDs with many purposes in mind, some of which reflect dominant policy and institutional discourses of purpose for doctoral education (such as human capital development, career preparation and knowledge production). However, students were also found to utilize doctoral education abroad as a mechanism for building less theorized forms of capital, for contributing to social good, and for pursuing sometimes surprising private purposes. Their experiences in first becoming and then navigating life as international graduate students demonstrated immersion and engagement in the attributes of deeply globalized societies, including networked technologies, high levels of mobility, globalized fields of education, research and work, and transnational spaces in which borders and identities become more fluid. The growing global embrace of neoliberal, market-based ideologies infiltrated student experience and imagined careers in nuanced ways. However, while large-scale forces of globalization clearly shape international doctoral student trajectories, these forces are not homogenizing nor fully controlling of student experiences. Students navigate these forces with agency and strategy within their personal ranges of motion, and offer a multiplicity of narratives and trajectories that counter any singular notion of the “international doctoral student”. Implications for doctoral education, public policy, and further research are advanced.
The research described in this dissertation was conceptualized, designed, undertaken and written up in full by myself, Jennifer Phelps, with a standard level of intellectual guidance from my supervisory committee members.

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CHAPTER 1
Introduction to the study

1.1. Introduction of the topic

The field of higher education has been rapidly transforming over the past decade, with a new era of globally interconnected educational systems, institutions and policies emerging from ongoing processes of globalization (Marginson, 2007; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Nerad, 2010). Globalization has been understood in varying ways, but many of its core characteristics are agreed upon, including the compression of space and time due to new information and transport technologies, increased global interconnections and interdependencies, greater mobility of people throughout the world, and the emergence of powerful new transnational actors and organizations (Castells, 1996, Cohen & Kennedy, 2007). In higher education, these globalizing processes have been seen through many indicators including increased collaborations between universities and researchers across the globe, international policy convergences driven by transnational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the development of worldwide university ranking systems, an expanding, global neoliberal market imperative and funding structures related to higher education and research, and significant increases in international mobility of both students and faculty (Gibbons, 2003; Marginson, 2007). Marginson and McBurnie (2004) suggest that the growing internationalization of education “is a cause, consequence and symptom of globalization” (p. 14). The research reported in this dissertation explores the influences of globalization on higher education and in particular, on practices and outcomes of doctoral education as experienced by international doctoral students. It likewise explores how these ambitious and resourceful sojourners are agents in the production of and resistance to forces of globalization.

In some developed nations (specifically in the United States and Great Britain), doctoral education has long been an “internationalized” milieu, with major universities drawing graduate students from around the world. Even in Canada, which is the site of this study but traditionally not considered a major magnet country for international doctoral students, individuals requiring a study permit comprised approximately 20% of all doctoral student enrolment in 2009\(^1\). The international

mobility traditionally inherent in doctoral education and academic research has been a harbinger of the vast flow of people and ideas across international borders that is now becoming commonplace across many sectors of public life. Given this tradition of internationalization in doctoral education, what is truly different in the current era of high globalization? To begin to put some of the current transformation into perspective, it is helpful to look back at characteristics of doctoral education and doctoral students in eras preceding the advanced globalization period of today.

Thirty years ago, prior to the current period of pervasive, technology-driven global interconnectedness of individuals and social institutions, aspiring doctoral students largely followed a well-worn path to a university in their home country (if available) or when possible, in the U.S., U.K., or in other colonial powers. International doctoral graduates typically either returned to their home country, or immigrated to the country in which they received their doctoral education. Academic merit more frequently outweighed financial means in the admission decisions of institutions, in part because students from less developed countries had many sponsored opportunities to go abroad for doctoral education. Careers outside of academia were relatively uncommon for doctoral graduates, and there was little if any effort to address that possibility during doctoral training. It was the norm for research to be “curiosity based” and it was rarely deliberately pursued in an effort to commercialize its output. While graduate education has also long been seen to serve utilitarian purposes for providing workers in areas of national economic interest (engineering is a good example), it did not shoulder the responsibility for producing workers for a new, “knowledge economy.” Research funding was not routinely “targeted” toward fields that had high commercialization potential

That was then. Now, in the era of neoliberal globalization, individuals pursuing doctoral education face a rapidly changing landscape in which pathways into and through doctoral education and subsequent career options have become more complex, market-driven and globally contextual. Today’s doctoral students and recent graduates are confronted with negotiating global possibilities, responsibilities, opportunities and challenges that are fundamentally different from those of a generation ago. This may especially be the case for the thousands of individuals who become international doctoral students. Research universities are accelerating their worldwide competitive efforts to attract outstanding international doctoral students for the purpose of boosting their research enterprises and global reputations. Policy actors in government are structuring new initiatives and expenditures to draw, develop and retain human capital in a global competition for talent. The students who represent this talent potential are increasingly streaming across borders
to obtain what they surely hope will be the best possible education and career preparation available to them, and in some cases, to migrate permanently to new countries. Both institutional and individual actors are operating in transnational space, striving to maximize the benefits and mitigate the challenges presented by a globalized doctoral education context. International doctoral students in particular can be thought of as occupying a transnational space, where their field of agency consists of simultaneous locations—at minimum their home country and the country in which they are studying, and possibly other locales of research, activism and professional work as well. Their active participation in, negotiation of, resistance to, and transformation of the global geographies of research, culture and career is a rich and understudied viewpoint from which to understand modern globalization, within higher education and beyond.

1.2. Research problem and research questions

Globalization theory predicts that conditions of contemporary neoliberal globalization are influencing the possibilities that doctoral students imagine for themselves, and their actions in seeking to negotiate the challenges and opportunities presented in the global fields of doctoral education, research and career development. Large-scale survey data about student mobility, student satisfaction with their educational experiences and planned career trajectories has provided broad outlines of how doctoral education is evolving in a global context. Yet little is known about the actual experiences, meaning-making and outcomes of doctoral education from the student perspective, or how the intersecting agendas of policymakers, institutional agents and students play out, vis-à-vis the processes of globalization. The voices of doctoral students, both domestic and international, have been largely absent from attempts to understand the complex influences of globalization on doctoral education.

Research done in this area has focussed almost exclusively on doctoral students in U.S. institutions. It has been argued that the U.S. has a hegemonic role in higher education and especially doctoral education, giving rise to the impression that globalization in higher education is driven by the activity of powerful American universities (Marginson, 2007). However, flows of doctoral students to areas outside of the U.S. have significantly increased over the past decade. Given that a hallmark of contemporary globalization is the dissolution of borders and that a new global field is evolving in doctoral education, students who are choosing pathways and negotiating transnational space from understudied yet significant locations such as Canada can reveal important insights into broader processes and outcomes of globalization in doctoral education. In order to
more fully understand how forces of globalization are affecting the doctoral student experience and pathways into a global career marketplace, it is crucial that researchers investigate locales outside of the U.S. graduate education hegemony.

Doctoral education in an era of neoliberal globalization is frequently constructed by policy makers and institutions themselves primarily in economic terms as a means of producing skilled labor and valuable research. Countering this economic, capital-based imperative is an academic discourse about the purpose of doctoral education. Beginning in the early part of this decade, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching undertook a “research and action” project to examine the purpose of doctoral education and to work within U.S. institutions to align purpose with educational practice (Golde, 2006). The Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate (CID) emerged from long-standing concerns about doctoral education, including how the existing system left students ill-prepared for a range of careers, posed barriers to the success of women and ethnic minorities, and resulted in attrition rates of nearly 50% in many disciplines. In this work, the fundamental concept that surfaced was that

The purpose of doctoral education, taken broadly, is to educate and prepare those to whom we can entrust the vigor, quality, and integrity of the field...someone who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application. We call such a person a ‘steward of the discipline’ (Golde, 2006, p. 5).

CID essayist Kenneth Prewitt also suggests that such stewardship requires PhDs to “link disciplinary knowledge to public benefit”, citing a wide range of ways to do so, including engagement in policy debates, promoting economic development, and generally “addressing the needs of society in order to make it better” (Prewitt, 2006, p. 37).

The Carnegie Foundation’s service-inspired aim of graduate education is a significant departure from the neoliberal discourse driving much policy in graduate education. However, Rizvi argues that the “stewardship” concept can also be seen as simply another utilitarian ideology in a different guise, one which also frames doctoral students in terms of their value to others (personal communication, August 2009). What is mostly missing from the dialogue are the voices of actual doctoral students describing how they are agentic actors in determining their own purposes for doctoral education and negotiating the opportunities and challenges that they encounter in the process. Also, while many international doctoral students may be inspired by the idea of becoming a steward of their discipline (or for that matter, a patent-producing millionaire in biotechnology), their immediate concerns are likely to be more grounded in their personal circumstances,
addressing the strategic, logistical and emotional challenges of life “across borders”. Above and beyond the fundamental “Why get a PhD and what do I want from it?” there are countless other questions that international students must negotiate: “How can I learn about and gain entry to the best doctoral program for me?”, “How do I navigate the logistics of visas, immigration and border crossings?”, “How do I adapt to this foreign environment?”, “How will my family manage with me away or in coming with me?”, “How and where can I find a job after I’m done?”. This research project begins with the hypothesis that all of these issues and constructions of the purposes of doctoral education must be understood as existing within the framework and under the influence of processes of globalization.

In my practice as a senior administrator in a graduate school at a major Canadian research institution, I engage in these issues from multiple entry points. I encounter public policy that constructs doctoral students as the “highly qualified personnel” needed to make nations “competitive in the global knowledge economy”, and encourages them to be “carriers of intellectual property” into industry settings where research evolves into commercialized products. I work routinely with university administrators who strive to make their institutions “globally influential” through building an esteemed reputation, attracting international sources of funding and rising in global rankings. I also engage with faculty members who have come to Canada from around the world who participate in international research networks and wish to attract the most talented students regardless of nationality to enrich the academic milieu of their programs and enhance productivity of their research endeavours. However, these actors appear to take little stock of actual student engagement in these goals and how students’ own goals may or may not be in alignment with them. Policymakers, university administrators and faculty members in the Canadian doctoral education context have largely not benefitted from input from students on which to base policy and practice that is meant to prepare doctoral graduates to meet the demands of a globalizing world. I also interact with many international doctoral students who are making sense of, and striving to make the most of, the opportunities and challenges they encounter in Canada. They may be anxious, excited, savvy or confused about what they are experiencing, or what lies ahead in their career path, but they are all inevitably active agents in making meaning and constructing themselves, in a transnational context currently dominated by processes of neoliberal globalization.

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This study begins with an overarching goal to understand the experiences and imaginaries (Taylor, 2004) of international doctoral students and recent graduates in Canada, within the context of contemporary globalization. Inherent in this general concern is a fundamental proposition—that international doctoral students are influenced by processes of globalization and are active agents in negotiating its spaces, challenges and opportunities during their doctoral education and towards entering a global career market. To investigate this proposition, the specific research questions adopted in this study were:

1. What purposes and meanings do international doctoral students at a large, North American, research-intensive public university ascribe to doctoral study and the attainment of the doctoral degree?
2. How do these students construct and navigate their educational and personal choices, experiences and responsibilities in pursuing doctoral study and in their imagined future careers and lives?
3. How do these choices, experiences, desires, imagined futures and discourses of educational purpose reflect the influences of processes of globalization?

The study, through the use of qualitative research methodology, intends to add the student voice to the discourse on the purposes, processes and outcomes of doctoral education in a globalizing context. The University of British Columbia (UBC), a major Canadian research institution, will serve as an exemplar location within the globalized doctoral education field. UBC’s placement in Vancouver, Canada is likewise a cosmopolitan, highly globally interconnected locale and “transnational space” which is imagined and negotiated by doctoral students.

Doctoral student experience and outcomes have been studied from many angles. Clusters of recent work have investigated international graduate student perceptions of and satisfaction with their educational experience (Myles & Chung, 2003; Trice & Yoo, 2007), motivation to study abroad and school choice of international doctoral students (Ruby, 2007; Chen, 2007), and on perceived career preparation and outcomes for doctoral students (Craswell, 2007; Sweitzer, 2009). Adding to this body is a growing theoretical and policy literature on globalization and its impact on graduate education (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007, Kehm, 2009). Yet there is only a very small collection of papers that investigate directly doctoral student experience and meaning-making in the context of globalization (see Brown, 2007; Kashyap, 2011; Szélenyi & Rhoads, 2007). This study will contribute to filling the scholarly gap between globalization as theorized and addressed by policy, and globalization as experienced and negotiated by doctoral students. It is also meant to provide information on Canadian research universities as specific transnational spaces in which the
challenges, opportunities and responsibilities of globalization are constructed and played out by doctoral students.

1.3. Significance of the study

The knowledge developed through this research is expected to have significance in the areas of theory, policy and educational practice. It is an opportunity to explore in new ways the relevance of theories of globalization to doctoral education, especially as seen through the eyes of international doctoral students. It will subject theoretical conceptualizations such as “global social imaginary” as advanced by Appadurai (1996) and Rizvi and Lingard (2009), to the test of actual lived experience of individuals presumed to be shaped significantly by its pressures and processes, and will provide contours to theoretical concepts through their voices. Given that highly-trained individuals such as doctorate holders can be construed as part of the “global elite” (Castells, 2010) who are shaping the future of a globalizing world, this study may also provide some insight into questions of global leadership, responsibility and how future globalization may evolve.

The study also explores, as context to the experience of doctoral students, matters of policy related to globalization and doctoral education. Namely, it investigates how neoliberal globalization may be influencing relevant policy development, such as that guiding research funding and immigration, in a specific national (Canada) and provincial (British Columbia) context, and reacted to by a particular university (UBC). In Canada and elsewhere, recent policies in these areas have been driven by national agendas to develop and retain a highly qualified workforce and stimulate the national economy through commercialization of academic research. This study does not intend to be a full policy analysis on these issues, but by exploring the experiences, challenges and perceived opportunities of international doctoral students and current graduates, information will be gleaned about how relevant policies are being experienced by those which are their intended “targets” and provide a perspective on whether the policies are achieving the outcomes predicted.

It is hoped that this study will also contribute valuable information relevant to the actual practices of doctoral education. If doctoral education is increasingly meant to achieve globalization-inflected goals such as developing the next generation of disciplinary leaders (Golde, 2006) and preparing researchers to engage in team-oriented, interdisciplinary and international projects to solve real-world social problems (Mohrman, Baker & Ma, 2008), its practitioners would benefit from knowing more about how students are experiencing these challenges. Implications for educational practice that will be explored through the lens of student experience in this study include university
activities in developing international partnerships, the recruitment of international doctoral students, and the education and training provided to doctoral students in preparation for new career landscapes in a globalizing world. The study will also be significant in that, in relation to issues of theory, policy and practice, the particular global position of Canadian doctoral education and the experience of international doctoral students within a Canadian institution is currently understudied. As practitioners, we need to understand how our institutions and the world surrounding them are being understood and experienced by students. The study will contribute a Canadian vantage point to the broader comparative education literature on doctoral education.

1.4. Overview and organization of the dissertation

This brief introductory chapter is followed by eight subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 positions the research undertaken within a theoretical framework that explicates several relevant dimensions of globalization theory. This begins with a review of foundational work which theorizes the intensified interconnectedness of global social fields, the compression of space and time, and exponentially increasing flows of people, information and ideas in a “network society” (Castells, 1996, 2004, 2010). These building blocks of globalization theory are then applied to major concepts of social theory, including the social imaginary (Taylor, 2004) and Bourdieu’s constructs (1977, 1986, 1990) of habitus, field and agency, to develop a conceptualization of how, in an age of pervasive globalization, the “canvas of the possible” for international doctoral students is imagined, constructed, acted upon and constrained. The new possibilities afforded by globalization for students to imagine and become “world-making agents” is evocatively raised here (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Theoretical work on “transnational space” (e.g. Vertovec, 2009) and “scapes” (Appadurai, 1996) that function as deterritorialized locales for social activity across or disembedded from national geographies is also explored as a way of conceptualizing how international doctoral students and other migrants experience “in-betweeness” of identity, affiliation and location when in the liminal spaces of an extended international sojourn. This work also helps us to understand how transnational phenomena related to higher education, such as policy convergences, academic mobility, and global ranking schemes, develop. This leads to an exploration of theoretical work on the global rise of neoliberalism in social institutions, including higher education, with a specific focus on work in the area of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997, Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004, Chan & Fisher, 2008). This work is especially relevant in understanding the experiences of doctoral students, who are seen as particularly valuable assets in the growing production/market imperative
of universities, as well as potential participants in the increased interpenetration of industry and academia. The chapter closes with a brief synthesis of theoretical constructs related to globalization and its potential influences on international doctoral students.

Chapter 3 contextualizes the study within contemporary policy and research. It first provides an analysis of recent policy initiatives and other strategic rhetoric at university, provincial and federal levels that are tied to international doctoral students. Policies related to research and scholarship funding in British Columbia and Canada demonstrate an increased “scientism” and privileging of close-to-market fields and deeper ties with industry, revealing the expansion of neoliberalism and capitalist activity in Canadian higher education policy. Changes in federal immigration policy to better enable the accumulation of human capital for the Canadian workforce is also reviewed, as much of this policy is focussed on retaining the high value talent and skills that international doctoral students bring. Students themselves interact directly and meaningfully with these policies as they seek funding opportunities and navigate the potential to immigrate to Canada. This review is followed by an assessment of the overall expansion of “internationalization” in higher education. Specific polices and rhetoric at UBC regarding student learning, internationalization, and institutional vision regarding its global stature and responsibilities are reviewed as important elements of the context in which the participants in this study are charting their courses. Examining both the global policy trends and how these trends are playing out in Canada, British Columbia and UBC help us to understand how these institutional actors define the value of doctoral education and engage in what I call the “discourses of purpose” for doctoral education. This, in turn, allows us to analyze students’ constructions of value and purpose in relation to dominant policy and institutional discourses and evaluate the convergences and divergences between them.

The second part of Chapter 3 reviews empirical literature that has investigated aspects of the international student experience. To the extent possible, this review is focussed on international doctoral students, but the relative dearth of literature on this specific group means that studies on other levels of international students (undergraduate, Masters) or domestic students must be included. This literature review starts by considering issues of purpose and choice. Studies taking a “choice factor” approach to understanding how and where students choose to go abroad for study are presented to introduce important dynamics and key determinants in student choices, and in doing so, surfaces the topic of purpose—what students want from doctoral education inevitably affects their choices about where to go (Chen, 2007; Ruby, 2007). While this is a valuable starting point, the research literature that best frames the goals of this study is that
which places student choices, purposes and actions within the domain of global imagination and transnational space. Several studies which look through this lens help us understand the purposes and experiences of international doctoral students as socially constructed and situated, non-linear, and mediated by desire, imagination, identity and agency in an increasingly globalized sphere (Baas, 2009; Smith, 2007; Szelényi & Rhoads, 2007). This framing opens the floor for student narratives about their lived experience to take centre stage. The most robust body of existing relevant work, on the social relationships, identity development and academic learning experiences of international students, is reviewed next, and includes work that evaluates the impact of neoliberal policies on graduate student experience. The chapter closes with a review of studies on career trajectories and migration intentions of international graduate students. These works are another opportunity to understand how the purposes of doctoral education are framed by both institutional interests and students themselves, and to survey the range of issues at play and decision points at hand as international students take their PhD degrees into their futures.

In Chapter 4, the research design chosen for this study is described and justified as the best approach for apprehending the research questions. Methods for site selection, sampling, participant recruitment, data collection and analysis are detailed. Issues related to my multiple positionings as a researcher, a migrant, a doctoral student researching other doctoral students, and my role as a professional administrator in the Graduate School at the institutional research site are discussed, with particular emphasis on bolstering data validity in this context.

Chapters 5 through 8 present the findings of the study. Chapter 5 offers an orientation to the findings chapters, describes the use and presentation of data in these chapters, and introduces major themes in the student narratives: globalizing imaginations and social fields, agency and its bounds, mobility and transnational space, and neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education. It also presents a deeper analysis of an overarching theme of the study, the discourses of purpose for doctoral study, which were engaged by study participants and their overall level of significance. The subsequent three chapters further explore these themes and discourses as they appear through three phases of what I call the “student pathway”, foregrounding student voices through the substantial use of interview excerpts.

Chapter 6 focuses on the beginning of the student pathway, from early imaginings of education and life “otherwise and elsewhere” from what they had known, to accessing information about options and possibilities, to ultimately choosing to come to Canada, Vancouver and UBC. In this chapter, we see how students develop and often expand the educational habitus of their earlier
socialization, forming a more globalized imagination of the possible through tapping into networked information sources and globally mobile others. We also learn about the considerations that were most significant for students in choosing their particular paths to doctoral study abroad.

Chapter 7 explores the living and learning experiences of study participants as they navigate the transnational social, cultural and academic spaces of UBC, Vancouver and Canada. The “living” component of the chapter focuses on the ways in which participants encounter and negotiate the spaces between where they’ve come from and their new milieus, experiencing shifts in their senses of home, belonging and affiliation, and forming new social networks. This discussion draws upon Gargano’s assertion that viewing international student experience within the theoretical framework of transnational social fields “refutes the generalization or homogenization of international students and acknowledges simultaneity of locality and multiplicity in identities” (2009, p. 337). The chapter then turns to student learning experiences as researchers, teachers and proto-professionals, focusing on their crucial relationships with their research supervisors, engagement with global academic communities and other ways of developing “career capital” for the next phases of their lives. This section also presents findings on student experiences, both positive and negative, which signify the increased neoliberalism and market imperatives in doctoral education.

The final stage of the “student pathway”, imagined and planned careers and futures, is the topic of Chapter 8. Here we return most prominently to themes of the global imaginary and the discourses of purpose for doctoral education. The chapter begins with an assessment of the types of careers students imagine and are planning for, the next steps they are taking, and the barriers and constraints they face in pursuing careers. The discussion then moves to explore students’ reflections on their desired career achievements and the responsibilities of PhD degree holders that they assume. These narratives reveal a great deal more about the fundamental purposes students ascribe to their doctoral journey. The chapter concludes by delving into how students are imagining their future mobility/stability, place and home, as well as their careers in context of other personal goals and obligations. From this vantage point, we understand further the influences and pressures of globalization on how students intend to navigate their lives as social agents and PhD holders.

The final chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 9) presents a wide-ranging and integrative discussion of the findings of the study and the conclusions that may be drawn from it. In this chapter we return to the primary themes of the study and assess their presence and meaning across the stages of the student pathway. This leads us to grapple with what the student narratives
ultimately have taught us about the multi-faceted influences of globalization on contemporary doctoral education and the students who have crossed borders into Canada to pursue it, as well as how theories of globalization are supported or confronted by their experiences. A forward view is taken in a discussion of the implications of these findings for both the practice of doctoral education and further research that would deepen our understanding of the international doctoral student sojourn in a globalizing world.
CHAPTER 2  
Theoretical framework of the study

2.1. Introduction to chapter

It is now clear that the world’s major social structures and institutions have been rapidly transforming and growing more deeply interconnected through ongoing processes of globalization. One encounters many conceptualizations of globalization phenomena in theoretical literature, attesting to its complex and contested nature. A comprehensive characterization is offered by Beerkens (2004), who defines globalization as: “a process in which basic social arrangements (like power, culture, markets, politics, rights, values, norms, ideology, identity, citizenship, solidarity) become disembedded from their spatial context (mainly the nation-state) due to the acceleration, massification, flexibilisation, diffusion and expansion of transnational flows of people, products, finance, images and information” (p. 12).

Beerkens’ definition captures several theoretical concepts of importance to this study on the experiences and imagined possibilities of international doctoral students. Facets of globalization immanent in his definition include four which particularly inform this study: the technology-driven “network” as core organizing social structure (Castells, 1996, 2004); global social imaginary as a canvas for the possible (Appadurai, 1996; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009); disembedded transnational space as a global location of lives and institutions (Massey, 1993; Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2003, Vertovec, 2009) and the rise of neoliberalism as the globally dominant political-economic ideology (Harvey, 2005). Each of these concepts has been theorized significantly, drawing at times upon other foundational social theory, such as Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of social fields, habitus and agency (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). These theoretical dimensions are each intertwined with the others, being mutually constitutive and part of a larger conceptualization of globalization theory. Indeed, the concepts are difficult to separate meaningfully, especially given that networked interconnectivity is the fundamental structure underlying the vast transformations of globalization.

Higher education, one example of a worldwide social structure, is inevitably being shaped by the forces of globalization. Stated broadly by Simon Marginson, “Although most activity in higher education is nation-bound, a distinctive global dimension is growing in importance, connecting with each national system of higher education while also being external to them all” (Marginson, 2008, p. 303). Woven together, these four foundational concepts—network society, global social imaginary,
transnational space and neoliberal ideology--form the theoretical framework from which the central phenomena of interest in this research project will be investigated. This research looks through the lenses of these ideas into the lived experience and subjective awareness of international doctoral students. In this chapter, these component parts of globalization theory will be explored individually, with connections and syntheses made between them when indicated, and applied to questions of how the forces of globalization are shaping higher education worldwide. A particular focus, aligned with the research questions of this study, is the relationship of these theoretical constructs to the possibilities imagined and challenges encountered by international doctoral students.

### 2.2. The “Network Society”

One of the most influential theories within recent thinking on globalization has been advanced by Manuel Castells, whose concept of “network” has become the dominant metaphor for the ways information, ideas, capital and people move and co-exist in a global system. Castells asserts that the “network society” (1996) is a network-based social structure, driven by advances in micro-processing technologies, in which information and its rapid communication, emerges as the fundamental basis of social organization in human activity. Castells calls this trend, and the mode of production emerging from it “informationalism” in contrast to “industrialism”. Informationalism is “the technological paradigm that constitutes the material basis of early twenty-first century societies” (p. 8), and indicates the extension of human capacity for information processing and communication beyond that which previously underlay basic social systems.

In Castells’ theorization, the network structure consists of interconnected “nodes”, that is, “places connected by electronically powered communication networks through which flows of information circulate and interact” (2004, p. 36). A network has no center, only interconnected hubs (nodes) of activity and information processing. Protocols of communication make it possible to connect to the entire network from any node, and no node can act entirely independently of the network. Every node within the network is, by definition, necessary for the network to achieve its goals (otherwise it is phased out), and is connected to and has potential influence on every other element in the network. A node is part of a network or not, based on an inclusion/exclusion binary logic, so an element (such as a person, organization or idea) that is not considered to be part of the network, is excluded from its dynamics of connection and mutual influence. Networks are characterized and gain their power by flexibility (ability to be reconfigured due to changing
environments), scalability (ability to expand or shrink with relative ease) and survivability (due to their configuration as clusters of separate nodes, any of which can be eliminated without destroying the network itself.

The network-based social structure has compressed our experience of time and space by allowing for instantaneous and asynchronous communication across the entire globe and making international travel (for those who can afford it) commonplace and quick. Notions of “near” and “far” and “fast” and “slow” have become entirely re-defined. In Castells’ conceptualization, the network-based organization structure and technologies have led to the development of a “space of flows” in which there exists “the possibility of practicing simultaneity (or chosen time in time-sharing) without contiguity” (2004, p. 36), such as now occurs digitally in global financial markets, global media networks, and world wide web-based communications. This is in contrast to the “space of places”, where time, practices and functions are contiguous and based in a specific locality. As a simple example common to the academic milieu, if I am collaborating on a paper with someone in South Africa, we can place our draft in a shared web-based mechanism such as Google documents (a space of flows), rather than it being confined to either of our locations. We can log-in simultaneously to collaborate on the document, while discussing in real-time (and for free) using chat or Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies. What thirty years ago would have been a costly and time-consuming (and therefore rare) process of collaboration is now normative.

Castells concedes that the “network” is not a twenty-first century phenomenon—indeed, even in antiquity, societies reached across the bounds of their localities to form networks for the purpose of obtaining resources, communicating ideas and securing power. However, these societies (and all societies until the rise of the network society) were structured based on “vertical-hierarchical organization” (p. 5), meaning that power and resources were concentrated towards the top of vertical organizations such as states, churches, armies, corporate headquarters and other bureaucracies. Castells argues that based on the communication and transport technologies that were available at the time, the vertical-hierarchical organization was the most efficient social structure:

The networked form of social organization had material limits to overcome, limits that were fundamentally linked to available technology. Indeed, networks have their strength in their flexibility, adaptability, and self-reconfiguring capacity. Yet, beyond a certain threshold of size, complexity, and volume of exchange, they become less efficient than vertically organized command and control structures, under the conditions of pre-electronic communication technology (p. 5, emphasis in original).
Over time, and with the introduction of more technologically sophisticated modes of production and transport, network-based organization began to emerge as a possibility.

According to Castells, the network society has arisen as a result of the happenstance convergence of three major social forces in the 1960s and 1970s—the crisis of industrialism and subsequent post-Fordist transformation of production, the Western sociocultural movements which shifted social mores towards personal freedom over static expectations of life courses and social roles, and the revolution of micro-processing in information and communication technology. These intertwined and mutually reinforcing phenomena have led to a unique and large-scale social restructuring where “the culture of freedom was decisive in inducing network technologies which, in turn, were the essential infrastructure for business to operate its restructuring in terms of globalization, decentralization, and networking” (Castells, 2004, p. 22).

For Castells, it is the instantaneous interconnectivity, flexibility, reconfigurability and expandability of networks that makes the current era properly termed the “network society”, rather than simply the “information” or “knowledge” society. How this information and knowledge is constructed, moves, and transforms via digital technologies both characterizes and is transforming basic contemporary social structure. This is, according to Castells, fundamentally a globalizing phenomenon:

Digital networks are global, as they know no boundaries in their capacity to reconfigure themselves. So, a social structure whose infrastructure is based on digital networks is by definition global. Thus, the network society is a global society. However, this does not mean that people everywhere are included in these networks. In fact, for the time being, most are not. But everybody is affected by the processes that take place in the global networks of this dominant social structure. This is because the core activities that shape and control human life in every corner of the planet are organized in these global networks: financial markets; transnational production management, and the distribution of goods and services; highly skilled labor; science and technology; communication media, culture, art, sports; international institutions managing the global economy and intergovernmental relations; religion; the criminal economy; and the transnational NGOs that assert the rights and values of a new, global civil society (2004, p. 22).

This constellation of networks with global reach creates conditions under which social phenomena that occur in a particular place in the world can be immediately and widely known and influential in others.

2.2.1. The network society and higher education. Although Castells does not address the context of higher education directly in his work, it is clear that the rise of the network society has profound
implications for higher education as a global endeavour. My previous example of cross-border collaboration on a paper is a micro-instance of much larger processes of transformation. Universities are now networked in a global field of mutual influences and activity. They are inherently involved with many social phenomena which are now subject to networked global circulation: research and knowledge production, teaching and learning, language, cultural production and interactions, and flows of human and economic capital. They are situated within globalized markets and policy networks, and ranked on global ‘rating’ schemes, all powered by networked nodes of information sharing (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Some of these phenomena will be explored further in a subsequent section on the “transnational space” in which universities operate. Two other applications of network society theory can be utilized here to demonstrate the broad-ranging influence of network logic and practice on the realm of higher education, and therefore on doctoral students—the transformation of the nature of work and careers, and the use of network technologies in higher education practices.

2.2.1.1. The transformation of work. Universities are concerned with the preparation of individuals to enter an employment market now transformed by the network society. Because this research has a focus on the imagined and planned career trajectories of doctorate holders, a discussion of work and employment in the network society is relevant here. In his 2010 second edition of The Rise of the Network Society, Castells provides a provocative analysis of “the transformation of work” in the regime of informationalism. Looking at trends in highly developed countries, he makes a general observation that employment overall is becoming more characteristic of informational societies, with a steady decline of agricultural and manufacturing jobs, the formation of a “white collar proletariat made up of clerical and sales workers” and a generally polarizing work force where both “low level” service positions and “high level” managerial, professional and technical jobs are increasing (Castells, 2010, p. 244). Nations have specific labor profiles which increasingly reflect their articulation to the global economy rather than domestic economies (i.e. U.S., U.K. and Canada are more engaged in the global “service economy” while Japan and Germany are articulated to the global “industrial production economy.” As Castells puts it, “as economies rapidly evolve toward their integration and interpenetration, the resulting employment structure will largely reflect the position of each country and region in the interdependent, global structure of production, distribution and management” (2010, p. 247). Despite this interdependency of the global economy, Castells also argues that there is still no true
“global labor market” for the vast majority of workers, due to the constraints of institutions, culture, borders and xenophobia. Even with increasing work-related migration, “there is not, and will not be in the foreseeable future, a unified global labor market” (2010, p. 251).

Where do doctoral degree recipients fit into this picture? Castells does not speak directly to level of education in the labor force, but not surprisingly he sees the highly-skilled worker as having a substantial advantage in the labor market of the network society. He describes a fundamental divide in the new division of labor and how it is valued, largely driving the further polarization of low level/high level employment. The divide is between “self-programmable” and “generic” labor. Generic labor has low value in a network, with associated tasks “being replaced by machines or decentralized to low-cost production sites” (2004, p. 26). Self-programmable labor has “autonomous capacity to focus on the goal assigned to it in the process of production, find the relevant information, recombine it into knowledge, using the available knowledge stock, and apply it in the form of tasks oriented toward the goals of the process” (2004, p. 26). The skills required for self-programmable labor sound very much like those that doctoral education purports to develop: the ability to autonomously search for and recombine knowledge, the application and mobilization of knowledge toward goals, and a creative capacity for developing new knowledge. Castells emphasizes that such self-programmable labor requires integration with networks in order for its productivity potential to pay off. Knowledge developed in isolation does not benefit from or contribute to the network. This too reflects the rising importance of collaborative work, knowledge mobilization and global research networks in the academy.

In his 2010 update, Castells suggests several dimensions of a new division of labor that speaks to the potential value of the highly skilled/highly educated worker (at least, perhaps, in certain disciplines). In terms of the roles that create value in a production process based on information technology, he cites roles such as “commanders” (strategic decision-makers), “researchers” (innovators), “integrators” (management of decisions, innovation and execution), “operators” (autonomous, task-oriented workers), and “the operated” (those who do pre-programmed tasks that cannot be automated) (2010, p. 259). He combines this with another typology reflecting the need for and capacity of networking for the worker to complete their tasks: the “networkers” (those who set up connection with others at their own initiative), the “networked” (those who are ‘on-line’ in the network, but not active agents in determining the nature of their involvement) and the “switched off” (those who are in prescribed tasks characterized by non-interactivity with others). Although Castells relates these typologies directly to those working in the
information technology field, it is easy to extend the descriptors to other domains where innovation is a key element to production.

Castells’ analysis predicts that the transformed world of work in the network society privileges the highly skilled in innovation-centric fields. Depending on what is meant by “innovation”, this could be a descriptor of nearly any doctoral student. If innovation means the development of new products or services for a market economy, the rosy prognosis may become more limited to those doctoral students working in close-to-market fields. This situation will be considered further in discussions around neoliberalism and market imperative in higher education. Still, with a growing emphasis globally on integrating “professional skills training” into doctoral education, many doctoral students across disciplines may be prepared to be self-programming “commanders”, “researchers” and “integrators” in a wide variety of career settings. Castells would likely predict that the extent to which these individuals are the “networkers” rather than the “networked” or the “switched off” will have a major influence on the value they hold in the network society.

Ultimately, while emphasizing that the majority of workers do not access a global labor market, Castells does acknowledge that there exists a “global market for a tiny fraction of the labor force, concerning the highest-skilled professionals in innovative R&D, cutting-edge engineering, financial management, advanced business services, and entertainment” (2010, p. 250). Interesting, given his own biography (professor at elite universities in the U.S., Spain and the U.K., Fellow of European, Spanish and British academies, holder of 14 honorary doctorates from universities around the world and author of works translated into 20 languages), that he does not include academic theorists in his list of individuals for whom there is a global market. It is a given that the doctoral degree is a passport to the global academic market, as a necessary, but not sufficient qualification. This research project is an opportunity to understand how some of these highly trained/highly skilled doctorate holders in various fields and from throughout the world imagine their career prospects in a globalized world of work.

2.2.1.2. Network technologies and the university. One critique of network society theory is that the network is often reified as an inevitable, self-propelling force that is seen to live apart from social influence. These critiques remind us that “while networked technology has a materiality and is a social agent in its own right, the potentialities the network form are not defined from the outset by a set trajectory but are socially embedded and therefore highly variable” (Lewis, Marginson &

Snyder, 2005, p. 71). In a study focused on the application of network society technologies to higher education, these authors investigated the implementation of information and communication technologies in a cluster of universities. They found tensions between emancipatory and oppressive discourses of the network, and a multi-faceted reality that reflected both views as universities grappled with the integration of powerful new technologies into their complex mandates. Network technology was seen and used by university actors as both a tool for expansive, flexible, devolved and participatory collaboration within the institution, as well as a device for advancing centralized control and surveillance of academic activity and the commodification of academic processes and outputs. Lewis, Marginson & Snyder argue that universities, “as perhaps the pre-eminent producers of knowledge in contemporary society and as organisations that have over the past decade been working within sophisticated, technologically mediated global networks” are the ideal organizational context in which to question and test the presumptions of network society theory (2005, p. 60). Using universities as an exemplar, they conclude that network theory must acknowledge that networks are not the generalizable contents of society, but an organizational feature of them which are defined and shaped by complex social specificity (p. 72).

Castells himself appears to accept this socially embedded view of network technologies. While he argues that the new organizing principle of social structure at the turn of the twenty-first century is the global network, he does not predict that this will lead to global monoculture, dislocated from any particulars of geography. Instead, his thesis is that the network society is necessarily manifested in unique ways across a multiplicity of cultures and locations, while at the same time creating a global commonality in real time which has never before been so accessible or influential. As Castells states it, “Thus, not only does it deploy its logic in the whole world, but it keeps its networked organization at the global level at the same time as it makes itself specific in every society” (2004, p. 38).

2.2.2. Summary. Castells’ foundational work in explicating the mechanisms by which the world is becoming globally interconnected is extremely valuable in helping us understand how other elements of globalization theory have arisen and function. His conceptualization of the network society powered by digital information technology is a sort of metaphorical DNA of globalization theory—the basic building block on which understandings of other phenomena of globalization depend. The spaces and flows of the network society described by Castells are now inherent in all
major social systems, including worldwide higher education. As we will see, notions of globally
networked nodes of influence and cross-border flows of people, ideas, images and capital arise
continuously in attempts to theorize modern globalization and its impact on higher/doctoral
education and those that engage in it. This study affords an opportunity to evaluate the
pervasiveness and influence of these globalized networks in social fields, including higher education,
as experienced by international doctoral students.

2.3. A world of possibilities? Globalizing the social imaginary

The network society infrastructure has enabled people to access the world’s vast
compilation of ideas, cultures, life stories and actual locations in unprecedented ways. What does
this mean for the range of possibilities individuals can now imagine for their own lives? How have
the forces of globalization impacted the repertoire of conceptualizations and actions available to us,
and affected our ability to employ human agency in grasping the possibilities we can imagine? The
journeys of migrants (including international doctoral students) are perhaps the most vivid
representations of these questions in lived experience. Several theoretical constructs help us
apprehend the canvas on which international doctoral students and recent graduates imagine and
construct their lives.

2.3.1. A Bourdieusian starting point. Over the course of four decades, French sociologist Pierre
Bourdieu developed a highly influential unified sociological framework for understanding
fundamental social processes such as structure, power and human agency. Particular elements of
his theory are helpful in constructing a foundation from which to investigate the social context of a
globalizing world and the practical activity of those within it. Specifically, the concepts of field,
capital, habitus and agency and their interrelations are of particular use in establishing a theoretical
base for this research project. I do pause to note here that while I use Bourdieu’s framework here
as a set of grounding “sensitizing concepts”, it is not the core of my theorization of international
doc toral students in globalized transnational space. I will elaborate on this statement subsequent to
this relatively brief exploration of Bourdieu’s social theory.

2.3.1.1. Fields and Capital. Bourdieu uses the term “social field” to indicate realms of social
activity such as religion, politics and education, and to identify the contexts in which social actors
take up relative positions of power. Much like the structure that Castells proposes about
“networks”, Bourdieu’s fields are conceptualized as largely autonomous, driven by their own
internal logics, rules and valuation schemes, and are based on an inclusion/exclusion binary. Power within fields is conceptualized as “capital”, expanding from the classic Marxian economic perspective of “surplus value” leading to profit (Lin, 2001). In a general sense, capital is the resources that can be appropriated for benefit within a given field.

Capital is recognized by Bourdieu and others in various forms: economic (ability to command economic resources); human (skills and knowledge that is convertible to economic value); cultural (ability to reproduce prevailing cultural values and legitimized knowledge, thereby sustaining power in dominant social structures); social (resources and power returning from affiliations with social networks and agents) and symbolic (representational assets, such as prestige or reputation, that are recognized as legitimate on specific matters) (Bourdieu, 1990; Lin, 2001, Adamuti-Trache, 2010). Capital is field-specific: “the structure of the field, i.e., the space of positions [is homologous to] the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits...which are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu, 1993, p.30). Capital becomes “a force inscribed in objective and subjective structures...It is what makes the games of society...[It] is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible and impossible” (Bourdieu 1986, p.46). Inevitably then, capital is competed for within fields, both in terms of agents having the influence to determine what constitutes capital (value) within the field, and once determined, having the ability to possess it. The strategies for and outcomes of the competition for capital within a field is termed “position taking” by Bourdieu.

Turning the lens of fields, capital and position-taking to higher education (as Bourdieu himself did), we can view the globalized system of higher education as a field, in which all forms of capital are relevant and in play. Education, and specifically educational credentials, is a primary carrier and signifier of human capital worldwide, with the doctoral degree in particular representing significant human and symbolic capital. The production (and re-production) of social capital, in the form of assets emerging from linkages at both individual (student, faculty, administration) and institutional levels is also intrinsic to higher education and is now expanding outward in the context of globalized higher education field. The global dominance of neoliberal state policies has made the accumulation and distribution of economic capital within and across universities a constant strategy game. Forms of capital generated in the higher education field once circulated primarily within national or well-established international pathways (such as the once well-trodden route of doctoral students from Africa to Commonwealth universities). Now, the network society has opened multi-
directional global channels of capital flow in higher education and all social domains (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). The impacts of globalized academic mobility and the influence of global neoliberalism and circulation of economic capital in higher education will be addressed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Marginson & Considine (2000) argue that for research-intensive universities, it is prestige and world standing (in other words, symbolic capital) that are the most valuable form of capital, with all other forms being in service to global institutional prestige. In an incisive essay on higher education as a global field, Marginson (2008) draws on Bourdieusian notions to explicate the relative positions of power that prestige-driven Universities occupy in the global field of higher education. He offers a taxonomy of the “polar field of global higher education, after Bourdieu” (2008, p. 306) which stratifies universities according to their prestige vs. revenue motivations and their level of global engagement, into categories such as “the Global Super-league”, “less globally engaged American doctoral universities”, “elite non-U.S. national research universities with strong cross-border roles”, “lesser prestige teaching only global for profits”, etc. The “Global Super-league” dominates the global higher education field through taking positions of hegemonic eminence and power, based on the forms of capital that have highest value in the field. These include economic capital in large endowments and research funding streams, human capital in attracting the most outstanding academic talent (including doctoral students), and symbolic capital in the prestige accorded to their very names and the credentials they confer. This idea is echoed in the notion of the “emerging global model” universities (Mohrman, Ma and Baker, 2008), the characteristics of which include transcending the boundaries of the nation-state in all activities, research intensivity, diversified funding and capitalist behaviours, and cross-field relationships (i.e. between academy, state and industry).

Marginson argues that within higher education (or in any field of power), agents compete for capital, and position-taking is inescapable for all institutions in a globalized field. Further, this competition leads to dynamics of power and subordination between institutions. “The global power of these institutions [the global Super-elite] rests on the subordination of other institutions and nations...Other institutions are solely nation-bound but nevertheless affected by the global field, for they are subordinated by it” (2008, p. 305). In other words, position-taking has constraints: “Only some position-takings are possible, identified by agents as they respond to changes in the settings and the movers of others in the competition game” (2008, p. 307). This theoretical reading of capital in higher education provides a helpful construct to evaluate the ways capital associated with
credentials and university positionings are made sense of and accumulated by international doctoral students.

2.3.1.2. Habitus and agency. Marginson utilizes another of Bourdieu’s core concepts, *habitus*, to describe the constraints of institutional agents (in this case, universities) in taking positions of power in the global field:

> Agents have a number of possible ‘trajectories’, the succession of positions occupied by the same agent over time, and employ semi-instinctual ‘strategies’ to achieve them. Agents respond in terms of their ‘habitus’, their acquired mix of beliefs and capabilities, and in particular their ‘disposition’ that mediates the relationship between position and position-takings (Marginson, 2008, p. 307).

Both individual and collective agents are subject to the generating and constraining influence of habitus. Marginson is referring here to a sort of ‘institutional habitus’, a helpful construct for appraising the actions and limitations of universities in responding to the pressures of globalization. Habitus is conceived by Bourdieu as “the durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations...[which produces] practices” (Bourdieu, 1977, p 78). The concept of habitus was developed by Bourdieu to provide a theoretical bridge between structuralist notions of social fields that constrain and control actors’ ability to act in the world, and the agency that such actors have to exert free will (engage in “practice”) within such fields. Practices are seen as both conscious (agency) and unconscious (constrained by habitus). In a concise synthesis of the general Bourdieusian model, Adamuti-Trache suggests that “Activation and conversion of *capital* (resources) is possible only when agents exert their *habitus* (dispositions) through *practice* (actions) in a *field* (multi-dimensional space of positions)” (2010, p. 40).

For Bourdieu, the tension between habitus and agency appears to tilt toward a more dominant influence of habitus in determining practice, although this point is debated. Bourdieu explains:

> Habitus is not the fate that some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an *open system of dispositions* that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable, but not eternal. [However] there is a probability, inscribed in the social destiny associated with definite social conditions, that experiences will confirm habitus, because most people are statistically bound to encounter circumstances that tend to agree with those that originally fashioned their habitus (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.133).

However, some theorists have argued that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is ultimately too constraining to account for the new possibilities of encountering notions and circumstances well
beyond the familiar that the new era of networked globalization provides. Marginson elucidates the critique in the context of higher education:

The problem is not just that the changes in the global setting, the emergence of a worldwide communicative system and a single system of published research have transformed the map of positions and the position-taking options. Bourdieu himself would make that point. Rather, the problem is that he sees agency freedom, self-determining identity, as bound a priori by the stratification of class power lodged in the unconscious (Marginson, 2008, p. 312).

This critique calls for a recognition of the expanding sense of possibilities the global network society enables, and the ability for agents (both individual and institutional) to imagine potential beyond their own immediate limits. At this point, theory related to social imaginary can extend the framework necessary to more fully understand the global field of higher education and bring the experiences, choices and imagined possibilities of international doctoral students into the globalized context.

2.3.2. The social imaginary in a globalizing world. Contemporaneous with Castells’ first publication of The Rise of the Network Society (1996) was Arjun Appadurai’s influential Modernity at Large (1996). In this volume, Appadurai suggests that two major forces of modern globalization, electronic mediation and mass migration, have had influence well beyond their physical and logistical impacts, by fundamentally shaping “the work of the imagination” (p. 4). He contends that the instantaneous global communication of images and ideas through electronic media and the vastly increased circulation of people across borders have enabled (perhaps forced) individuals to imagine their lives in a much more global context than ever before. These ideas suggest that all social (and thus many institutional and personal) practices and phenomena are now subject to global influence.

Rizvi and Lingard, in their 2009 book, Globalizing Educational Policy, suggest that globalization can be understood in three different ways: as an empirical fact, as an ideology (specifically neoliberal), and as a social imaginary. The concept of social imaginary is a theoretical device that helps us think about the intangible ways both empirical realities and ideological influences are internalized, and shape how people think about themselves, their lives and the possibilities for the future. It has been described as a deeply normative implicit sense, a way of thinking shared in a society by ordinary people, and as the ways people imagine their social existence (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Taylor, 2004).
Charles Taylor (2004) clarifies that an imaginary is not simply a “set of ideas” or a “background understanding that makes sense of our particular practices” (p. 25), but a complex, unlimited and indefinite “wider grasp of our whole predicament: how we stand to each other, how we got to where we are, how we relate to other groups”. He argues that imaginaries of modernity are based on a fundamental sense of moral order—a sense not only of how things normally are, but how things ought to be. The imaginary makes certain acts and ideas possible—they must be imaginable, even in an implicit sense, to be actionable. Taylor further suggests that social imaginaries are a mutually constituting relationship between theoretical understanding and social practice. A theory, in the way of an “intellectual scheme” used by people to “think about their social reality in a disengaged mode” (p. 23) can penetrate the social imaginary and induce new practices that are made sense of via the initial theoretical understanding. New practices bring the intellectual understanding of theory into the realm of implicit understanding, making the theory accessible in new ways, and ultimately legitimized and normative. In turn, new practices reflect back on to theory, modifying and evolving previous intellectual schemas, and so on. This cycle parallels Bourdieu’s basic notion of habitus being an open and modifiable system of dispositions, yet still based on deeply embedded social norms.

Taylor’s conceptualization of social imaginary is extended into a globalized and transformative context by Appadurai, who argues that the globalized era of “a world system of images” and “transnational construction of imaginary landscapes” has engendered a new element to global cultural processes, the “imagination as a social practice” (1996, p. 31, emphasis in original). He sees the imagination as “a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility...The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order” (p. 31). As such, under conditions of globalization and its pervasive transmission of images, ideas and stories across borders and cultural groups, “more persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of possible lives than they ever did before” (Appadurai, p. 53). The imagination of ordinary people is now operating in globalized context.

This notion is affirmed by Rizvi and Lingard who also emphasize the social imaginary as a dynamic, creative force, through which individuals have the means to imagine how things might be “otherwise”, and through this imaginative action be “world making collective agents” (2009, pp. 8, 34). They stress that:
A social imaginary is not simply inherited and already determined for us, it is rather in a constant state of flux...[and] involves a collective social force that is not only specific to time and space, but is also always multiple and highly contested within and across particular communities. It is through the collective sense of imagination that a society is created, given coherence and identity, but is also subjected to social change, both mundane and radical (2009, p. 35).

That the social imaginary is now in a more global context has profound implications for what is deemed possible and by whom. Rizvi and Lingard contend that in the global era, individuals now have access to a multiplicity of social imaginaries, global as well as those that are nationally bound and prescribed. The social imaginary is carried through story, parable and other narratives, and the global mass media allows these narratives to be shared in an accelerated, farther-reaching way than ever before. “Possibility narratives” are no longer carried between, for example, Vancouver, Canada and Apia, Samoa only by, for example, the physical return or occasional, expensive phone calls of a Samoan graduate student at UBC to his home country. It is carried by Facebook and Skype and distributed from there to anywhere the individuals connected to the student via this technological network may be located. In the current parlance, the narratives of a single individual have the potential to “go viral”, impacting that which many others, whether they personally know the source individual or not, can imagine.

While the imagination may be becoming less and less constrained by time and space, this of course does not mean that all that can be imagined can be acted upon. In fact, the social changes inherent in globalization may make some possibilities more imaginable but less attainable. The notion of “bounded agency” is successful to some degree in expressing the range of motion available between structure, imagination and agency. Bounded agency has emerged from life-course research (Shanahan & Hood, 2000; Evans, 2007) and refers to the interactions between personal agency (i.e. an individual’s ability to determine and pursue courses of action), agentic strategies of close social structures (e.g. family and community groups), and the macrostructural context (i.e., established structures of education, work, economic conditions and family) as they impel individual action. In establishing a theoretical location for bounded agency, Evans envisions a “scope for middle ground theory” which is at a nexus of structure-agency, internal-external control and social reproduction-capital conversion axes. She contends that “bounded agency is socially situated agency influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions” (2007, p.93). In other words, social structures and their internalization (habitus) matter, but they do not dictate action.
Thus, the global social imaginary informs agency and is linked to, but challenging of the concept of ‘habitus’ advanced by Bourdieu (1986). Habitus and social imaginary are not conflicting theoretical constructs. Both address the fundamental tension between structure and agency. Both assert that the range of actions and opportunities that an individual perceives to be available (and are able to operationalize) are bound by past experiences and one’s location within social hierarchies and power relations, while also accepting that humans can and do “improvise” (in Bourdieu’s term) or “imagine and create” (Rizvi & Lingard), possibilities and actions that go beyond the bounds of one’s conditioning and circumstance. Undoubtedly constrained by ingrained structures, agency is also inspired by the ability to imagine alternative possibilities which are made available through an expanding and network-communicated global social imaginary.

2.3.3. Summary. While Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is a robust and valuable resource to help apprehend the shaping and limits of personal agency, the research project reported here will draw more heavily on the notion of social imaginary, especially as framed by global theorists Appadurai and Rizvi and Lingard. Appadurai asserts that this moment of contemporary globalization, with its constant patterns of flux and transformation, calls for a greater emphasis to be placed on improvisation than Bourdieu incorporated into his concept of habitus. Similarly, Rizvi and Lingard emphasize that globalization is challenging traditional sociocultural structures and implicit norms of thought and behaviour so profoundly and with such wide reach, that the possibilities for “world-making” creativity is the clarion call of the present era. It can be argued that the contemporary conditions of globalization simply transform one’s habitus so that it now encompasses the presumptions of “the network society” such as constant transformation and a globalized range of imagined practice. However, it is fundamentally the capacity (if not the necessity) to imagine “how things might be otherwise” that makes the lens of the global social imaginary applicable to a greater degree than that of habitus, particularly for the mobile, agentic subjects of this research, international doctoral students. Still the concept of habitus and its constraining influences will also be explored within student narratives.

The global social imaginary is an instrumental notion for understanding the choices, opportunities and challenges experienced by international doctoral students. International students by definition have “imagined” (and asserted agency to create) possibilities for themselves that reach beyond the known and the local. In crossing borders, in greater numbers and from more locations than ever before, they are both reflecting and constructing new global social imaginaries. This study
inquires into characteristics of the global social imaginary as expressed by international doctoral students at the University of British Columbia, as well as structural barriers that constrain agency. It also seeks to explore some of the workings of this world-making agency, through their stories of navigating their way to and through UBC, and their imagining of futures beyond their doctoral experience.

2.4. **Here, there and in-between--transnationalism and transnational space**

Theorists working in the area of “space and place” face a fundamental question—in a world now characterized by constant flow through compressed time and space, and where, for those plugged into the global network of information and transport, almost any place is available (either in representation or in actuality) in short order, what does it mean to be somewhere?” The disembedding of social phenomena that previously tended to be more nation-bound, such as political ideologies, citizenship and identity from fixed space and time has meant that “transnational” or “global” space is the new field in which institutions operate and people must understand their lives and navigate challenges and opportunities. The prefix trans- contains meanings of “across”, “beyond”, “through” or “so as to change”

4 giving the word transnational the connotation of a space that sits above national localities, that goes beyond linkages of bordered states, and in fact changes the meaning and relevance of national borders. It is not a sum of one place and another, but a dynamic transactional environment. Transnational space evokes a sense of “movement between”. Said with simple elegance, “Place is security. Space is freedom” (Tuan, 1977). Drawing on Castells’ foundational explanation of accelerated, networked flows of interaction in compressed time and space, Vertovec indicates that “Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (and all the laws, regulations and national narratives they represent), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common—however virtual—arena of activity” (2009, p. 3).

All participants in this study have in common the experience of coming from another country to live in Vancouver, Canada during their doctoral work. It is safe to assume that they all will have left places to which they have social, economic, cultural and familial ties. The physical body, some possessions, and perhaps a spouse and children all travel to a new location. What remains “back home” and how is it related to? How is the distance between “here” and “there”

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reconciled and traversed? For universities (like UBC) that thrive on transnational flows of students, faculty and knowledge, and are impacted by policy and governance trends emerging ‘elsewhere’, where are the bounds of their location and edges of their responsibilities? Theoretical constructs of transnational space help us to consider these questions.

2.4.1. Spaces and scapes. Transnational space has been theorized as both a kind of “material geography” in which flows of activity such as migration and human mobility, communication and transactions of various kinds take place, and as a “type of consciousness” (Vertovec, 2009) or “symbolic/imaginary geography through which individuals make sense of our increasingly transnational world” (Jackson, Crang &Dwyer, 2004, p. 3). These two lenses are mutually constitutive, with transnational space being “complex, multi-dimensional and multiply inhabited” (ibid). Transnational space, then, exists as part of the global social imaginary suggested by Appadurai and Rizvi & Lingard. Transnational space is not only populated by those who move internationally to pursue opportunities, but literally by almost everyone, as the worldwide transmission of images and ideas reaches into virtually all modern societies, creating an influence of the global even in the local. A fundamental (re)construction of “place” becomes possible, if not inevitable, through the creation of social fields unanchored in specific locality (Vertovec, 2009).

Doreen Massey, in an early and prescient work on “progressive global space”, posits that even particular localities cannot be thought of “as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings”; she transforms “place” from being bounded containers of land and people to being “processes”, “a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus” (1993, pp. 66-67).

Appadurai advances the concept of “scapes” — ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes and ideoscapes (1996, p. 33) — to evoke the spaces in which practices, ideas, images, people and goods move quickly and multidirectionally, without bounding by national borders. This conceptualization reflects both Castells’ space of flows and Bourdieu’s social fields theories. The ethnoscape reflects “the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers and other moving groups and individuals[that] constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree” (ibid). While acknowledging that there are many locally stable communities, Appadurai argues that the reality of people in motion and the grand narrative of migration in the social imaginary, bring all localities in contact with the ethnoscape of
mobility. The technoscape parallels Castells’ conceptualization of a global network of high-speed technologies that serves as the infrastructure of financescapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes and enables them to have global reach and disregard (to an extent) for national borders. These other scapes deterritorialize and disaggregate the movement of global capital, and the modes of production and dissemination of images and narratives. Scapes are an evocative framework for apprehending the complex milieu in which both institutions and individuals are operating.

2.4.2. Transnational lives and identities. Within the broad social scapes, flows and spaces of globalization is the grounded reality of lives. In his recent volume Transnationalism, Steven Vertovec delineates several ways of apprehending the title phenomenon which are especially helpful in the context of understanding the lived experience of global migrants. One is transnationalism as a new social formation (or “morphology”) which spans across borders. The diaspora is the established construct of transnational social formation, but Vertovec suggests that contemporary globalization driven by technology-based networks is transforming the traditional formation of the dispersed diaspora into connected “transnational communities”. These communities are connected by “dense and highly active networks spanning vast spaces (and) are transforming many kinds of social, cultural, economic and political relationships” (2009, p. 5). Cheap phone calls, email, social networking websites and relatively inexpensive global travel, become the “social glue” of transnationalism, and in fact, create a “normative transnationalism” in which individuals do not have to abandon close involvement in the affairs of their home countries, nor those of their own far-flung kinship networks even when they are physically located at a distance.

Doreen Massey contributes another crucial analysis to understanding globalized space by relating space and power. In discussing the time-space compression of the emerging network society, she reminds us that “different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections”, and that therefore there is a “power-geometry” to who has control in, and is controlled by the flows and movement of a globalizing world (1993, pp. 61-63). While it may be true that many people experience an increased ability to move through space and time due to globalization, control over mobility both reflects and reinforces the socio-political power of agents. Massey provides a resonant example of the power-geometry of globalized space:

There are the people who live in the favelas of Rio; who know global football like the back of their hand, and have produced some of its players; who have contributed
massively to global music; who gave us the samba and produced the lambada that everyone was dancing to a few years ago in the clubs of Paris and London and who have never, or hardly ever, been to downtown Rio. At one level they have been tremendous contributors to what we call time-space compression; and at another level they are imprisoned in it (1993, p. 62).

Put basically, globalized space and power within it is mediated by factors such as class, race and gender. An individual can be a “world-making agent” by dispatching creativity that is drawn into the space of flows and carried across borders into the global repository of available resources, yet still remain on the outside of its reward systems. Further, Massey contends that the power some individuals have to shape global flows and mobility decreases the power others may have to do the same. In a brief but relevant aside, she notes that Western academics, as a socially elite group, are among those who are able to use time-space compression decidedly to their own advantage.

Appadurai echoes Massey’s concept of the power-geometry of spaces in emphasizing that scapes are “deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors” (p. 33). Thus, transnational space is a context shared by all and influencing of all, but intersected in specific ways subject to the social positioning of its inhabitants.

Jackson, Crang and Dwyer (2004) suggest that attachments to specific locations do remain important, both practically and emotionally, but that still, “to sit in place is also always to be ‘displaced’ in the senses of inhabiting threefold geographies: of immediate contextuality; of flows and circuits, that in turn constitute those contexts; and of imaginative geographies, that characterize those contexts and flows and or relations to them” (p. 7). Social identities and awareness can become detached from a territorial or national space, and relocated in transnational, transcultural and transtemporal spaces. Rizvi and Lingard, citing Tomlinson (2000), theorize that globalization encourages “deterritorialized” ways of thinking about identity. That is, “increased global mobilities are deterritorializing forces that have the effect of reshaping both the material conditions of people’s existence and their perspectives on the world” (2009, p. 166). Inevitably, personal identity becomes fluid in the global flows of information, ideas and human migration. They further emphasize, “through accumulation strategies, mobility and modern mass media, people are no longer linked just to one place, but through their transnational connections and imagination may identify with a number of locations” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 167). Despite increased ability to remain attached to homelands, Appadurai suggests that as globalization continues, highly multicultural nations such as Canada and the United States will become “federations of diasporas” and that “diasporic diversity” will put “loyalty to a nonterritorial transnation first” (1996, p. 173).
However, other theorists have asserted that “transnational social fields” (Glick Schiller & Fouron, 1999) do not necessitate the surrender of national identification, and instead “may ultimately reinforce a sense of cohesiveness and familial relations, may not necessarily challenge nationalism, or may be coupled with national imaginaries that transcend geographical borders” (Gargano, 2009). Both the material and the imaginary geographies of transnationalism are important in the context of understanding the experiences and imagined futures of international doctoral students. These students are among the millions of migrants who do physically cross borders for the purpose of pursuing an imagined future. For these individuals, transnational space takes on a more immediate and concrete meaning, literally an experience of being one place and another, simultaneously. Migrants may be disembedded from the specific physical and social context of their country of citizenship and re-located in a new terrestrial space, yet are constantly negotiating both places (and others still). They continue to engage with the place from which they came through both imagination and literal connections via communication technologies and home-culture enclaves, while at the same time, navigating the real and imagined spaces of their current location.

For many individuals (including graduate students), a transnational life includes everyday complexities such as managing a family that is “back home” or raising children in a culturally new environment. Highly skilled migrants in particular (graduate students again) may be contemplating permanent immigration and the cultural, financial and family negotiations that entails. Vertovec suggests that those living transnational lives may develop a “habitus of dual orientation” through which individuals make sense of their lives based on a “bi-focal” sense of living both “here and there” (2009, p. 68). This may materialize through the development of a repertoire of actions that spans and maximizes the benefits of affiliation with both “home” and “new” locales, such as engaging in cultural practices that maintain the security of long-held cultural identities, while gaining economic benefit by working (or going to graduate school) in an alternative location with superior opportunities.

2.4.3. Transnational space and higher education institutions. In the globalized network society, transnational space is also the operating context of previously nation-bound institutions such as universities and the policy apparatuses that guide them. Like individual migrants, institutions too, can be said to be disembedded to some degree from their national context via extensive global networks and dependencies. Of course, universities and policy makers are still largely grounded in a national context, but are inevitably impacted by larger global forces and transnational initiatives:
Nations and institutions have varying potentials to absorb, modify and resist global elements at home and to engage and act across borders in a global setting, which affects them in different ways...They pursue their own pathways, articulated through national tradition and open to their own strategy making, yet they no longer have full command over their destinies. A base level of global flows and forces in higher education is inescapable (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007, p. 13).

The impact of these global flows and forces on universities has been seen through many indicators. Institutions are now placed in global context via comparative rating schemes, benchmarking, increased cross-border collaborations and other global circuits of interconnectivity and influence. Marginson & van der Wende suggest that “In global knowledge economies, higher education institutions are more important than ever as mediums for a wide range of cross-border relationships and continuous global flows of people, information, knowledge, technologies, products and financial capital” (2007, p. 5). Universities are not passive bystanders to these forces, but active co-constructors of them. In this same paper, the authors emphasize that higher education operates, and is a transformative agent, “on both sides of the economy/culture symbiosis” (p. 7). Marginson and McBurnie (2004) suggest that the growing internationalization of education “is a cause, consequence and symptom of globalization.” At the same time, we must recognize that globalization does not roll out in neat and equitable patterns. Nations and institutions vary in their ability to engage with global flows and exert agency within them (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Two phenomena that reflect the positioning of universities in transnational space merit further elaboration here: the increased mobility of students and researchers across the globe and the development of a globalized policy field driven by transnational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These trends demonstrate the new flows of people, ideas and influence that are possible in a networked higher education arena, as well as the differential configurations of global engagement exhibited by various agents. Theorists describing these phenomena nearly uniformly introduce the argument that new patterns of mobility and global policy convergence are driven by neoliberal market forces, and it is inescapable to address their influence here. Neoliberalism is fundamentally the embrace of free markets as an organizing ideology for public policy. A more comprehensive look at the rise of neoliberal ideology in higher education is offered in a subsequent section.

2.4.3.1. Academic mobility. Increased and diversified flows of people across borders are defining characteristics of modern globalization. Higher education, and especially graduate
education has long drawn individuals to seek out better educational opportunities in other countries. In the late 20th century, doctoral education became an increasingly international milieu, particularly in the United States (and the major universities in the U.K.) which drew the vast majority of international doctoral students to their well-developed and resourced research programs. In that era, the availability of graduate education to students from less-developed countries was seen partially in welfare terms by universities; it was considered charitable to provide advanced education to students who would return to their home countries and lead progressive change and development and enhance intercultural understanding. Under conditions of globalization and a new, neoliberal global social imaginary, a new discourse has emerged which views academic mobility of international graduate students “more as a matter of global trade than as overseas aid” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). In this conceptualization, transnational space serves as a marketplace in which academic talent is traded.

The United States has long been the world’s primary magnetic pole for doctoral education. In 2003, U.S. institutions enrolled over 100,000 international doctoral students, while the next largest contender, the U.K., enrolled just under 24,000 (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Now, however, with more new, high-quality doctoral programs becoming well-established in alternative destinations, such as Australia, Korea, China, the E.U., Canada and other locales, travel paths across borders to obtain doctoral education have become more diverse. Marginson and van der Wende see this challenge to American hegemony in doctoral education, while still in its nascent stages, to be largely the result of the cultural and economic flows of information that accompany neoliberal globalization. International education (and students) has begun to be framed as a “market” to be maximized for economic benefit both by institutions themselves and through government policy. At universities, this has led to a “new administrative technology of global marketing of education and recruitment” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 170). Influential transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organization has, through the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), set a neoliberal tone to student mobility, defining it “in terms of the efficiency of global markets in education rather than in terms of international education’s more general political, social and cultural purposes” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 171).

Increased market pressures have also been noted in the efforts of institutions to compete globally for “mobile researchers” – faculty members, postdoctoral scholars and doctoral students. These individuals, coveted for their high-level skills now have the ability to move transnationally to maximize their own value. Kim (2010) suggests that transnational academic mobility is structured
by political and economic forces that include new transnational occupational cultures which
transcend borders and the positioning of particular institutions and disciplines within global fields.
Kim asserts that individuals have both economic and academic motivations for capitalizing on the
mobility available to them in a globalized field of higher education as they seek “transnational
mobility capital” which makes them more valuable and mobile across this field. Undoubtedly a
global market for their talents exists (especially those in science and technology fields), which can translate to economic benefit. The global milieu also offers rewards within the academic career system—“international linkages” is now a significant element within tenure and promotion considerations, and for many, international collaboration is simply the most impactful way in which to pursue their research agenda and it’s social value.

Marginson and van der Wende claim that most researchers “have primarily national careers and use cross-border experience to advance their position at home, travelling mostly at the doctoral or post-doctoral stages and for short visits” (2007, p. 64). However, Jöns (2011) also points out that gender, and the social and family roles associated with gender may limit the access to academic mobility for women. Overall however, the implication is that in the globalizing world, national borders are becoming less significant as information flows, human mobility and neoliberal ideology combine to draw the most valuable people to the most attractive spaces and places, which can now be almost anywhere with a developed economy. Rizvi and Lingard summarize the underpinnings of this trend as “a powerful new discourse of internationalization which seeks to redefine the ways universities need to engage with the ‘imperatives’ of globalization. This discourse points to the commercial opportunities offered by the increasing movement of people, capital and ideas. It encourages a new kind of knowledge about international relations and programmes based on a neoliberal imaginary of the global economy” (2009, p. 170).

Talking with students about their decision to become mobile globally for the purposes of education, and their plans for future mobility gives us the opportunity to understand the personal choices and meaning-making behind the vast flows of people characteristic of contemporary globalization. This analysis also provides insight into the new and evolving roles of national borders in doctoral student mobility. Academic research across most disciplines has also become increasingly globalized, with technology facilitating ever broader international dialogue and knowledge dissemination. In this context of global disciplinary diasporas what does it mean to cross a border for doctoral education and what compels students to do so? This study addresses these
questions specifically as they relate to international doctoral students making the choice to pursue a doctorate in Canada.

2.4.3.2. Transnational higher education policy field. As indicated above, academic mobility and other trends in higher education do not “just happen.” Policy is developed to shape trends in directions deemed beneficial by policymakers at all levels of governance. Policymakers increasingly must place their work in international context. The forces of globalization have made it impossible to view educational policy development in purely localized, or even nationalized terms (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Educational policy is still primarily the responsibility of the state, but the global reach of supranational organizations such as the OECD exerts significant influence over unique state-based ideologies. A brief discussion of some key policy trends help put the experience of international doctoral students into a larger perspective. Graduate education in particular sits at the nexus of several policy domains—particularly the areas of economic development, research and innovation, and immigration. Several countries have undertaken significant policy initiatives in all of these arenas in an attempt to benefit from processes of globalization.

The OECD, in their 2007 innovation strategy paper, noted that economies and innovation are more complex, dynamic and global than ever before and that funding domestic research institutes is no longer sufficient to drive innovation. They conceptualize education as human capital development and research as economic capital development. The ideal for the OECD appears to be robust public-private partnerships, often in an international setting:

Successful experience in promoting rapid advances in the science and technology that underlie industrial innovation in strategic fields suggests that relevant R&D programmes need to involve industry closely in their funding and management. Public-private partnerships for innovation promote co-operation between the public sector (government agencies or laboratories, universities) and the private sector in undertaking joint research projects or in building knowledge infrastructures...Efforts are also needed to boost exchanges of tacit knowledge between the public and private sectors, through the movement of human resources, for example. Low rates of researcher mobility between the private and public sectors remain a major bottleneck to knowledge flows in many countries (OECD, 2007, p. 20-21).

This transnational, neoliberal policy directive has been influential in policy development at the national level. Governments have begun altering their higher education funding strategies to encourage universities to seek research funding through private sector partnerships with local or global industrial entities, which in turn, promotes economic development nationally (Mohrman, Baker & Ma, 2008).
Another significant international policy trend relates to the convergence and neoliberalization of national educational systems in the European Union via the Bologna Process and Lisbon Strategy. The EU, in an effort to be more competitive for international students, and to do a better job of retaining its own students, has created the European Credit Transfer System to ease student mobility within the region, changed the normative degree structure to a North American-style, three cycle (Bachelor, Master, Doctoral) system, and has re-oriented its higher education system towards competing for “market share” of international students and educating for competitiveness in the “global knowledge economy” (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007).

A third major internationally-focused policy trend involves immigration reform. The developments mentioned above represent a major narrative that has become dominant in graduate education policy discourse: the global competition for “knowledge economy” workers. Policymakers can no longer think about “what is in the best interests of the country” without situating the answer to that question in a context of global markets. Globalization has inflicted new pressures on individual nations to compete in a global market for a limited commodity—people with the economic resources to be internationally mobile and educated, and also with the intellectual potential to become skilled labor and therefore contribute to the national economy. Even while acknowledging the rise of the “space of flows”, human beings do still exist bodily in the “space of places”, and bordered nation-states are an enduring and defining locality in the globalized world. As such, immigration policy is one of the most powerful tools that nations have in shaping their populations, and therefore the human resources available to pursue national priorities. These policies, as they have materialized in Canada, will be reviewed in the following chapter on the research context of this study.

2.4.4. Summary. The framing of universities as being purveyors of global flows is affirmed by Luke (2007), who reshapes Appadurai’s notion of “scapes” to describe what she calls the emerging “eduscapes” of global higher education. Luke calls the network of universities the “connective tissue of a globalized knowledge community in which new patterns of knowledge, accreditation, research alliances, and social relationships are emerging” (2007, p. 98). However, she takes pains to emphasize Appadurai’s theory that rather than leading to homogenization of higher education, these flows are disjunctive, creative and subjective to individuals and locations: “the direction or force of global flows, one’s sense of place on any scape, are only intelligible from a local site, a place, a point of view...social subjects’ experience, uptake or interpretation of globalization is always
a question of context” (p. 101). This is true at both the individual and institutional levels. Globalization, despite its vast pressures in transnational space, is always translated at individualized and localized levels (Gargano, 2009). Still, certain trends seem to have been transmitted through transnational space and materialized in quite common ways at various locales. The impact of neoliberal ideology, foreshadowed in this discussion, appears to be one of these pervasive trends. I turn next to a discussion of the rise to dominance of neoliberalism across a range of national settings and the global field of higher education.

2.5. Neoliberal ideology and the “new economy”

Globalization is not a value-neutral phenomenon. Many theorists point to the rise and expansion of neoliberalism as the fundamental driving force of contemporary globalization (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Others have suggested that neoliberal economic development should be thought of as simply one of many characteristics of larger ongoing processes of global interconnectivity, rather than its 
raison d’être
 (Marginson & Considine, 2000; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Regardless, neoliberal ideology has clearly been the dominant economic philosophy of the past twenty-five years, significantly influencing how globalization has progressed during this period. Neoliberalism is a political-economic ideology which proposes that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). The neoliberal state views its role as providing the framework and mechanisms to support profit-motivated, unregulated free-market capitalism as the fundamental organizing policy construct.

Largely seen as taking hold as a widespread political movement in the 1980s with the coming to power of Margaret Thatcher in the U.K. and Ronald Reagan in the U.S., neoliberal policies have deregulated economic activity and reduced the role of nation-states, opening up global flows of capital and trade in a globalized marketplace. This has benefitted economically advanced nations and spawned powerful transnational corporations and other organizations who, without a framework for international regulation, have subjected weaker entities to economic pressures and competitive forces that are difficult to resist (Cohen & Kennedy, 2007). The “network society” of instantaneous communication, flows of capital and interconnected organizations has fostered a global convergence of fiscal policy dominated by neoliberal ideology. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) consider neoliberalism to now be foundational to the global social imaginary, fundamentally shaping
that which is imagined to be possible and desirable by people (and especially policy-makers) all over the world. Similarly, linking back to Bourdieu’s concept of habitus’, Harvey contends that neoliberal ideology has become hegemonic, and “has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (2005, p. 3). We now imagine our world in market terms.

2.5.1. Enterprise, exchange and entrepreneurs: Neoliberalism in higher education. A full history of the development and rise to dominance of neoliberal policies is beyond the scope of this dissertation; what is most relevant here is how institutions of higher education have responded to these changes, and further, what this means for doctoral education and those who engage in it. The neoliberal economic philosophy has had a major impact in the public sector with its reach into public education policy being particularly significant. It posits that social systems, including education, are best managed and maximized through mechanisms of the free market such as competition, consumer choice, managerialism, de-regulation and privatization. Governments have seized upon neoliberal approaches to reduce their financial commitments to education while actively encouraging market-based activity to compensate for the decline in public investment (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997). This has been especially evident in the higher education and research domains of public universities. The pressures of neoliberal globalization are now having significant impact on the educational, research and immigration policies that shape doctoral education at the nation-state level, as well as the ways doctoral education is conceived and pursued by universities and students themselves.

The influence of neoliberal principles on higher education has now been examined thoroughly by several researchers, with various analytic angles in different world locales. In the United States, Sheila Slaughter and colleagues have theorized a phenomenon of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). With the publication of the seminal book Academic Capitalism—Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), the authors describe a process, beginning in the 1980s, where post-industrial market globalization led governments to begin viewing universities primarily as incubators of intellectual products which could have utility in the marketplace, as opposed to arenas for “curiosity-based” research. As a result, governmental policymakers have withdrawn block-grant state funds and expect universities (and their students) to be entrepreneurial in competing for funding from both within government and in industry. To the extent that government funding continues to flow, policymakers, “whether
responding to pressures from the market, international capital mobility, or the business class, are concentrating state moneys on higher education units that aid in managing or enhancing economic innovation and thereby, competitiveness” (1997, p. 14). The authors report that with this shift in emphasis towards marketability, government funding is targeted differentially to particular academic fields—the funding “winners” are those fields with closer ties to the market (i.e. many physical and biological sciences, engineering, business and law), while those with a more distant relationship to the market, such as humanities, social sciences and education, “lose shares” in the governmental funding strategy. In this way, the notion of “innovation” becomes a code-word for academic research that has commercial potential.

An additional, market-driven trend Slaughter and Leslie highlight is the increasing involvement of universities in partnerships with industry, and in particular the involvement of academic faculty (and their graduate students) in market-oriented fields with joint university-industry research projects. This development, according to Slaughter and Leslie is largely driven by resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), the basic premise of which is that organizations deprived of critical revenues will seek new resources. As governmental funding, even in market-driven areas, declines, there is motivation to follow the money. Thus, the proliferation on university campuses of University-Industry liaison offices, the mandate of which is to connect academic research with industry investors and to facilitate “technology transfer”—the commercialization of research conducted at universities. Slaughter and Leslie’s examination of national and provincial/state higher education funding policies of four western nations—the U.S., the U.K, Australia and Canada found that “all four countries developed national policies that promoted a shift from basic or curiosity-driven research to targeted or commercial strategic research” (1997, p. 14).

Working from an Australia-based perspective, Simon Marginson and Mark Considine suggest the term the enterprise university (Marginson & Considine, 2000), and adopt a core focus on how university governance and processes of reinvention increasingly adopt principles and practices of “the secular science we now call management” (p. 2). Marginson and Considine theorize that the corporatization of the enterprise university goes well beyond the embrace of neoliberal economic activity in contemporary research universities. They contrast their preferred term and its scope to Slaughter and Leslie’s ‘academic capitalism’ concept:

We prefer Enterprise University because it captures the new institutional personality of the universities, while enabling a broader understanding of what drives them. It allows us to imagine the new spirit of ‘enterprise’ as driven not only by money, but also by the
desire for institutional status, and by more engaging academic cultures and by the requirements of government (2000, p. 51).

The authors assert that the fundamental mission of the enterprise university is to advance the overall prestige and world standing of the university, and that both academic and economic imperatives are subordinated to that goal. In this way, it is symbolic capital that is most prized and valued in the global higher education field. They focus on new trends in university governance (particularly in Australia) which increasingly adopt corporate management practices to achieve institutional goals, and along the way, shift institutional identities. The primary trends they identify include increases in executive power coupled with decreases in traditional democratic/collegial forms of governance, a premium placed on flexible resources (including labor) and a strategic positioning/accountability regime in resource allocation. Like Slaughter and Leslie in the U.S., Marginson and Considine see revenue generation as an ever more basic motivation of university governance in Australia. Their overall assessment is that corporate-style management is being adopted largely because “Universities need new control structures and decision-making systems in order to render resources more flexible, and to respond effectively to the external imperatives of government and industry” (2000, p. 135). This leads to, among other outcomes, the “programming” of research through incentives toward prestige and profit maximization.

From a Canadian vantage point, a recent volume coins the term “the exchange university” (Chan & Fisher, 2008). This collection focuses on how “exchange is linked to commodity production and capitalist production in the education system” (p. 2).

Through legislation and other policy instruments, governments have created quasi-markets that encourage institutional competition with the public sector and between the public and private sectors. By the same means, universities have been encouraged to become centres for capital accumulation through the commercialization of research, an increase in technology transfer and the production of intellectual property, and a weakening of the boundary between the academy and industry. The relationships between the academy and industry now constitute a new academic culture for universities (p. 1).

Chan and Fisher in particular focus on the profound academic cultural shifts engendered by a neoliberal policy environment. The most predominant shift they note is a triangular intensification of research focus, scientism and commercialization activities. Universities have become more “research intensive”, specifically in the sciences, a trend that was deliberately facilitated by policy that urged commercialization activity. This gives rise to a general cultural swing towards
utilitarianism rather than intellectualism as the base motivation of academic activity and an institutional focus on science in university culture.

Like Marginson and Considine, these authors also found an emergence of “managerial culture” (p. 62) with a greater degree of administrative complexity and accountability to external audiences. In general, they argue that in the exchange university, “Almost everything has to have a strategic justification that is time consuming, part of a more complex administrative structure, part of an accountable, outcome-oriented, and performance-based culture” (p. 63). Chan & Fisher also contribute an insightful analysis of how the rise of neoliberal policy in academia has led to a time and space scarcity which compromises the traditional collegiality culture of the academy, and to a “generation gap” between younger professors well-steeped in the competitive funding/commercial research regime and older professors who are not. All of these cultural changes lead the authors to questions of crucial importance to this research—what is the future of the professoriate and how attractive will it be to new doctoral graduates? This dissertation research seeks to know more about how these individuals are imagining their futures as doctorate holders and the extent to which neoliberal ideologies and their consequences impact that imagination.

In a subsequent crystallization of the theory of academic capitalism, Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) expand the initial work by Slaughter and Leslie, to explore more fully the ways universities are integrating into the “new economy”. This expansion adopts many of the themes introduced by Marginson and Considine. While their earlier work on academic capitalism was an empirical investigation of the extent to which western universities were engaged in commodification of research, this later work accepts “the embeddedness of profit-oriented activities” (p. 11) in universities as a starting point. The new economy, they argue, is based on a global market for knowledge as “raw material”, the post-Fordist casualization and flexibilization of work, and the need for highly educated knowledge workers. Slaughter and Rhoades draw upon network theory in identifying the new triangulation of the academy, the state and the market in a “network of actors.”

Along with corporations and the state, universities are (or can be) active contributors to and beneficiaries of its evolution and spread. Slaughter and Rhoades make the concise point that universities are inseparable from the new economy, and in fact, “contribute richly to its development” (p. 15). Those institutions and units that embrace integration with the new economy stand to benefit the most:

In many ways the new economy depends on the neoliberal state for ground rules that create and sustain a global playing field. Colleges and universities, often arms of the state, benefit from (and sometimes participate in lobbying for) neoliberal initiatives to
the degree that they are committed to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime. Those colleges and universities unable or unwilling to integrate with the new economy have difficulty accessing new programs and opportunities. Similarly, programs, departments, or colleges that resist, ignore, or are unable to intersect the new economy within institutions that are generally pursuing an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime rarely share in its rewards and incentives (2004, p. 22).

What affects academic departments can also be assumed to impact the doctoral students within them, and the career trajectories they imagine for themselves and are able to actualize. Academic capitalism theory would predict that those students whose work does not “intersect the new economy” will be outside of its rewards, both while in doctoral education and afterwards. This study is an opportunity to investigate this assumption in a qualitative sense.

Slaughter and Rhoades also suggest that there have been several other institutional outgrowths of universities’ integration with the new economy and partnerships with state and corporate entities. Interstitial organizations and intermediating networks (Metcalfe, 2004) now commonly exist, which serve to link universities more closely with state, corporate and non-profit sectors for the purpose of maximizing mutual benefits within the new economy. Concurring with both Marginson and Considine and Chan and Fisher, they theorize other trends such as growing managerialism and professionalization of academia and growing ranks of non-academic professionals gaining influence within institutions via their roles in steering university activities toward market-based outcomes. Knowledge production and dissemination itself becomes “unbundled” into component parts, with faculty members becoming “content providers” while teams of professionals (as well as graduate students) generate a variety of knowledge products for market, including instructional content, websites, and research publications. Academic work becomes casualized as full tenure-track professors are replaced by flexible and less expensive sessional instructors. The university itself becomes both product and marketplace, with aggressive marketing of educational offerings to prospective students, along with institutional corporate agreements that market products to the “captive” student audience that arrives on campus (whether online or in bricks and mortar) (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004; Rhoades, 1998).

Shumar (2007) argues that this commoditization of the university environment is fundamentally altering its purpose and its relationship to students, asserting that “teaching and learning become less a social relationship and more a relationship of delivering a pre-packaged service quickly and effectively to waiting customers. The impact of this re-configuring of education as a commodity to be bought and sold is profound” (p. 830). This all-encompassing infusion of
market-based values into the educational policy domain has transformed the very purposes that are imagined for education, redefining the “good” of education largely in economic terms. Slaughter and Leslie call this the transformation of a “public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” (2005, p. 7). It has “led to an emphasis on policies of education as the production of human capital to ensure the competitiveness of the national economy in the global context” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 16).

Clearly, the theorists noted above are largely critical of the influences of corporate-style governance and market activities on the culture, purposes and educational outcomes of higher education. A contrasting viewpoint is offered by Burton Clark, who has researched and argued for the potential benefits of what he terms the “entrepreneurial university” (1998, 2001, 2003). Clark’s case studies of universities managing change in the face of shrinking government allocations led him to develop an argument which “is much needed as a counter-narrative, one that challenges both the simplistic understanding of the university as a business, about which we hear so much these days, and the simplistic depiction of universities as passive and helpless instrumentalities whose fate is determined by irresistible external demands” (2001, p. 10). He identifies five key components of institutions that appeared to thrive academically, administratively and financially as a result of entrepreneurial activity—a diversified funding base; a strengthened steering core; an expanded developmental periphery; a stimulated academic heartland; and an integrated entrepreneurial culture (Clark, 1998).

Clark argues that a diversified funding base (including market-oriented activities) increases the resources under the control of the university, giving it more autonomy and enabling it to achieve stronger educational outcomes. Like Slaughter and Leslie, he does caution about investment in industry partnerships due to potential influence of corporations on the academic mission of the university, but in general he seems to view balanced contributions to a diversified funding portfolio as a path to self-reliance, rather than the external control predicted by resource dependency theory. He further sees de-regulation of national policy controls, which is characteristic of neoliberalism, as a benefit to self-steering universities that are capable of responding to the rapidly changing global context in which institutions operate. For Clark, entrepreneurialism in universities is about maximizing institutional autonomy and creating open yet strong management schemes that have as their primary goals the stimulation of initiative and “ambitious collegial volition” (2003, p. 112). Clark argues pointedly that:
purposive transformation can significantly strengthen university collegiality, university autonomy, and university educational achievement. Entrepreneurial character in universities does not stifle the collegial spirit; it does not make universities handmaidens of industry; and it does not commercialize universities and turn them into all-purpose shopping malls. On all three counts it moves in the opposite direction (2001, p. 10).

He contends that the sustained, incremental, context-sensitive embrace of these values creates fiscal independence and strong, shared institutional culture with participants who engage in the “tough choices” that protect and uphold that which benefits the university as a whole, not just the profitable factions of it.

2.5.2. **Summary.** Neoliberalism provides a lens through which to view the experiences and imaginings of the doctoral students that are participants in this study. We would expect that the neoliberal transformations in higher education, which according to globalization theory are not isolated national phenomena but globally interwoven influences, would impact students’ experiences of education and the futures they imagine for themselves as holders of the doctoral degree. The extent to which these individuals frame their challenges and opportunities in market-based terms will help reveal the influence of neoliberalism in contemporary doctoral education. The study is an opportunity to investigate this assumption by talking with international doctoral students about the value they perceive themselves to hold, both in the university environment and the wider global job market. This is an area that remains understudied. Given that today’s doctoral students are the future “stewards of their disciplines” (Golde, 2006), their relationships to (and inculcation in) neoliberal ideology and market-based academic practices provides glimpses of the future of the academy.

2.6. **International doctoral students in globalized transnational spaces**

Summarizing and drawing together the four fundamental theoretical elements addressed in this chapter, the network society, global social imaginary, transnational space and neoliberal ideology, we see how they inform and mutually co-construct one another. Our experiences, our absorption of the norms, stories and cultural artefacts in our milieu form our habitus (durable dispositions and repertoire of responses) as well as link us to a social imaginary (implicit sense of the social realm and its norms and possibilities). Under conditions of the vast social changes of globalization, in which networked communication and transportation technologies expose us both literally and imaginatively to the full global range of ideas, images and cultures, we experience transformation in both what we imagine to be normal and possible, and our fundamental set of
conscious and unconscious responses to life around us. Significant influences on habitus and social imaginary which are characteristic of contemporary globalization include experiences of living in transnational space, of living in one place while retaining strong ties to others, and the resulting complexities of identities and affiliations that this multiplicity and simultaneity engenders. Also, the rising hegemonic domination of neoliberal economic ideologies and policies have compelled what were formerly entirely public enterprises (such as education) to adopt market-driven logics, and perhaps shifted the social imaginary towards viewing such enterprises as private investments, conferring market value on an individual or society, rather than as primarily serving a purpose of the public good. In turn, all of these influences, experiences, conscious and unconscious beliefs, and imagined futures inform the agency individuals exert to shape their life course at pivotal decision points. These transformations are occurring and diffusing at a rapid rate and affecting all social structures and peoples, either by inclusion or exclusion. The fundamental inquiry of this study is to explore how this profoundly changed global landscape manifests in the experiences and imagined future of international doctoral students.

To conclude this theoretical orientation to this dissertation research, I turn to the work of Aihwa Ong (2004). Ong’s perspective integrates the theoretical resources introduced in this chapter to formulate an understanding of the trajectories of international students and major world universities in the context of contemporary globalization. While not focussing specifically on doctoral students, she identifies new patterns in which individuals from around the world are appropriating higher education (especially in the United States) to meet goals of capital accumulation in a global sphere. This has challenged traditional purposes of higher education as constitutive of citizen-subjects with Western liberal values. As Ong states it, “the traditional goals of higher education—to inculcate fundamental Western humanist beliefs and nationalist values—are becoming challenged by a stress on skills, talent and borderless neoliberal ethos” (p. 57). She cites a “double movement in American higher education—a shift from a national to a transnational space for producing knowledgeable subjects, and a shift from the focus on liberalism and multicultural diversity at home to neoliberalism and diversity of global subjects abroad” (2004, p. 50). Ong argues that the global turn many universities are now taking is a “risk calculation” and a corporate survival technique, a way to maintain fiscal viability in a neoliberal global educational marketplace and a means of remaining globally competitive by recruiting the world’s best brains.

From the student perspective, the move to a neoliberal approach means that only the global elite (at least at the undergraduate level) can access universities that are major world
knowledge centres, and they do so in order to accumulate various forms of flexible global capital—the ability to find jobs in and ultimately immigrate to the U.S., English proficiency, and a globally recognized credential, especially in highly market-oriented fields such as science, engineering and commerce. Such credentials are “a part of the global accumulation strategy to reposition oneself and one’s family within the global arena of competing intellectual and economic markets” (2004, p. 61). Ong suggests that such instrumentalist approaches to higher education (jointly participated in by both students and institutions) fracture the relationship of universities to the nation-state and therefore to the traditional national citizenry-production purpose of higher education. When higher education becomes a marketplace in which only the global elite have access and the primary purpose of that education is to provide multinational corporations with globally-savvy and mobile “knowledge workers”, we are left with questions about what role universities have in promoting democratic citizenship, in either a national or global sense. However, it also perhaps debatable whether the notion of education providing private gains with particular market value is entirely incompatible with it also serving purposes of public good. At the doctoral level in particular, with its focus on knowledge generation and preparation of future educators (even though this is a shrinking career path for PhD holders), the PhD credential may bridge the public-private divide more than others.

This study provides a unique opportunity to evaluate this overarching concern—the purpose and value of doctoral education—from the perspective of international doctoral students themselves and in the context of their own globalization-inflected, transnational lives. Doctoral education, while undoubtedly being transformed by global market forces, is still largely a milieu in which merit trumps market. A promising doctoral student without significant financial resources can still find a place in a globally-elite research university, although those opportunities are shrinking. International doctoral students do still come to institutions to pursue study in non-market fields, although perhaps mainly from countries that are already well-developed economically. What forms of capital are these students pursuing? International doctoral students have imagined a path for themselves in globalized, transnational space. Their active participation in, negotiation of, resistance to, and transformation of the global geographies of research, culture and career is a rich and understudied viewpoint from which to understand modern globalization.
CHAPTER 3
Research context—policy and literature review

3.1. Introduction to the research context

The previous chapter introduced several aspects of contemporary globalization—the networked interconnectivity of people, ideas and institutions into global fields, the development of global social imaginaries which influence the sense of the normative and possible in an increasingly global context, the phenomenon of transnational space in which individuals and institutions operate across and beyond fixed national borders, and the rise of neoliberal ideology which has infiltrated the social imaginary and compelled a wide range of social institutions, including higher education, into a global capitalist, market-driven logic. This chapter will bring these powerful theoretical concepts directly into the realm of graduate (especially doctoral) education and place this study in the current policy context affecting doctoral education in Canada, and within the previous research that has empirically examined these dynamics as they impact the living and learning experiences of international doctoral students.

This review is organized into three broad areas which surround and inform the current study. First, to establish the broader context in which the international doctoral students in this study are pursuing their education, elements of the Canadian higher education policy milieu, and the internationalization activities of higher education institutions in general and at UBC in particular will be reviewed. This analysis provides an understanding of how the purposes of doctoral education are conceived of and promoted through public and institutional policy.

Secondly, research literature relating broadly to international graduate student purposes and choices in navigating global educational and career options and associated mobility issues will be reviewed. By focussing on purpose and choice, this section will necessarily look at the “bookends” of doctoral study—both the factors that drive the entry into a doctoral program abroad, and the hoped-for outcomes of this process. It includes a discussion of selected studies on factors related to international students’ choice of country and institution for doctoral study, but does not dwell on these factor analyses. Instead, the section will focus on works that examine themes of imagination, purpose and agency related to transnational educational mobility. These themes come to the fore as a way of understanding how participants exert agency by imagining and constructing their lives in globalized transnational space. The focus in this section on the student
perspective also provides an opportunity to contrast their discourses of purpose with the policy-driven and institutional discourses examined in the previous section.

Thirdly, the growing body of research on the living and learning experiences of international doctoral students while engaged in their educational programs, and the global career and post-graduation mobility trajectories of international doctoral students will be reviewed. An analysis of this work is important to surface some of the challenges and opportunities faced by students, and position them in relation to forces of globalization. It helps us also to problematize international doctoral education as imagined or idealized by both students and institutional stakeholders, in relation to that which is actually experienced. Studies on issues such as adapting to and navigating a new cultural and academic environment, maintaining transnational ties, experiencing transformations of identity, and student satisfaction with their educational experiences will be examined, along with a discussion of research on career-related outcomes of doctoral study.

Taken together, this analysis of policy and research literature provides a landscape of the current understanding of the challenges, opportunities and imagined futures of international doctoral students in globalized transnational space. It also affords an opportunity to step back, as I will at the end of this chapter, and reflect on varying discourses of the purposes of doctoral education, taken from the perspectives of policymakers, institutions and students themselves. The disjunctures between the motives and purposes for international doctoral study articulated by the various stakeholders reflect broader dynamics of globalization whereby economic “globalization from above” (Falk, 1997) exerts significant power over policy development, the definition of “value” in higher education, and the experiences of international doctoral students. However, dynamics of “globalization from below” (ibid) in terms of the agentic, sometimes resistant behaviour of international doctoral students in transnational space also exerts influence in a networked realm of interdependencies. The chapter concludes by revisiting a fundamental question of this study--whether the purposes of doctoral education as advanced by both neoliberal policymakers and higher education theorists can hold up under the light of research on the constructed and lived experience of international doctoral students.

In surveying the literature, some overall trends appear. The literature that addresses globalization and higher education is weighted more towards work on theoretical and policy aspects than empirical research studies of impacts on and experiences of students. Most of the empirical research that exists focuses on large-scale demographic trends in student mobility or surveys of student populations, both of which obscure the actual lived experiences of international students.
Perhaps this gap comes from a sense that major social transformations such as globalization can be best (or only) apprehended theoretically, or through detecting population-scale shifts in activity. However, transnational educational theorists have also advised that globalization is translated and made meaning of at local and individual levels, and must be investigated within those contexts, lest we be left only “homogenizing and generalizing the negotiations of international students when great dimensions of difference actually exist” (Gargano, 2009). A growing literature is related to a wide variety of specific migrant populations as they navigate transnational spaces, and this broader horizon of work on migrancy is helpful in fleshing out the small number of studies which focus specifically on international students and provide insight into the factors that shape decisions to become transnationally mobile. Very few research pieces directly address these “negotiations” of globalization phenomena from the international student perspective (even less specific to graduate/doctoral students), although when one digs into the repository of (as yet) unpublished dissertation research, this imbalance is slightly improved.

Another noticeable trend in the relevant literature overall is that although the relevant work has relatively broad international provenance, the bulk seems to emerge from the U.S., U.K. and Australia. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the positions of these countries as global hubs of graduate education and the significant involvement of these countries and their institutions of higher education in policies and practices which capitalize (quite literally) on the forces of globalization. It may also be a function of the domination of the published academic literature by western countries. Studies from or exploring the Canadian context are scant, but will be drawn upon and supplemented by the broader literature. Especially given that the research site of this study (The University of British Columbia) is among those institutions which has significantly transcended its national borders as part of the league of globally engaged research intensive universities (see Marginson, 2008), it can be expected that this literature has relevance in the context of a Canadian study as well.

3.2. The globalized doctoral education policy context

The impacts of neoliberal globalization on the policies and practices of higher education field have been well-established and discussed in general terms in the theoretical framework chapter of this dissertation. We understand, through the work of Sheila Slaughter, Simon Marginson, Donald Fisher, their collaborators and others, that forces of globalization are prompting an evolution in universities towards market behaviours, deeper integration with industry, increased
internationalization in part for the purposes of extending institutional global influence and draw for talent and resources, and in general a trend in higher education-related policies toward maximizing the potential for universities to act as production sites for commercializable output and workers for a global economy. To contextualize this study’s investigation of international doctoral student imaginations, choices and experiences in global context, I examine relevant Canadian higher education policies which shape the environment in which the study participants are manoeuvring, and then turn to a review of the internationalization policies and practices activities of higher education institutions, including at UBC, the institutional site of this study.

3.2.1. The Canadian policy context. Slaughter and Leslie (1997) established the tie between neoliberal national policy directions and the rise of academic capitalism in the higher education context. At the time of their first study, Canadian universities were tentative participants in market-oriented behaviours, and were under only moderate pressure by its governmental bodies to do so. However, as Metcalfe found in her revisitation of Slaughter and Leslie’s analysis of Canada (with the benefit of updated and more comprehensive data), new “policy initiatives have contributed to academic capitalism in Canada by creating new circuits of knowledge, intermediating organizations, and expanded managerial capacity as well as increased private revenue streams” (2010, p. 509). From a human capital development perspective, immigration policy to attract skilled immigrants has long been in place in Canada, but not until the last decade was it directed at maximizing the influx and retention of international students. Both research/innovation and immigration policy in Canada have become much more aggressive in the dozen years hence, as Canada strives to position itself favourably in the global economy and competition for talent. To further contextualize the experiences of the international doctoral students in this study, a brief review of recent federal and provincial policy initiatives in these two areas follows.

3.2.1.1. Research and innovation policy. In 2007 the Canadian government launched its new research and innovation policy, Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage. Its general aims are well-articulated in the policy’s Executive Summary:

For the business community, we will focus on what government does best; providing an enabling environment that promotes private investment in R&D, advanced technologies, and skilled workers. For the higher-education community, we will sustain our world-leading commitment to basic and applied research in all domains, while focusing that collective effort more effectively on priorities that matter to Canadians. We will sustain our commitment to train the next generation of researchers and innovators upon whom Canada’s future success depends. For Canadians overall, we will hold ourselves accountable for delivering results. Canada’s federal government understands the far-
reaching implications of science and technology discoveries and applications, and the endless educational and professional opportunities they provide for Canadians. The main reason for enhancing Canada’s S&T capability is to improve the lives of ordinary Canadians, their families, and communities. This is our ultimate aim, and it is how Canadians will judge the success of this S&T Strategy.  

What is not overtly stated in this summary, but infused throughout the details of the policy is an emphasis on tying university research more closely to business, industry and commercialization potential. While the summary statement asserts that research “in all domains” will be supported, it is made clear in the policy the types of research that are most valued: “Under the S&T Strategy, the Government of Canada made a series of commitments to strengthen public–private research and commercialization partnerships, with a focus on the four priority S&T areas: environmental science and technologies, natural resources and energy, health and related life sciences and technologies, and information and communications technologies.” These are the fields that have the most direct ties to economic development potential. In a similar vein, Metcalfe’s (2010) analysis of activities promoting and reflecting academic capitalism in Canada, shows the aggressive research commercialization agenda jointly adopted by the Canadian government and Canada’s primary higher education advocacy association, as well as the increasing role of “intermediary organizations” in Canada that operate between academia, government and industry to leverage and funnel funding toward “innovation”-oriented research that is closely aligned with industry.

Following the funding trail demonstrates that research in business, the hard sciences and technology are by far the priority in government spending. In the federal Budget of 2009, the Government of Canada allocated $17.5 million over three years to SSHRC to fund additional Canada Graduate Scholarships (CGS) focused on business-related research, the only field within the social sciences and humanities to receive targeted increased funding for students. Further federal funding has also been committed to new initiatives such as the Centres of Excellence in Commercialisation and Research, the decision to make the College and Community Innovation Program a permanent scheme, and the introduction of new business-led research networks in the Networks of Centres of Excellence. Each of these programs are focussed on strengthening public-private research and commercialisation partnerships, demonstrating the strong shift towards neoliberal values in the funding of university-based research.

5 http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/ic1.nsf/eng/00871.html
Another example of this tie is the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) “Industrial Postgraduate Scholarship” program, which funds graduate students to conduct research in an industrial setting, under the co-supervision of a faculty supervisor and an industrial supervisor. The goal of the IPS program overall is “encouraging scholars to consider research careers in industry where they will be able to contribute to strengthening Canadian innovation.” Over its first twelve years, funding of graduate students via the IPS program grew from $800,000 in its inaugural year to nearly $4 million in 2009-10, although this is down from a peak investment of nearly $6 million in 2006-07.

At the provincial level in British Columbia, interest and investment in graduate education had been on a upswing prior to the global economic downturn. In their 2007 annual report, a roundtable of business leaders who advise the Premier of British Columbia on technology matters (known as the BC Premier’s Technology Council), the BC government was urged to develop a “graduate education strategy” given their view that:

Universities play a crucial role in any jurisdiction with a strong innovation climate. Not only are they the progenitors of most primary research but they are the training grounds for the HQP that an innovation economy needs. A strong university needs good faculty, focused and efficient research capabilities with strong mechanisms for transferring technology to industry, and a cadre of graduate students that support the primary research and act as the primary carriers of Intellectual Property. (BC Premier’s Technology Council, 2007)

This view was further explicated in the 2007 provincially-sponsored review and recommendations document concerning BC’s post-secondary education system, Campus 2020 (Plant, 2007). This report made explicit the interdependence of the provincial economy and BC’s research universities—the province needs the highly trained workers generated through graduate education and the university needs money to provide them. Campus 2020 recommended that graduate education in BC be expanded significantly, with a target to have the “highest per-capita enrolment of graduate students in Canada by 2015” (p. 77). Plant recommended that BC become, by 2010, “one of the three highest spending provinces in terms of provincial support for basic and applied research” (p. 3).

In alignment with these recommendations, the BC provincial government committed new resources for graduate education through several initiatives. The most significant investment was

the funding of 2500 new “graduate seats” over four years at BC’s four research-intensive universities. Each seat came with a grant of $20,000 and UBC received roughly 60% of the 2500—an infusion of approximately $32 million over four years into UBC coffers. This has become known as the “graduate expansion” initiative. Also, in March 2007, two new provincial graduate scholarship programs were announced—the Pacific Century and Pacific Leaders scholarships. These programs represent a further $11.6 million investment over four years to support graduate students. A third major announcement was $10 million to triple the size of an industry internship program for graduate students (ACCELERATE BC).

Each of these funding initiatives from the BC government brought with it an attempt at influence, and in some cases, very specific demands on the university. The province stipulated that the graduate expansion funds and the Pacific Century scholarships were expected to be used in attracting graduate students in areas that were identified as economic drivers. Specifically, the funds were meant to “support British Columbia’s Research and Innovation Framework by expanding the number of graduates who will support the following key sectors of the province’s economy: Life Sciences (health and biotechnology); Technology (information and communication, new media and wireless); Clean Technology (alternative energy and sustainable technologies); and Natural Resources (forestry, agriculture, fishing, mining oil and gas).”

Other priorities the province sought to support through these funds included the “government’s Asia-Pacific Gateway Strategy”, increased “opportunities for aboriginal students to pursue advanced study” and provision of “opportunities for science and engineering students to develop business and commerce skills.” With the ACCELERATE BC program, the mandate was for graduate students to “work with B.C. businesses to help increase the province’s competitiveness.” The framing of graduate students as resources for economic development was clear in the press release announcing the new funding:

B.C.’s graduate students are truly an untapped resource,” said Dr Arvind Gupta, scientific director of MITACS. “The research expertise that the next generation is developing at the province’s universities and colleges is going to help B.C.’s businesses to become more competitive on the national and international stage. This $10 million in new funding from the provincial government will help to ensure that knowledge transfer takes place.”

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9 ibid
11 ibid
This targeted investment from the province was largely a new approach to funding graduate education—a move from general block grants with few strings attached to a strategic policy to cultivate graduate students who will help achieve specific, largely economic, goals of the province, albeit with a gesture towards social equity concerns for Aboriginal students. Further, the province made it clear that keeping funding flowing to universities for graduate education over the four years would be dependent upon institutions delivering on the stated “Highly Qualified Personnel” production priorities. However, both the targeted graduate enrolment growth funds (which did coincide with the targeted growth, at least at UBC) and the Pacific Century Graduate Fellowships were discontinued in 2011 after their four-year investment with little explanation why. In the economic downturn that followed the initial investment, the BC government presumably turned to other priorities, perhaps hoping that the desired ripple effect of the investment would carry the provincial economic goals forward without further expenditure.

3.2.1.2. Immigration policy and graduate students. Immigration policy is one of the other main levers that a nation has to build its desired workforce. Looking at the Canadian context, the nation is highly developed, with economic centres and labor needs from coast to coast. Its birth rate is amongst the lowest of all developed nations, and below the average of OECD member countries. Therefore, it relies heavily on immigration to meet national labor needs. A 2004 review of Canadian immigration policy over the past several decades indicates a fluctuation in the approach taken by policymakers to achieve economic goals via immigration. Green and Green (2004) found that Canada has gone back and forth between what they term an “absorptive capacity” based policy that takes a short-range view by calibrating immigration precisely to meet immediate labor market needs, and a longer-term approach that focuses on larger immigration flows of adaptable, flexible workers. The idea of the latter approach is that immigration should create “long term economic growth and thus, rather than cutting it back during a recession, this spark to new growth should be maintained even during bad times” (p. 130). This perspective has grown more dominant in recent Canadian immigration policy.

Although Green and Green are sceptical that the long-range approach is in the best interests of Canada, it appears to be in alignment with the “new global knowledge economy” discourse that has only grown stronger since 2004 and currently dominates the social imaginary. The new economy is seen to rely on flexible “competencies” rather than skills, and on qualifications that are

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12 OECD Statistics Portal [http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,3352,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/statsportal/0,3352,en_2825_293564_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)
valuable in the broader global environment, rather than just the national labor market (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 174). These global pressures have continued to shape Canadian immigration policy, which in turn has the potential to shape Canadian higher and graduate education. Immigration policy influences the possibilities for international students and faculty members to engage with Canadian universities, bringing valued capital in many forms to these institutions. The importance of attracting excellent international talent for meeting innovation goals was demonstrated in a compelling recent study in the U.S. which employed a data modelling methodology to calculate the impact of international graduate student enrolment in U.S. science and engineering programs on measures of “innovation output” such as patents (Chellaraj, Maskus & Mattoo, 2008). This study concluded that “increases in foreign graduate students as a proportion of total graduate students had a significantly positive impact on both applications and awards” of patents (p. 454). The authors hypothesize that this phenomenon is connected to the higher proportion of international doctoral students in science and technology fields, and because U.S. students have more opportunity to be employed in non-research activities both on and off campus. In turn, it is the educational and career offerings of high-calibre Western universities that draw and produce the productive, connected, innovative individuals that the nation is eager to have immigrate.

A series of recent immigration policy reforms in Canada further tightens this interdependency, and reflects the pressures and opportunities of the globalizing world. Three are of particular importance in the higher education milieu: changes to the Post-Graduation Work Permit Program (PGWP), the creation of the new “Canadian Experience Class” (CEC) of immigration eligibility and the new eligibility for any foreign PhD student to apply for permanent residency under the “Federal Skilled Worker” category.

The PGWP is presented as an opportunity for international students who have graduated from a Canadian post-secondary institution “to gain valuable Canadian work experience.”13 The work permit available through this program used to be valid only for one or a maximum of two years and recipients had to have a job offer in a field related to their education. The permit is now extended to three years, recipients do not need a job offer, and can work in any skilled job, regardless of whether it is related to their education. The CEC piggybacks on to the PGWP by offering a route to permanent residency for any international student who has combined two years

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of Canadian post-secondary education with one year of work experience in a skilled profession in Canada. It seems apparent that the ideal scenario driving these policies from the government perspective (and perhaps also from the perspective of education providers) is for international students to come to Canada, pay higher international tuition rates (at least in the case of non-doctoral students), obtain a “trustworthy” Canadian education while acclimating to Canadian culture, get a knowledge economy job, and then, through the Canadian Experience Class immigration category, settle permanently in Canada, contributing to a highly skilled workforce.

In 2011, Canada introduced an even more targeted policy to attract and retain doctoral students in particular, recognizing the high value of these individuals for the Canadian workforce. Doctoral students in any field are now eligible to apply to immigrate as “Federal Skilled Workers” after just two years of study. The policy does not establish (or at least make public) any restrictions or preferences for students in close to market fields, but the “innovation” discourse is evoked in the policy’s rationale. The press release that accompanied this policy announcement makes evident that this policy is meant to achieve national talent acquisition and innovation-related goals: “Attracting and retaining immigrants with high levels of skill will help Canada compete in the knowledge-based world economy. With this initiative, we are telling the innovators of tomorrow that Canada is ready to welcome them and their ideas” (Gary Goodyear, Federal Minister of State-Science & Technology). These reforms reflect characteristics of neoliberal globalization, such as minimal regulation and maximum flexibility to compete in the open market of the global talent pool. They can also be seen as a direct attempt to exploit developments in the global geopolitical context which affects human mobility. Mueller (2010) presented compelling evidence that enrolment of international students, particularly from predominantly Muslim countries, decreased in the U.S. while increasing in Canada in the years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, likely in part due to the simultaneous immigration policy restriction in the U.S. and relaxation in Canada. This example demonstrates the global interconnectedness of policy, in that changes in one dimension (or “node”) of the global policy network reverberate elsewhere.

We know from some research literature (to be reviewed shortly) that the potential for immigration is a motivating factor in choosing where to pursue graduate studies for some students. However, there was not any research located that investigates students’ awareness and deliberate
navigation of immigration policies and the immigration options available to them as they consider their graduate school choices and as they may evolve as students proceed through doctoral study in Canada. While this was not a specific research question of this study, student narratives were expected to reveal insights on the ways immigration policy translates to the options they imagine and choices they make as globally mobile individuals.

3.2.2. **Institutional internationalization.** Parallel, and sometimes in response to governmental policy developments, internationalization efforts in higher education institutions have accelerated significantly in the past two decades (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Globalization represents larger processes of worldwide social, cultural and economic interconnectedness which is “mostly beyond the control of individual higher education institutions” (van der Wende, 2007). Internationalization is then a possible response to globalization and can be said to encompass “all the objectives, processes, structures, activities and results that bring elements of global information, action and decision-making to bear on all levels of university life” (Lemasson, 1999, p. 4). An alternative conceptualization of the relationship between the two terms is that globalization reflects the extent to which national systems and individual institutions become more integrated, blurring national boundaries, while internationalization reflects the extent to which they become interconnected, maintaining national boundaries (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007).

Internationalization of institutions takes place for many reasons and takes many forms. Altbach & Knight suggest that the primary motivations for internationalization efforts include economic payoffs (attracting high-paying foreign students and low-cost graduate student labor), meeting access demands, and what they call the “traditional” motivation of “provid(ing) international and cross-cultural perspectives for their students and enhanc(ing) their curricula” (2007, p. 293). In addition, they note that internationalization also happens at the individual level via students themselves who seek international education and future opportunities. Some of the ways that internationalization of institutions is achieved includes deliberately enrolling more international students and hiring foreign-trained faculty, creating cross-border research partnerships, establishing off-shore campuses, and re-shaping curricula to more directly address international and global issues. Institutions are also significantly and increasingly involved in international research partnerships, which broaden their access to additional funding sources and to new “markets” for talented graduate students, postdoctoral scholars and faculty members.

In the 1999 book, “A New World of Knowledge: Canadian Universities and Globalization”, editors Sheryl Bond and Jean-Pierre Lemasson argue that Canadian universities have long been full
and active players in internationalization activities. In this volume, Bond and Scott cite a growing awareness in Canada that internationalization is no longer seen as “a set of unrelated and uncoordinated activities added to the menu of learning opportunities for students...(it) is moving deep into the heart of the academy, affecting the nature of knowledge, defining, for example, what it is, how it is structured, and how it expressed in the curriculum” (p. 65). Especially relevant to doctoral education is a chapter on internationalization of research in Canada (Gingras, Godin and Foisy, 1999) which reports data on the growth of collaborative research publications between Canadian and foreign researchers in the 1990s. In 1995, the Canadian rate of international research collaboration was twice as high as that for the world as a whole in the sciences, and somewhat less high in social sciences and humanities. They note that these results are consistent with those of other “middle power” countries, “which have a greater tendency to collaborate with foreigners than do the larger countries, as they need to frequently look beyond their own borders in search of the expertise that may be missing at home” (p. 87). This data, while now more than fifteen years old, makes a compelling point about opportunities and pressures for Canadian universities to internationalize, and therefore provide their doctoral students with those same opportunities and pressures, due to its place in the global academic milieu.

In a survey of research on the internationalization of higher education, Kehm and Teichler (2007) found that the topic had become a key thematic area of higher education research in the mid-1990s and research interest has increased steadily since then. Other trends they noted were that studies on internationalization in higher education were particularly prevalent in policy-oriented publications and were becoming more complex, politicized and closely linked to other topics such as management, policy and funding. Overall, the concerns most commonly addressed in the research included mobility of students and academic staff, mutual influences of higher education systems on each other, internationalisation of the substance of teaching, learning, and research, institutional strategies of internationalisation, cooperation and competition, and national and supranational policies regarding the international dimension of higher education. (Kehm & Teichler, 2007, p. 264).

While the topics on this list are undoubtedly of significant importance in investigating the increasingly global context in which universities operate, a gap remains in our understanding of how students themselves actually experience and interpret the internationalization of their educational experiences and the institutions in which they are pursued. This study contributes to filling that gap through exploring participants’ views on living and learning within a highly internationalized
university environment. To complete this section on the policy and institutional context of the current study, a review of the specific UBC context of internationalization follows.

3.2.2.1. The UBC context. At the University of British Columbia, President Stephen J. Toope released a “thought paper” in 2009 in which he called into question UBC’s success in maximizing the opportunities of internationalization, and laid out strategic principles for the institution to become “relevant and significant as a globally influential university” (2009, p. 2). He notes that such global influence, via being “at the centre of dialogue and activities on the big issues that matter” is increasingly how major research universities are judged. While calling UBC “one of Canada’s most internationally engaged universities”, he also suggests that the “whole seems to amount to less than the sum of its parts” (p. 2). He attributes this partly to a general decline in Canada’s global influence and partly to an incoherent strategy at UBC. Toope envisions a bold role for UBC and universities generally, in “re-establish(ing) a more prominent role for Canada around the world” (p. 4).

Of particular relevance to this study are some of the “principles of engagement” and priorities that Toope suggests in relation to student experience and research engagement. He states that “international engagement is a good in itself for it reveals new worlds to students...it is likely to enrich lives and open spirits”, that “engagement across borders and cultures is ethical only if the benefits are to a significant degree mutual”, and that “existing international ties developed by faculty members and students should form the primary basis for increased interaction” (pp. 4-5). This frames internationalization as something done to promote the “good” of education, in an ethical framework and from a grassroots, more than top-down approach. He further specifies the role he sees for foreign graduate students in institutional internationalization, pointing to their value to the university in bringing their talents to UBC’s programs, creating connections with foreign institutions, enhancing cultural diversity on campus, improving UBC’s international reputation, drawing new talent permanently to Canada, and, for those students who return to their home countries (he didn’t mention the possibility of them moving on to third countries), “opening up possibilities for future academic, economic and social interaction with Canadians” (p. 14).

Toope’s treatise on internationalization was followed at UBC by the release of the institutional strategic plan (“Place and Promise”), which identified as strategic goals to “increase the capacity of UBC students, faculty, staff, and alumni to engage internationally” and to “strengthen UBC’s presence as a globally influential university” (UBC, 2009). This was followed in 2011 by the development of an “International Strategic Plan” (UBC, 2011) which elaborated on these goals with a focus on, among others issues, to “significantly increase the number of international graduate
students seeking degrees at UBC” and to “establish significant new strategic research partnerships.”

These goals are largely justified in terms of university imperatives to provide an environment for student learning which prepares them for lives and careers in a global context, and to advance global social good through providing access to education and through the generation and dissemination of knowledge internationally. This is summarized as follows:

The University has a responsibility to educate students with internationally grounded perspectives and critical capacities. This is the essence of global citizenship. In addition, as a world leading university, UBC has a responsibility to advance knowledge in areas of vital global concern such as sustainability. This includes, of course, advancing research and scholarship, but also extends to disseminating this knowledge globally, educating students from around the world, and promoting intercultural understanding within our communities (UBC, 2011, p. 3).

Through such policy statements, UBC, like many other major research universities, positions itself as advancing an academic discourse of purpose for education that combines the creation and transmission of knowledge with social contribution imperatives. Toope and the UBC International Strategic Plan carefully promote the academic and ethical imperatives of internationalization, acknowledging the challenges and opportunities faced by universities in a globalizing world, but they also notably underplay any economic motivations or advantage to the university from further internationalization. Financial benefits from bringing in more high-paying international undergraduates or fully-funded international graduate scholarship holders, increasing lucrative international collaborative research grants and industry partnerships, and creating a worldwide alumni network that delivers philanthropic dividends to the university are all underlying and powerful motivators for increased international engagement as well. When university policy papers suggest a goal of expanding UBC’s global influence, it certainly pertains to increasing economic influence as well as to expanding the educational, research and social contribution reach of the university.

It may seem unsavory for the university to be forthright about the economic benefits of internationalization, lest it appear corporate or exploitative, and indeed the economic development activities of the public university can fundamentally be seen as being in service to its educational and social advancement purposes rather than private gain. However, the government policymakers have little to gain in obscuring the fact that international students are financial drivers. Recent releases from both the BC and Federal governments trumpet the economic value of international students and challenge universities to expand their enrolment. Ottawa reports that “in 2010, international students in Canada spent in excess of $7.7 billion on tuition, accommodation and
discretionary spending; created over 81,000 jobs; and generated more than $445 million in government revenue.”  

The BC government’s “Jobs Plan” states that “In 2010 alone, international students spent more than $1.8 billion in British Columbia, supporting 22,000 jobs and generating $70 million in government revenue. That makes international education B.C.’s fifth largest export – with an almost unlimited potential for growth.” The provincial government seeks to increase international student enrolment (at all levels of education) by 50% in five years. The economic value of international students at the doctoral level is not as direct as high tuition paying undergraduate, masters and even secondary students, and such students are attracted by universities more for their indirect productivity value than their direct revenue generation value. Doctoral students are also not known for their disposable income, but surely do bring some level of increased economic activity to line local business coffers. This may also be part of the explanation for why the BC government has discontinued its graduate scholarship program, as they redirect resources into staff and offices to attract more high-revenue international students at lower levels of the education system.

The policy initiatives related to “internationalization” in institutions and the governments which support them tell us much about how the purposes of education, and the presence of international students are constructed by these entities. This study is an opportunity to parallel the discourses of purpose and actual practices advanced by the university and public policymakers to the professed purposes and experiences of study participants as they act as “internationalizing agents” of universities. Convergences and divergences will be revealing of the dynamics between institutional and student agendas.

3.2.3. Summary. In a globalizing world which is increasingly characterized by the accelerated mobility of people and ideas worldwide, global economies based on knowledge and technical innovation, and a neoliberal ideology which subjects public domains such as education to market forces, it is not surprising that governments and higher education institutions are seeking to maximize their advantages in a global field through the strategic use and positioning of graduate education and international graduate students in particular. Doctoral education produces exactly

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what is most valued in this globalizing context—highly skilled individuals who are prepared (to more or less a degree depending on academic discipline) to enter a knowledge-intensive labor force and who, while students, are generating research and instructional labor and goods, which in some fields, may lead to commercializable products. The emphasis on science and technology and their commercialization potential is inescapable in this framing, and leads inevitably to a science bias in policy at both state and institutional levels, in Canada and elsewhere (Chan & Fisher, 2008; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). Theorists have coined the term “scientific and technical human capital” (Bozeman, Dietz & Gaughan, 2001) as a way to recognize “the dynamic interplay between scientists’ human capital and their social networks” (Bozeman & Mangematin, 2004, p. 565). This concept indicates that it is not only the specific knowledge and skills that individuals possess that make them valuable, but also how these individuals and their knowledge now circulate within global social networks.

Research/innovation policies are geared toward promoting industry infiltration of higher education (although the preferred term is “partnership”), and a certain level of mobility of international graduate students between countries and between academia and industry. Study/work visa policies encourage students to be mobile enough to come to Canada (or the U.S. or Australia or the U.K., etc.) but then aim to retain the value of such students “permanently” in country through immigration incentives. Countries which tend to be stronger “senders” of students than recipients are also shaping their policies to try to reduce the “brain drain” that can come with increasing mobility. In the Canadian context, this most often means the loss of highly skilled individuals to the United States (Easton, Harris & Schmitt, 2005). Such policies include the government funding of graduate students to study abroad, with the restriction that recipients must return to the home country for a specific period post-degree, and efforts to improve research infrastructure to retain the best “home grown” minds in national universities or entice educational emigrants to return. All of these policies seem to convey the message “Be mobile, but not so mobile that we lose our investment. Be mobile to our advantage.”

Higher education institutions such as UBC also promote international mobility, by striving to recruit outstanding international graduate students through various marketing and student funding schemes, and also establishing academic mobility mechanisms for students to circulate through UBC and international partner institutions on exchange programs. Ostensibly, these international exchanges are meant to edify the student learning experiences, which they unquestionably do. However, the institutional goals of “becoming globally influential”, have purposes well beyond the
educational enrichment of students. Financial imperatives such as the diversification of financial inputs through international student tuition and research grants can be achieved through “internationalization” efforts, as well as achieving more academic imperatives such as optimizing knowledge and solving real-world problems through international collaborations. In both cases, student mobility serves institutional as well as student purposes.

Some state actors have conceded that highly skilled individuals are motivated to maintain their mobility to maximize their opportunities, and therefore have pursued policies which maintain strong ties with their human capital diaspora. This is the “brain circulation” argument which acknowledges the potential contributions that highly skilled migrants can make to their home countries through their access to the world’s most developed economies and research networks (Johnson & Regts, 1998). These policies “exploit the situated networks of the expatriates” rather than attempt to “extract the individual from the locale in which their skills are at their optimum in order to entice them to return them to the home country” (Davenport, 2004, p. 627). These efforts focus on building capacity, productivity and connectivity of local research networks vis-à-vis international networks and assume that “the global flow of skilled human capital...is inevitable and should be viewed as a resource rather than a loss to be stemmed” (Davenport, 2004, p. 628). It is worth noting that at the institutional level, the intense efforts to maintain connection with alumni networks serve many of the same purposes. In these ways, both government and university actors seek to harness the forces of globalization towards national and institutional goals.

3.3. Purpose and choice in international doctoral study

The previous section focused on the motives of government and institutions to promote international graduate student productivity and mobility and the policy mechanisms employed to do so. Of course, the other significant “players” in this dynamic are the students themselves. It is not difficult to imagine bright, young, well-educated individuals having a range of compelling reasons to seek educational credentials “elsewhere”. Indeed, research on student motives for going abroad for tertiary education reveal common themes, particularly for students from countries with developing economies and educational systems. These include improving qualifications for a global job market (including obtaining a more prestigious credential and learning English), lack of local access to suitable opportunities, providing access and contacts in a desirable location for purposes of migration, and simple “exposure” to different ways of thinking and living (Rizvi, 2000). At the doctoral level, motivations may become more focussed on accessing elite levels of training and
academic and professional networks. But what compels students to go somewhere in particular? What opportunities and outcomes are imagined to be possible and attractive, and why? How does what is imagined become what actually occurs or transform to something else with experience? This section considers the literature that addresses these questions empirically and finds, unsurprisingly, a range of approaches to understanding the motivations and outcomes of the international student’s pursuit of graduate education.

A fairly significant body of literature takes a “factor analysis” approach to identifying processes and specific factors related to the choice of country and institution for international students. Influential factors discovered have ranged from institutional/program reputation (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), geographic location (Poock, 1997), Universities’ marketing and communication efforts (Chen, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Waters, 1992); and the influence of significant others (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). This work will not be reviewed in detail here; one reason is that much of it focuses on undergraduate international student mobility in an era previous to the contemporary period of high globalization. But more importantly, this dissertation takes a different theoretical view on the movement of individuals across borders to pursue doctoral education. Concepts such as imagination, desire and mobility take center stage here, concepts which do not appear in a traditional factor analysis approach. Concentrating on the literature linking student mobility to themes of globalization such as transnational space and the global social imaginary brings the focus to the broader social context in which individuals are constructing and navigating opportunities as “agents of transnationalism” (Al-Ali & Koser, 2002, p. 5). However, an initial review of two recent studies which focus on factors related to international graduate student choices provides a helpful foundation of the more traditional view of the phenomenon, from which we can depart into newer understandings of “mobility”.

3.3.1. Factors tied to international graduate student educational choices. An example of factor analysis research from the Canadian graduate education context is offered by Chen (2007) who utilized both survey and interview data to explore the processes by which students from Asian countries came to select a Canadian institution for graduate study, and the variables which most influenced their choices. Drawing on Mazzarol & Soutar’s conceptualization of “push and pull” factors motivating student choice (2002), Chen arrived at a choice-process model in which decisions are made at three levels—deciding to study abroad, deciding on a country, and deciding on an institution (although the country level may be bypassed when the goal is to study in a specific
institution). Additionally, the Chen choice-process model suggests the choice is influenced by three categories of factors—student characteristics and motivations (such as socio-economic status, personal preferences, academic ability and career prospects), significant others (e.g., family, friends, academic mentors and employers) and external push-pull factors. The “push” factors are the elements of their home country scenario which compel them outward to consider international education (such as lack of local opportunity), while the “pull” factors are the opportunities and attributes which steer them toward a particular country and/or institution (such as prestige, quality of education, desire for English training, funding, and local environment).

Chen ties the push-pull factors to processes of internationalization and globalization which make international study valuable. Some of the core findings most relevant to this study were that improving career prospects and English skills, having an “experience” of Western culture, and the prestige of an international credential were major motivators for studying abroad, and that for students in research-intensive programs, professors were the most influential “significant others”. However, there were significant differences by country of origin in the perceived value of studying abroad. For example, international study is highly valued in China, Korea and Taiwan, but not in Japan. For Japanese students, the active urging of professors to study abroad was the strongest influence. This is an interesting indication of how national cultures do mediate larger trends of globalization. In the case of Japan, these findings seem to illustrate that globalization asserts its influence through professors who are likely linked to global academic networks.

In an additional choice factor study looking at international graduate student motivations and choice of graduate schools in the U.S. context, Ruby (2007) surveyed students at six research-intensive universities. This analysis focused on the relationship between independent student variables of sex, age, citizenship and academic program, and dependent variables of general institutional characteristics (such as location), reputation, influences of significant others, institutional marketing and recruitment activities and financial characteristics (such as cost and scholarship support). Significant findings of note in this study included doctoral students assigning more importance to financial and reputational characteristics than masters students, and Asian students reporting being more influenced by significant others and recruitment tactics of universities than students from Latin America or Europe. Surprisingly, there were no differences found in relation to the sex of respondents on any dependent variables.

Chen’s and Ruby’s studies provide a good starting point (perhaps foil) from which to consider alternative conceptualizations of the process and motivations of doctoral education
abroad. Their studies introduce us to some of the important dynamics of and key determinants of choice of graduate school location for a range of international students, and suggest that these factors can be seen differently by individuals from different national contexts. In doing so, they hint (but do not address outright) that these decisions are being made in response to the pressures and opportunities of a globalizing world. Chen in particular frames her student participants as part of the “creative class” (Florida, 2002), who seek global experience and are valued and courted internationally for their potential economic and cultural contributions. The fundamental push-pull model in her study is also broadened to consider geopolitical dynamics beyond “home and host” locations, specifically in its identification of the looming significance of the United States in the study participants’ choice of a Canadian institution. While many students would have preferred to pursue graduate study in the U.S., difficulties in either obtaining an admission offer or a study permit were factors pushing students away from the U.S., and pulling them towards Canada due to its proximity to the U.S., generally high quality education, and ease of visa approval. Not surprisingly, this triangulation dynamic with the U.S. was also found in a study of Muslim graduate students studying in Canada (Mostafa, 2006) who were pushed away from the U.S. in the post-9/11 era. Chen’s study participants also reported the importance of digital, easy-to-access information about graduate programs to their choice process, reflecting the influence of networked communication that is characteristic of contemporary globalization.

Ultimately however, these studies can be critiqued for assuming too much rationality on the part of its actors and an uncontested linearity to the process of choosing a destination for graduate study, with a set of fixed variables under consideration. It is indeed possible to imagine that, when later recounting the experience to a researcher, a student could report a linear process of seeking information, assessing options, collecting input from significant others, and a rational decision about whether to pursue study abroad and where. In fact, this may indeed be a typical set of behaviours that accompany the decision choice. But what of the ambivalence, the conflicting motives, the difficult-to-articulate social influences, and the constructions of self and imagined futures that surely accompany and shape a decision of this magnitude and consequence in the context of a complex and globalizing world? To address these issues, a different approach is required.

3.3.2. The transnational turn in mobility studies. Some scholars have taken a turn away from investigating measurable factors related to the mobility choices of international students and instead, situate international graduate students in the broader dialogue on highly-skilled migration,
migrancy and transnationalism, offering a theoretical path and research findings that integrate dimensions of globalization more deeply into understanding international student motivations and experiences in graduate study. Scholars working in areas of transnationalism and migration studies (Bailey, 2001; Al-Ali & Koser, 2002) suggest that under conditions of globalization, in which information circulates rapidly and almost without barrier, processes of becoming mobile and living transnationally do not happen in a linear way. Mobility (of bodies, lives, identities, imaginations) becomes the paradigmatic characteristic in what Bailey (2001) calls the “transnational turn” in understanding the movement of individuals across borders, the lives they lead, the affiliations they make and the identities they develop.

Baas (2009) has suggested that mobility (or in his formulation, imagined mobility) is a useful construct for examining the actions and motivations of students in pursuing graduate education abroad in a globalizing world. He problematizes a rational, linear approach to graduate program choice after discovering in his ethnographic study of Indian “postgrad” (largely Masters) students in Australia, that in many cases these students had multiple and conflicting motivations for international study that continued to evolve after arrival in Australia, and which cannot be condensed into discrete “factors”. He argues that “the way we understand migration and transnationalism is often too static and basically ignores the wider process that influences the decision to live abroad...the way people imagine life abroad is still often omitted from the equation.” (p. 174). He concludes that investigating the ways individuals imagine their lives and their futures is a crucial element of understanding motivation to study abroad. In this framework, whatever the pushing and pulling “choice factors” that studies like Chen’s and Ruby’s isolate and identify, it is the imagined experiences and outcomes of international study that underlie seemingly rational decision-making.

Imagination is a creative space, but it is not unbounded. Theorizations of the “global social imaginary”, suggest that what we can imagine is shaped by our experiences, by what we’ve seen, heard, felt and learned. As Rivzi puts it, “Imagination is the attempt to provide coherence between ideas and action, to provide a basis for the content of social relationship and the creation of categories with which to understand the world around us. What is imagined defines what we regard as normal” (2000, p. 223). As discussed previously, forces of globalization have radically changed the social imaginary. For example, the ways the Indian students in Baas’ study imagine Australia, and indeed, how they imagine themselves as “future transnationals” are shaped by the collateral of the globalized network society—advertisements tailored to paint a picture of
Melbourne and Sydney as exciting, multi-cultural hubs of the knowledge economy, other media images including Bollywood films featuring Indian migrants to Australia, agents hired by Australian universities to work in India on their behalf, stories of other students shared via the internet. Higher education is becoming increasingly commercialized and commodified by institutions of higher education, and by peripheral industries such as educational agents as well, so the motivation to “sell mobility” to a market of individuals who are eager to imagine new possibilities is significant. However, this imagined future, often overlaid with a glossy neoliberal capitalist facade, was met by contrary experience for many students in Baas’ study. They had successfully negotiated their way across the ocean to Australia, but “arriving also means being confronted with the reality of now being in a place which previously only existed in the imagination” (Baas, 2009, p. 40). The reality of their experiences included poor educational experiences at for-profit “universities”, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and long hours at distasteful jobs (the night shift at 7-11 was a common one) to afford life in a Westernized economy.

Based on his research, Baas argues that above all, his study participants are motivated by a desire to be “transnationally mobile”, imagining this state as one in which they will have the ability to take advantage of the best opportunities available in a globalizing world, wherever they may emerge. Baas found that many students’ choice to go to Australia revolved around the notion of obtaining permanent residency (PR) there. This was, ironically, not so much about becoming “permanent” (fixed) in Australia, but becoming “mobile”. Even those students who, at the beginning of their stay in Australia, said they were there primarily as “serious students” were ultimately drawn into the dominant narrative (imaginary) of their fellow international students, and often adjusted their studies and work experiences toward whatever gave the best chance of “getting PR”. Students imagined Australian residency as a way to “get out” of India and facilitate easier transnational mobility, possibly even a way to eventually get to the much-desired destination of the United States. Baas’ work situates international students as “people on the move” who are in an “in-between” location—having departed a home country, but not yet immigrants (if they ever will be), and generally not yet arrived (if they ever will) at whatever status or location which motivated their leaving in the first place.

This approach transforms our understanding of the motivations of international students from a framework of how they choose between one place or another, one nation or another, to seeing their choice as a way to access one place and another. It is the “and” that defines the motivation to be transnationally mobile and reflects the international student experience of
“straddling worlds” and being “grounded in multiple social spaces” (Gargano, 2009, p. 336). As Baas found, students were seeking to ensure “that going back to India remained an option rather than a threat. Their aim was flexibility, the type required to be able to regularly move back and forth between both home country and their chosen destination...the idea of in-betweenness refers to not having to commit to any one country in particular” (p. 180, 182). This “in-between” stage of studenthood is referred to a “pseudo-migratory” by Szelenyi (2006) who also recognizes this period as an instance of living in transnational space where a prolonged but presumed temporary stay in a “receiving” country may transform the intentions with which a student arrived. And, in an important additional analysis of the gendering and cultural reading of mobility, Baas derives from his interview data a conclusion that the rewards of imagined transnational mobility (symbolized by the obtaining of Australian Permanent Residency) translate differently for women and men. For the women, “PR” represented freedom to live life as they pleased, with less binding to traditional gender roles and marriage expectations of life in India, whereas the men’s desired mobility was “based on stereotypical images of the successful, transnationally mobile, globally active, middle class India” (Baas, p. 148).

In a study offering a valuable perspective on graduate education mobility from outside the Western-dominated literature, Gracia Liu-Farrer (2009) used ethnographic methods to explore the work and educational experiences and career aspirations of Chinese students seeking (mainly) professional Masters education in Japan. Here too, mobility appears as a key goal in both student and host country motivations for study abroad. Supporting theories of higher education’s implication in reflecting and promoting neoliberal globalization, Liu-Farrer coins an evocative term, “educationally channelled international labor mobility” (p. 179). Her study focuses on the ways there is an overt exchange of economic value between international graduate students from China and the Japanese labor market, in which these students play a significant role in filling low-wage jobs while studying. Chinese students show willingness to work tremendously hard at such jobs, in exchange for the opportunity to obtain graduate degrees which will eventually place them well in the competitive market for professional positions in Japanese transnational companies that value their ties to China. In a way, this parallels the characterization of graduate students as “tokens of exchange” that Slaughter and colleagues (2002) found between faculty supervisors and industry placements.

The study also reveals an interesting regional twist on the Western trend of focussing on skilled labor migration in science and engineering. Liu-Farrer found that the majority of Chinese
students in Japan enrol in “arts” programs, because under conditions of a globalized economy, the current Japanese labor market demands professionals with knowledge and cultural and language skills relevant to international marketing and trade. As the author succinctly states, “With the expansion of the transnational economy, the linguistic cultural, and social skills international students acquire in the process of migration have increasing economic utility” (p. 200). This research provides a helpful reference point for this study, as it inquires into the potential trade-offs made by international graduate students who enter an institution that values them in part for their academic labor and contributions to institutional “internationalization”, vis-à-vis the student’s own career imaginings.

Both the Baas and Liu-Farrer studies are models of qualitative research into the forces of neoliberal globalization as experienced by international graduate students, using theoretical constructs such as transnationalism and social imaginary to analyze and situate these dynamics. The parallels to this study are evident. Where this study departs from Baas and Liu-Farrer is in its focus on doctoral students from a wide range of national backgrounds. Although motives to “become mobile”, potentially by seeking permanent residency in Canada, and to enhance career opportunities in a global field are likely to surface in some students’ narratives, the pursuit of a doctoral degree represents an investment in an academic discipline that far surpasses that of the student pursuing a one or two year professional Master’s degree in whichever field appears to be most likely to lead expediently to a well-paying job and/or a PR card. Also, students from different geographic (and economic) locations are likely to have diverging motivations for coming to North America, and to Canada in particular. One of the more interesting opportunities of this study was to compare the narratives of students from countries as culturally, economically and politically different as, for example, the United States and Iran. Does educational mobility serve some, all or none of the same purposes for these diverse students?

In a study that has strong parallels to this research in its cross-cultural view, but from a U.S. perspective, Katalin Szelényi (2006) investigated the migratory decision-making of international graduate students enrolled in a research master’s or doctoral program at a major U.S. research institution. The decision to study abroad and intentions to migrate or return home after studies have a clear relationship to the possibilities students imagine for themselves in a globalizing world. Szelényi interviewed graduate students from China, Italy and Brazil, and found common themes across their explanations of their decisions to study in the U.S. and of their post-graduation aspirations. Many study participants emphasized that the connectivity of countries and cultures,
and the flow of information in cyberspace that characterizes modern globalization, had a major enabling role in their decisions to undertake international graduate study. The easy availability of information about opportunities elsewhere led them to imagine alternative possibilities in a more concrete and informed way. Social relationships, especially those with academic mentors in their home countries, and friends or family that had previous experience in transnational space with U.S. universities, or strong impressions of American prestige also provided motivation for the students to pursue U.S. graduate study. The student participants in this study also indicated powerful individual and collective motivators for international graduate education; on the individual side, they cited personal curiosity, adventurousness and a desire to achieve higher professional status. The reputation of superior quality in U.S. universities was a major draw for these students, who saw their U.S. degree as an *entée* to better career opportunities and economic advancement. On the collective side, several students expressed a desire to contribute to their home countries by bringing their new training and expertise gained in the U.S. “back home” or by working for transnational organizations.

This latter motivation was also found in a study of sub-Saharan African doctoral students in a social science discipline in a U.S. university, who indicated that contribution to the development of their home regions and identity-affiliation groups was a significant motivation (Smith, 2007). Smith calls this the “desire-production” link, emphasizing the desire of students “to produce knowledge relevant to their experiences” and to produce for themselves “mobility, flexibility...and the opportunity to work creatively and to realize one’s full potential in one’s career” (p. 55). She contrasts this to the “desire-consumption” discourse that has had strong play in both the educational policy and migration research realms which has tied desire for mobility to the desire to consume Western material goods and culture. Smith concludes that one fundamental desire driving international doctoral study is the motivation to produce global opportunity and culturally-relevant knowledge. This drive to produce knowledge may be one of the distinguishing characteristics separating the motives of doctoral students from professional Master’s level students. However, Smith argues, in order for students to maximize the opportunities and knowledge afforded by a Western doctoral education, students must exert active agency to construct (produce) their education in a way that is relevant to their own context. I will expand on this crucial point in the following discussion of research on the living and learning experiences of international doctoral students, as it demonstrates some of the key challenges and disconnects such students experience in tying their motives for international graduate study to their imagined and desired outcomes.
3.3.3. Summary. Research literature on student mobility suggests that decisions to undertake international study are complex and fluid, motivated by both practical issues and intangible, imagined futures. Attempts to segment and measure “factors” in this process may succeed in surfacing important considerations for the analysis of student mobility, but are somewhat futile in capturing the breadth and complexity of why students move, and how their goals and motivations change in the “in-between” spaces of transnational mobility. We know that these choices reflect agency on the part of students, but a “bounded agency” which is shaped by social structures and policies that are increasingly influenced by the transformative processes of globalization. As well-stated by Harney and Baldassar, “These transformations, however ‘fluid’ or rapidly changing are embodied or made material through specific bodies (such as migrants) or through institutions or ideas that manifest themselves in local sites” (2007, p. 192). In her work on academic mobility, McAlpine (2012) echoes the notion that most literature on cross-border human capital development fails “to attend to how this ‘supply of skills’ is physically and emotionally embodied in particular individuals” (p. 175). Thus, macro-scale analyses of economic determinants of mobility, “push-pull” factors and policy levers must eventually be joined by investigations of micro-level individual considerations and narratives of motivations, interpretations and personal evolutions to understand the phenomena of international doctoral students in globalized, transnational space.

3.4. Living and learning experiences and future trajectories

Students arrive physically on campuses abroad with a social habitus; ways of thinking, behaving and interacting that have become normalized to them through their experiences and situated acculturation. This includes culturally-influenced epistemological and ontological assumptions. They also may arrive with an academic skill set (including varying levels of English proficiency) that differs significantly from that which is valued and is required to foster ‘success’ in their new academic environment. Similarly, as noted in the Baas study of Indian students in Australia, students arrive with imagined experiences and outcomes of their academic study in mind. All of these dimensions of students’ academic habitus and imagined futures will vary in their fit with the norms, expectations and resources of an institution, and will change with the evolving realities of life in transnational space. Taking as fact Massey and Zenteno’s claim that “once someone has lived and worked in a foreign setting, he or she is no longer the same person” (1999, p. 532), we wonder how the experience of international doctoral study transforms the student’s academic perspectives, sense of identity, their career plans and trajectories. In considering the value placed
by institutions on attracting the best international graduate students, we also may wonder whether the transformation goes both ways; that is, how, if at all, does the presence of international doctoral students bring change to the institutions in which they study? Further, how does the transformation inherent in international doctoral study possibly reverberate back to students’ home countries or other future destinations?

3.4.1. Navigating the transnational learning context. A review of studies, especially those conducted within the past ten years of “high” globalization, can inform us about how international graduate students are making sense of (or imagining) their experiences, opportunities and challenges in transnational space and the globalizing university, how they experience transformation (and even become agents of change), and how institutions adjust (or more frequently, do not adjust) their practices to address and benefit from the diverse academic needs and contributions of international students. Quantitative and mixed-methodology studies are again helpful in surfacing some key factors affecting the international student experience. However, not surprisingly, qualitative studies which amplify the voices of participants in the international doctoral education experience, often appear to problematize the results obtained through survey research. Survey-based studies on the international student experience have generally found high levels of satisfaction with academic programs (Fletcher & Stren, 1989; Harman, 2003; Trice & Yoo, 2007). For example, a survey study of nearly 500 international graduate students in a wide range of academic disciplines revealed that most students felt they were meeting their academic and career goals and were satisfied with their relationship with faculty (Trice & Yoo, 2007). A large majority (77%) felt prepared to work in their home country following graduation. However, despite finding a generally high level of satisfaction, through this study and others, it becomes evident that international students face a myriad of challenges in extracting optimal value from their education. Among the challenges are adapting to their new academic environment, connecting with other students and making their education relevant to their future plans and home contexts. Research findings also indicate that challenges differ by discipline, post-graduation plans, national background and level of English proficiency.

In looking at social patterns of international graduate students, Trice makes a compelling argument (2004) that students of differing backgrounds have access to varying levels of social capital, based on their ability to form relationships with domestic (U.S.) students. Research has shown that contact with domestic graduate students positively influences international students’ academic experiences (Perrucci & Hu, 1995), but not all international students are equally able to
form such relationships, due to language barriers and significant cultural differences. Trice argues that international graduate students from backgrounds that are culturally similar to the host country and have minimal language barriers, benefit most from the social capital garnered through close ties to the host country’s students. Trice further found that students from some cultural backgrounds (particularly Middle Eastern and African students) were less concerned about interacting with American students than others (especially Asian students) were, and had a stronger tendency to establish their own insular support networks of other similar students, a finding that was replicated by Mostafa (2006) in a study of Muslim students in Canada. Proficiency in English has also been found to be a significant factor in the ability of international students to form relationships beyond their own cultural group and in their sense of comfort and competency in the academic program (Brown, 2008). Although this analysis was not undertaken in the Trice study, the level of concern about socially integrating with host students could be hypothesized to be related to the positioning of home countries in relation to neoliberal globalization (with the Middle East and Africa being more on the periphery and Asia more central). Perhaps for students more on the periphery of globalization, the social capital of developing linkages with American students and improving English by venturing out of monolingual and monocultural enclaves, is not as valuable as it may be for those students who are, or intend to enter the global mainstream.

With regard to academic learning experiences, the research has shown that some international doctoral students struggle to make their experiences relevant to their “home” cultural context. In this struggle, universities, doctoral program curricula and faculty members often do not exhibit the same fluidity that the students themselves are compelled to embrace. Through her research on a special “bridging” program for international students in Australia, Cadman (2000) concluded that “both postgraduates and their supervising staff often assume unquestioningly that only newly-recruited foreign postgraduates need to change their academic goals and practices, especially in relation to critical thinking and to studying in a different postgraduate research culture” (p. 475). Trice and Yoo found that most students did not believe that their courses had an international focus or that faculty members altered assignments to accommodate their unique needs or interests as international students. Non-native English speaking students in particular report that it is important for professors to be “culturally sensitive” to the specific challenges and varying perspectives of international students, lest such students be unfairly judged by the host country’s “cultural norms, behaviours and values” (Myles & Cheng, 2003).
In interview-based studies, Trice found that while most faculty members recognized that international students “face unique academic and personal issues” (2003), there were mixed results regarding attitudes toward international students and academic departments’ attempts to address unique needs by altering pedagogical practice (2005). Such shifts to practice were more common in the “sociotechnical” fields she studied (Architecture, Public Health) than “technical” ones (Mechanical Engineering, Materials Science). In general, those in the sociotechnical fields were more likely to view international students as a distinct asset, enhancing the program’s international reputation and enriching the learning environment. There were concerns across all departments about English proficiency, and in the technical fields, about segregation of international students, although the technical fields did little to intervene in these perceived problems.

In a study of international doctoral students studying in the social sciences in the U.K., Robinson-Pant (2009) found two primary areas of academic “cultural conflict” which concerned students, criticality and research emphasis and approach. This was particularly the case with students coming from developing (rather than developed) countries. Many students reported that the emphasis on “being critical” in Western academia was a foreign and uncomfortable concept, especially when expected to do it directly and in English. Some reported that “it would not be appropriate to facilitate open critique in a more hierarchical cultures and situation where it might be politically dangerous” (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 421). The research intensivity of PhD programs and approach to research ethics also posed a dilemma for some students. They would be returning to a home academic culture in which a greater value is put on teaching than research, and they would be expected to “have returned as a better teacher and not as a better researcher” (p. 418). The Western approach to conducting and writing up qualitative research in particular created conflict for some students. When returning home to do fieldwork, researchers found that “legalistic” Western ways of obtaining informed consent were looked upon as insulting to local values of trust. Research epistemologies which privilege the voices of those studied over the researcher’s, and engage participants in co-constructing meaning from interview data for example, were viewed as going against traditional hierarchies and were difficult to implement. Writing up research in English, and in the first person, as many students reported their supervisors pressing them to do, left some students feeling either ‘disempowered’ by not being able to use their native tongue, or too “self-centred” by writing in the first person. Some faced (or anticipated) criticism from colleagues in their home country for having an overly “dominant authorial voice and critical stance” in their research (p. 419). Robinson-Pant’s study found that different cultural assumptions
about doing research “were rarely explored in supervision encounters or taken account of within university proceedings” (p. 420).

These findings ask us to consider a core question about globalization and higher education. That is, whether increasing “internationalization” of graduate education simply implies the development of more international research partnerships and the enrolment of more international students, with the expectation that they will assimilate to standardized academic practices in the new (Western) environment? Or, must the institution adapt to accommodate the unique needs and pathways of at least some of the international students it enrols? Cadman (2000) suggests that universities strive to move beyond interculturalism, which denotes the simple additions of new cultures to an institutional environment to transculturalism “in which a common culture is created which is different from the original cultures of both teachers and students.” She rightfully identifies that “a central challenge of internationalising postgraduate education is for us to embrace the politics of difference which it generates in a way which moves us fruitfully towards culturally inclusive learning dialogues” (p. 477). Kim (2009) argues that while promoting “interculturality” is part of the internationalization and student learning rhetoric at universities, in fact there is little attempt to actualize this ideal, and market forces driving more international students and scholars into a dominant educational paradigm prevail. A counter-argument that might be proposed is that for those students who intend to remain transnationally mobile, or will be working in a country that is more fully integrated into modern globalization, adopting the dominant Western academic norms, while perhaps a struggle during the program itself, can only be a benefit to them after completion. In the globalizing world, “professional academic cultures extend beyond the boundaries of the national culture” (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 419), and perhaps acculturation into the English-dominated, transnational academic culture is a key to success in a global academic market.

However, in the debate about the relevance of doctoral training to a wide range of professional settings (Craswell, 2007; Golde & Dore, 2001; Golde & Walker, 2006), there is little attention paid to the particular concerns of international students who may be returning to a home country in which both the academic and non-academic career paths differ significantly from the norm in westernized countries, where many of them will have received their training. Despite globalization, not all students will become highly mobile after receiving their degrees, and worldwide systems of higher education, while converging, are not homogenous. In terms of academic career pathways, even after graduation with a PhD, students may still find themselves “in-between” academic cultures and navigating a dilemma of adapting to or agitating for change.
(absorbed in their Western doctoral training) in a “home” institution where the student may be filling or returning to an academic position (Robinson-Pant, 2007). It remains to be seen whether, as globalization continues, the dominant academic culture will continue to homogenize and demand assimilation, or will diversify and embrace more and different ways of “doing” graduate education and research into its repertoire. However, as aptly pointed out by Nerad and Tryzna, “In a global higher education system where a few nations dominate the international research and publishing agenda, it is difficult for other nations and scholars to identify or lead distinctly different research agendas” (2008, p. 301).

If the institution (or global field) is unlikely to change on its own accord to reflect and respond to the needs and interests of international doctoral students, it is left to the students themselves to try to shape their education towards their own needs. Most doctoral students, international or not, must be agents in charting their course as independent researchers and may need to navigate cultural divides between their perspectives and the expectations of the academic culture in their program. However, especially for international students who will engage in academic work on the outskirts of the globalized network society, doctoral study calls on them to exert a tremendous amount of agency to “own” their education, shape it in a manner that will serve their best interests, and allow them to produce work that has credibility in both host and home environments. Smith found that for African students at her university, “the full potential of their presence in programs was often not maximized because of what one participant described as the ‘unequal value’ placed on what is proffered by programs and what international graduate students bring into programs and classrooms” (2007, p. 62). One wonders if this might particularly be the case for students in disciplines which are discourse-focussed, such as in the social sciences.

Both Smith (2007) and Robinson-Pant (2009) found that some international doctoral students were strategic, creative and entrepreneurial in adapting their educational programs to their own needs, despite a lack of full support from their programs. Smith calls this the “desire-production” link in which, rather than being passive consumers of “brand name” education, “students demonstrated that even though they do desire American educational brands, they see what is proffered as a conduit for producing the kinds of knowledge that they desire” (p. 64). These studies also found that international doctoral students understood the role they play as potential “change agents” in both the home and host environments they traversed. They recognize that they bring diversity and new ideas to graduate programs, and have an opportunity to create change in their home environments, although as mentioned earlier, this carries some risk of criticism. Some
students may only temporarily (and strategically) change their own writing or research style “in order to pass the PhD” but others “planned to facilitate changes in their home academic institutions: questioning the dominant hierarchy of languages used in academia, experimenting with academic writing styles and writer identity and introducing new research approaches ” (Robinson-Pant, 2009, p. 424-425).

These students found some support for making personally contextualized meaning of their educational experiences from program mentors who were willing to explore the student’s work in cultural context, although the overall commitment of graduate programs to doing so was questioned. More important was such students’ ability to connect with an unofficial mentoring network of expatriates both on and off campus. As Smith reports:

[This finding] support(s) Appadurai’s (1996) claim that graduate students and other expatriate intellectuals are critical players in the establishment and maintenance of emerging diasporan publics that have become one of the hallmarks of globalization even as they are simultaneously localizing processes. These networks offered connections to ‘home’ by providing avenues to share news, participate in nationalistic activities, and so on and therefore became local/global communities for students (2007, p. 65).

This finding also supports the more generalized “developmental networks” approach to doctoral student professional identity development offered by Sweitzer (2009), who found that many doctoral students rely on relationships beyond those with faculty and student peers to support their academic work and professional identity development. This finding was especially prominent for those students whose academic and career goals were not an easy “fit” with the identified goals of the doctoral program. For international students, especially those who will pursue opportunities outside of the mainstream globalized networks, their connections in the transnational diasporic space may be crucial to their educational experience and imagined futures.

3.4.2. Neoliberal academic capitalism and the student experience. Another question that has been addressed to a small degree in the research literature, is how do policy and institutional trends related to neoliberal academic capitalism impact the actual educational function of the university, as experienced by these students? While the theoretical, economic and institutional research on academic capitalism has grown extensive, there remains limited empirical work on how these trends actually affect graduate students. In one study, Slaughter and colleagues investigated the impact of university-industry partnerships on the educational experience of graduate students and found several troubling conflicts as graduate students become “tokens of exchange between academe and industry” (Slaughter, Campbell, Holleman & Morgan, 2002). Some faculty admitted to concerns
about the breadth and quality of research training their graduate students were receiving in the industrial setting, and about how “market values” such as secrecy and competition can trump “academic values” such as openness and collaboration, compromising academic integrity. In a later study, faculty expressed a tension between their academic and industry affiliations, but insisted that their motivation for industry partnership was really to raise necessary funding to fulfill their primary function as educators. “The professors understood that graduate students were cheap labor for their labs, but valued graduate students primarily as apprentices and future colleagues” (Slaughter, Archerd & Campbell, 2004, p. 139).

Slaughter and colleagues offer this additional concern about the increasing capitalistic influence on academic research:

The federal government might provide an alternative source of funding for problems not attached to markets and profits, but as the neoliberal state becomes more deeply committed to its de facto, bottom-up industrial policy, it may become less likely to fund research contrary to the interest of the global corporate order, for example, research on global warming, the results of which might call for broad changes in manufacturing processes and products that could prove inimical to the maintenance of current profit structures (2002, p. 306).

Similarly, Gumport (2005) suggests that graduate students in industry-sponsored research may be less likely to be encouraged to engage in research for the public good, unless it has profit-making potential. In this dynamic, a student in a commodified field learns that her value as a scholar lies in her ability to place her inquiry at the nexus of academia (where she will gain her credential) and industry (where she will gain her funding), and to produce research that is “alienable, ownable and a product, process or service in global markets” (Slaughter et al, 2002, p. 308).

While the cited studies from Slaughter and colleagues touch on the student experience, they actually collected data only from professors, not the students themselves. To take a balanced view of this dynamic, a study that did solicit student perceptions of the value of their participation in industrial research partnerships reported some highly positive evaluations. In a study of twenty doctoral students involved in industry-sponsored research, Mendoza (2007) found that the students felt their academic departments were using industrial sponsorship to “foster a learning environment for students by providing them not only with full financial support throughout their doctoral studies and outstanding facilities but also, more importantly, with valuable opportunities to interact with the industrial world, to be involved in projects that might have a real impact on society, and to find jobs upon graduation” (p. 89). It goes almost without saying, however, that the students impacted in all of these studies are those in the STEM fields. For such students, benefits such as funding,
experience and networking may be a significantly positive outcome of academic capitalism in practice.

While graduate students in science and technology fields are valuable as producers of marketable intellectual property, those in social sciences and humanities, in particular, have accrued value mainly as producers of instruction in the neoliberal university. Reduced state funding has led universities to curtail hiring of expensive tenure-track faculty and to seek alternative resources to meet their teaching mandates. In a highly critical essay entitled “The Waste Product of Graduate Education”, Marc Bousquet argues that the primary value of graduate students (particularly in the humanities and social sciences) to a university is that they supply a cheap and perpetual source of academic labor. He asserts that corporatization has led universities to “accumulate capital and conserve labor costs by casualizing faculty positions by any means available” (Bousquet, 2002). A primary way this is achieved is by expanding graduate programs (therefore expanding the cheap teaching labor pool) and employing sessional/adjunct instructors, rather than hiring full-time faculty members. He argues that universities save money by diminishing the tenure-track faculty job market, thereby limiting the career opportunities for which doctoral students have actually been trained. His metaphor is that graduate students become the “waste product” of universities—their academic labor as teachers has been extracted from them during their time as students, only for them to be ultimately “excreted” by the university into a disappearing academic job market.

Rhoads and Rhoades (2005) make a related argument about how the corporatization of higher education has led to the pursuit of “cheap labor” in an effort to divert scarce resources toward entrepreneurial ventures. Their qualitative inquiry using interviews, participant observation and document analysis at graduate employee unions at four U.S. universities revealed that graduate students actually double up as resource providers, being both payers of tuition and providers of academic labor. They develop identities as “workers” even as they resist their construction as such by the university:

They are at one and the same time consumers and employees; they pay for high quality education services, while delivering educational services for the same enterprise which maximizes its revenues and productivity by managing human resources in such a way as to enhance the ability of faculty to generate knowledge (and its products) by exploiting the abilities of its own graduate customers. In this context, many graduate employees have come to see themselves as ‘line workers in the production of knowledge’, doing the educational work of the entrepreneurial university (p. 252).

The authors found that unionization was a deliberate approach by graduate student teaching assistants to respond to commodification of instruction in universities, and to exert influence on the
organization: “graduate organizers saw unionization as a response to, not a cause of corporatization in academe. Several directly addressed the fact that for them graduate student unionization was a resistant movement seeking to challenge market-driven aspects of the university” (2005, p. 260).

These studies begin to indicate how larger processes of neoliberal influence in universities may affect the doctoral student experience and the possibilities students imagine for themselves within and beyond academia. They do not address specifically how international graduate students are affected by and may perceive these pressures and processes, but one might predict that there would be particular vulnerabilities and inequities, as well as potential benefits that international students might encounter in a doctoral education context infused with market logic. International doctoral students that are particularly reliant on funding provided by an industry internship or a teaching assistantship may find they are especially susceptible to exploitation, lest they run afoul of faculty or program expectations, be pushed out of their program and required to return home empty-handed. Or, as Mendoza’s study suggests, an international doctoral student may obtain industry experiences and contacts in a developed Western context that would generate future opportunities that are fruitful beyond all initial expectations. This gap in our knowledge indicates the importance of listening to the student voice to get a more comprehensive view of the impact of neoliberal forces on doctoral education. This study poses an opportunity to learn more about the opportunities and challenges presented to and constructed by international students in context of the turn towards neoliberal influences in doctoral education.

3.4.3. Changing identities in transnational space. Drawing again on migrancy and transnational social field theory, in which the nation itself becomes de-centered and spatial/temporal movement loses its linearity in the lived experience of migrants (Harney & Baldassar, 2007), we can see that the international student experience is one of movement—not just geographic, but in terms of identity and imagination as well. Rizvi, reflecting on his research with Malaysian students in Australia, finds a dynamic of simultaneous transformation and preservation of identity to be a common theme in the international student experience. Like Baas, Rizvi places international students in the transnational discourse of movement and “in-betweeness”. Students are in a new cultural milieu, absorbing different perspectives and practices in language, religion, intercultural relations and so on, yet also may continue to have their identities “steered, disciplined and monitored by diasporic communities in their various stages of formation” (Rizvi, 2000, p. 220). Rizvi summarizes the fluid ways in which the process of crossing borders for education shapes the imagination:
So it is with international education, which has clearly become a force that helps reshape student identities, their cultural tastes, and professional aspirations, but in ways that are neither uniform nor predictable. Students interpret their experiences in a variety of ways, and their global imagination is always a product of a range of factors, some of which are known to them, others of which are not (2000, p. 221).

The idea of a globalizing imagination is reflected too in Gargano’s claim regarding international undergraduate students, but equally applicable to those at the doctoral level, that such students “simultaneously remain family members in contexts of origin, while attending classes, engaging in campus activities, and interacting with local communities abroad, thereby building and maintaining social networks that transcend national boundaries” (2009, p. 336).

Speaking of international graduate students in the U.S., Smith asserts that “once students have migrated into American higher education, there is a desire to hold on to their identities even as they adapt to a new environments. This often leads to hybridized identities and subjectivities, “within which students begin to see themselves belonging not to either one country or another, but to one and another” (2007, p. 67). International education then, is a form and driver of transnationalism, in which individuals experience transformation of identity through the daily activities of connecting across cultural divides. Further, the actions of these “agents of transnationalism” are constitutive in and of themselves of transnational space, expanding its reach throughout their own networks of influence.

However, while imagination creates a space of agency for students and other migrants to imagine, and even create a transnational future, Bailey warns that transnational activity (and that which can be imagined) is still bounded by larger social and cultural processes. As he states: “Overemphasizing agency undermines the ability to study how power relations may transform the social networks that individuals are embedded in, and how the flow of power through social systems affects understandings of identity and community” (2001, p. 421). Here we cycle back to the discussion of how pressures of neoliberal globalization are reflected in higher education-related policy on immigration and research/innovation, and in turn, shape the actual experiences of international doctoral students towards the goals that policy has set forth for doctoral education.

Szelényi & Rhoads (2007) produced a study that touches on the topic of identity transformation as they investigated international graduate students’ evolving notions of “citizenship” in global context. This study, with Chinese, Brazilian and Italian graduate students, focussed on how (if at all) the experiences gained during graduate study in the United States challenged international graduate students’ notions of citizenship and contributed to more
globalized notions of citizenship. In their investigation the authors drew from contrasting conceptualizations of citizenship in a globalized context, including Ong’s “flexible citizenship” idea which emphasizes the ways “cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement ...induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions” (Ong, 2004), as well as Rhoads’ (1997) and Torres’ (1998) idea of “democratic multicultural citizenship”, whereby “individuals develop the ability and disposition to work across social and cultural differences within a global context in a quest for solidarity” (Szelényi & Rhoads, p. 27). They found three dominant themes in the students’ narratives; an emphasis on “global rights and responsibilities” (primarily with the Italian students) in which students identified with a multicultural, global notion of citizenship, an emphasis on “globally informed nationalism/regionalism” (favoured by Chinese and Brazilian students) in which students remained primarily identified with their home country/region but within a newly acquired global perspective, and a less common “free marketeering” perspective (found with one student from each country) which echoed Ong’s more opportunistic concept of emphasizing individual attainment of privilege for themselves and their families through obtaining the most valuable educational credentials possible. Across the majority of all students, the researchers found that the experience of international graduate study was “decentering” in that students’ views “were broadened to encompass a larger whole that included the local/national context...an increased identification with the United States, or a strengthened understanding of citizenship in a global sphere” (p. 35). In this way, the study supported theoretical notions of deterritorialization within transnational space, shifting identities in a globalizing world, but to a lesser extent than might be predicted, the influence of neoliberal ideology in globalized context.

3.4.4. Career and future location trajectories. Research indicates that the PhD degree, by and large, is a good investment in career development, although this seems to be particularly well-investigated and borne out for students in science and technology fields and for those who are working in western environments (U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia and Europe). The PhD has been called “the ticket to multiple journeys” (Enders, 2002), and increasing globalization, expanded career paths outside of academia, and immigration policies favouring the highly-skilled have opened up new possibilities for PhD holders to pursue more career options in more places than ever before (Tremblay, 2005; Craswell, 2007). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has shown that median weekly earnings of PhD degree holders in that country (aggregated across all disciplines) was 22.8%
higher than those holding Masters and 47.3% higher than those with bachelor’s degrees, using 2011 data on workers over 25 years old employed full-time.17

A recent OECD report provides helpful statistical context of outcomes and mobility of PhD holders across multiple countries (Auriol, 2007). Unemployment rates of doctorate holders is very low, although not a great deal lower than those who hold any university degree; in Canada the difference is between 4.5% for university graduates and 3.7% for doctorate holders, similar to other OECD countries. Seventy-six percent of doctorate holders in Canada (using 2001 data) reported that they were engaged in research. However, Canada has one of the highest rates of “underemployment” of doctorate holders (15%), meaning that they are not in management or professional positions. Interestingly, Canada is the only OECD country in which the unemployment rate for women PhD holders is lower than for men. Reflecting its liberal immigration policies, the share of foreign-born doctorate holders is much higher in Canada than it is in the United States, and in fact, foreign-born doctorate holders outnumbered the native ones at 54% in 2001. Another trend of note, however, that may counteract the retention of international doctoral students in Canada as immigrants, is the high level of mobility of young doctorate holders. According to the OECD report (which used 2003-04 data from Canada), up to 16% of Canadian citizens newly obtaining doctoral degrees in Canada and 40% of international students earning degrees in Canada indicated a plan to move out of the country in the next year, usually to the U.S., showing that at that time, Canada was experiencing a substantial drain of both Canadian doctorate holders and those from abroad that had been educated in Canada.

As discussed earlier related to immigration policy, “stay rates” of doctoral students (that is, the percentage of international students who remain in the country after earning their doctorate there) is an important policy matter for governments, as they seek to retain value from their investment in educating foreign doctoral students. Canada’s assertive immigration policies of recent years are certainly an effort to stem the drain. Interestingly, while the OECD analysis reported that 40% of international doctoral students in the U.S. also intended to depart that country within one year, leaving a 60% intended stay rate (utilizing primarily student survey data), Finn (2010) used data derived from Social Security and the Internal Revenue Service in the U.S. to report a one-year stay rate of 2006 graduates of 73%. This poses an intriguing question about the differences between students’ stated intentions and their actual actions. The research reported in

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this study is limited by the fact that it only reports participants’ intentions and imagined futures; a follow-up study would be required to investigate the differences inferred in the discrepancy between the OECD and Finn findings.

The OECD report (Auriol, 2007) also reports a relatively high level of satisfaction of doctorate holders with their employment situation, using data across three countries, Argentina, Portugal and the United States. Survey respondents were more satisfied with elements linked to the content of their work (intellectual challenge, level of responsibility, degree of independence and contribution to society) than the more logistical elements of their employment conditions (salary, benefits, job security, location and opportunities for advancement). A large-scale survey of PhD holders in Germany indicated that across all disciplines, there was a high level of career satisfaction overall, significant attainment of high-level career positions, and that a wide majority would pursue the same educational path again (Enders, 2002). These overall results, however, obscure other important findings such as the fact the women PhD holders consistently earn less than men in both academic and private sectors and across all disciplines, and that certain disciplines reported greater satisfaction than others. The Enders study mainly supports the predicted outcomes of the neoliberal turn in higher education and research in its findings that 10 years post-graduation, PhDs in Business/Economics and Electrical Engineering have landed high-level jobs more than the other disciplines studied, and were more satisfied with their career outcomes, but also surprisingly found that a majority of Social Sciences PhDs were working outside of the higher education/research sector and half had obtained a “high-level” position in their sector. Equally surprising were results showing that Biology PhDs were furthest down the “career ladder” in terms of level of jobs secured, second only to a group in the Humanities, holders of PhDs in German studies.

This study also found a strong “entry-job” effect, in which “sector of employment of the entry job (public vs. private; inside vs. outside higher education and research) is a clear determinant of the sector of employment in the long run. Furthermore, only a minority of doctoral degree holders succeed in significantly changing and improving their careers if they accept a modest first job” (Enders, 2002, p. 515). This supported earlier findings by Mangematin (2000) which found limited flexibility for PhD holders in science and technology to shift between sectors, and that “PhD graduates have to choose a trajectory when their level of information is at its lowest” (p. 741). However, other studies have indicated rising levels of flexibility in PhD career trajectories (Cruz-Castro & Sanz-Menéndez, 2005), which is linked to the increased focus many universities are placing on transferable “professional skills development” for doctoral students. “Arguments for workplace
skills training are said to be ‘strengthened by the increasingly wide employment destinations of graduates’ and the decline of ‘academic work as a career destination’” (Craswell, 2007). However, as Craswell points out, this argument tends to erect a “deficiency model” of doctoral education and skew doctoral training towards the “perceived needs” of science and technology students entering knowledge-based economy jobs, and obscuring the skills that many doctoral students in other fields bring to their doctoral training and continue to contribute afterwards in professional roles in and beyond industry.

A few smaller, institution-specific studies have investigated the relationship between career and future location trajectories of PhD graduates, most of which have been based in the U.S. Trice and Yoo (2007) found that only one-third of international students planned on returning to their home countries immediately upon graduation. They report that the more prepared students felt to work in the USA, the longer they planned to remain. This was especially true for students in scientific fields. Conversely, the more prepared students felt to work at home, the more likely they were to plan to return home immediately after graduation or soon thereafter. Interestingly, students who were academically satisfied also were more likely to plan to return home immediately after graduation or soon thereafter. There were also interesting regional and “critical mass” effects found in the study; students who came from some highly “collectivist” cultures such as Latin America and Southeast Asia were more likely to report a plan to return home, although the authors do note that study participants from South and East Asia, also collectivist societies, were less likely to return home. Trice and Yoo postulate that since there were much smaller numbers of students from Latin America and Southeast Asia at the institution studies, they may have “experienced more difficulty developing an adequate support group” (p. 61), leading them to prefer to return home after their studies. This study was survey based, and did not give the researchers an opportunity to probe the students about this hypothesis.

Musumba, Jin and Mjelde (2011) have contributed another survey-based study looking at factors influencing graduate (Master’s and doctoral) student preferences about where they will begin their careers. Overall (and not surprisingly) they found that students prefer to start their careers wherever they have better career opportunities, higher earning potential and a perceived superior social and living climate. However, these findings were mediated by several variables. Doctoral students were more likely to prefer to return to their home countries than Masters students; the authors hypothesize that the increased prestige of the PhD degree may afford them better career opportunities at home. Women were more likely to prefer to remain in the U.S.; this
was hypothesized to be related to increased personal rights, liberties and career opportunities for women afforded in the U.S. relative to other countries. Students in STEM disciplines were more likely to prefer to stay in the U.S., a finding presumed by the authors to be related to superior career opportunities and technological advances there. The authors also make a fascinating tie to whether students’ academic disciplines are more connected to “global” (as in science and engineering) knowledge or “local” knowledge, such as might be more prevalent in agriculture, education and social sciences. They hypothesize that those in more “global” knowledge fields will be more inclined to remain in the U.S. to maximize their global mobility and capital in their fields.

A small, interview-based study addressing career placement concerns of international graduate students at a U.S. university found great heterogeneity in students’ motivations to either stay in the U.S. or return home post-graduation (Shen & Herr, 2004). For those who intended to return home, motivations included a commitment to their home country, family ties and career promotion. Those who intended to remain in the U.S. cited reasons ranging from family expectations to professional growth and lack of opportunities in their home country.

3.4.5. Summary. This array of findings related to the living and learning experiences and career trajectories of international graduate students is helpful context for this research project, which is an opportunity to investigate further the purposes, experiences and views of students that are behind the responses they may provide on survey instruments that require them to choose between pre-determined options. It is clear from these findings that doctoral education abroad presents a wealth of challenges and opportunities to students which they must navigate in a global context that is highly influenced by neoliberal pressures to maximize the value they receive from their education and the options that will be available to them as doctorate holders. The transformative power of doctoral education abroad and the social and cultural interactions that accompany it is particularly clear when one goes beyond the survey research on trends and trajectories and into a deeper analysis of how students navigate their experiences in the transnational spaces that globalized universities create. This dissertation aims to give full voice to the participants in these processes and spaces so that we may better understand how they create meaning and opportunity from their experience.
3.5. Conclusion

The policies and research studies reviewed in this chapter provide important findings to contextualize the links between the challenges of pursuing international doctoral education in transnational space and students’ imagined opportunities and futures in a globalized context, as mediated by student agency and institutional structures and policies. They also raise significant questions about the roles and ability of institutions such as UBC to serve and educate international students—particularly those who have come from and will return to regions on the periphery of contemporary globalization, and those who are in academic fields which lie outside of the neoliberal “academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

This review also leads us back to broader questions about the purposes of doctoral education. Policy discourses construct (some) doctoral students as “highly qualified personnel” which are desired “knowledge economy workers” that can generate teaching and research labor at bargain prices, and contribute to commercializable “innovation”. UBC, the site of this study, mainly employs a discourse of “excellence”, “quality” and “productivity” in framing the purpose and funding rationale of doctoral education, as stated in the draft “Research Strategy” of the university’s overall “Place and Promise” institutional strategic plan:

While the role of graduate students in research depends on the research area, for most of the research done at UBC, the research effort depends on involvement of graduate students in the research projects, and the quality of the research that can be accomplished is dependent on the quality of graduate students involved in the research. Even in areas where graduate students are not part of a research team but work independently, the overall level of research improves as the number and quality of students improves, and the quality of the research programs is reflected by the quality of research graduate students attracted to that program. Thus, to improve research at UBC, and to build excellence, increasing the amount of money available to support researchers and graduate students is critical.\(^{18}\)

Excellent graduate students come from all over the world, and to the extent that international doctoral students can help extend the university’s research mandate and desire for international influence, UBC and other similar universities are keen to recruit them. Whether that keenness for student “excellence” extends to supporting student success in a wide range of career paths, disciplines, and global locations is a question for inquiry in this study.

Broader academic discourses, such as explicated in recent work by the U.S. based Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate, frame doctoral students as “disciplinary stewards”: “the purpose of

doctoral education, taken broadly, is to educate and prepare those to whom we can entrust the vigor, quality, and integrity of the field...someone who will creatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching, and application. We call such a person a ‘steward of the discipline’” (Golde, 2006, p. 5). In this framing, the calling of the PhD holder is one of service, with the conservation and advancement of the academic discipline to be primary concern.

So, it is clear that these various stakeholders have quite well-defined instrumental purposes for doctoral education, and indeed, doctoral students. They are to produce research (commercializable if possible), hopefully immigrate and be highly qualified personnel to bolster the knowledge economy of their host country, help “internationalize” universities, and preserve and uphold their academic disciplines. But what of the students’ own purposes, goals and imagined futures in undertaking doctoral study? The studies reviewed in this chapter suggest that the purposes of doctoral education are multiply constructed, negotiated and challenged by students (and perhaps particularly international students) to pursue very different desires and opportunities in a global context than the dominant policy, institutional and academic discourses put forward. With the rare exceptions of these few studies, we are left still, as Smith contends, “yet to understand the impact of these ongoing globalizing processes on how graduate students conceptualize their work” (2007, p. 58) and with “a need to scrutinize the relationship between international graduate students and their professional goals, on one hand, and the goals of the programs that train them on the other” (2007, p. 60). The study presented in this dissertation is another step towards filling these gaps.
CHAPTER 4
Research method

4.1. Introduction to chapter

It has been established that globalization is a vast, complex, pervasive and evolving set of processes which reflect and generate the growing interconnectedness of all major domains of social activity. Few, if any, areas of social life escape the multi-directional global influences facilitated by the rise of the technology-driven network society (Castells, 1996), the normalization of transnational spaces and flows as a milieu for social activity (Vertovec, 2009; Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2004) and the reshaping of the social imaginary towards global possibilities which are significantly mediated by neoliberal market logic (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009). Given the scope and complexity of these phenomena, how do researchers begin to apprehend questions about their features, prevalence and impact?

To a large extent, processes of globalization have been investigated through quantitative research strategies, as researchers have sought in particular to quantify issues of scope and prevalence of global interconnectedness. One of the primary ways this has been approached is through the development of quantitative indicators of global activity in major social fields. “The construction of indicators creates an opportunity for gathering empirical data on global and regional flows, as well as on a state’s enmeshment in processes, networks and flows at both the global and regional level” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999). These authors reference the growing availability of measurable indicators in domains ranging from the political-legal (e.g. growth of international treaties, foreign ministries and intergovernmental organizations); the military (e.g. numbers of international security treaties and peacekeeping missions; the production, importing and exporting of arms); the economic (e.g. quantity of international trade, finance and multinational corporations); the socio-cultural (e.g. migration flows; international media and communications companies and activity); the environmental (e.g. quantification of greenhouse gas emissions, toxic waste movement across borders, international treaties and environment protection organizations); and in patterns of global stratification (e.g. the measurement of inequalities across all the above domains within and between countries).

In the domain of higher education research, the impacts of globalization have been evaluated through a wide range of lenses. One is through quantifiable indicators, such as numbers and flows of
international students (OECD, 2004); trends in research funding to fields for which there is a global market (Slaughter & Leslie, 1996); global university rankings based on quantitative measures of elements such as publishing, award-winning faculty and reputation; and measures of ‘global engagement’ or ‘internationalization’ of institutions, such as numbers of research collaborations and off-shore campuses and volume of cross-border flows of capital and data (Marginson & van der Wende, 2007; Beerkens, 2003). Another angle of inquiry is policy research, which investigates ways the pressures and discourses of globalization have shaped higher education-related policies such as research and innovation funding, global accountability and performance evaluation schemes, and immigration polices related to building a labor force for the “knowledge-based economy” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). Such research has frequently noted the global convergence of policy ideas, largely through transnational organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and World Trade Organization (WTO), and is often driven by the quantitative indicators mentioned above (Beerkens, 2003).

These efforts to quantify dimensions of globalization processes certainly assist us in understanding the scale, prevalence and distribution of phenomena related to global interconnectivity. It also helps us apprehend how, at a macro level, globalization is affecting populations, nation-states, and social fields (in the Bourdieusian sense) such as higher education. What it doesn’t so readily provide is insight into the lived experience of individuals (or groups of individuals), or the actions and strategies of a particular institution in a globalized context. To do this, a different research strategy is required. Several of the theorists working in the arena of globalization indicate that while the forces of globalization are indeed immense, ubiquitous and transcending of circumscribed boundaries, they still are experienced, interpreted and constructed at local and individual levels. In talking about a “progressive sense of place”, Massey suggests that “instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (1993, p. 66). This point illustrates the need to investigate a meta-concept such “transnational space” at a localized level, through the interpretive reality of individuals occupying and negotiating such space.

Similarly, in introducing the theoretical device of “scapes” to describe global cultural flows, Appadurai emphasizes the constructed, subjective nature of globalization:

[Scapes] are not “objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but, rather, they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors...indeed the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are
eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in
part form their own sense of what these landscapes offer” (1996, p. 33).

Supporting this point, Luke asserts that “one’s sense of place on any scape [is] only intelligible from
a local site, a place, a point of view” (p. 2007, p. 101). In their critique of the reification and
generalization of the impacts of the globalized “network society” on social institutions, Lewis,
Marginson & Snyder (2005) argue that it is a mistake to conceptualize “the network as a force that is
somehow seen to precede the social” (p. 71) and that “network technologies are socially embedded
and therefore highly variable in their expression” (p. 56). These arguments point to the need for
research strategies that investigate processes and mechanisms of globalization as socially mediated
and subjectively experienced in order to understand the impacts of this immense social
restructuring in lived context.

In this chapter, a rationale will be presented for taking a constructivist ontological and
interpretivist epistemological stance towards this investigation. An argument will be put forward
for employing qualitative research methodologies, specifically utilizing an interview-based multiple
case narrative approach within a single institution of higher education, as an appropriate strategy to
apprehend the experiences and imagined possibilities of international doctoral students in
globalized transnational space, and to test and refine theoretical conceptualizations of globalization.
A complete explanation of the study site and participant selection, data collection methods, analytic
approach and ethical and validity considerations for the study will also be presented.

4.2. Overall research strategy and rationale

The fundamental concern of this study is to explore the ways in which international doctoral
students at a Canadian university understand their own experiences, imagine their possibilities and
actively negotiate their lives in the context of a globalizing world. Given the primary focus on the
meaning-making processes of the individuals involved, the research approach must be one that
elicits their own perspectives and ways of knowing. It inherently requires the adoption of a
constructivist ontology, one that views knowledge as a subjective entity which is constructed in
multiple ways by individuals based on their social positionings and perspectives. Drawing from a
range of foundational texts, some of the key reference points and concerns of the constructivist
paradigm are articulated here to frame the approach of this study, namely ontological and
epistemological assumptions, the role of theory and generalizability in interpretivist research,
qualitative research methodologies, and issues of researcher positionality.
4.2.1. The constructivist research paradigm. The fundamental ontological premise of the constructivist research paradigm is that the world (and particularly human phenomena) can be known only in a mediated, subjective sense. There can be no objective reality to be discovered, only “multiple, socially constructed realities ungoverned by natural laws” which can be explored (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 86). From this basic viewpoint springs many other principles and consequences for the pursuit of knowledge and the practices of research. The constructivist approach views the knower and the known as interdependent, with no possibility of a social ‘reality’ standing apart from the processes of interpretation and meaning-making. The values held by individuals within societies intrinsically mediate and shape what is understood and considered to be real. Further, phenomena are seen to be occurring in a complex social context with particular historical antecedents that also shape how it is interpreted and understood (Bryman, 2008). A holistic approach, which sees phenomena and human understanding of it as contextual, relational, particular, fluid and complex is adopted. This approach has frequently been contrasted with an objectivist ontological perspective which conceives of (at least some) knowledge as “fixed, universalistic and sociohistorically invariant” (Weinberg, 2008, p. 14).

Following from this ontological perspective, the epistemological approach to discovering “knowledge” then suggests that the basic task of the researcher is to interpret and seek understanding of how the phenomena of interest is constructed and understood by those who are engaged with it (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). “Phenomenology” is an epistemological position which focuses on exploring and interpreting the meanings that events and situations hold for others. Qualitative researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 4). In this paradigm, the accounts offered by individuals to explain their experiences and perspectives count as evidence of a “real” occurrence or phenomenon. There is no effort to draw conclusions about “reality” apart from personal experience and meaning-making; the role of the researcher is to interpret how individuals are constructing reality and its meanings. One metaphor used to describe knowledge generated through this lens is the “holograph” in which a multidimensional image appears and is fundamentally altered depending on any shift in perspective (Shkedi, 2005). Another is “bricolage”, the process of bringing “different voices, different perspectives, points of views, angles of vision” to create a “pieced-together set of representations that is fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, pp. 5-6).
Interesting epistemological distinctions are made even within the tradition of constructivist research. In exploring the elicitation of narratives as a research method to understand how humans make sense of their experiences, Sparkes and Smith (2008) point to a distinction in narrative constructivism and narrative constructionism. They use the former term to indicate an ontological and epistemological stance that holds that meaning, while indeed constructed, is fundamentally embedded in the individual, “a property within the interiority of individual actors that can...be transmitted to others via narrative” (p. 299). This conceptualization indicates that narratives “provide an important means of access to the interiority of individuals’ personal experiences, selves, and identities...they have a real nature, which can be found and known for what it actually is” (p. 298). The presumption, in other words, is that humans have inner, constructed “realities”, which can be reliably communicated and understood by others through narrative. As a contrasting view, the authors use the latter term “constructionism” to signal narrative as a form of social and discursive action, rather than simply a reflection of interior reality. In this perspective, narratives are “ongoing social practices that people perform and do in relation to others as opposed to something they have...Narratives instead generate meaning by virtue of their place within the realm of human interaction” (Sparkes & Smith, 2008, p. 299, emphasis in original). While indicating an interesting tension, the ontological distinction between narrative as reflecting inner ‘truth’ and narrative as social action are not necessarily mutually exclusive views, and do share a common assumption which is a helpful departure point for this study. That is, “people act on and are acted on by social and cultural contexts of a society and culture in which interaction occurs. They both actively position themselves in relation to and are positioned by narrating social beings” (Sparkes & Smith, 2008, p. 301). This study is concerned with understanding how the social and cultural contexts of transnational space in a globalizing world impact and became part of the narratives study participants construct about their lives.

In the constructivist paradigm, qualitative research projects are frequently meant to help form theory “from the ground up.” There is a general preference among qualitative researchers to see theory as “something that emerges out of the collection and analysis of data” (Bryman, 2008, p. 373). The purpose of such research is often to establish new theory emerging from empirical study rather than testing established theory. However, other researchers have argued that there is a role for qualitative research in “testing” as well as in “seeking” theory. (Silverman, 1993; Bassey, 1999). In practice, theory building and testing can be an iterative process during the course of a study where a theoretical orientation may initially frame specific research questions, and as data is
collected and analyzed, more concrete theoretical positions may come into stronger focus, and lead to the collection of further data to test that theory (Bryman, 2008).

This dissertation research might best be described as having a relationship to theory that is a hybrid of testing and seeking. It is based firmly on well-developed dimensions of globalization theory and begins with a presumption that the experiences and imagined possibilities of study participants will reflect, to some extent, these theoretical constructs. However, it is also intended to elaborate on theoretical understandings of globalization by exploring their influences on the narratives of international doctoral students. It will subject theoretical conceptualizations such as “network society”, “neoliberal global social imaginary” and “transnational space” to the test of actual lived experience of these individuals who are presumed to be shaped significantly by its pressures and processes, and will provide contours to theoretical concepts through their voices. In this way, the study both tests certain dimensions of globalization theory, and seeks new theoretical understandings of how the forces of globalization may actually materialize in the lives of particular individuals. As is common in qualitative research, the relationship of research to theory in this study has developed iteratively, with findings and theory informing one another throughout the research process.

Many methodological approaches have been developed to assist in grasping the “meaning making” of human subjects, each appropriate in addressing particular situations and research questions. Some of the main research methods associated with the qualitative paradigm include ethnography/participant observation, qualitative interviewing, focus groups, and material culture/textual/discourse analysis (Bryman, 2008). Further facets of qualitative inquiry include self-focussed methods such as autoethnography and personal narrative (Ellis & Bochner, 2003). Some approaches combine these methods (and others, including quantitative approaches) to more comprehensively investigate a complex phenomenon or population. A policy evaluation study, for example, may integrate elements of discourse analysis, interviews with policy makers and quantitative measures of policy impact.

Another overarching research strategy is the case study, which seeks to examine a specific and bounded phenomenon, such as a program, institution, group or situation (Merriam, 1988), and may use a wide range of methods, including observation, surveys and interviews to do so. Although this study does not adopt a full case study methodology, there are elements of the case study approach which are useful in framing the scope and strategy of this project.
4.2.2. A case study approach. Case study research has come to encompass multiple data collection methodologies and has been applied to wide ranging phenomena, from activities of nation-states to the in-depth study of a single individual (Gerring, 2007). Indeed, the literature on case study as methodology struggles with the very definition and purposes of case studies, and many typologies and categories of case study research are offered. Stake (1995) differentiates between intrinsic and instrumental case studies, with intrinsic referring to “research into a particular situation for its own sake and irrespective of outside concerns” and instrumental meaning “research into one or more particular situations in order to try to understand an outside concern” (in Bassey, 1999, p. 29). Yin (1994) identifies three versions of case studies: exploratory (to develop hypotheses for further study), descriptive (to describe what has happened in a particular situation) and explanatory (to investigate why things have happened the way they have). Bassey suggests that case studies can be categorized as theory-seeking and theory-testing, story-telling and picture-drawing and evaluative. (1999). A simple articulation of Bassey’s “theory seeking or theory testing” case study is that it is “the particular study of general issues” (1999, p. 62). Using a combination of Stake’s and Bassey’s terminologies, this might best be categorized as an instrumental case study, which has purposes both to test and seek theory and to tell a story about the influences of globalization on a particular group (international doctoral students) in a specific setting (the University of British Columbia).

Despite variances of conceptualization and usage, some basic premises of case study methodology appear to be clear, and indicate why it is an appropriate framework for this study. Case studies are seen to be a preferred strategy to investigate research questions that seek to understand how or why a contemporary phenomenon occurs within some real-life context, “especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 14). This description fits well here in that it seeks to understand why and how the contemporary phenomenon of globalization affects the real-life context of international doctoral students. Also, there is certainly no evident boundary between forces of globalization and the contexts it influences.

Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies are routinely employed in case studies, although Merriam argues that, qualitative case studies are more appropriate when investigators wish to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, 1988, p. xii). Again, these characteristics align with the purposes of this study. Merriam further suggests that qualitative case studies share four
fundamental characteristics: they are particularistic (focus on a particular phenomenon; in this study, the experiences of international doctoral students at a specific university); descriptive (the end product is a “rich” account and interpretation of the phenomenon under study); heuristic (stimulative of the reader’s own understanding and insight of the phenomenon); and inductive (leads to the emergence of new hypotheses, concepts and theoretical understandings). Merriam asserts that the end product of a case study will tend towards being descriptive, interpretive or evaluative of the phenomena, and sometimes a combination of these outcomes. This study is intended to be descriptive of the experiences and imaginings of participants and the university in which they are studying (or have studied), and also interpretive of the relationship of those phenomena to broader processes and theories about globalization.

Case studies frequently typically draw upon multiple sources of data which are converged (or “triangulated”) to provide a holistic portrayal of a particular context or situation (Yin, 1994). This data may come from a range of qualitative approaches, or a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, such as observations, interviews and survey data. In this study, data will be drawn from both participants and context, as both students and the institution (the University of British Columbia) are elements of the case. The core data source is interviews with current international doctoral students. UBC as an institution is not the primary “phenomenon” of interest and will not be thoroughly investigated as an institutional case study itself. However, the university context of the study is important as an instance of “space and place” within which the students are living and learning. Therefore, an assessment of contextual elements helps us to understand the influences brought to bear on the primary phenomenon of interest—the experiences and imagined possibilities of international doctoral students at a particular university—and how these influences are mediated by institutional context. For this reason, documentary evidence, in the form of statistical reports, public policy papers and strategic communiqués are valuable in a site-specific, case-oriented study such as this one because “they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated. Analysis of this data sources “lends contextual richness and helps to ground an inquiry’” (Merriam, 1988, p. 109).

4.2.2.1. Multiple case studies. Case study methodology can be used to investigate multiple cases as part of one study. This study, which focuses on multiple individuals who are currently pursuing doctoral studies at a single university, can be thought of as a “multiple” or “cross-case” study design (Stake, 2006; Shkedi, 2005). Again attesting to the range of conceptualizations within case study research, there are differing ways to consider the purpose and reasoning of multiple case
studies. Yin (1994) identifies a primary advantage of the multiple case study as being that “the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust” (p. 45) than a single case. Yin argues that in studying multiple cases as part of an overall study, a replication logic, rather than a sampling logic is crucial. He suggests that each case should be selected so that “it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) produces contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (1994, p. 46). Yin warns against a sampling logic where cases are selected based on a presumption that they can represent “the entire universe or pool of potential respondents” (p. 47). He sees sampling logic as a misguided use of case study methodology to address issues of “incidence” of a phenomenon. In Yin’s conceptualization of a multiple case study, “each individual case study consists of a ‘whole’ study, in which convergent evidence is sought regarding the facts and conclusions for the case” (p. 49). The ultimate goal for Yin is to develop a “rich, theoretical framework...(which) later becomes the vehicle for generalizing to new cases” (p. 46).

Yin’s point that each individual case within a multiple case study should be chosen to create a theoretically coherent study overall is well-taken in this project. However, his emphasis on replication and generalization reflects an objectivist epistemological stance that does not fully align with the purposes of this study. The purpose of this study is to explore theoretical conceptualizations of the phenomenon of globalization as experienced by individuals within a particular institution, not to draw conclusions about a specific individual or institutional “case”. A more fitting conceptualization of using “cases” for the purpose of this study is offered by Shkedi (2005) in his use of the “multiple case narrative” approach, which is the fundamental strategy adopted in this study.

Shkedi (2005) uses the term “multiple case narrative”, to describe qualitative interview based-research methodology that facilitates data collection “from a large number of people as part of the same study” (p. 25), with “large number” further described as “from ten to several tens to hundred and several hundreds” (p. 26). He differentiates between a “collective case study”, in which a relatively small number of individual cases are each developed in rich detail and comparisons are developed between them (the focus still being on the individual ‘unit’ being studied), and “multiple case narrative” which de-emphasizes individual cases in favour of illuminating cross-cutting themes, but still “preserv[ing] its qualitative-narrative nature...and produc(ing) narrative-qualitative findings” (2005, p. 25-27). Shkedi asserts that this approach allows the researcher to see associations between cases, identify broad patterns across a variety of
narratives, and potentially make claims to generalization from case to case, and from cases to populations. Each participant is a “case” in and of themselves, but the analytic emphasis of this study is not on the individual case, but a sample of cases that constitute a grouping, “international doctoral students” who are choosing and experiencing doctoral education abroad in a globalizing world. Robert Stake uses the terms “case” and “quintain” in describing multi-case methodology, to differentiate between an individual or component part the student (the “case”—individual international doctoral students at UBC) and the larger entity or phenomenon under study (the “quintain”—international doctoral students at UBC as an instance of globalized transnational space) (Stake, 2006).

The multiple case narrative approach appears to be an appropriate methodological framework for the purpose of this research, in that the study seeks to understand broader themes related to globalization and transnational space through the experiences of a group of approximately thirty current international doctoral students. Choices regarding participant sampling and data analysis approach (to be discussed subsequently) support the goals of a multiple case narrative framework. Individual narratives will remain important, as will smaller groups of narratives (such as students from a particular world region or within an academic discipline grouping). The option to retain and privilege personal meaning-making aligns with the epistemological values of the study and will help substantiate and illustrate broader conclusions. However, the effort to also generalize experience to theory is inherent in the research questions and a key ambition of this study.

With regard to the contextual elements of the case, case study research typically focuses on a specific site, a location that mediates or “contains” the phenomenon of interest. This cross-case study of individual participants is in the context of a singular site—the University of British Columbia. This context was investigated via review of institutional enrolment statistics and recent policy and other strategic initiative papers related to internationalization and global ambitions which have been published by the university administration. Recent government policies that impact the institutional context will also be reviewed. A full policy analysis is beyond the scope of this study, but a review of relevant policy will contextualize the experiences of the study participants within the institution’s formal responses to challenges and opportunities of globalization. In the multiple case narrative methodology, such information is termed “secondary data”, which Shkedi defines as “any data that we collect in our research which are not derived from the stories, descriptions, explanations and interpretations taken directly from the informants. This type of data includes
observations...documents and other materials related to the phenomena under inquiry” (2005, p. 57). Given that the focus of this study is steadfastly on the experiences and meaning-making of the participants themselves, the contextual analysis of the study site is appropriately considered secondary.

4.2.2.2. Qualitative interviewing. The multiple case narrative methodology utilizes qualitative interviewing as its key method for data collection. Interviews are one of the most common approaches within the qualitative research paradigm for obtaining information about how individuals experience the world and make meaning of their experiences. In fact, some see the use of the interview to be so pervasive within and beyond social science that they refer to an “interview society” (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997) in which asking individuals to reveal personal information through responding to questioning becomes “a universal mode of systemic inquiry” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1998, p. 1). The potential power of interviewing is apparent; asking an individual to describe their inner landscape is one of the primary ways we can access that which we cannot easily observe. Some of the strengths of qualitative interviewing as a research method include providing a means of uncovering and exploring the meanings that underpin people’s beliefs, behaviours and feelings, allowing for clarification of given answers in an iterative process, and “helping people to make explicit things that have hitherto been implicit – to articulate their tacit perceptions, feeling and understandings” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 32).

Within social science, the interview takes various formats, depending on the goals of the interaction, ranging from highly structured with no significant interpersonal interaction or deviation from a predetermined interview script, to the negotiation of co-created text between interviewer and interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2003). The type of interviewing that is adopted in a particular research situation is based on the ontological and epistemological stance adopted in the study. A study based in a constructivist paradigm will normally take a qualitative or “semi-structured” interview approach in which there is considerable flexibility in the lines of inquiry pursued and a conversational, interpersonal tone to the interview (Bryman, 2008; Kvale, 1996). The use of semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to enter a conversation about a theme of mutual interest with the participants (Kvale, 1996), covering key topics consistently across multiple participants, while still allowing her to follow topical trajectories unique to each participant (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It is important in the qualitative interview to set a tone of openness, communicating to the participant that the research seeks to “understand the world from your point of view...to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you
feel them, to explain things as you explain them” (Spradley, 1979, p. 34). The researcher’s primary concern is to enter the world of meanings constructed by the participant. This is the approach taken in this study.

While the effort is made to fully engage in the participant’s world, the qualitative interview is still a mutual interaction, an “exchange of ideas” (Kvale, 1996, p. 125), not a simple elicitation of input from the interviewee. The researcher is implicitly involved in the construction of meaning both during the interview and in subsequent analysis. As stated by Fontana and Frey (2003, p. 92), “It is time to consider the interview as a practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of the interviewer and respondent.” Further, the constructivist paradigm instructs us to understand that an individual’s perspective is never static, and that an interview is, at most, a snapshot in time of a person’s understanding of themselves and the world and likewise, of the interviewee’s ability to grasp those understandings. This dynamic is well stated by Holstein and Gubrium: “To say that the interview is an interpersonal drama with a developing plot is part of a broader claim that reality is an ongoing, interpretive accomplishment” (1995, p. 16). In this way, the insights gained via interviews, while being accorded due validity, must be seen as tentative and evolving. The researcher must take caution to not reify an understanding gained as an unwavering reality. This “evolving reality” perspective also resonates with the iterative induction process typical of qualitative research. This view is especially well-taken in this research, as participants in doctoral study abroad are inevitably in a period of significant transition in their professional, locational and social positionings. As such, their narratives must be taken as views into their own evolving perspectives rather than as a conclusive description of set phenomena.

In semi-structured interviews, an interview guide with key questions and potential follow-up questions and probes are normally used to ask participants to address main research questions and prompt for elaboration, clarification and examples. In this study, questions were structured to elicit both “stories” of experiences and participants’ reasonings and imaginings about past experience and future plans. The interview guides used in this study are presented in Appendix 1. The following practical suggestions of Arksey and Knight (1999) influenced the development of the guide: First, ask “easy to answer” questions to put the participant at ease, such as important factual items (name, citizenship, academic program, when participant first came to Canada, etc), and then progress to the main questions, asked in a logical order. In this case, the questioning followed a somewhat chronological path, from inquiries about their process in coming to Canada for graduate study, to their experiences in their doctoral program, to their post-graduation plans. The main and
follow-up questions were developed with Charmaz’s typology in mind (as reported in Bryman, 2004). Charmaz distinguishes three types of qualitative interview questions that align well with the past, present and future overall chronology of the interview protocol: initial open-ended (getting the participant to begin addressing key topics via discussing their experiences), intermediate (asking the participant to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings about their experiences) and ending (reflecting on what has been learned, what participant would have done or will do differently or advise others to). Bryman advises that in actual practice, such categories overlap and that it is most important to vary the types of questions asked, and to focus on active listening during the interview. All of these points are reflected in the interview guides.

4.2.2.3. Researcher positionality and reflexivity. Given the assumption inherent in the constructivist research paradigm of the interdependence of the knower and known, the researcher working in this tradition is seen to also be a subjective, meaning-making agent. The researcher, as well as the participants who are the focus of the research, are implicated in the creation, rather than simply the “discovery”, of knowledge. The researcher participates in creating knowledge by seeking to understand the experience of others and the meanings they ascribe to it, from her own point of view, not by being on the outside of phenomena and attempting to describe it from an objective stance. (Shkedi, 2005). There is an expectation that the researcher is “close” to the subjects, so as to best “genuinely understand the world through their eyes” (Bryman, 2008, p. 394). This stance has been described as “indwelling”, literally the effort to “be at one with the persons under investigation” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 25), while still maintaining a capacity to extract oneself and reflect upon the meanings of the interaction. In qualitative research, the researcher adopts a “human as instrument” (Lincoln & Guba, 1995) stance in which she or he absorbs, interprets and reflects on the experiences and perspectives of the research participants, through a particular subjective lens, just as the participants themselves do. The idea is that “the human instrument is the only data collection instrument which is multifaceted enough and complex enough to capture the important elements of a human person or activity” (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 27).

While this closeness of the researcher to subject is indeed required to acquire a penetrating view of the subjective reality of other individuals, this posture raises important questions about power and bias in this kind of research. It is now widely recognized, especially by most qualitative researchers, that there is no such thing as an entirely “value-neutral” approach to the research process (Greenbank, 2003). Theorists have called for vigilant reflexivity by the researcher on the
values and biases that they inevitably bring to bear on their analysis, lest the conclusions drawn in
the research become imbalanced towards researcher opinion rather than a comprehensive and
faithful account of phenomena as understood by the study participants themselves. Such reflexivity
must be exercised throughout the data collection and analysis process.

An important consideration regarding interviewing in this study has to do with power
relations between myself as an interviewer and participants, and the culturally diverse nature of the
participant group. The qualitative research goal of “indwelling” in another’s experience (Maykut &
Morehouse, 1994) certainly has an egalitarian and empathic appeal and is a worthy ideal in the
research process, but it can disguise the inherent power asymmetry that exists in an instrumental
dialogue such as an interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These power asymmetries can manifest
in multiple ways and for several reasons, including the fact that even in semi-structured interviews,
the researcher normally initiates the conversation, determines the questions and which of them
merit follow-up, and decides when to terminate the interview. The interviewer may have a hidden
agenda for obtaining certain kinds of information, and may have a “monopoly of
interpretation...with exclusive privilege to interpret what the interviewee really meant” (Kvale &
Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 33-34). Feminist perspectives on research advocate for deliberate
deconstruction of power imbalances by establishing a high degree of rapport and reciprocity
between interviewer and interviewee that creates a non-hierarchical relationship and a privileging
of the interviewee perspective throughout the interview process (Bryman, 2008). This approach
does not just pertain to interviewing women, but to any individual who may particularly be in a
position of less social power than the interviewer.

Concerns about potential bias and power relations between me as researcher and the student
participants were present throughout this study. I inhabit multiple social, cultural and institutional
positions that bring with them the potential to affect students’ expressions of their experiences,
possibly compelling them to reveal partial, cautious or strategic narratives. While I overtly
positioned myself in my interactions with study participants as a “fellow doctoral student”, I am also
a University administrator in the graduate school and hold a role that could be perceived by
students as having (and indeed does have) authority or influence in academic and administrative
matters pertaining to them. Although not directly questioned about their knowledge of my
professional role, it was made transparent to participants in the informed consent documentation
for the study, and some students made clear in certain comments that they were cognizant of my
professional role. Other dimensions of potential power imbalance included the
ethnic/cultural/language “minority” status, lower socioeconomic status, and younger age of some participants in relation to my privileged status as an older, professional, Caucasian, North American, native English speaker. It is inevitable that the students made choices about what to say in the interviews that were impacted to some degree by their perceptions of how I would receive this information based on these elements of social and institutional positioning. My efforts to build awareness of and reduce the potential influences that these dynamics might pose on the data validity will be discussed further in a subsequent section.

While awareness of my positionalities may have impacted how the students constructed their narratives in the interviews, another potential dimension of influence emerging from these positions comes from my own side of the equation. Like the participants in this study, I am also a migrant to Canada, having lived my entire life and received all of my earlier education in another country, up until four years prior to commencing doctoral study. I came to Canada from the U.S. for personal and professional reasons, and decided to undertake doctoral study at UBC after having established permanent residency in Canada. This trajectory, along with the fact that I come from a globally privileged position of being American, Caucasian, and of a professional class, makes my experiences, motivations and horizons as a doctoral student potentially very different than many students who participated in this study. However, like study participants, I do think about the global opportunities that may be available to me as a doctoral holder and wonder about the value of my degree in a global career market. These imaginings are framed also by my disciplinary location in the social sciences domain. Like others, I also experience disjunctures in my transnational existence of being both “here” in Canada and “there” in the U.S. where most of my family and friends live, and where my core sense of habitus and relation to social imaginary were developed and are rooted.

These similarities may give me a certain empathy for the students participating in the study, but also raises the possibility that I may interject my own experiences and opinions into the interview and data analysis processes in a way that obscures the genuine voices of participants. At the same time, my professional career in higher education has brought me into close contact with students from a wide range of nationalities, disciplines and personal situations. I know well that the experience of international doctoral students is diverse and that opportunities for them vary significantly and are affected by a range of social, cultural, economic and personal conditions. Although participant observation as a research method is not included formally in the study, my own personal experiences as a doctoral student, learning with other doctoral students, as well as my professional position, ground me in a continuous and informal ‘observation’ mode of the
population which is the focus of this study. While these empathic experiences are still subject to the biases of my own ‘lens’, I would argue that they ultimately assist me in better understanding the narratives of student participants as well.

A challenge, then, that I face as a researcher is to reflect on the ways I make meaning of my own experiences as an international migrant and doctoral student in globalized, transnational space, while allowing full berth to the voices of students who have very different perspectives, interpretations and life courses than mine. In adopting a qualitative, constructivist research strategy, I have committed to privileging these voices and seeking to understand and portray them as they are meant by the participants themselves. This commitment to giving participants agency in constructing their worldview extends as a value underlying the entire investigation. An a priori assumption of this research is that international doctoral students have agency in creating and navigating their lives, even in the face of vast and powerful forces of globalization. As such, a research methodology that takes their stories and explanations as valid representations of constructed realities is necessary to support that agency. Likewise, adopting reflexive processes such as journaling and stating influential values in the research report may help diminish at least the ‘unconscious’ bias I may bring to the research. These issues will be touched on further in a subsequent section on research validity.

4.2.3. Summary of research strategy and rationale. To summarize, this study is situated within the constructivist/interpretivist research paradigm. The project adopts key commitments of the paradigm, including seeking to capture the individual’s point of view as a fluid description of their constructed reality, securing rich descriptions, and exerting reflexivity on values, biases and other influences on the researcher’s interpretation of participant meanings. It adopts a multiple case study approach utilizing semi-structured interviews to collect narratives from participants at a particular university, and a review of statistical trends and the policy context related to internationalization at that university and related federal initiatives. It privileges the voices of the participants in investigating how forces of neoliberal globalization manifest in their experiences and imaginations. It also assumes that the participants have agency in creating and negotiating their lives and opportunities in globalized transnational space.

This requires a data collection approach that gives the participants an opportunity to reflect meaningfully on their experiences and their aspirations, and as much flexibility and control as possible in articulating their inner world. Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method for
doing so. Because globalization is by nature a phenomenon which intersects with social dimensions such as nation, race, gender and class, to apprehend its influences on a highly diverse population such as “international doctoral students”, a research strategy that allows for a wide range of individuals to participate is necessary. A multiple-case narrative approach meets this requirement. A study which focuses on a particular institutional “case” helps to ground our understanding of participant experience in the social and policy context of a “place” that is likewise responding to the flows and pressures of globalization in tangible ways that impact that experience. For these reasons, the multiple case narrative approach that integrates elements of institutional policy analysis was selected as the best strategy for apprehending the research questions of this study.

This approach is not the only way the phenomena of interest in this study could have been investigated. Rather than interviews with a relatively large and diverse sample of students at one university, a survey or questionnaire could be sent to a random sample of international doctoral students across multiple universities. This approach might yield a wider range of insights or give a greater sense of generalizability across settings of the conclusions drawn. It would not, however, allow for interactive exploration of participant meanings and a site-specific description of contextual influences on participants. An ethnographic approach could employ interviews and close observation in academic and social settings to try to understand the impacts of globalization on a group of students and their cultural practices. However, this approach would limit the analysis to a very specific group of doctoral students, probably only those who were in a particular discipline or academic department, as that is the primary location where most doctoral students carry out their day-to-day activities. Because the study wishes to understand the impacts of globalization on the experiences and career imaginings of students in a variety of disciplines, and theorizes that neoliberal globalization will affect students in varying disciplines differently, the ethnographic approach would place unacceptable constraints on that investigation.

For similar reasons, an individual case study or an autoethnography on my own experience as an international doctoral student would not allow for the broader and diversified exploration of the phenomena of interest that is desired. A policy study on how a government or a university or a political interest group of universities (such as the Canadian “G 12”, which was formed to maximize political clout and differentiate themselves as “high reputation” institutions in a national context) has responded to conditions of contemporary globalization would also provide avenues of insight on how globalization affects policies which in turn affect graduate students. While understanding the policy context of doctoral education at the institutional research site is a facet of this study, a policy
study alone would not investigate the agency with which international students construct meaning and opportunity in a globalizing world, which is a primary interest in the study. Only a multiple case narrative will serve this study’s dual purposes of exploring the constructed realities of a wide range of international doctoral students, and through these lived stories, come to better understand and theorize processes of contemporary globalization.

4.3. Site and participant selection

The primary concern in selecting the site and participants for a multiple case narrative study is, of course, ensuring that they will allow for the investigation of the research questions. This section will present the rationale and process for the selection of the University of British Columbia as the study “site” and for the sampling frame utilized in drawing participants.

4.3.1. Site of study. There are two ways to think about the “site” of this study. In a theoretical sense, the site can be construed as the transnational spaces within a globalized world that are perceived and occupied by the international students participating in the study. Rizvi and Lingard, citing Tomlinson (2000), theorize that globalization encourages “deterritorialized” ways of experiencing oneself. That is, identity is less and less attached to a particular national location or citizenship, and that “increased global mobilities are deterritorializing forces that have the effect of reshaping both the material conditions of people’s existence and their perspectives on the world.” (2009, p. 166). This conceptualization of “site” is relevant in the context of a study in which imagination in a global field is a focus of inquiry.

In a more terrestrial sense, however, the primary site of this study is the University of British Columbia (UBC), a research-intensive public university in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. UBC was selected because it is an exemplar of a contemporary doctoral-granting institution with a large, cosmopolitan international student population and significant global engagement and aspirations. It “exemplifies a broader category of which it is a member” (Bryman, 2008, p. 56), that of large, public, doctoral-granting universities. The official UBC statistical report of 2008 showed an overall student population in 2008 of 45,310, with an enrolment of 8636 graduate students (19.01% of total student body). Of those, 3352 were doctoral students (38.8% of graduate student body), with 987 (29.4%) being “international” (requiring a study permit). A subsequent data snapshot taken for the purpose of structuring the study sample on December 20, 2009, shows a total international

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doctoral student enrolment of 1115 individuals. The distribution of international doctoral students by world region found in this snapshot can be viewed in Appendix 2.

As reviewed previously, UBC has been actively engaged in “internationalization” efforts over the past ten years. It was a significant element of the university’s “Trek 2000/2010” strategic plan which guided university activity from 1998 to 2008, emphasizing international student recruitment, student and faculty exchange, international research partnerships, and fundraising from international sources. At one point, UBC touted itself as “Canada’s Global University”. In 2009 the university embarked on a new institutional strategic plan, entitled “Place and Promise”, which includes a re-conceptualization of internationalization strategy. A “commitment” statement on this point has been offered: “The University creates rich opportunities for international engagement for students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and collaborates and communicates globally.” Accompanying general goals include “increasing the capacity of UBC students, faculty, staff, and alumni to engage internationally and strengthening UBC’s presence as a globally influential university.”

These elements establish UBC as a transnational location in which global challenges, responsibilities and opportunities are actively engaged by students, faculty, administrators and alumni, and which provides a rich and relevant environment in which to explore impacts of globalization on doctoral education. Marginson (2008), in writing about the global field of higher education, has offered a type of taxonomy of institutional global influence, based on dimensions of autonomy and global engagement (Figure 4.1.). UBC fits into the “2b” category as an elite, non-U.S. national research university with strong cross-border roles. As such, UBC provides an opportunity to view the impacts of globalization on doctoral education and doctoral students from an understudied yet highly relevant vantage point outside (if just barely) the hegemonic U.S. domain (Marginson’s categories “1” and “2a”).

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| AUTONOMOUS SUB-FIELD of elite research* universities, prestige- not profit-driven |
| Notes |
| 1. autonomy relative to global field |
| 2. elite teaching- only liberal arts colleges feed into category 1 |
| 1 The “Global Superleague”: Much of American doctoral sector and a few high prestige universities in UK. Prestige derived from stellar research reputation and global power of degrees [Harvard U, Cambridge etc.] |
| 2 Elite non U.S. national research universities with strong cross-border roles: Prestige-driven non profit research universities at national level. Global presence in research; cross-border students some on for-profit basis [U Sydney, U of Warwick] |
| 3 Elite and globally focused for-profits: Prestigious fully for-profit institutions operating globally, largely teaching focused with some research. National exclusivity and global power creates autonomy vis a vis 6. Very small group. [Indian IITs, IMB] |
| 4b Teaching-focused export universities: Lesser status non-profit universities, commercial players in global market; lower cost quality foreign education at scale. May have minor research role [Oxford Brookes, U Central Queensland] |
| 6 Lesser prestige teaching only global for-profits: Fully commercial operators actively building export markets, low cost mass production, no research [U Phoenix, DeVry, various global e-U] |
| 5 Teaching-focused national universities: Largely teaching focused institutions, marginally global in research and/or cross-border teaching [most Malaysian public universities, some Canadian community colleges, etc.] |
| 7 Non-profits without global agendas: teaching-focused, local demand orientation. No cross-border role. [largest group, especially in importing nations] |
| 8 For-profits with minor global functions: Commercial operators focused on local market with some cross-border students. [some private industry training in Australia] |
| 9 For-profits without global agendas: local degree mills, no cross-border students. Large category in some nations [Brazil, Philippines] |

Figure 4.1. Marginson’s “Polar field of global higher education, after Bourdieu”. Marginson (2007) Used with permission.
The evolution of internationalization at UBC and impacts on international doctoral student enrolment was presented in the research context chapter and will be further explored in this study through student narratives about their perspectives on UBC as an “internationalized” institution. Inferences will be drawn from their narratives about how UBC as an institution may be influenced by neoliberal globalization and function as a transnational space. This study will be particular to an individual institutional “case”, but will also serve as an example to draw upon for other similar institutions, in Canada and beyond. One of the hallmarks of globalization is what Rizvi and Lingard (2009) term “policy convergence” through which policy ideas homogenize across multiple sites, reflecting and driving larger-scale global trends. In this highly interconnected environment, the experiences of students and recent graduates at one site, such as UBC, is likely to be of use and interest in other sites as well.

My professional role also makes the site selection of UBC logistically helpful. On a practical level, it certainly eases my access to potential study participants and to strategic documents related to global engagement at the university. My participation on various university committees and planning groups provides me with an in-depth understanding of activities undertaken by UBC to establish a global profile. Having such “pre-understanding” of the research site context can be a benefit, but also warrants cautions. Literature on action research, which typically takes place in a site known to the researcher, speaks helpfully to this dynamic. An advantage to being an “insider-researcher” is having both explicit and tacit knowledge about the organization, its formal (or public) representation and its informal cultures, politics and norms (Coghlin & Brannick, 2005). This provides an immediate frame of reference from which to draw on in comprehending and analyzing the narratives and reports that emerge from institutional participants. However, there are disadvantages to being an insider as well, as

You are likely to be part of the organization’s culture and find it difficult to stand back from it in order to assess and critique it...when you are interviewing you may assume too much and so not probe as much as if you were an outsider or ignorant of the situation. You may think you know the answer and not expose your current thinking to alternative reframing (Coghlin & Brannick, 2005, p. 62).

The recommended remedy for inadvertent bias or perspectival foreclosure in any qualitative research endeavour, but especially for insider researchers, is reflexivity. Continuous reflection on presuppositions, biases and conclusions drawn is suggested as a way to both identify what is taken for granted, and to stand back from it for perspective. This was achieved in this project through both deliberate querying of students for perspectives contrary to my own, and ongoing scouring
and presentation of the data for student commentary that questioned and confronted my assumptions.

4.3.2. Study participants and sampling frame. A purposive sampling approach was used to develop the participant group, as is appropriate when the goal is to select participants “in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed” (Bryman, 2008, p. 415). This is a non-randomized approach, but not a convenience approach either. The goal was to include doctoral students that, as a group, represent the diversity of international doctoral students at the University of British Columbia, and can provide a breadth of perspectives on the research questions.

4.3.2.1. Participant eligibility. The student group was composed of individuals enrolled in a PhD program at the University of British Columbia and who required a study permit from Citizenship and Immigration Canada to do so. This is the standard definition of “international student” and rules out those who have Canadian citizenship or permanent residency at the commencement of the study. The student group was also limited to those who have been “admitted to candidacy.”

The rationale for this eligibility requirement is that reaching candidacy is a crucial milestone in a doctoral student’s career, and the student has typically become seriously engaged with research at that point. This is important, as students’ goals and aspirations about their research and what possibilities and challenges it may present for them in global context as doctorate holders is a focus of the study. Also, doctoral student attrition slows significantly after the third year in program, the timeframe when candidacy is typically reached. The admission to candidacy normally indicates that the student is strongly committed to completing their doctoral education. That a doctoral degree will be earned by participants was a presumption of the study.

4.3.2.2. Sampling method. In utilizing a multiple case approach, Stake suggests that there are three main criteria for selecting cases: “Is the case relevant to the quintain?” (the quintain is the overall group of cases); “Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?”; and “Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?” (Stake, 2006, p. 23). In this study, the overall population of international doctoral students afforded the ability to meet all of these criteria through a purposive sampling frame. Each eligible case (international doctoral

22 UBC definition of requirements to be “Admitted to Candidacy”: Student has completed all coursework required by the program, has passed a comprehensive examination and has obtained supervisory committee approval for a dissertation proposal: http://www.grad.ubc.ca/policy/index.asp?menu=002,007,000,000

student) can be assumed to be relevant to the overall population of students; the sampling frame is based on representativeness of the inherent diversity in the overall population, therefore producing a diverse sample; and ensuring a sample that spans students from many geographical regions and various academic disciplines will indeed provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and context.

Participants were recruited especially to provide diverse perspectives on the experience of navigating transnational space in a globalizing world, and to represent to the extent possible, the international doctoral study body of UBC. This means that global region, disciplinary field and sex of participants will all be important variables in establishing a diverse and representative sample. The ability to analyze differences in student narratives in relation to each of these variables may reveal important distinctions in how globalization impacts various participants’ perspectives, challenges and opportunities. Other individual variables, including class or financial standing, may also be important in understanding differential impacts of globalization on this group, but there is no way to sample based on this variable. It can be probed, however, in the interview process.

The sampling technique was as follows. A real-time data snapshot of all students actively enrolled in a PhD program at UBC was taken on December 20, 2009 and obtained by the researcher. The data was cleared of any students on a leave of absence or otherwise not registered for the 2009 Winter I term. The data was then sorted according to “Visa Code”. The three main visa codes in the overall sample represent Canadian citizens, Canadian permanent residents, and study permit holders (i.e. international students). Only the student records for those requiring a study permit were retained. The data was then sorted according to “regional codes” based on the country of citizenship of each student. The regions were: United States (USA), Central America, South America, Caribbean, European Union (EU), Asia, Middle East (ME), Africa and Oceania. Due to small numbers and common characteristics, the Central America and South America regions were collapsed into one region for the purpose of this study (Central/South America, CSA), as were Africa and Caribbean. Each student record was then coded to indicate whether the student was in a Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) discipline or a Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM) discipline. (See Appendix 2 for definitions of countries and disciplines included in these categories, and overall UBC PhD student population numbers by region and discipline). There is a small margin for error in the categorization of students into disciplinary category, as some students studying in SSH-coded fields such as Geography or Psychology might be more accurately placed in the STEM category, while some individual students in STEM-coded fields such as Forestry or Human
Kinetics might better fit into the SSH category. These anomalies are not seen as threatening to the overall integrity of the sampling. When it came to including specific students in the study, an individualized determination was made about their suitability in a particular category.

Percentages of students in each category were calculated. Overall, the region that represents the most doctoral students at UBC is Asia, followed by the Middle East, USA, Europe, Central & South America, Africa & Caribbean, and Oceania, in that order. The overall disciplinary balance was 69.6% in STEM fields and 30.4% in SSH fields. This contrasts to the Canadian doctoral student population, which has a ratio of 60.3% STEM to 39.7% SSH.

The next sorting was on the variable of sex. Appendix 3 shows the results of categorizing students by region, discipline and sex. Overall, there is a ratio of 62.1% males to 39.9% females in the international doctoral population at UBC. This contrasts to the Canadian students, where females outnumber males slightly, 51% to 49%.

Finally, from the same data snapshot, the doctoral students who had achieved candidacy were extracted and sorted by region, disciplinary field and sex. Numerical results are shown in table 4.1. In all, there were 351 international doctoral candidates out of 1115 total international students, a percentage of 31.5%. The numbers of candidates from the Africa/Caribbean and Oceania regions were very small, together less than 5% of all candidates. A decision was made to remove the students from these regions from eligibility for the study. This is largely due to the potential difficulty in recruiting participants from such a small eligibility sample, and also to avoid any potential problems with confidentiality of data. All other regions had enough candidates to comprise a minimum of 10% of the total candidate pool. Percentages of candidates by category within the remaining regions are shown in table 4.2.

The percentage of doctoral students in each region that had reached candidacy varied interestingly, with the highest percentage being among the US region with 40.6% of all registered doctoral students having reached candidacy, 39.4% of CSA students, 38.8% of EU students, 28.2% of Asian students and 23% of Middle Eastern students. It is difficult to make any conclusions about quality or persistence of students from these numbers, as reporting of candidacy varies by department, and flows of student enrolment would affect the percentage that would have advanced to candidacy. The lower percentage of Middle Eastern candidates in relation to their higher representation in the overall doctoral student population could indicate more difficulty for these students in advancing to candidacy, but it could also reflect the fact that incoming student rates have risen from that region in the past few years, giving UBC more first and second year
doctoral students from the Middle East to dilute the percentage of those who had advanced to candidacy. These rates may also be affected by poor reporting of candidacy in the departments which they are predominantly enrolled.

The intended sample distribution (table 4.3.) was drawn from the candidacy analysis by assigning one participant slot to each “cell” category (region x discipline x sex) indicated in table 4.2. for every full 3% of the overall number of candidates in that cell. For example, Asia/Male/SSH students account for 3.3% of all candidates, so there is one participant slot for that category. USA/Female/STEM students account for 6.1% of all candidates, so there are two participant slots for that category, and so on. This technique distributed 24 participant slots. To bolster the overall participant group numbers, six additional slots were added (and one was redistributed from EU/Male/STEM to US/Male/SSH) to make the coverage of different categories more robust and to help make the overall initially planned participant sample of 30 students more representative of general student population characteristics. The final planned sample included 11 (36.7%) females and 19 (63.3%) males, which closely approximates the 37.9% to 62.1% ratio in the overall international doctoral student population. Likewise, the sample was planned to include 8 (26.7%) SSH students and 22 (73.3%) STEM students, which was slightly off from the 30.4% to 69.6% ratio in the overall population. There were nine slots planned for Asian students, eight for USA students, six for European students, four for Middle Eastern students and three for students from Central/South America. This is a reasonable distribution, given the overall distribution of international doctoral students. The only anomalies are a slight underrepresentation of Middle Eastern students in the sample, relative to their prevalence in the overall doctoral student population (although not of their prevalence in the candidate pool), and a slight overrepresentation of U.S. students in the sample relative to their prevalence in the doctoral candidate pool (although not of their prevalence in the overall doctoral student population).

After the recruitment of participants, there were two final variations to the planned sample distribution cited above. It was felt that the four Asia/Male/STEM students who were included (the most of any specific group) was adequate, and the planned fifth slot in this category was converted to an Asia/Male/SSH slot to accommodate an extra willing interviewee in this category. Also, an interview was conducted with an “extra” EU/Male/SSH student for insurance, should a scheduled participant not show up, and this extra student was included in the overall sample. The final sample of 31 students is shown in table 4.4., along with the pseudonyms used in this report.
Table 4.1. Numbers of UBC international doctoral candidates by region, disciplinary field and sex (data snapshot Dec 20, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASA (Asia)</th>
<th>ME (Middle East)</th>
<th>USA (United States)</th>
<th>EU (European Union)</th>
<th>CSA (Central/South America)</th>
<th>AFR (Africa)</th>
<th>OCA (Oceania)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SSH</strong></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STEM</strong></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**# of doctoral students overall**

|               | 375 | 235 | 197  | 170 | 94  | 25   | 28   | 1124 |

**% of doctoral students who had reached candidacy**

|               | 28.2 | 23  | 40.6  | 38.8 | 39.4 | 28   | 24   |

Total # of candidates: 351
Table 4.2. Percentages of UBC international doctoral candidate pool by region, disciplinary field and sex (data snapshot Dec 20, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASA</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>CSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSH</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of all candidates</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3. Original planned participant sample by region, disciplinary field and sex (cells with +1 participant slot in bold)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASA</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>CSA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Females: 11
Total Males: 19
Total SSH: 8
Total STEM: 22
Total sample: 30
Table 4.4. Final sample, numbers and student pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASA</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>CSA</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSH</td>
<td>Arvind</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Helena</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEM</td>
<td>Ravi</td>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>Farjad</td>
<td>Hoda</td>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Ake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total females: 11
Total males: 20
Total SSH: 10
Total STEM: 21

Countries of citizenship represented by student participants: Austria, Chile, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States.

Academic disciplines represented by student participants: Animal Science, Anthropology, Asian Studies, Botany, Cell Biology, Chemistry, Civil Engineering, Earth & Ocean Sciences, Education, Forestry, Geological Engineering, History, Law, Mechanical Engineering, Medical Genetics, Microbiology/Immunology, Neuroscience, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Pharmacology, Physics, Sociology
4.3.2.3. Participant recruitment. This research project was approved as an instance of “Institutional Research” at UBC by the university Planning and Institutional Research (PAIR) office. Institutional research is considered by the UBC PAIR office to be "research conducted in order to support decision making by the institution" (Sudmant, 2010, personal communication). This study was deemed to qualify under this definition due to its focus on UBC and the usefulness of the study to decisions made regarding the recruitment and education of UBC doctoral students. When a study is considered "Institutional Research", it is allowable for student contact information provided by the student to the university to be utilized to recruit study participants. As such, I was able to obtain a roster of doctoral candidates and the email addresses that they had provided to the university, as well as information about their citizenship and the graduate program in which they were registered.

Recruitment of participants began in October 2010. All international doctoral candidates on the roster who were from countries that were within the sampling frame were sent an email requesting their participation in the study, with a formal request letter attached (Appendix 4). Because of my role as a staff member of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, it was important that recruitment communications were clear that I was acting solely in a role as a doctoral student, lest inadvertent coercion to participate or personal consequences of accepting or declining the invitation participate be perceived. Emails were sent from and replies sent to the email address globalphdstudy@gmail.com. All students expressing interest in participating were sent a brief eligibility confirmation email, inquiring about their current registration status at the university and their previous education, as well as whether they had become permanent residents of Canada. Students who were not actively registered at the university any longer, or who indicated that they had pursued formal education in Canada prior to graduate school, or who had already become permanent residents of Canada were advised that they were not eligible. Other categorization data, such as their country of citizenship, sex, and their program of study could be confirmed through the original data roster provided by the university.

If there were no eligibility barriers to participating, students were accepted into the study, and interviews scheduled on a “first come” basis, based on the slots available in the applicable sex/citizenship/discipline category. Once the planned number of slots had been filled with completed interviews, other volunteers were declined. Students volunteering to participate were only declined if they didn’t fit the eligibility requirements or if their “category” had already been filled. The majority of slots in the study were filled by the response to the initial recruitment email.
However, a few were more challenging to fill (in particular Asian STEM students, both male and female), and follow-up emails that had slight revisions and language tailored to these groups were sent. For example, one early Asian student participant suggested that some Asian students are often reluctant to volunteer to speak about themselves and may be concerned about their English proficiency. A follow-up email was sent specifically to Asian students with an encouragement that their English did not need to be “perfect” and that they were a large and important group at UBC and their perspectives would be very helpful in my research. This approach generated several more volunteers. All participants were offered a $25 Amazon.ca gift credit.

With this overall approach, student participation was entirely self-selecting and at students’ own initiative. As is well-known in qualitative research, this tactic may limit participants to those who are particularly motivated to share their experiences, and these individuals may have experiences that “outlie” the typical or mid-range. These validity considerations are addressed directly within the findings chapters, in the context of specific findings which raise questions of potential self-selection bias.

4.3.3. Data collection via interviews. The interview guide (Appendix 1) was piloted with two international doctoral students and the questions were refined for clarity and focus on the research questions. Interviews began in October 2010 and all but one of them were completed by April 2011. One-on-one interviews ranging in length from 60-90 minutes were held with study participants in a variety of locations on the UBC campus, usually in either a spare room in the Graduate Student Society and Graduate School building or a space in the student’s academic department or research area. Interviews were digitally audio-recorded. Participants had been sent the study summary and informed consent forms in advance and a preliminary discussion of these documents was held prior to the interviews commencing. As planned, the interviews followed an open-ended course, with the guide providing the core questions asked of each student, with additional exploratory questions emerging from each unique conversation. Notes were taken directly after each interview to chronicle the tones and attitudes, major conversational themes, and any unusual circumstances arising in the interviews. In general, there were no highly noteworthy or unusual interview occurrences. In one situation, a student was interviewed and it was later found that the audio recording had terminated after the first 20 minutes. This interview was unfortunately not usable for the study, and another student was recruited to take this slot. This final interview was completed in March 2012.
The interview questions were developed to explore students’ entire educational and global mobility imaginings, experiences and trajectories. This trajectory is conceived in this study as “moving into, through and beyond” doctoral education. Interview conversations travelled from students’ early education in their home country and their family and cultural habitus related to education, to their initial imaginings and choices about pursuing graduate education abroad and their conceptualizations of “Canada” or “North America”, through their “living and learning” experiences during their PhD programs, and their imagined and planned futures as PhD holders. The interviews elicited a wide range of stories, opinions, conjectures and facts. Overall, participants were asked about their experiences throughout their educational trajectory and how they make sense of them and their beliefs and aspirations.

A professional transcriptionist was employed to transcribe most of the interview recordings into text (the researcher transcribed a few on her own). These transcriptions were reviewed and corrected through a second listening by the researcher.

4.4. Data analysis

Data analysis is, fundamentally, “the process of bringing order, structure and coherence to the mass of data collected, and thereby arriving at an understanding of its meaning.” (Shkedi, 2005, p. 79). The analysis stage of research, like the overall design and data collection, aligns with and reflects particular epistemological positions. In keeping with its exploratory, emergent view, qualitative constructivist research findings are typically inductively derived from the data, and analysis is an ongoing and iterative process that occurs throughout the data collection phase. (Shkedi, 2005). Researchers are reminded again in the analysis stage to maintain a reflexive posture to make explicit the processes and influences on their own constructions of meaning out of the data. Shkedi (drawing on Charmaz, 1990) recommends a “memoing” process, where the researcher engages in an “on-going dialogue with self” (p. 89) to reflect on the process of drawing meaning and inference from the data. Brief memos of this kind were written throughout the process of working with the data. The data is the foundation from which theory can be generated, or new layers of theoretical understandings and applications can be developed, which is the approach taken in this study.

Strauss and Corbin (1990, reported in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) have offered three approaches to analyzing qualitative data that indicate a continuum of interpretation and abstraction to theory. The first approach, akin to reporting in journalism, is to present qualitative data more or
less “as is”, without analysis. The rationale for that approach is for research participants to speak for themselves, without the filter of researcher analysis. The second approach has been called “interpretive-descriptive”, in which the researcher has a primary interest in accurately describing what she or he has understood from the data, and “weaving descriptions, speaker’s words, fieldnote quotations, and their own interpretations into a rich and believable descriptive narrative” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 22). Some level of interpretation and abstraction for theory-building may be present. The third approach is more explicitly concerned with theory building, with the focus being on a high level of interpretation and abstraction of the data in order to explicate core organizing concepts and build “grounded theory”.

The overall approach taken in this study is best characterized by the middle ground of the second of Strauss & Corbin’s analytic methods. An “interpretive-descriptive” approach is taken in which themes within participants’ own descriptions of their experiences and imagined futures are identified, and interpretations are made about what this data tells us about how processes of globalization operate to shape the lives of current and recent international doctoral students. These inferences are reflected back to theories related to globalization and agency to add layers of understanding about whether and how globalization theory constructs such as the network society, transnational space, and a neoliberal global social imaginary actually manifest in the lives of individuals. Interview transcripts form the substantive data for analysis, along with secondary, contextual data such as institutional enrolment statistics and policy and strategy documents. The basic approach to data analysis taken in this study was the one presented by Shkedi (2005) as appropriate to the “multiple case narrative” methodology.

4.4.1. Theme-building and data coding. Thematic coding of text-based data is a fundamental analytic technique in qualitative research. Coding is a phasic process of “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61), leading to the identification of core concepts and themes emerging from the data. Shkedi prefers the term “categorization” rather than coding, and he describes this as a process of “fragmenting the data into separate bits and then of assigning these ‘bits’ to categories or classes which bring them together again, if in a novel way” (2005, p. 83), all towards the desired outcome of creating a “coherent narrative” about the phenomenon of interest. For the purposes of this study, I use the term “theme” to describe an overarching topic found within the data, and the term “codes” to describe specific subtopics within or aspects of a theme.
Shkedi offers a comprehensive and systematic approach to analyzing multiple case narratives that utilizes thematic coding, while also retaining the narrative flavour of the interview data. His staged process was generally followed in this study, but adapted to the researcher’s sensibility as well. Shkedi’s focus is on creating theory, fundamentally from the data up, and in his approach, the first (“initial”) stage focuses on deriving tentative categories of information directly from the words of the “informants”. The categories are given “in-vivo” labels—that is, terms used by the participants themselves. Every interview transcript is coded into categories:

In the initial analysis stage, the researcher categorizes each and every case (interview or diary) separately and with an equally open mind. The intention is not to force the categorization of the first case narratives on the latter. Nonetheless, since all the cases generally deal with similar phenomena, the researchers often have a general idea of the probable categories for the whole study (Shkedi 2005, pp 100-101).

The result of this stage of analysis is an inventory of the broad themes of the data and references to excerpts of the data which illustrate each category. This initial stage was undertaken as suggested, but there were also some themes that were identified a priori, based on existing literature and the theoretical framework of the study, as suggested by other qualitative researchers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As stated earlier, this study adopted both a theory-testing and a theory-seeking approach, following Bassey’s conception of case study types.

4.4.1.1. First phase of thematic analysis. Prior to beginning transcript analysis, a “codebook” was established, starting with themes derived from theory and identified a priori as being of interest. These themes were specifically related to globalization theory: “network society”, “global imaginary”, “transnational space”, “globalization of higher education” and “neoliberal ideologies”. As I began examining the interview transcripts, instances and subtopics related to these themes were noted, and preliminary codes assigned to concepts. Other themes (or major topics) also began to emerge as I continued close reading of the transcripts, and were added to the codebook. These included “purpose/value of doctoral education”, “agency and binds”, “career development”, “family and influential others”. Many tentative codes within all of these themes were identified in the data at this early stage and were applied to the transcripts and added freely to the codebook. The transcripts themselves were notated with codes, and instances of the codes in particular transcripts were tracked in the codebook. After completing close reading and coding of about half (15) of the transcripts, there were no new major themes and few new codes emerging from the data. At this point, the codebook was re-assessed and evaluated for multiple entries which were duplicative or had very few entries and some were either removed or collapsed into a single,
more descriptive code. This resulted in a tightening of the coding scheme and each code was clearly defined. Shkedi refers to this activity as the “mapping stage” where the goal is to conceptualize the links between the categories, identify sub-categories, and group them together in logical “families” of topics in a “category tree” (p. 109). There is a constant process of comparing emerging categories to ensure that the relationships between them are properly established, and of going back to the data to “look for evidence that supports or refutes our new array of categories” (p. 107).

After this exercise, the rest of the transcripts were given close reading and coding. No new themes or codes were identified in the second half of the transcripts, but a few further refinements to existing codes took place. Codes were generally neutral in tone, and both affirmative and critical comments related to the code were noted. As proposed by Shkedi, the “prevalence” and “eminence” of each category was also noted both during the overall coding process and afterwards through a process of quantifying the number of times a code or concept was mentioned, and making judgements as to the importance of a given topic to the students as indicated through their wording choices, emotion and/or repetition of ideas, stories or opinions. Once primary themes are identified, Arksey & Knight (1999) also suggest that meaning can be generated from the data by counting instances of the theme to assess how common or rare a concept really is, by looking for relationships between concepts, and ultimately, by checking whether the analysis “can be put together in a story that is plausible to you and that can be related to the picture you drew in the literature review” (p. 168). They also emphasize the importance of looking for disconfirming as well as affirming evidence. These activities were deliberately undertaken during and after the initial phase of coding through the practice of writing analytic memos to track insights, trends, connections between individual student narratives, and contrary views on similar phenomena. Here are two examples:

*I’m struck by the choices (student) felt he had – could be choosy about where to go to school; doesn’t seem to have felt a great deal of pressure; a ‘luxury’ available to NA students? Also hearing (student) in a space of seeing an ‘ideal’ around contribution to society, but pulled also by more practical (self-enriching?) concerns around selling a product, having it used widely, making money; right in the middle of the discourse poles around purpose of doctoral education-stewardship/market. Market seems to be winning. I’m struck by his imagined purpose of a career to have fun. Seems like quite a privileged imagination, compared especially to students in other fields where the ability to just find any job is about as far as they are able to imagine.—seems like direct relationship to marketability of discipline*

*Another example of student wanting to compete in merit-based system, believe they have more of a fair shot in Canada to advance in career based on own merit, looking for ways to maximize own capital, get away from systems where capital development*
is bound by external forces. But at same time, they are strategically gaining capital by accessing NA credential and other forms of capital development, in order to get an edge in those systems at home. Grad students (esp in science) are looking to maximize capital, agency.

4.4.1.2. Second stage of thematic analysis. In Shkedi’s approach, after the initial and mapping stages comes the “focused” stage in which the one or two “core” categories emerge from the data that anchor the analysis and presentation of the overall project. The core category must be related to as many other categories as possible, be frequent and eminent in the data, and in general “have the potential to produce a coherent narrative” about the primary concerns of the interview participants (p. 122). This is used as a springboard to test, refine and generalize to the established theoretical framework of processes of globalization. In this study, rather than “one or two”, it was determined that there were five core theoretical themes within the dataset that met Shkedi’s criteria: discourses of purpose in doctoral education, globalizing imaginations and social fields, agency and its bounds, mobility and transnational space, and neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education. Other themes identified in earlier stages of analysis, such as “student experience”, “career development” and “student choices” were seen as experiential themes which illuminate the larger theoretical themes related to globalization which form the foundation of the research project. The variables used to ensure a representative sample of students—world region of citizenship, sex and disciplinary area—were not analyzed as themes, but instances where these variables were relevant to thematic findings were noted and woven into the reporting of findings. Other similar personal aspects that were referenced by students in their narratives, such as class and age, were treated similarly. Given the relatively small numbers and diversity within of various “categories” of students in the sample (e.g. students from Asia, students in the social sciences and humanities) assertions based on these aspects cannot be responsibly extrapolated, due to the risk of essentializing diverse groups of people based on the attributes and experiences of a few.

4.4.2. Summary of approach to data analysis and reporting. The multiple case narrative thematic analysis approach chosen for this study requires the analysis of interview transcripts for both general concepts and themes related to students’ experiences and imaginations of the future, as well as for narratives that illuminate the themes. Emergent themes, their significance in the overall body of data, and the relationships between them will facilitate understanding of how theories related to globalization are reflected in the experiences and aspirations of study participants. Their
narratives will bring to life how these themes are constructed and made meaning of by participants. Analysis within the findings chapters will suggest new or contrary dimensions that can be added to the theoretical literature on globalization, and may also lead to implications for change in practice.

The epistemological stance taken in this project is that individual participants will construct meaning from their experiences based on their own cultural, social, gendered, and academic discipline-based positionings, which may reflect discernible larger patterns of the impacts of globalization on doctoral education and, specifically, on students who are coming to UBC from other countries to pursue it. The emphasis placed in the constructionist view of narrative on the social relatedness of narrative meaning-making indicates that while narratives may be experienced by the individual as being highly personal, they are inevitably culturally situated and rely on mutually held conventions about language and story-telling in order to be successful in their communication of meaning. This was an important consideration in this research project given that participant narratives form the major portion of the data collected, and there will be significant cultural and language differences between the researcher and the participants producing narratives about their lives, and also between the various participants themselves. It has been crucial that both in the interview and analysis phases that I take Shkedi’s advice to heart: “The researcher...must attempt to see the data from the standpoint of the interviewee’s culture, rather than imposing upon it frameworks or understandings from other cultures within which the same words or concepts may have different meanings” (2005, p. 99).

Analysis of documentary data such as policy papers will contribute perspective on how globalization may be affecting policymakers and institutional action, which in turn impacts the context in which the study participants are experiencing doctoral education and career development. While full policy analysis is outside the scope of this study, the documents will be evaluated for themes, discourses and patterns of activity that reflect the forces of globalization on institutional strategy and action.

Shkedi asserts that the final “narrative report” in a multiple case narrative analysis may take varying forms with the overall goal being to create “a guided tour in which we introduce our ‘tourists’ to a natural and/or human and cultural landscape through description and logical explanation in order to arrive at an understanding of them” (2005, p. 160). Shkedi recommends two general formats. One is the “focused-narrative” report in which the main purpose is to “take the reader inside the phenomenon that was studied” (p. 166) with a focus on using particular case narratives and the informants’ own language to tell the specific “story” of the phenomenon within a
given context. The other is the “narrative-based theory” report which focuses on theoretical explanations of the phenomenon of interest, using narrative data to “(translate) the informants’ narratives into theoretical academic language within a conceptual framework” (p. 175). A combination of these two approaches is also possible with the “integrated-narrative” report which attempts to integrate both foci, the story of the phenomenon and the theoretical analysis of it. In this approach, specific narratives are highlighted, the context described, and theoretical inferences regarding the phenomenon are drawn primarily from these specific cases. This combined approach is adopted for the study as the best way to emphasize both participant lives and theoretical underpinnings of globalization’s impacts on lived experience, both of which are of equal interest to the researcher.

The theoretical and experiential themes identified in the study are ultimately presented in findings chapters in an integrative and iterative way, across three main phases of the student educational experience—imagining and becoming an international doctoral student, living and learning as an international doctoral student, and imagining and planning the future. These three phases form the “coherent narrative” of student experiences and provide the framework for presenting the core theoretical themes of the study. This is admittedly a more complex and multiplicative analysis and cluster of findings than Shkedi suggests. However, as the following chapters will demonstrate, all of these themes are evident and discrete (although interconnected) within the data and fundamental to apprehending the research questions posed in this study.

4.5. Data validity considerations

In general terms, research validity refers to “whether you are observing, identifying or measuring what you say you are” (Bryman, 2004). Research is said to have internal validity when there is congruence between a researcher’s findings and the theoretical concepts they are meant to support or advance, and external validity when findings can be generalized across other social settings (Bryman, 2004). Because of its highly interpretive stance and usual deliberate focus on understanding the constructed realities of smaller groups of individuals who are purposively, not randomly selected to participate in the research, qualitative research is sometimes criticized for having limited internal validity and external applicability to other settings. In the case of this study, these criticisms might be framed as “how can we know that the researcher’s interpretations of the relationship between study participants’ experiences and broader processes of globalization are valid?” (internal validity) or “how could we know whether the findings generated from this sample
of international doctoral students at one institution are relevant to other students at other institutions?" (external validity).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) have suggested that the concept of validity should be thought of in a unique way for qualitative research, suggesting that trustworthiness should be the goal of such studies. Trustworthiness is not a matter of “proof” but of “defensibility” of the research process and ultimate claims to knowledge. For these authors, trustworthiness consists of four sub-criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. I will describe each of these criteria and indicate the measures that have been taken in this study to meet their demands.

**Credibility** maps on to the concept of “internal validity”. In qualitative research, credibility requires that it is carried out according to the standards of good practice in the field, avoids (or at least acknowledges) bias and that findings are confirmed as valid by those who are studied. This study has been evaluated by the UBC behavioural research ethics board and by my supervisory committee to ensure the proposal conforms to standards of good practice. Procedures were recorded in a research log and in the research write-up. One approach to enhancing internal validity is to provide tentative results to the research participants, who are asked to validate the analyses’ faithfulness to participant meanings. However, the technique of respondent validation of findings and interpretations has limitations as noted by Fielding and Fielding (1996) who suggest that participants, due to their own biases and self-contradictions, should not have “privileged status as commentators” on their own actions or on the researcher’s inferences. They suggest that processes of “validation” by participants themselves should not be seen as definitive, but “treated as yet another source of data and insight” (p. 43). This approach, while commendable, was not adopted in this study, primarily due to the relatively large number of research participants and time pressures. Instead, validity is strengthened in this study through detailed and thorough reading and coding of data, and careful attention paid to presenting alternative and contrasting views in the data, the significant use of direct student quotes to illustrate analytic conclusions, and conscientious tentativeness in articulating such conclusions.

It is possible, given the professional role that I hold, that students who were aware of this role were motivated to shape their responses in the interviews as to seem more satisfactory to me, or to shield them from any negative consequences that I might bring to bear in my professional capacity. This could be seen to compromise the credibility and general validity of the research findings. Indeed, it was clear in my interactions with a few students, that they were aware of my professional position, mentioning that they had seen me speak at a campus event, or received a
correspondence in my name from the graduate school. Since my professional role was also disclosed on the informed consent form (Appendix 5), it can be assumed that any of the participants could have taken note. My primary concern was the portion of the interview which explored student academic experiences at UBC, since this was the scope of experience on which I would be most likely perceived by the students to be able to exert influence. I took steps to encourage candor and dispel concerns about my professional role throughout the interviews. I provided the informed consent form to each student in advance of the interview and also asked each student to read the form again just prior to commencing the interview. The consent form made explicit that “participating in this study will not affect your standing with the University, access to university services, or your academic program. No one outside the research team will be informed of your participation” and also articulated the confidentiality parameters of the study data. I probed each student for any questions or concerns and none were articulated. I affirmed to any student who mentioned my professional role (two or three students) that I was acting only in the role of a PhD student in conducting the interview. I continually encouraged students to be candid in their comments and made a point of probing for experiences and opinions that may have been contrary to a “positive spin” on events. These actions don’t guarantee that students did not alter their comments in response to my role, however there was also no indication that students did so.

Transferability of research maps on to a concept which is more common in positivist research, generalizability, or “external validity”. One of the key questions related to any research study is the extent to which its findings pertain to individuals or contexts beyond the scope of those studied. The goals of constructivist research are typically to explore a social phenomenon and its potential meanings to the individuals or groups engaged (rather than draw definitive conclusions about a generalizable reality), and to describe it in rich detail. Bryman states it differently but along the same conceptual lines, suggesting that “the findings of qualitative research are to generalize to theory rather than to populations...it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization” (2008, pp 391-392). The process of generalization to theory requires candid acknowledgment of failures of the findings to support theory. These instances have been reported in the dissertation.

It is also important that the research findings be reported in enough detail and richness of description that others in similar settings be able to judge their applicability to their own milieu. In this case, other practitioners in graduate education should be able to recognize relevant themes, experiences and implications related to how globalization is manifesting in their own institution with
their own students. This has been addressed by providing detailed descriptions of my research context and findings, and including significant interview passages for readers to relate to their own perspective. Also, transferability of findings takes on a particular meaning in the context of evaluating processes of globalization, in which theory predicts convergence of policy and other contextual elements of doctoral education. The site of this study, UBC, was deliberately chosen as an exemplar of an university that is highly engaged in and affected by processes of globalization. While students experience these processes at a locally level, a high level of transferability to students at peer universities in the global field can be anticipated.

Dependability relies upon the researcher maintaining complete documentation of the study, including fieldnotes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, etc, and making this documentation accessible to others. This has been accomplished in this study, and documentation is available upon request. Confirmability of research suggests that while researcher objectivity is not the goal, the researcher needs to be shown to have acted “in good faith” to avoid the influence of personal agendas on the conduct and outcomes of the research. Again, doctoral research has the benefit of close supervision and evaluation by senior researchers, which will undoubtedly cast a scrutinizing eye on the potential for undue researcher influence. Additionally, I have strived to be transparent and reflective in my research process, acknowledging as I have in this chapter my positioning as a researcher, and journaling/reporting on my analytic process, value commitments and instances of personal influence I became aware of.

4.6. Concluding remarks

Research on the processes and impacts of globalization is now wide-ranging and addresses many social structures and institutions. Quantitative indicators of cross-border and transnational activity and power are well established (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999) and theoretical analysis of these processes is significant across many disciplines, including in the study of higher education (Beerkens, 2003: Marginson & van der Wende, 2007). What appears to still be largely missing from our understanding of the influences of globalization is analysis of how it is to live with and imagine in and make meaning of these vast and transformative forces. International doctoral students are an exciting group of individuals with whom to explore these 33. They not only have purposely crossed borders to pursue favourable educational (and likely living) conditions, as eventual doctorate holders they have unique potential horizons in a globalizing knowledge economy.
and career possibilities that exceed those of most global migrants. Their lives in transnational space have the potential to reveal a great deal of what it means to negotiate our globalizing world.

The only way to understand their experiences and utilize them to illuminate globalization theory is through the use of qualitative research methodologies which elicit their stories, opinions and imaginings. The research strategy articulated in this chapter, employing qualitative interviewing in a multiple case narrative approach, will allow us to hear from a diverse group of students and recent doctoral graduates which forms a representative sample from an exemplar, globally situated university. It is anticipated that this analysis will provide heretofore neglected perspectives on some of the globalizing world’s most ambitious travellers.
CHAPTER 5
Introduction to thematic findings and discourses of purpose

5.1. Orientation to the presentation of findings

This chapter offers an orientation to the findings of the study and introduces the major thematic areas arising from the data (see Figure 5.1.). The themes identified in this chapter will be explored in greater depth in three subsequent chapters which trace international students’ trajectories through three distinct temporal phases of their doctoral journey: becoming an international doctoral student, living and learning in transit, and imagined careers and lives. These three phases will collectively be called the “student pathway”. Thematic findings are interwoven throughout these three chapters, as they surface repeatedly across students’ lived experience coming into and navigating through their PhD programs at a major global university located in Canada, and as they begin to imagine and develop their career plans and future lives. Likewise, analysis of major “categories” within the students in the study sample—academic discipline (Science/Technology/Engineering/Math or “STEM” and Social Sciences and Humanities or “SSH”), citizenship region (Asia, Central/South America, European Union, Middle East and USA), and gender occurs throughout the findings chapters.

![Finding Map](image-url)

**Figure 5.1. Findings Map**
This chapter also addresses, with a more significant level of depth, the first research question of the study: What purposes and meanings do international doctoral students ascribe to doctoral study and the attainment of the doctoral degree? The notions of “purpose” and “meaning” are related but distinct from the concept of “motivations”. There is a very full body of research on human motivation towards goal attainment, including pursuing higher education, which is well beyond the scope of this project. What I have attempted to investigate through this research question are not discrete “motivation factors”, as in external forces or internal attributes which compel students to initiate doctoral study (although some of these factors will surface in later chapters), but discourses of purpose. By discourses of purpose I mean the ways in which students in this study construct and articulate meaning, desire and reasoning about their choices, experiences and imaginations related to doctoral education. This applies to the general notion of doctoral education as well as students’ undertaking of it at a particular institution (UBC) in a particular city (Vancouver) in a country other than their home (Canada) all of which exist in increasingly globalized contexts. Discourses of purpose for doctoral study also exist within state and institutional policies (and therefore collective public imaginations) and understanding the relationship between these and student discourses of purpose is also part of answering the research question about impacts of globalization on international doctoral students. Student discourses of purpose, examined and defined here, are also interwoven through subsequent chapters as they surface across student narratives of their pathway into, through and beyond the PhD.

In sum, this chapter offers an introduction to the major thematic findings of the study and a deeper look at discourses of purpose of doctoral education, as well as their overall level of significance. The subsequent three chapters will further explore these themes and discourses through the student pathway. Used sparingly in this first chapter, data in the form of student interview excerpts are presented extensively in the following three chapters to illustrate and expand the study’s findings in relation to the two other research questions which ask, “How do international doctoral students at a large, North American, research-intensive public university construct and navigate their choices and experiences in doctoral study and their imagined future careers, lives and responsibilities as PhD holders?” and “How do these choices, experiences, imagined futures and discourses of educational purpose reflect the influence of processes of globalization?” A summary and integration of the study’s findings in relation to these themes as they appear across the student pathway will be presented in the final chapter of the dissertation.
5.1.1. On the use and presentation of data in findings. Data in the form of student quotes is presented in this and subsequent findings chapters to animate and bring more detail to the general themes and findings introduced here. Quotes and exchanges will sometimes be abridged, using the “standardized” rather than “preservationist” approach (Weiss, 1994; Boeije, 2009), where the wordings and meanings of quotations are retained, while edited for clarity and readability. Careful attention has been paid so as to avoid editing that fashions convenient statements at the expense of students’ words being taken outside of their expressed context. Inevitably, certain students’ stories and voices will appear with more frequency and depth due to their powerful representation of central concepts of this study, but a concerted effort has been made in the presentation of qualitative data to include contributions from all study participants. Students, when quoted, will be identified by a pseudonym, their sex, disciplinary area (SSH or STEM), and their home region for contextual reference. Wording substitutions in quotes will be made in brackets to conceal any information that may make an individual personally identifiable, such as their home town or country, their academic department or supervisor’s name.

In this and subsequent chapters, the magnitude or frequency of a particular theme appearing in the data will be characterized using, in some cases, an actual count of students expressing a thematic finding, or more commonly, through the terms “few” or “occasion­ally” (defined as five or fewer of total sample, or roughly less than 20% of the relevant subgroup of students, e.g. women students, native English speakers, etc.), “several” or “quite often” (6-10 students or 21-35%), “many” or “frequently” (11-20 students or 36-65%) or “a large majority” or “very frequently” (21 or more, or at least two-thirds, 66%).

5.2. Major themes within the study

Several themes emerging from the basic theoretical framework of the study--contemporary globalization and its influences on higher (especially doctoral) education and the individuals and institutions involved with it—were identified a priori and investigated in the context of interviewing study participants about their perceptions, choices, experiences and imaginations. There were four such key themes which took shape as significant and repetitive presences in student accounts. A fifth major theme, the discourses of purpose for doctoral education, will be described separately.

5.2.1. Globalizing imaginations and social fields. This theme reflects, at its base, Castells’ conceptualization of the “network society” (1996) in which fundamental advances in transport and
information technology has enabled the global distribution of people, knowledge, images and capital across time and space in a rapid and compressed manner. The global, networked interconnectedness of people and information has infiltrated and shaped all contemporary social fields, including higher education. This phenomenon appears throughout student accounts, from the ways they imagine and pursue information about studying “elsewhere”, to their efforts to bridge geographic space between themselves and other people and places that are important to them, to the formation of global academic and professional networks which influence their educational and career trajectories. These accounts also reflect an intensified global social imaginary, fostered through networked interconnectedness, in which international doctoral students are highly aware of global social, cultural and political dynamics as well as academic and professional opportunities, and imagine their trajectories in, through and beyond the PhD in a global context, even if their personal choices may, in many cases, remain more focused on localized and immediate concerns. Overall, these students demonstrated significant engagement in and reliance on networks, both technologically mediated and not, to negotiate opportunities related to doctoral study in a global milieu.

5.2.2. Agency and its bounds. Agency, as conceived of by Bourdieu (1977), is the ability to exert free will within a particular field of social practice. This ability is constrained, in his conceptualization, by the internalization of durable social norms, strictures and inequities which become personal dispositions (habitus). Other theorists have argued that while durable social constraints on individual agency certainly remain, access to globalized fields of imagined and actual possibilities has increased individual scope of agency considerably, perhaps particularly through globally interconnected networks. Participant accounts in this study demonstrate that students exert considerable personal agency in charting their educational and career paths in global context, but are indeed required to negotiate a range of social, institutional and personal constraints in doing so. I expand the Bourdieusian definition of agency here to consider not only the exertion of “free will” but the creative and proactive generation of options and opportunities by students to advance their own (and in some cases, collective) interests, a phenomenon that surfaces in many student narratives. This reflects Rizvi and Lingard’s conception of people as “world-making collective agents” during the current period of high globalization (2009, p. 35). The factors that bind student agency (and imagination) are at times attributable to the Bourdiesian construct of habitus, in that dispositions are so ingrained that alternatives cannot be imagined, but are more frequently a function of structural or personal limitations on agency that students consciously recognize and
navigate to the best of their ability or accept as personal compromises, even understanding that alternatives may exist. In general, the findings of the study support the conception that international doctoral students act as agents whom, to a significant extent, imagine and create their own lives in global context.

5.2.3. Mobility and transnational space. Another hallmark of the contemporary period of globalization is pervasive mobility of people across borders, both physically and imaginatively. This is seen in the ever increasing flows of international students and other temporary or permanent migrants into an ever widening range of mobility patterns. Theorists of transnationalism describe resulting “complex, multidimensional and multiply inhabited” social spaces (Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2004) and “deterritorialized identities” where individuals re-imagine their sense of place in the world by identifying with multiple localities or a “global” identity and/or with a sense of living “in between” places (Appadurai, 1996; Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Vertovec, 2009). These same mobilities apply to institutions such as universities as well, which, while being firmly rooted in a national context, increasingly position them in terms of global connectedness and influence (Marginson, 2009). Inherent in this phenomenon is accelerated “academic mobility” of students, scholars and faculty members (Hoffman, 2009; Kim, 2009, 2010). The mobility theme was evident throughout student narratives, obviously in their actual crossing of borders to become international doctoral students and in their previous and subsequent academically-driven mobility (quite substantial for some, less for others). It is also found in their descriptions of imagined futures as they consider where they can or shall go as a doctorate holder. The gains, losses and dilemmas of life in transnational space were also persistent themes in many student accounts, expressed in their narratives about social and cultural belonging (or not) in their Canadian ‘host’ environments, in their shifting senses of personal and national identity (or not), and in their imaginations about where “home” is and will be. The concept of doctoral education abroad being a “liminal space”, in which students are in motion, in between countries, in between life stages, and for some, in a deeper state of identity flux, was a significant impression.

5.3.4. Neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education. It has been well-established that universities and other public institutions are increasingly subject to and are adopting corporate and market-based principles in an environment of constrained public resources requiring higher levels of accountability (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Slaughter & Rhodes, 2004; Chan & Fisher, 2008). This has led to a range of trends that may impact doctoral students, including the
privileged funding of those in academic disciplines which have more potential for commodification of research-borne products (generally STEM fields), closer ties with industrial partners in the research training and production process (again mainly in STEM fields), an increasing consideration (some say exploitation) of doctoral students as academic (research and teaching) or industrial labor (Bousquet, 2002, Rhoads & Rhoades, 2005) and a growing tendency by students and others to view higher education in instrumental terms, as a consumer product with credentials serving as private capital, rather than as a public good for promoting democratic citizenship (Ong, 2004). This theme is significant in the student narratives of this study, both in its presence and absence. There certainly were many students who were focussed on the capital of acquiring a PhD (especially from a highly-ranked global university), several who felt they were required to “compete” in the university and job market contexts, a few who were involved in university-industry research partnerships and imagined their future careers in industrial settings, as well as a few that experienced a sense of labor being “extracted” from them by the University. However, these themes had a relatively low profile in the overall data set, at least in terms of what may be predicted by the scholarly focus on neoliberalism in the higher education domain. Themes of doctoral education as a mechanism through which students can advance the public good (through various means) were more prevalent, while out of thirty-one students, only three pointed to themes related to neoliberal, market-driven ideologies as influencing their choices and experiences in a highly significant way.

These four themes, previewed here, will be returned to again and again in subsequent chapters on student pathway, giving deeper insight into their prevalence, significance and specific expressions in student lives. However, not every theme is apparent in each chapter. Another overarching subject that pervades the data, as well as reflects the themes mentioned above, is student discourses on the purpose of doctoral education, to which I now turn.

5.3. Discourses of purpose for doctoral education

The first research question of this study is “What purposes and meanings do international doctoral students ascribe to doctoral study and the attainment of the doctoral degree? Put more simply, this research question asks international students “Why doctoral study?” As discussed previously, there are established policy discourses about the purpose of doctoral education, including the production of research (commercializable whenever possible) and the development of “highly qualified” knowledge economy workers. There is also a well-developed academic discourse of purpose encapsulated by the concept that doctoral study is meant to enable the “formation of
scholars” and “stewards of the discipline” (Golde & Walker, 2006, Walker, et al, 2008). The gap in knowledge that this research question addresses is to what extent international doctoral students themselves adopt and reflect these same discourses of purpose and meaning, and what other discourses of meaning are revealed in students’ own accounts of their journey into, through and beyond doctoral study.

This study found four significant discourses of educational purpose expressed by students, which I shall refer to as the capital accumulation, academic, social contribution, and personal discourses of purpose. These discourses were directly engaged through interview questions about purpose and meaning (e.g. “What does becoming Dr. (last name) mean to you?”) as well as embedded in their descriptions of the choices they made in selecting their academic discipline and deciding to pursue doctoral study, in the many subsequent decisions they made about where to study, their choices and experiences while in a doctoral program, and their imagined careers and futures. Their discourses of purpose are not simply a recounting of their initial motivations. Purposes of doctoral study are conceived in this study as the evolving ways that students make meaning of why they have pursued doctoral study abroad as they recalled their deliberations to do so, reflected on their experiences while engaged in PhD study, and looked ahead to next stages. These discourses are introduced and described here, and will be investigated further in the subsequent chapters on phases of student pathway. There will also be a brief discussion at the end of this section about student discourses as they relate (or do not) to larger public policy and institutional discourses of purpose.

5.3.1. Capital accumulation discourse. It is perhaps not surprising that a major purpose expressed by students for pursuing doctoral education is to accrue capital to maximize their personal agency and effectiveness in charting their courses through and beyond the PhD, and especially to enable them to enter and advance in desired careers. This general motivation of personal advancement has been well-documented in research literature on international student institutional choices (Chen, 2005; Kallio, 1995; Mazzarol & Souter, 2002). Following Bourdieu, I adopt in this study a broad definition of capital as resources that can be appropriated for benefit within a given social field, that take various forms and value within specific fields, and can be exchanged for advantage within and across fields. The data collected in this study affirms that students imagine and experience doctoral study as enabling them to accrue capital in multiple forms and through various sources, and expect to exert this capital to gain advantage in various settings in the future.
Several forms of capital have been identified by Bourdieu and other scholars. Those that appeared in student discourses of purpose in this study include:

**Symbolic or reputational** capital gained through holding the PhD credential itself, and through the global status (often expressed in terms of world university ranking schemes) and reputation of the university at which it was earned and the faculty supervisor who under whose auspices the doctoral research was conducted. This capital was commonly expressed by students using words such as “credibility”, “clout”, “prestige” and “authority”.

**Academic capital**, most commonly defined by students as research publications, which were seen by many as being a major and distinct form of capital which would determine their viability as a candidate for jobs in the academic realm. I pause here to recognize that the term “academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997) has come to have much broader meanings related to neoliberal market forces shaping universities, but in the context of discussing forms of capital sought and valued by doctoral students, I use “academic capital” to denote specific assets held by individuals that confer power within academia.

**Human capital** in the form of skills, expertise and knowledge gained both within students’ actual academic training and in their experiences living abroad. This type of capital was viewed as assets in obtaining professional positions and advancing careers. Valued skills and expertise varied, of course, by discipline, with teaching skills and English proficiency notably crossing disciplines. A large majority of the students who came to Canada without a strong command of English saw the opportunity to live and study in an English speaking environment as an important form of global human capital and a significant purpose for choosing to study in North America.

**Social capital** gained through access to, development of and integration in social networks. Students identified these networks as being within and across academic disciplines, within industry or other professional settings (and sometimes bridging across academic and professional contexts), and social or friendship networks in and beyond the University. These networks are often global in scope, extending their capital into globalized fields of academia, professions and other social networks.

**Cultural capital**, which was often expressed in terms of exposure to and adoption of cultural norms, both in an academic context (i.e. disciplinary and North American academic cultures) and North American or specifically Canadian sociocultural contexts. This is a view of cultural capital which extends Bourdieu’s fundamental theorization (which argued that cultural capital, or assets conferring status/power within a given culture, is bestowed primarily by one’s parents) and extends
it into notions such as acquiring “Canadian-ness” or “academic-ness” through cultural and educational immersion. Such capital was viewed as having particular value for those intending to remain in North America or pursue careers where North American cultural values are more dominant. In a related construct, a few students affirmed the value of gaining what Kim (2010) has conceptualized as transnational identity capital. That is, “competences... to engage with otherness” (pp. 583), or to be adept in manoeuvring within cultures that are not highly familiar, specifically across global occupational cultures such as academia or multi-national corporations.

Motility; mobility as capital (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004). This form of capital is expressed by students as an ability to be mobile, to re-locate, perhaps to immigrate or at least obtain Permanent Residency (PR) and/or Canadian citizenship, and also as the advantages they perceive in being mobile and carrying other forms of capital with them as they move. There is an interesting relationship between Kim’s notion of transnational identity capital and motility. Motility, in Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye’s conceptualization, is the value individuals possess in being both geographically and socially mobile; having the ability to move between locations and social strata. Transnational identity capital can perhaps be considered the competence to adapt well, both socially and in one’s self-concept, to new locations and social positions. Students identified gaining both of these forms of capital as a valued purpose of doctoral education abroad.

Financial capital was generally expressed not as the accumulation of actual financial resources while a graduate student (quite the opposite was the case!), but in terms of gaining earning potential via the other forms of capital more directly acquired through international doctoral study. Interestingly, financial capital (or, improving prospects for the acquisition of it) was the least frequently mentioned form of capital that students identified as a purpose for pursuing doctoral education.

Students recognized that pursuing doctoral education at a major research university with high global status in a country other than their own was an opportunity to accumulate multiple forms of capital. Indeed, as we will see in subsequent chapters, they imagined this would be the case in making their educational choices, strategized to make it so, have experienced this accumulation during their studies, and are counting on being able exert it as they plan their futures. These forms of capital were often viewed as additive, not mutually exclusive of one another, and some were commonly noted as being intertwined, as in the notion that pursuing a PhD from a foreign, highly ranked university (symbolic capital) would typically result in high-level skills and
knowledge (human capital) and provide access to influential academic and professional networks (social capital).

Students emphasized these forms of capital differentially as key purposes of doctoral education, and expressed desire to exert earned capital in various contexts. All thirty-one students acknowledged a desire and belief that doctoral study would provide them with capital that they believed would help them to enter desired careers in desired locations, obtain specific types of professional positions that are appealing to them, and advance within these careers. The most commonly cited form of capital that students imagined would advance their career trajectories was the human capital of skills and knowledge gained via doctoral education. Also cited by many students was symbolic/reputational capital of the PhD degree itself, and of the fact that it was earned in North America (for non-U.S. students), that it would be earned at UBC as a highly-ranked institution in global ranking schemes, and/or obtained in a particular UBC department or with a particular faculty supervisor that is highly regarded within their discipline. Building social capital in the form of accessing networks with faculty members around the world, and for some students, with colleagues in industry settings, was mentioned by several students as being of significant value to them. Developing academic capital, represented most specifically by research publications, was acknowledged by many students as a core activity within doctoral education at UBC, and was cited by several students as being a significant element of career capital for those intending to move toward an academic career.

To provide a sense of students’ understanding of these forms of capital, the table below provides a representative quotation related to each major type of capital identified in the study, especially as it relates to career development in most cases:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of capital</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic/reputational</td>
<td>Christopher (male, STEM, USA)</td>
<td>“My first issue was does a Canadian degree stand up to a US degree? Because I don’t want to go somewhere and be a step behind just because of where I got the degree, not that the curriculum would be any less rigorous or anything like this, I just wanted to make sure that, you know, the degree held weight....And then just looking at school rankings, I mean UBC is like in the top 50 universities in the world, right? So, I don’t think it’s going to be a problem when I get a degree from here to get a job, I think it’s actually going to be a plus.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>Suzanne (female, SSH, USA)</td>
<td>“That’s probably the most important thing, that I’m trying to publish some journal articles from my thesis before I graduate or at least have them sent out before I graduate. And I guess teaching experience, publications and a record of professional engagement within, in service you know in my department, but also giving conference presentations and things like that. So that’s what I’m focusing on, but it seems to me that the publications is probably the important one.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>Rico (male, STEM, European Union)</td>
<td>“To me the major points of graduate schoo l is really to get a deep knowledge of your field. Lots of reasoning and rationale and prioritization and a lot of experimental design. With good knowledge, good reasoning, rational, high logical process and lots of organization and prioritization and some good performance. Then I think you’re geared up good enough to face the steeper steps of the real job market, especially these days... I would tend not to measure everything in terms of publications. They’re important, nobody is denying that, but there is a lot aside of that and those are more soft skills for us but sometimes they are what really makes the difference ...so it’s really becoming a round person from that point of view.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Helen (female, SSH, European Union)</td>
<td>“My contacts, for sure. I’ve been in situations where you know, people haven’t given me the time of day until it comes to the realization that I’m [supervisor’s] PhD student because he has a name already. So, undoubtedly my supervisors, and who I’ve been mentored by, give me a lot of value, it seems. You know there was a point where I was giving a talk and there were two people not particularly paying attention, they were emailing or whatever, and these were people who are just borderline famous within our field, and when I said I was [supervisor’s] PhD student they closed their laptops and started to listen. “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Reza (male, STEM, Middle East)</td>
<td>“If I want to feel as a Canadian, I think I have to spend at least 10 years here and really engage with the Canadians, and also from internal things, I also have to try to be part of that, then I start to feel like a Canadian... I really like to communicate with the Canadians who were born here, at least for like one or two generations so that I can learn more about the details. For example, from some of the histories,”</td>
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Table 5.2. Sample student quotes on development of capital
what happened here. About the First Nations. These are the things that I have to find like people who have been here for more generations and have more experience coming from the families.”

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<tr>
<th>Motility</th>
<th>Farjad (male, STEM, Middle East)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>“Canada is a bit far away but one reason that most of the students coming here is for immigration, to apply for PR and become citizen....(interviewer) You would say most students come to Canada [from your country] with an idea to get PR?...Yeah most, yeah exactly. PR has a great influence on decision for sure...(interviewer) Especially for Canada?...Yeah, for Canada because, yeah and Australia, that’s another country. But again, Canada is easier to get PR.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Li (female, STEM, Asia)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>“The biggest factor will be the space to grow for me. For example I want a job, it doesn’t have to be, it doesn’t have to pay well at the moment but I would love to see the future that I can really grow on this position or on this job. In the way that I can go higher and higher financial wise and also I need to feel the satisfaction with my job. So I need to, yeah, that could be, yeah. I want to, how you say, how to explain? A higher position maybe, yeah.”</td>
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<th>Overall (combined forms of capital)</th>
<th>Arvind (male, SSH, Asia)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>“I will be a PhD from UBC and it’s a very highly ranked University, a good University, that’s one thing (symbolic capital). Second thing is, I’ve been able to perform very well the course work. So again, it’s strong thing there (human capital). Then my mentors here, especially in the beginning, really encouraged me to present papers so I’ve been to many places (internationally), and many places in Canada. So I have that exposure of conference presentations are listed on my resume as well (academic capital) and then I was able to meet people and discuss the PhD work (social capital). I’m really happy with it.”</td>
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Table 5.2. Sample student quotes on development of capital

In all, acquiring capital, especially for the purposes of career advancement, was a dominant theme in the overall study findings regarding the purpose and meanings of doctoral education as constructed by international doctoral students. However, several students were also critical or rejecting of some forms of capital accumulation as a core purpose of doctoral education, or at least questioned whether some of the capital they may accumulate as a PhD student has actual value or would be able to be exchanged for a valued outcome (a key characteristic of capital). For example, Maya relays a story of being questioned about the value of a PhD degree from UBC as opposed to one from a “global super elite” institution (Marginson, 2008) to which she had also been admitted. While affirming the academic capital of her actual work and the symbolic capital of her research supervisor, she rejects the value of symbolic capital of a degree from a higher status institution when searching for an academic job:
I mean there are some places that you would apply to, and they would want to see that (institutional) name, the few names that people always want to see. But there are also places where they would look at, you know, what was your research? Who did you work with? What did you do and what did you publish? What kind of contribution you’ve made to scholarship? So I guess then it comes down to would I want to work in a place where all people are looking for is a name on the degree and probably not. That’s not why I went to grad school. (Maya--female, SSH, Asia)

An insightful elaboration on this same sceptical view is offered by Simon:

I’m just fulfilling the world’s requirement, because the world likes people to have high ranked university degree so I have to achieve that in order to get to the next step. You see what I mean? That’s nothing to me. I’m just fulfilling the requirement. ...(interviewer) Just kind of playing the game?...That is exactly the thing. I’m playing the game. Exactly the way that I’m approaching for my next step for postdoc, I’m also still playing the game, this science game or the academic game. You have to go through that first in order to get to the next level. It is kind of silly actually. The longer I would be spending in this academic world, the more I think this is silly. Even though you are doing very good work, if you’re not in a very good lab or not in a very good university, people won’t really appreciate that. I don’t know why. (Simon--male, STEM, Asia)

Simon recognizes the power of symbolic capital ascribed to the PhD and the reputation of the institutions in which they are earned, and identifies it as a purpose in own education choices, but in agreeing that it is something of a “game”, he echoes Bourdieu’s analysis of capital as the force that “makes the games of society” (1997).

A student in a field with close ties to industry questions the overall career and financial capital of a PhD degree, due to its high degree of specialization:

In some ways I guess the PhD kind of makes people like, you’re kind of pigeonholed; like you’ve done this one thing and so, in some ways it, they find that PhD’s tend to not make that much more than their colleagues who just have a Masters and some make less than their colleagues who have Masters or undergrad degrees. (Jackie – female, STEM, USA)

Diego, a male STEM student from the Central/South America region emphasizes the overall value of knowledge production in research, but rejects the focus on accumulation of publications as academic capital, perhaps because he is trying to imagine a career path outside of the academy:

Well, I think that creating knowledge is, you can create knowledge from the academia and from another organization...Not the ones which are paper producers. Here in the faculty, everybody is focused on papers, paper, papers. If you don’t have papers, you’re nothing. I don’t believe in that.

Despite these critical voices, all students did point to capital accumulation, primarily for the purpose of career development as one major purpose for their pursuit of the PhD. Of note is the finding that
there did not appear to be many clear disciplinary, gender or regional distinctions in the types of
capital sought. One exception was that, on the whole, STEM students appeared to be more
concerned than SSH students with the value of symbolic capital conferred through the global
ranking of UBC and the reputation of their research supervisor, perhaps indicating that this type of
capital is perceived to have more “trade-in value” in career progression in the STEM disciplines. The
greater degree of internationalization typically found within STEM fields, in the form of networks of
collaboration and related academic mobility and exchange, may make the symbolic capital of
institutions more globally recognized and valued. Subsequent chapters will further illuminate how
the core purpose of capital accumulation shapes students’ educational choices and experiences and
their imagined futures, and the ways the accumulation of capital discourse reflects the globalizing
context in which capital is accrued and exchanged.

Other important purpose discourses also emerged from the data. Capital is also
accumulated to promote effectiveness in these areas, but capital accrual is not at the core of these
alternative (if often complementary) purpose discourses, to which I now turn.

5.3.2. Academic discourse--independent scholarship and knowledge stewardship. Nearly all of the
student participants (28/31) referenced at least one element of what I shall call the “academic”
discourse of the purpose and meaning of doctoral study. This discourse has traditionally been at
foundation of universities’ self-concept about their purpose. As reviewed previously, the academic
discourse of purpose has been advanced most influentially in recent years by scholars connected
with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and their five year “Carnegie
Initiative on the Doctorate” (CID). To briefly recap my summary in Chapter 1, the CID ran from
2001-2006 and evaluated what the fundamental purpose of doctoral education ought to be. Its
work with doctoral programs across many fields in research intensive universities in the United
States culminated in a vision of the purpose of doctoral education being “the formation of scholars”
through basic, integrative and applied research, teaching, the development of intellectual
communities, and overarching disciplinary “stewardship”, defined as the consideration of “the
applications, uses and purposes of the field and favor[ing] of wise and responsible applications”
(ibid, p. 11).

Student participants in this study spoke in similar terms about these elements of scholarship
and frequently described them as key purposes of their own doctoral study and attainment of the
doctoral degree. This discourse emerged throughout their narratives of the phases of the overall
student pathway—in their choices to obtain a doctoral degree and at which institution, in their academic experiences as doctoral students and in their imagined career trajectories. Three specific dimensions of the academic discourse were identified in the data: knowledge production/acquisition and application, teaching the discipline to new learners, and the development of academic communities.

5.3.2.1. Knowledge production, acquisition and translation. Creating, acquiring and finding uses for new knowledge were the most commonly cited element of the academic discourse of purpose by study participants. Interesting disciplinary differences were apparent, with this purpose being expressed with differing frequencies and terminology by STEM and SSH students. Two-thirds of the STEM students referenced knowledge production to advance their disciplines as a core purpose, using terms keyed to “innovation” and “discovery” constructs, perhaps reflecting the more experimental and applied research typical in science and engineering. In contrast, half of the SSH students also identified this purpose, but it tended to be phrased more in terms of the student acquiring knowledge through research to satisfy their own curiosity, or a tentative goal of “making an intellectual contribution” to their field.

Examples from each of the two disciplinary groupings demonstrate the diverging ways students from these disciplines interpret or adopt the knowledge production/acquisition purpose:

Actually the most interesting, most exciting in doing research is I am the first person to see this, to discover this. So for example, during a reaction, you’re the first person to see the reaction that got the pure product. I think that’s the most exciting, but unfortunately I’m doing kind of fundamental study, it’s not application. But I think discovery, the knowledge itself is very important because the application is based on fundamental study. Maybe you discover this, maybe for 10 years nobody use it, but discovery, the knowledge itself is interesting process for me. (Jun - male, STEM, Asia)

What I’m researching now for a dissertation, it’s meaningful to me, but I wouldn’t call it the ideal project. I haven’t figured out what the ideal project would be, but I would like to just make an intellectual contribution to help us rethink. I mean with [my discipline], the goal is to rethink the way you understand the world. (Jason – male, SSH, USA)

Jun employs a “discovery” narrative about “being the first” to identify an empirical phenomenon which can find a practical application, while Jason is looking to contribute to new ways of thinking about social phenomena. This contrast perhaps reflects an inherently more conceptual or theoretical construct of knowledge production in many social science and humanities fields than in science and engineering fields. However, I would also argue that the disciplinary differences within
the academic discourse may be a reflection of increasingly divergent trajectories of research between these two broad disciplinary areas, with STEM research becoming less “curiosity-driven” and more driven (in no small part by funding policies) by “practical” application or commercial motives and SSH research remaining more tied to “theory” and “curiosity” while struggling to find traction in an increasingly neoliberal, accountability-oriented global academic research context.

Student narratives seem to reflect this divide to some extent. Of course there are many dimensions of SSH research which are highly applied and which adopt an “innovation” discourse. It may be that the students in this sample were simply not in subfields where this is more common, or pursuing this sort of research. This is also not to say that SSH students in this study do not have “knowledge advancement” purposes in mind for their doctoral research and learning; in fact, many do, and these are reflected in other dimensions of the academic discourse, to be discussed shortly. However, it seemed notable that knowledge production for the purpose of advancing disciplinary knowledge (at least in academic settings) was less pronounced, perhaps less imaginable for SSH students than for STEM students. This dynamic will be revealed further in subsequent chapters, especially in relation to imagined careers.

Part of the knowledge production dimension of the academic discourse of purpose was, for several students, the notion of becoming independent, autonomous researchers. Interestingly, only STEM students indicated this purpose. Perhaps because the academic culture of science disciplines is frequently laboratory-based and collaborative, the ability to function “independently” (or as constructed by some of these students, as the “Principal Investigator” of a research group), is particularly prized as a sign of arrival as a member in full of the discipline. Two STEM students described the importance of “independence” to them:

So in science it’s (the PhD) an important path to go through if you want to become independent and either you want to become a P.I., but even if you want to get a position in industry there is a certain level you need to know how to go on this process and become completely independent. (Giulia – female, STEM, EU)

Now I think I’m intellectually trained to be a researcher because during my PhD I found that there are many, many things I need to learn to do a really good research. Actually a whole system, you need to think in a logical way so you can do good research. So it’s a training process and after PhD I will got the minimal ability to do research by myself, I can do independent research. (Jun - male, STEM, Asia)

Although it was not investigated directly in this study, one hypothesis for the fact that “independence” was not mentioned by any of the SSH students may be that research in these fields tends to be highly independent anyway. Independence is perhaps an implicit prerequisite at the
outset of study, an orientation to academic work already established in the individual and ingrained in the discipline to the extent that its development is not recognized as a discrete purpose of doctoral education. This study does not delve significantly into the robust arena of research on academic cultures, normative modes of inquiry in disciplines and enculturation of doctoral students (e.g. see Becher & Trowler, 2001; Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001), which would be a helpful companion literature to better understand the differences seen in this study regarding “independence” and the academic discourse purpose of doctoral education.

Overall, many students felt that knowledge production had been a significant purpose of their doctoral education at UBC. However, a few students, while acknowledging the central role of knowledge production as a purpose in doctoral education, expressed a sense that they could not claim to have made a meaningful contribution in this area. This sense was perhaps most directly conveyed by Ira, a male STEM student from the Middle East, when discussing the role of research in his current life and future plans:

*Academia might not be a good place for me. Because I’m not committed to it. It’s not that I want to contribute to scientific knowledge or anything like that...I don’t live under any illusion that the work that I’m doing is, well, it is contributing to some body of knowledge, but it’s not you know, influential.*

Knowledge production in a globalizing context will continue to be a theme that arises in the student pathway chapters, especially in investigating student learning experiences at UBC and imagined careers.

For many students, knowledge production itself, while perhaps a foundation of doctoral study, was not something to be done just to advance an academic discipline. They placed more value in the purpose of applying new knowledge to sites of professional practice and/or for the purpose of public engagement in a related topic. “Knowledge translation” as this process is often called has been defined simply as “putting knowledge into action” (Straus, Tetroe & Graham, 2009) and is increasingly considered part of the mandate of major research institutions, including UBC. In this way, knowledge translation becomes part of the academic discourse of purpose for doctoral education. It is also reflected in the CID work on disciplinary stewardship: “In many fields, knowledge is also applied: it is generated in the service of problem solving or greater understanding. Stewards have a responsibility to apply their knowledge, skills, findings and insights” (Golde, 2006, p. 12).

Again, there was a predominance of STEM students who cited this element of academic discourse as a purpose of their doctoral education, but it was relevant to students in both groups,
albeit in different ways. STEM students more commonly expressed a hope that their research would eventually lead to a technological or scientific breakthrough that would advance a professional practice such as engineering, clinical medicine or forestry, or in the case of Kim, land and wildlife management:

> I don’t know the Canadian equivalent necessarily, but the Bureau of Land Management, or Parks and Wildlife, or something like that. Academia pushes the envelope of human knowledge but it’s very sort of blinders on and people tend to pursue whatever question they’re into and not worry about, once they learn something, well then what? Do you know what I mean? It has to be applied at some point. I feel that there’s this disconnect generally between academia and the people who are actually in positions to apply that knowledge. There’s a lag. The kinds of management schemes that are in place now are based on research that was done 10, 15 years ago. And we’re learned things since then. So I would be interested in decreasing that lag time substantially. (Kim – female, STEM, USA)

Kim’s remarks indicate that while knowledge application is increasingly considered by universities (and the CID) to be an essential element of scholarship and disciplinary stewardship, it may not be occurring in practice to the extent some students would like it to be.

The few SSH students who focussed on knowledge translation in other settings (but not formal teaching settings) all mentioned a desire to engage the public (or some particular subgroup) in dialogue about important issues related to their research. For Sheddy, this goal was expressed almost literally as translation—finding lay language to engage people in his home community in his research topic related to gender and power and provide practical help for achieving community development goals:

> I mean the more I get involved with them, the more I realize that my life in the University is so banal, actually so superficial. I know so many things but I’m not really in touch with the real people outside of the University. And these people hate theories, they hate concepts, terminology, jargon. Once you speak with jargons, you turn them off and they wouldn’t want to listen to you. They just want to (say), “this is what we want to do, but since you are a learned person, do you have any advice for us?” And well it’s like I’m a beginner in a new area. Now I have so much knowledge, how can I communicate with them without sounding snobbish? Can I explain to other people what I learned without using all of the jargons and theories? Can I make this useful for practical purposes? (Sheddy, male, SSH, Asia)

These two student quotes (Kim and Sheddy) show very different contexts (government resource management agencies and grassroots community development) in which students imagine a similar goal of their research/knowledge being translated for more effective processes and better outcomes. There are similar disciplinary twists on common purposes around teaching.
5.3.2.2. Teaching the discipline to new learners. Teaching is another core element of the academic discourse of purpose for doctoral education emphasized by CID scholars. Eighteen of the thirty-one student participants in the study identified gaining experience and skills in teaching their discipline (and therefore, for some, enabling entry to a career focused on teaching) as an important and valued activity within their doctoral study. In a striking finding, all ten of the SSH students cited this purpose, while fewer than half of the STEM students did. A question that emerges from this finding is whether teaching is a desired purpose for the SSH students which they actively pursue, or more a construct of how these disciplines and their students are situated, valued and funded within the university and broader “academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” (Slaughter & Leslie, 2004) which may constrain what purposes are imaginable and attainable for these students. It indeed did appear that for many SSH students, acting as a teaching assistant or sessional lecturer was their primary source of funding, driving teaching into being a basic survival purpose as much as a formative academic experience. However, even for these students, teaching was meaningful and purposeful. None of the SSH students reported teaching to be a burden without strong value.

An example is provided by Shane, who described struggling to live off a meagre $10,000 per year teaching assistantship throughout his studies, but nonetheless found the teaching experience very purposeful:

*The first intro class that we taught, it was their very first University class and it was really cool. It’s their very first day in University and you get an opportunity to introduce them to the arts and [my discipline] and I know it’s a cliché like but to sort of get into their heads and maybe introduce them to ways of thinking that they’re not used to and [my discipline] is a brilliant subject for that. You can talk about gender, race, you can talk about globalization, you can talk about everything. So just getting into their heads and it’s another cliché, but it’s cool, like you see them and you can see the light bulbs coming on over their heads. Some of them are bored and are watching their computer or whatever, but for the ones who are interested, you feel like you can sort of give something of value to people.*

(Shane--male, SSH, EU),

Most of the several STEM students who referenced the teaching element of the academic discourse also found teaching (or at least being exposed to new ways of teaching) to be an important component of their doctoral education. However, teaching experiences seemed to be less of a core educational purpose than an “added value” activity for most. Teaching also didn’t appear to be as much of a crucial and depended-upon element of their financial support, perhaps reflecting the more privileged funding context of these fields than SSH fields. A STEM student who was
particularly enthused about teaching described the context of his teaching experiences and expressed the view that an important purpose of doctoral education is to train teachers:

*I'm actually on a fellowship here as well, but I kind of wanted to TA and it's been the best thing I've done. I've gotten involved in a course also in [my department] that helps you learn how to teach. And that's been really eye-opening...I think that for so long there was the idea that if you were a good researcher, you could teach and I think now they are starting to realize that you are trained in academia how to do research, but you're not trained how to teach. So yeah, I've been really happy about that... I do teach while I have the fellowship, so that's like extra money that I get on top so that certainly helps. I mean, I do that for the experience as much as anything else, but the money is nice.* (Jerry – male, STEM, USA)

So, while teaching was important to both SSH and STEM students, there were distinct differences in the role teaching played in financial support, and in the centrality of teaching in the imaginations and experiences of the two groups of students. This differential will appear again when we explore the learning experiences and imagined careers of the study participants.

5.3.2.3. Development of academic communities. The final element of the academic discourse of purpose that emerged from the data was related to students’ desire to develop and engage in global academic communities. Authors writing on behalf of the Carnegie Initiative on the Doctorate focussed on the purpose of developing intellectual communities within and across departments at individual institutions. The students in this study also found this to be important, but expanded the notion of “intellectual community” far beyond their current institution to a more global context. This dynamic was referenced earlier, in comments on student’s desire to accrue “social capital” through global academic networks. Many students across every regional area expressed this as an important purpose of their doctoral education, and it was cited as influential in all phases of the student pathway; students utilized and/or were motivated by the idea of joining academic communities when making their educational choices, sought opportunities to access and build them during their doctoral studies, and imagined establishing or expanding them in their future careers. This trend was, however, more pronounced among STEM students than SSH, perhaps again highlighting the typically more globally collaborative nature of scholarship in science and engineering fields (and the financial support in place to foster it).

These examples give a sense of the value of intellectual community within the student learning experience:

*In [my] department, there is regular, if not even twice a week, speakers who are invited from somewhere else, other universities in Canada, the U.S., overseas, and they present their research. So you have this feeling of being part of a greater scientific community through that. You learn what is going on in other places, at
other universities. This might not be entirely in your own field, but it is always—not always, that would be a lie—but a lot of times it is really inspiring to see that. (Stefan – male, STEM, EU).

You know, you sort of go back and question the assumptions that you’ve lived with, or the things that you thought you knew, but realize you don’t. For me, I think a huge part of this has been understanding the significance of conversations across difference. It’s been a huge learning experience. I mean even working with others who don’t agree with you, you know, who look at things very differently and finding ways of communicating. (Maya, female, SSH, Asia)

In the research world there are so many different opportunities to interact with global colleagues, so I think that is a major thing that will shape my PhD. There just seems to be lots more interactions with people from all over the world. Students in our lab are always conference calling with people from Switzerland, or people in Korea. So there’s just so many different opportunities to interact, from a research standpoint on a more global basis. And so I think that is shaping the work that we’re doing. (Jackie, female, STEM, USA)

The theme of growing networked interconnectedness in academia is evident in these comments. A few students emphasized the value of creating connections between researchers in their home countries, Canada and elsewhere, a topic which will be explored in the next section. More examples of intellectual community development and engagement in global fields of research will arise in subsequent chapters.

To sum up the academic discourse of the purpose of doctoral education, it is clear that students quite strongly adopt academic purposes for doctoral study—advancing and applying knowledge, teaching and developing academic communities. It is likewise evident that they are viewing and pursuing this purpose in global context. The academic purpose is not entirely separate from the capital accumulation purpose, in that the knowledge they produce and acquire, the teaching skills they develop, and the intellectual communities they engage in are all forms of capital that will have value during and after their PhD experience.

5.3.3. Social contribution discourse. The capital accumulation and academic discourses are also closely interrelated with the third distinct discourse of purpose emerging from the data, that of doctoral education being a means for fostering positive social contributions. The “academic stewardship” literature suggests that such stewardship requires PhDs to “link disciplinary knowledge to public benefit”, citing a wide range of ways to so, including engagement in policy debates, promoting economic development, and generally “addressing the needs of society in order to make
it better”. (Prewitt, 2006, p. 37). However, because this discourse was so widely engaged by study participants, it will be evaluated on its own, rather than as a dimension of other discourses.

In a key finding of this study, a large majority of student participants (24/31) indicated that they intend for their doctoral work to increase their capacity to make positive social contributions. I use the term “social” broadly to encompass many contexts reported by students, including those that directly impact civil society and human well-being, as well as those in related dimensions of global benefit, including environmental sustainability and animal welfare. Much of this intended impact is imagined by students to occur after the completion of their degrees, through exertion of the forms of capital they accumulate during their doctoral study. However, a few report making these contributions during their time as a student. I argue that these intentions comprise a “discourse of purpose”, in that students themselves link their ability to make these contributions to their attainment of the doctoral degree, and several expressed that advancing social causes was an explicit motivation in their decision to engage in doctoral education.

The general purpose of social contribution and advancement was articulated simply and clearly by Stefan and with a touch of humor by Kim:

*I mean what are we going to university for, like what are we being educated for? Is it just to be, to inflate our heads with a lot of knowledge, or is it to apply that knowledge to the benefit of others? And I think the latter is what is the case.* (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

*Sure, I want to save the world! Why not? (laugh) If you don’t have an impact on the world, why are you here? You could, so why not give it a shot?* (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

In a contrary, and very candid comment, another student conveyed that making a social contribution was what she felt she “should” want to do, especially with regard to her research, indicating her awareness of the social contribution discourse of purpose. However, she “confessed” that she chose her research topic (which could indeed lead to significant human well-being benefits) solely because it was interesting to her scientifically:

*In terms of the big picture contribution, I don’t have any specific goals with my PhD necessarily. Um, it’s hard to say. I’d like to say I really want to make the world better and I wanna help people, but I think in some ways it’s an interesting problem, I see it as a good challenge, and I think that is kind of why I’m interested in it. I enjoy doing it.* (Jackie, female, STEM, USA)

Students identified several mechanisms through which such contributions could be made, most commonly through teaching (broadly defined), research, policy work and community development.
Some students were still forming their ideas of how they might enact a meaningful social contribution as a PhD holder, but felt strongly that they wanted to:

_ I do want to put in practice everything that had been taught here, you know, like again the multiculturalism and the global citizenship and everything, I do want to put that in practice, I just don’t want to come out with words, words, words and like talk, talk, talk like many people does. I want to put that in practice...apply that knowledge and always try to give the community back of what you have learned somehow you know?_ (Chela--female, STEM, Central/South America)

Several students framed the purpose of social advancement in terms of assisting their home countries or communities, either by returning there to live or building academic or professional linkages with organizations there, a desire indicated in other research literature (e.g. Smith, 2007). Perhaps not surprisingly, nine of the ten students who cited this goal were from countries with developing (rather than developed) economies, and those nine were out of fourteen students overall from developing countries. An example was provided by Sheddy (male, SSH, Asia) who was speaking of his decision to return to his home country to teach after finishing the PhD:

_ I think I will be able to do much more back home than here. Here you have already so many people with PhD and so many intelligent people but back home I think we need more people who are well educated but also willing to go and work back home rather than run away after they get a PhD... I learned a lot, but all of them would mean nothing if I don’t know how to use them for the benefit of others... I want to start working and do good things by teaching, by helping students see more possibilities. Now I have an opportunity to get PhD and so I should be able to do more back home than if I only had had a Master’s Degree._

The other (tenth) student who cited a desire for a more “local” social contribution was Jason, a SSH student, whose research investigated environmental concerns in his home region in the USA.

Other students, while eager to contribute to the advancement of their home countries, were quite ambivalent about relinquishing capital or other benefits they perceived they’d have if they remained in North America or went elsewhere. Reza, a student from a country with significant social challenges and safety concerns expressed this tension:

_ I love to help my people, my country, of course, but life is one time, right? So I cannot risk it and especially because I’m married so I have to think something very stable for my family, right?_ (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

A few students expected to spend more time in Canada (developing additional capital) prior to going back to their home countries, even better equipped to contribute. Many more examples of

24 The designations of “developed” and “developing” economies was taken, albeit with reservations and awareness of the criticisms of these terms, from the International Statistics Institute (http://www.isi-web.org/component/content/article/5-root/root/81-developing) accessed June 12, 2012.
the social contribution discourse will be presented and the various possibilities and dynamics of doing so will be explored in greater depth in subsequent findings chapters, particularly Chapter 8 on “imagined careers and lives”.

5.3.4. Personal motivations and meanings discourse. A final discourse of purpose emerging from the data involves students’ personal desires and motivations for pursuing doctoral study at a particular time and place. This discourse seems to be largely private, occurring between students and their intimates, not between students’ and the institutions with whom they are transacting to engage in doctoral study. These purposes are idiosyncratic to the individual student’s circumstances, but general themes do emerge. They include a desire to engage in new experiences and interact with new people and different cultures, a desire to undertake or prolong a period of personal growth or to indulge in personal interests, a desire to enable these same sort of experiences for family members, and a desire to satisfy a deeply felt personal drive to rise to their potential and obtain a PhD despite its many challenges.

Some of these personal motivations (especially the desire to interact with other cultures) are frequently cited in research on undergraduate students’ motivations to study abroad, but this purpose, mentioned by a majority of participants in this study, is largely ignored in research on graduate students. Likewise, the personal (as distinct from academic or capital accumulation) purposes that students attach to doctoral study are not often addressed in institutional policy or practice related to doctoral education. Perhaps there is an implicit belief that at the doctoral level, academic and capital accumulation considerations are so primary that personal purposes are assumed to be inconsequential to student navigation of educational choices. Perhaps surprisingly, these purposes were quite extensively attached to doctoral study, and especially to doing so abroad, by study participants. Quotes are used prominently in this section to emphasize and give voice to these otherwise often undisclosed personal purposes for pursuing doctoral study.

More than half of the students in this study (17/31) cited having new experiences, learning about other cultures or enjoying personal interests as a significant purpose for pursuing doctoral education. This was not framed as just an added benefit of pursuing the PhD for most students, but an actual purpose for doing so. Utilizing doctoral study for the purpose of facilitating cross-cultural interaction was a particularly strong theme. One student recounts a fascinating dynamic in which she initially came to Canada as a Master’s student and entered an “Asian” lab environment at another institution, where her supervisor and all the other graduate students were from her same
home country. She also lived with her expatriate aunt, and felt this overall situation did not enable her to pursue a primary goal:

I came here for a different experience but I didn’t get that when I was doing my Master’s...So I feel I really need to see how Canada really is. That’s why I decided to stay. ...My decision doing a PhD was not based on I want to be a PhD. It was based on I want to have more Canadian experience. I think I would have the same experience working as long as it’s in a Canadian setting. So PhD doesn’t really mean that much to me. I think my experience, interacting with the real Canadian environment, that means a lot to me. (Li - female, STEM, Asia)

Enabling the pursuit of personal interests and simple enjoyment of life were also cited quite often. One student recounted her choice of pursuing a Masters degree primarily because it would enable her to continue playing on a university ultimate Frisbee team, and then moving on to do a PhD at UBC largely because she wanted to live in Vancouver for awhile. She seems to recognize that her reasoning, at least in part, goes outside the dominant discourses about why and where students pursue PhDs:

It sounds like I do these things for horrible reasons. Doing my Masters because I like Frisbee, coming here because I like the city. And I really like the lab. So I mean it was kind of the combination of all the things that I wanted and yeah it just seemed like a good place to be. (Jackie, female, STEM, USA)

Indulging personal interests and preferences may seem simply like a “luxury motive” that students from developed countries have in choosing to pursue doctoral study. However, students from less privileged backgrounds and from societies which are more repressive of personal liberties also cited this sort of purpose:

Based on my experience, if I want to give you a percentage, maybe half of [nationality] students come here just to have more fun, that’s it. They even don’t care about degree...(interviewer) Even PhD students?...Even PhD students. So this is the half. The other half, some of them come here just to get a degree, that’s it...But some of them, maybe some for me, they come for experience. I don’t want to say just experience, but 80% experience, 20% of course get a degree and it gives you more knowledge about your research. But it’s not only because of the title of the degree, you know? (Farjad - male, STEM, Middle East)

Doctoral education abroad appeared to be one of the few sanctioned “ways out” of his home country and “ways in” to a more enjoyable life for this student. However, not all students adopted the “fun” purpose:

I took my work seriously. Maybe someone else didn’t and they said well, you’ll work too much in the rest of your life, just let’s have fun, let’s have fun now we’re in Canada. Let’s party. I said no, I will party when I have some work done and it was just a different approach. And that guy is out now. (Jaro – male, STEM, EU)
Another significant and rather moving clustering of personal purposes for pursuing doctoral study had to do with deeply felt personal drives, such as a desire for personal autonomy in life, a sense of pride, achievement, satisfaction, even defiance of expectations and odds. Examples from a few students give a flavor of these rather private purposes and meanings of the PhD:

(It is) a very, very personal goal. It was something I really wanted from the beginning, something that I really, really wanted on my own. I mean doing the undergrad and thing like that, or finishing high school, it’s something that you do for the other people that they want you to go ahead and fulfill that. The PhD was something that I really wanted so bad from the beginning so it was something like fulfilling that goal that I wanted. (Chela, female, STEM, Central/South America)

I want to gain my own independence. I want to achieve more and of course being here is the next obvious step. And I’m not saying it was easy. It took a long time and more than once I was about to say, forget it, I have my degree, I can do a simple job, but I guess it’s more a personality thing, right. There are some people that just want to go on and get more and some people they are o.k. with we stop at a certain point. (Giulia – female, STEM, EU)

To be successful here or just to get my degree here. To prove to myself that I can do it here. Sometimes it's because of my history, because I'm the youngest of five boys and they used to be the most powerful and they used to tell me, ‘[Diego], don't do that, don't do that, you have to do this thing, or this things’. So right now, I'm trying to prove to myself and to my family that I can do something interesting here. (Diego – male, STEM, Central/South America)

I wanted to do it for personal reasons like more so. I wasn't thinking about getting a job after that as such, I just wanted to see if I could actually do a PhD. Whether I’d be capable of doing it. And I suppose coming from a kind of lower class background, going to University, because of my class position in [home country], from a sociological kind of perspective, I’m not somebody who should be doing a PhD in University. I should be working as a mechanic or in some sort of vocational trade. And it didn’t make a lot of sense for me to do arts because all the middle class students were the ones who could afford to do arts. I suppose part of it was, I don’t know how to phrase it or whatever, but it’s kind of sticking two fingers up to the world. (Shane, male, SSH, EU)

These sort of personal purposes, in which pursuing the PhD is, to some degree, a mechanism to experience individual enjoyment or achieve personal goals lie outside of the dominant narrative about why and where students pursue doctoral education, yet it surfaced in various ways with several students. As with the other discourses examined, the personal motivation discourse is intertwined with the others; one can easily see that, for example, the development of social capital through interpersonal networks, or making a meaningful social contribution through one’s research would have a personal meaning to it. However, the personal purposes that are highlighted in this
discourse were framed by students as primarily having benefits within one’s own private life. This is a hidden discourse, private yet significantly influential for many. This may belie reasons for the relative silence in the research literature and policy communiqués around this “discourse of purpose”; students may not feel they are able to discuss these motives, since they do not reflect the dominant “public” discourses of purpose, and to the extent that institutional and public policymakers are cognizant of these purposes, they may seem difficult to support (or exploit) through policy mechanisms. The upcoming chapters focussed on “becoming an international doctoral student” and “living and learning in transit” will reveal more about how the personal purposes (and the intimate relationships) of students influence choices and are experienced during graduate study, and whether institutional and public policies and practices are responsive to this meaningful discourse.

5.3.5. *Public policy and institutional discourses.* The primary goal of this section has been to demonstrate findings related to how students view the purpose of doctoral education, as this has been a little understood area. Crucial questions remain, such as how do student discourses of purpose reflect and diverge from policy and institutional discourses of purpose, and how do they reflect the influences of the globalizing fields of doctoral education and careers beyond?

Several aspects of the global, Canadian and institutional (UBC) policy discourses on the purposes of doctoral education were reviewed in previous sections. Canadian (and other state) policymakers have indicated that their primary purpose in investing in graduate education is to generate so-called “highly qualified personnel” (HQP) and innovative research that can advance the (primarily) economic interests of the country. Given the privileging of STEM disciplines and industrial partnerships with regard to state funding mechanisms, it is clear that state policy actors are primarily interested in HQP production in close-to-market fields. The fact that in the UBC doctoral candidate population, international students are enrolled 3 to 1 (74.4%) in STEM disciplines over SSH, suggests that “scientism” has become globalized both in policy and in the educational imaginary of prospective doctoral students. However, for some international SSH students, who are largely on the periphery of the relative funding largesse funneled through federal research grants and scholarship programs, there was a sense of being on the outside looking in on policy-driven purposes for doctoral education. This was most acutely felt in the lack of eligibility these students had for federal scholarships. One student cited this “policy gap” clearly, and also held UBC responsible for failing to advocate more effectively:
I’ve found the relative lack of funding for international students a problem...I think it’s very peculiar that Canada welcomes international students and then doesn’t let them compete on equal footing as Canadian students and landed immigrants. The SSHRCs for example. And I don’t know why that isn’t more of an issue... why can’t UBC ask for this to be changed if it wants to be an international university? In the US, any student, regardless of their national origin is eligible for almost all of the scholarships that there are. (Suzanne—female, SSH, USA)

The findings that research production was cited more frequently as a main educational purpose by STEM students while teaching was cited more frequently by SSH students reflects in important ways the purposes that both state policymakers and the University itself has for enrolling these students. Thinking in terms of academic labor, the value that the University gains from the students is different, and is valued differently. STEM students are valued primarily for their research productivity while SSH students are valued more for their teaching service, and this is reflected in funding schemes as well. In this way, the students’ discourses of purpose are indeed reflecting the higher-order institutional and policy discourses that shape the doctoral education enterprise.

Canadian policy related to “talent mobility”, specifically the relative ease of obtaining a study permit compared to other countries (i.e. U.S., U.K.) and the recent introduction of the Post-graduation Work Permit program, the “Canadian Experience Class” of skilled immigrants and the Federal Skilled Worker program reflects a state view on the purpose of educating foreign doctoral students as a helpful mechanism to recruit and enculture individuals with high talent potential to Canadian society, or at least to extend their period of direct contribution to national socioeconomic interest. This appears to both reflect and stimulate student narrative related to “motility” capital – the ability for individuals to “be mobile in social and geographic space” (Kaufman, Bergman and Joye, 2004, p. 750). While there were only two students in the study who stated that they intended from the start to immigrate to Canada, several more were either in the process of or considering doing so by the time of the study interview, and a few others were thinking of taking advantage of a post-graduation work permit to extend their time in Canada. If these students had not had a purpose of accruing motility capital at the outset of their doctoral study, they came to attribute this purpose later, a possibility made more imaginable by policy initiatives.

From an institutional perspective, one notes that the stated “vision” (or purpose) of the particular university site of this study (although also reflected in many other peer institutions’
similar statements) encompasses three of the four major discourses of purpose found in the student data. The UBC “Place and Promise” strategic plan25 states the purpose of the University as:

As one of the world’s leading universities, The University of British Columbia creates an exceptional learning environment that fosters global citizenship, advances a civil and sustainable society, and supports outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada and the world.

In this one sentence, the University stakes a claim to providing symbolic capital (“as one of the world’s leading universities”), providing academic and human capital and engaging the teaching element of academic discourse (“creates an exceptional learning environment”), providing social capital and engaging the social contribution discourse (“fosters global citizenship, advances a civil and sustainable society”) and ends with connecting the knowledge production discourse to an overall purpose of “glonacal” (global, national and local – Marginson & Rhodes, 2002) social advancement (“and supports outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world”). This is a lot of promise for one policy statement, but it appears to be largely in tune with the purposes that international doctoral students are bringing to their endeavor. The extent to which these purposes, both institutional and in the minds of students, are brought to fruition in the choices, experiences and imagined futures of international doctoral students is the subject of the following chapters.

5.4. Summary

This chapter offered an introduction to the presentation of findings in relation to the three research questions. Four major themes were identified and defined, followed by an elaboration on findings related to a fifth major theme, the discourses of purpose for international doctoral study. These were explored as expressed by study participants and discussed in relation to policy and institutional discourses of purpose.

6.1. Introduction to chapter

We know that the overall production of PhD graduates has increased significantly around the world over the past twenty years, as some countries (especially in Asia) have begun investing significantly in their universities. This has created more “domestic” opportunities for students to pursue doctoral work in their home countries, yet individuals are also flowing across borders to pursue doctoral education in greater numbers than ever before, especially to English-speaking nations (Nerad, 2010). In Canada overall, international doctoral student enrolment has remained steady at 19-21% of all doctoral enrolment in the period 2002-2008, but increased in overall numbers by 56.6% over that same time. At UBC, the increase in international doctoral student enrolment has been even greater, with international students growing in percentage of overall doctoral students from 23.1% in 2002 to 29.7% in 2008 and grew dramatically by 95.5% overall. These statistics tell a broad demographic story reflecting the forces of globalization at play in the doctoral education field. We know, in statistical terms, what is happening. However, the research questions (and knowledge gap) addressed in this chapter focus on how and why prospective graduate students are making these choices. A couple of other studies have also looked into these questions (Chen, 2008; Baas, 2009), but few focus specifically on doctoral students, or on a global range of students. The specific research questions addressed in this chapter are how do students themselves construct and navigate their educational and personal choices in becoming doctoral students in a particular discipline at the University of British Columbia and how do student accounts of these processes reflect the influences of globalization? The chapter considers three phases of students’ progression into enrolling at UBC – imagining education “elsewhere”, fuelling their imagination through seeking information and making contact, and ultimately choosing their path forward.

6.2. Imagining education elsewhere

Before an educational pathway can be considered and chosen, first it must be imaginable. How do students living in nations as socially, economically, culturally and geographically distant

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from one another as Austria, Colombia and Iran (three of the countries from which study participants have arrived) each come to imagine doctoral study in Vancouver, Canada? How do their imaginations of what they will encounter and gain here differ? Philosopher Charles Taylor gives us the notion of a “social imaginary” in which our imagined scope of social life is a construct made from our empirical and affective experiences with other people and social institutions, including educational institutions. He suggests that we each dwell in social imaginaries that are “much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode” and which shape “the ways in which people imagine their social existences, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (2004, p. 23). Education itself is part of this social imaginary, our purposes for pursuing it, our expectations of what it is and will provide to us are shaped by normative assumptions, directing us to imaginable educational options. Rizvi and Lingard suggest that such social imaginaries are “carried in images, myths, parables, stories, legends and other narratives and most significantly in the contemporary era, the mass media, as well as popular culture” (2009, p. 34). This is a helpful starting place to understand what students in this study expressed about how they came to imagine becoming a doctoral student in Canada, and at the particular site of this study, the University of British Columbia.

6.2.1. Imagining education and “educational habitus”. One of the elements of imagining higher education that came to the fore in student narratives is related to family, social and cultural backgrounds. Harkening back to Bourdieu, this constellation of influences can be thought of as forming a student’s “educational habitus” (a part of what Bourdieu framed as cultural capital). Students were asked about what sort of family-based and other sociocultural expectations about higher/doctoral education they encountered, influences presumed to shape their imaginings about education. There have been many studies linking educational attainment of parents and socioeconomic status to educational attainment of their children, with generally the predictable overall results of more education and resources in the family leading to higher educational attainment of children (for examples, see Ermisch & Pronzato, 2010; Dubow, Boxer & Huesman, 2009), although this research doesn’t typically extend to looking at doctoral degree attainment.

This study found complex and diverse relationships between aspects of the “educational habitus” and students’ foundational imaginings about pursuing doctoral study and doing so abroad. Of the thirty-one students in the study, only three had parents (all fathers) who had obtained a PhD.
One student’s mother was an MD and another’s father had a long-time career in university administration. The regional make-up of this group of five was three students from the USA, one from the EU and one from Asia. University life and/or doctoral-level education seemed to be part of the imaginary of these students in an almost intrinsic way, as expressed by Carl and Kim:

Yeah, it’s sort of strange...My Dad has a PhD, so that might have had something to do with it, but it always seemed like something, I was always, I’m going to go and get a PhD. Even before I had decided, it wasn’t like oh I was going to do it in [discipline], it was kind of like, I’ll get a PhD in, in something. (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

I grew up in [hometown]. My dad was a staff member there at the University of [State], so we were always doing stuff at [the university], with [the university], with people at [the university]. (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

Most of the rest of the students (22) reported that there was a basic expectation of them within their families, and/or a strong cultural norm, to “go to university” and pursue an initial degree. For some, especially those from developed countries, there seemed to be more of a presumption and less of an intense imperative around it. A representative expression of this dynamic comes from Ira:

My parents both have degrees. My Dad has a second degree in economics and my Mom has a general arts degree. Was I expected to go to university? Yeah, I think my parents expected me to go. Was I expected to go to graduate studies? I don't think so. I think also if I hadn't gone to University, they would've been o.k. with that, if I had some other thing that interested me or some other path that I wanted to go along then probably that would've been fine. (Ira—male, STEM, Middle East)

A few of these students were from educational systems in which students were “tracked” quite early on, both reflecting and reinforcing habitus (and therefore imagined possibilities) about educational futures. For example, while expressing that he was not subject to overt pressure from his family to pursue education, Stefan acknowledged that educational possibilities are largely implicit in social norms:

A lot of it is inherited. If you come from a family with an academic background, you’re most likely going to be put into a Gymnasium, being set on a track where you can go into University. Whereas if you are from a more working class background, your parents will more likely put you into high school unless your marks are really indicating that you can do something else. I think there’s a lot more of inheriting your family’s socio-economic status there than it is here. (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

In this remark, Stefan also reflects a theme expressed by several students, across regions and disciplines, that showing academic ability (also framed by some students as having internal
attributes such as “academic orientation” or simply “liking school”) was part of what enabled them to imagine further education and stimulated others to encourage them in that direction.

For many students, where there were social or family expectations for higher education, it was focused on post-baccalaureate professional degrees (i.e. in Medicine, Engineering or Law), and there was very little expectation about (or even knowledge of) research-oriented graduate work. Social and family pressures appeared to be especially strong for students from developing countries, and countries where spaces in universities were very highly competitive and determined by rigorous national entrance exams which were part of the cultural fabric for young people and their families. Gaining a place at a higher-ranked university at the bachelor’s level, especially in fields that are easily imagined to lead to more lucrative professional careers was of paramount family and social importance for some. Ravi’s story follows this trajectory:

Back at home it’s free education so it’s slightly different but it’s very competitive to get into a University. It’s a part of the culture in [my country]. There’s a competitive exam. About 2% of the whole population get the chance to go into that University because you only have a few universities, compared to here in North America. Few universities and the selection process is very strict. So we are brought up, our parents wants to push in that direction. They want their children to get into university and then by doing that they have a clear path in a certain direction... (interviewer) Why did you decide to study engineering?... Well I’m very good in math, but honestly, I wasn’t interested in engineering at all but I was more keen in, I think, physics and history. But I got good marks when I was at high school for math so then I just did the engineering. (Ravi—male, STEM, Asia)

Ravi adopted an ingrained cultural narrative about the need to pursue higher education in a “practical” discipline that can lead to a good job, regardless of personal interest. Chela encountered a similar set of family and cultural expectations, but still charted a unique path:

My Mom and my Dad were basically elementary school educated only and they had clear in their heads that they want us to go to university no matter what it will cost them, so we were raised thinking that we had to go to university. From there on, that was our destiny or whatever we wanted to do afterwards. People in general don’t even know what a PhD is, so going to undergrad and getting a degree at a university was more than enough for my parents...My parents as many parents in [my country] and I guess in many countries, they wanted me to go to Med school but I say no, I don’t want to go to Med school. I wanted to study chemistry because that was my favorite subject in high school. But science in [my country] is not seen as a good career path...people don’t really know what a chemistry major or a physics major will give you a job for... (interviewer) What is considered a better degree for a successful career?... Medicine of course, a good recognized path is (one) that led you to get good money. Like all kind of engineers and architecture and like computers, law school, of course. I would say like the major ones are med school and law school. (Chela—female, STEM, Central/South America)
These stories reflect, perhaps out of economic necessity in developing countries, a utilitarian career capital accumulation imperative of education and the neoliberal view of credentials as private capital. However, Chela’s story (and the fact that she did ultimately pursue a PhD in science) also shows that some students who seek PhDs may have to actively resist these dominant perspectives held by others in order to pursue the personal purpose of following one’s own interests. In doing so, Chela is exerting agency in the act of imagining an education that is not necessarily part of her educational habitus.

At the other end of the spectrum were a few students whose foundational educational habitus included little, if any, imagination of higher education from their families and general social milieu. We saw this earlier from Shane, whose class and family background precluded assumed notions of advanced education. In his interview, he referenced more than once the fact that his father was a soldier and mother a “part-time cleaner”, and he framed his pursuit of the PhD as defying social expectations and “sticking two fingers up to the world”. Another student, also from a working class background, explained that both she and her mother had found a way to imagine possibilities beyond what was expected, potentially beginning a new family educational habitus:

_Mallory—female, SSH, USA_

Mallory goes on to explain how she began to imagine the possibility of bachelor’s level education primarily through her high school guidance counsellor, and then became aware of the possibility of graduate education through undergraduate professors and graduate students who worked at the same bookstore as she did.

The experiences of Chela, Shane and Mallory are striking examples of students exerting agency to go beyond the norm of what their educational habitus might ‘destine’ for them, and there were other variations on this same theme, such as Maya, who abandoned a prestigious professional.
practice to pursue graduate study, Hoda who resisted family pressure to get a job in industry and pursued doctoral education abroad and Farjad who moved outside of the “high social status” disciplines favoured in his country because he was determined to pursue his research interests with a professor he admired in an “alternative” field. The trajectories of some students in this study demonstrate that while “educational habitus” passed through family and society is influential, and may increasingly include the neoliberal narratives of “maximizing financial return on educational investment” (Ong, 2004), there is much opportunity to imagine and act beyond these frames. These students’ examples substantiate the possibility of agency beyond typically accepted bounds and affirm Rizvi & Lingard’s assertion that “a social imaginary is not simply inherited and already determined for us, it is rather in a constant state of flux. It is thus an enabling concept that describes the ways people act as world-making collective agents within a given symbolic matrix that refuses an ontology of determinism” (2009, p. 35). A globalizing world provides an expanded canvas of the possible on which to create.

6.2.2. Imagining doctoral study otherwise and elsewhere. To become an international doctoral student, an individual must imagine that there is a place elsewhere that will provide opportunities to fulfill their educational purposes that are not available (or not as preferable) to them in their home countries. For some students, especially those from developing nations, it may be necessary to leave their home countries to access quality doctoral education options. For others, the draw may be to a specific university which just happens to be in another country. Some may desire a different approach to doctoral education (education otherwise) that they perceive to only be available elsewhere. These and other reasons for why students decide to pursue education internationally have been framed in previous research literature as “push-pull factors” in student choice (Mazzerol & Souter, 2002; Chen, 2007). That is, what factors push students to leave their home country for education, what pulls them toward a particular country or institution, and how does this choice process occur?

The current study is not a factor analysis. However, if we start here with the general question “why study elsewhere?”, the data in this study does indicate that several students did so because of what Mazzerol and Souter (2002) framed as “push” factors, such as what was considered by students as poor social, economic, political and/or educational climates in their home country. Some of these cases may be predictable, as in students from developing countries with especially difficult political conditions or minimal educational resources. Reza, who experienced war very close to his home as a child, described the fear he had about escalating political tensions and rumors of
war in his country at the time he was considering graduate school. He ultimately chose to go the EU for a Masters before coming to Canada for a PhD. Chela expressed having almost no options to pursue graduate education in her home country: “like undergrad is kind of like the highest level you can get because graduate programs are not that many and I mean PhD, there are like I would say like very few, few, few that you can count”. However, several students from countries with developed economies also felt “pushed out” and perceived the need (or at least desire) to go elsewhere. For Rico and Giulia, STEM students from the EU, a lack of commitment (or global engagement) in their home countries with regard to science led them to look elsewhere:

*I didn’t like the very limited possibilities that were offered in the faculty where I was at that time. I knew for a time that scientific research is very poorly considered and offers very, very limited options and possibilities in [my country] so I took the step of the situation of the thesis, as a chance to start to step outside the local community and see if I could face better opportunities for myself.* (Rico)

*I also realized that for me in [home country] that were wasn’t much because I mean, of all my friends that stayed [there] they either find a PhD in [home country] which is something that I didn’t want to do because it’s not like here. It’s called PhD, but it’s not the same, it’s much shorter, then they’ll require you to publish papers in [home language]. I would always find that a little bit pointless. So this is what happened to half of the people I know from back home. The other half, even you hear of the people they acquired a job, they ended up in doing a non-science job because science jobs were not actually available.* (Giulia)

In a quite interesting finding, half (four) of the students from the United States also ascribed their desire to go elsewhere to what they perceived as an inhospitable social and political environment at home. Three out of the four referenced the re-election of George W. Bush as an influence:

*I guess I thought, that, you know in terms of North America, Canada seemed a little bit more humane than the US. It was the time of George Bush and so on.* (Suzanne—female, SSH, USA)

*I mean I came to Canada right when George Bush was re-elected and that might’ve been another motivation, like let’s get out of this country for a little while.* (Jason—male, SSH, USA)

*It’s right when Bush got re-elected, it was like thank goodness, I can go away from this place for a little bit.* (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

The influence of American politics and policy was also brought up by a couple of non-U.S. students as an influence in their specific choice of Canada, which will be discussed shortly when we turn to an examination of the specific educational pathways students chose.
In student choice models, on the other side of such “push” factors compelling students outward, are the “pull” factors that draw students towards a specific alternative. Before exploring these sorts of factors, a question to address first is how do students come to imagine the possibilities of doctoral education otherwise/elsewhere? If, as Rizvi and Lingard suggest, social (and educational) imaginaries are carried through “images, myths, parables, stories, legends... other narratives and...the mass media, as well as popular culture” (2009, p. 34), how did this transmission of possibilities across borders and cultures occur for the students in this study? In our current era, perhaps the answer that immediately jumps to mind is “they Googled it”. Indeed, the use of internet search engines was prevalent amongst students in their university searches and an important influence when it came to choosing a university, but few students described this as their first step. Rather, for many students, the imagined possibility of studying (and living) elsewhere began early through previous schooling and by viewing media images that bring students into visual contact with other global locales. “Elsewhere” was framed by students in various ways, including as “in Canada”, “in Vancouver”, “in North America”, in “the West”. Some examples vividly illustrate early influences on educational imaginaries.

Mallory initially simply imagined going to a place different than what she had known, a possibility stoked in her mind by her own inherent curiosity and piqued through earlier education, media exposure and adventuresome reading:

Where I grew up was a very monochromatic place, racially, ethnically and there was just a lack of diversity really. There was some class diversity you might say but I didn’t see a lot of difference growing up. I would see difference on television and I would be reading about it. I wanted to learn about other faiths for example because I was raised Christian. So when I went into university I took a lot of religious studies classes. I was really interested in language because I never got much of an opportunity to learn another language. I just had that curiosity and I loved to read and I liked to travel via books you could say and think about other places and other ways of life. My parents, we’d go to the same vacation spot every year and that kind of thing and it was a very stable environment which I appreciated and continue to appreciate more as I get older but at the time I just had this hunger for difference and trying to see what else made the world tick elsewhere I guess. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

Jaro’s imagination centered on his idea of “Canada”, a place he saw on television:

But before that, a long time before that, when I started to think about Canada, it was when I was a kid. I was ten years and there were Olympic games in Calgary. And we were still, 1988, behind the Iron Curtain and I had no idea what it is. I knew that we are part of some world that is not really connected to the West, so I knew that I could not go to Canada any time unless something probably changes and it did, one year later, during the revolution in 1989. So something changed and we
Canada as a nation where things are “better” was featured in the imagination of a few other students as well. Stefan (male, STEM, EU) learned about Canada in high school and imagined that it was a place “where minorities more or less can conserve their cultural background, you have that more in Canada” as compared to the United States or his home country. For Suzanne (female, SSH, USA), who is the mother of a young child, and who had been living in an intense urban environment in Asia, her imagination was that it “had a space for children to run around and clean air and things like that”, although she’d never been to Canada. A few students spoke of influences on their imaginations of Vancouver in particular:

*Before I came here, you know we have some satellite TVs and some of the program, they talk about the nice and beautiful cities and location around the world. So some of them were about Vancouver. So for me, yes, I think, I had the experience that I expected before coming here about Vancouver. That’s a nice city, there are lots of outdoor activities, friendly people.* (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

*I heard about it. It’s a very beautiful tourist city in [my country]. People, all the people know that, oh we go touring, maybe to Canada. The first city you should come is Vancouver. Then maybe Toronto...(interviewer) I see, so Vancouver is quite well known in [your country] as a tourist destination...Yes, and you know that there are more and more immigrant here. So, the connection maybe is tight. I mean people know more about this city. Yeah, yes, yes. I think maybe that’s the reason.* (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

Quon’s comment about immigrants reflects another fairly common contributor to students’ imaginations about pursuing education otherwise and elsewhere, the global mobility of others within their sphere of influence. While stories of other places, other options have always travelled back across borders from mobile individuals, in a world increasingly characterized by networked interconnectedness and accelerated mobility, stories travel with greater speed and frequency than ever before. Just more than half of all study participants (16/31) referenced the influence of “mobile others” in their own imagination of living and studying elsewhere. In many instances, these “others” were individuals who went before them as international doctoral students—older peers, professors or family members. Some variations on this theme:
I have uncles and aunts and they immigrated (to Vancouver) several years ago and have been living here since. My ancestors originally are from [region in home country] and there is a large [home region group] population here, so I guess Vancouver has been historically a destination that people go to... (interviewer) So you were familiar with Vancouver and the idea of Canada since you were young?...Yeah. Because they would be visiting, so I knew about Vancouver. I didn’t know about the University until I actually sought out information. But I knew about Vancouver and that people lived there, so it was a reality more than just a, you know, dot on the map. (Maya—female, SSH, Asia)

Basically the reason why I was thinking about North America was that there was a prof. back in [my undergraduate institution] and I used to go to a lot of his classes, I liked a lot of his stuff and he had done his PhD in York in Toronto and also his wife who would come back to [my home country] with him, I also took some of her classes. She’d done her PhD in York as well which was where they met and he was saying to me, ‘you should check out Canada or else the U.S.’ because he was saying there are plenty of opportunities there and it’s a different world and he was just saying, basically try to get as far away from [home country] as possible in some respects. (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Basically it’s the States (students are interested in) but then when I talk with my, I don’t know how to say, in the previous years, your, how you say it... (interviewer) Oh just your friends from the previous years, so older students?..o.k., yeah, older students, they usually they apply a bunch of States university and several Canadian universities so I followed them. (Jun—male, STEM, Asia)

Farjad expresses this same theme, and describes how he has now become part of a network of mobile others transmitting “stories travelling back” to coming waves of students imagining education elsewhere:

The faculty that I mentioned to you, he had experience in Europe and Canada. He said that Canada is much better in terms of the society and they are friendlier and they have more job opportunity for your future...When you are raised in Canada, you usually have free contact with most of the countries. You can travel and visit most of the places. So it’s really easy for you to find the material and researches in internet but in [my country], especially for bachelor student, they are not very familiar for the process, the internet process, how to find...In [my country], every person that get admission before leaving [the country], the students that have plan for applying next year, they go and meet the guy and ask him lots of question. For example, right now I’m sending a lot of documents about the background of University, admission process, the requirements for PhD. In [my home region] we say, go from old generation to the next generation. The next person study them, ask me question. (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

Most of the accounts from other mobile individuals stimulated a positive image in students about going elsewhere. What others have done and where they have gone becomes imaginable, and
mostly desirable. One student relayed a contrary experience however, demonstrating that stories travelling back through global networks can also be discouraging to mobility.

That’s what the image is back home—‘people in that part of the world (North America), they are so busy, they don’t want to be disturbed, they have their privacy, they’re so individualistic. So don’t expect any help, don’t expect to be able to have a networking or establish friendship or communication. Everybody there is crazy about pursuing their own career, grad students they didn’t socialize, they didn’t want to share their research because they were afraid that somebody will steal their research’. You know all of these scary images, they came with me...(interviewer) Where did those come from? Who said those things to you?...Some people who were back from overseas studies, they had those experiences. I don’t know, but you keep on hearing stories like that and when I came here, I was positive but I also prepared myself for unpleasant surprises which have never occurred at all, even to this day. (Sheddy—male, SSH, Asia)

Sheddy overcame the fear of an imaginary that was developed around going to North America and fortunately the myths that had returned to his country did not materialize for him. It has been documented, however, that the flow of negative images, stories and impressions can be a factor in changing actual student migration to a particular region. This has been seen in recent years when post-9/11 visa restrictions and perceptions of growing hostility towards international (especially Arab) students contributed to reduced flows to the United States (Lee & Rice, 2007; Mueller, 2009; McMurtie, 2001). A similar dynamic also been observed in steep decreases in Indian students going to Australia following several highly publicized racially-motivated attacks there (Baas, 2009; Johnston & Wade, 2009). In a globally networked social sphere, these sorts of events become immediately and vividly accessible and widely discussed, quickly affecting how prospective students imagine the possibilities of life and study elsewhere.

Interestingly, the stories of mobile others seemed to primarily travel through more personal, less technologically mediated contact, although email and phone were also fairly common “transmission” tools. Given that many of the students in the study were beginning to develop their imagined graduate education pathway five to ten years prior to the widespread use of internet-based phone (Skype) and social networking tools such as Facebook and YouTube, this does make sense. Those tools become much more prevalent in students’ narratives when describing their lives in Canada, discussed next chapter.

Many students (14/31) had experienced a fairly significant level of international mobility, either studying abroad for a period of time or undertaking extensive personal travel, prior to charting their doctoral education path. Previous mobility, and exposure to other cultures and
systems of education had an apparent impact on how several students could imagine doctoral education elsewhere and otherwise. This was strikingly true for Stefan:

*During my [undergraduate] studies I have been to [a university in Africa] for three months, a summer studies internship and this is what really triggered my interest in going to another country. I saw that the hierarchy that is there between student body and professorship is a lot lower, or a lot flatter, maybe. In [home country university] you have a very steep hierarchy. There’s nothing like an open door policy with professors. You can hardly engage with professors. Like they fly in and out of the classrooms and that’s the contact that you have with them. There at [university in Africa], I first saw that there can be more collegial. I came back from that experience telling a friend of mine and he said ‘well, I’ve experienced the same in the States’ and another friend said ‘well, I’ve experienced the same in England’, so I started figuring out that maybe mostly in the English speaking countries, you have like North America, England, but then also ex-Commonwealth countries, the university system is more collegial, more encouraging to engagement, not such a gap between studentship and professorship. I think this is what made me interested in doing a PhD outside of [home country].* (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

Several other students also recounted how the international travel, internships, semesters abroad and other instances of academic mobility they had previously engaged in had widened their imagined educational horizons. This phenomenon crossed gender and disciplinary lines, but was largely limited to students from the United States and European Union (with four exceptions), suggesting that while academic mobility is becoming imaginable to all, globalization of the higher education (and tourist) fields are still highly uneven. For students from developing countries, pursuing a graduate degree abroad may be their best or only chance at international mobility, especially given that there is normally funding attached to doctoral study offers (Blanchard, Bound & Turner, 2009). Several of the students in this study from developing countries had never travelled abroad prior to arriving in Canada for doctoral study.

Clearly, the increasing global movement of images, information and people have the potential to globalize the social and educational imaginaries of students in all regions of the world. A trickle of stories about doctoral education elsewhere and otherwise that could once only circulate slowly in physically proximal interpersonal networks and between socially “open” societies is beginning to grow exponentially and across new boundaries via both networked technology and through rapidly increasing flows of international students. Opportunities that were once only imaginable to the few are becoming part of the “canvas of the possible” for many more. Although not all students have the same access to imagined opportunities, whether due to their individual educational habitus or their positioning on the periphery of a globalizing higher education field,
student narratives from this study demonstrate the broadening scope of agency available to and
exerted by prospective international doctoral students to facilitate the realization of newly imagined
possibilities. Student agency and the context of global trends of information sharing, academic
mobility and policy development become even more pervasive themes as students move from
imagining educational pathways to actively seeking contact with people and institutions elsewhere.

6.3. Fuelling the imagination – agency and points of contact

Once students have imagined the possibility of pursuing a PhD elsewhere, for many the next
step is to begin accessing more information to help them move closer to charting a specific,
informed path to a country, a university and for some, a particular research supervisor. In
describing this stage, many students began referring very directly to accessing network technologies
and to coming into contact with the artefacts and mechanisms of a globalizing field of higher
education. Not surprisingly, many students referenced utilizing the internet to research institutions
and individual faculty members. Only in rare cases however was this a “cold” search where the
student had little notion of what options were available or few pre-conceived ideas about where
they would like to apply. For most, their search phase was primed by the factors mentioned
earlier—a desire to study in Canada (or at least North America), tapping into networks of mobile
others who had stories about Canada, Vancouver and/or UBC, or a referral from a professor.

One type of information that was sought after and influential for several students was
reputational (symbolic capital) factors of various universities, with one important source being
global university ranking schemes. Students across every region were aware of major ranking
systems such as those produced by the Times Higher Education publication and the Shanghai Jiao
Tong University, although only students in STEM fields appeared to have been influenced by
rankings. Several students mentioned consulting rankings when deciding where to apply and in
their final choice of institution. For some students, especially those for whom it may be more
difficult to have direct access to information (or to translate its meaning effectively), rankings serve
as a sort of “shorthand” to indicate and legitimize quality and capital:

I first looked at the rankings and then selected certain universities that I thought
that I had a good chance getting the acceptance. I didn’t select MIT or Stanford,
like that... I wanted to do higher studies and I wasn’t sure which country I should
target but I had some idea about, which universities I had to apply, but other than
that I didn’t focus on a particular country...(interviewer) o.k. so it wasn’t important
to you whether it was Canada or the U.S. or the U.K.?... At that stage I think I had
little understanding about the graduate study. So now I know I took a good
decision coming to North America. At that time I wasn’t sure, I was just looking at the university first then later the country, just looking at the ranking and then selecting... (interviewer) Where did you find the rankings? Like which rankings?... That I can’t remember. It just, it’s a random internet search. Now I know there are different ranking systems, right. It can be different from one to another. (Ravi—male, STEM, Asia)

A similar sentiment was expressed by Quon, who also provides an insightful view on some of the limitations of global ranking schemes:

There’s some ranking, although now I think it’s not very important, but while I was an undergrad the ranking was very important for me... (interviewer) so you paid quite a bit of attention to that when you were an undergrad but now you think it’s not so important? Can you tell me more about why?... so basically you know nothing about the University, for example in science, you don’t know to research the many professors. Some are doing great, some are just good at teaching so at that time I know nothing about it. If you have some friends already there, you ask them, get some feedback. But if not, I have to read the ranking. So number one, it’s more easy to understood for us... (interviewer) Why do you think now that it’s not so important?... Because most ranking is based on the whole university. Especially for graduate student, if you are in [discipline], maybe [discipline] is the best in UBC but others maybe not best. So basically now I think it’s not that important. (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

Several students described accessing information on graduate education options (and the reputational status of these options) through other globalized dimensions of the higher education field, such as reading the international research literature in their field (i.e. checking the institutions of influential researchers on publications), attending international conferences and via their previous faculty mentors, many of whom are engaged in global academic networks and collaborations. This latter mechanism was a highly significant influence, with nearly a third of all students (10) reporting that they learned of or met their current doctoral supervisor through international networks and events. Esteban’s and Jaro’s experiences demonstrate the role of global academic mobility in graduate student recruitment:

In the summer of ’99, there was a summer school in my University. My area of study is [description of subfield of discipline] and we have a summer school on this topics in my University and one of the lectures was my current supervisor. So I met him there and we get along very well and he told me well, if you apply to do your PhD you may as well apply to UBC. And so that’s how things happened, pretty natural... (interviewer) So he was teaching a class and you were just in his class?... Yes, he went to [my country] a couple of weeks to teach this class and I was participating in the class so then after the lecture I approach him and I told him like tell me about your research, tell me about your University. I didn’t know much about UBC (at) that time. (Esteban—male, STEM, Central/South America)
All of a sudden this guy came to [the city I was doing research in] and changed my life completely. So it was in May 2006, he came to [city] and he was very nice and we talked and he told me about this opportunity. He knew what I was doing and he told me about what I would do here if I came and it just sounded fantastic, like a dream... Without meeting him there in [city], I would never know about this opportunity. I didn’t even know that I, as an international student, can just simply apply. I thought that I have to have some connections. I really didn’t know that every international student has just simple opportunity to come here and apply and study here... I came home and I told my wife, that I met [supervisor’s name]. He seems like a very nice guy, a great researcher, because I knew him from publications. I told her that he mentioned I would maybe have this chance to go to Canada to study for a couple of years but I thought of it and no, it’s too late, we wanted to just have family, so no. And she said, well that’s a great idea so let’s go... a few days after that, I looked online what UBC standing is and it has such a great credit. (Jaro—male, STEM, EU)

Although Jaro suggests in this passage that he “thought he needed a connection” to apply, in fact he did have a connection. This became clearer later in the interview when he recounts that his home country research supervisor had been collaborating with his UBC supervisor on a multinational project. This dynamic actually comes to pose problems for Jaro which will be revealed in a following chapter, but at this earlier stage, the connection fuels his imagination of the possible and sets him on a global educational path.

Although connecting with future mentors due to global academic mobility was more common amongst STEM students (eight of the ten who did so), it also happened in this manner, equally unexpectedly, for Sheddy:

So interest in this area also grew at that time and conferences were organized for people to discuss these new phenomena and [people] from other countries, Australia, United States and Canada also participated. And in these conferences I met a UBC professor who would later be my supervisor. We had a chat during lunch. It’s not really about serious topics on [my research topic], it’s just that she asked me, have you ever wanted to do a PhD? At my age, probably no, I don’t think there will be another chance for a PhD because I’m already 40 something at that time. Then she said well what if somebody can help you, would you come to Canada and start your PhD program? Well of course, I mean. She said it would be crazy if you said no, right. And then, that’s all. (Sheddy—male, SSH, Asia)

Two women, having already determined that they wanted to pursue doctoral education in North America, demonstrated more deliberate, agentic approaches to creating opportunities for themselves. In Giulia’s case, it was reaching out through information technology and taking advantage of the global mobility of her eventual supervisor:
I started to look here (at UBC) and I found a lot of labs in which I was interested to work for. So I started to email basically everyone here on this floor, and I didn’t get any answers back. And then [my future supervisor], he emailed me and said I’m in [city] in [European country] for a conference, so it’s about a couple of hours by plane, and he asked me if I was willing to go there to have an interview. So I guess I was lucky that I emailed him at the exact time he was planning to come to [country]. It was a very lucky combination because otherwise I’m not even sure if I could ever get one answer from any of them. So I said o.k., that’s great, at least I don’t have to fly all the way to Vancouver to get interviewed so we met there and we chat for I guess one hour and then he left and I had no idea how the interview went...After that I started to email him quite constantly because I wanted to keep in touch and make clear that I was really interested in coming. And then finally in August, almost nine months later, he said that he actually got money from an agency and they could hire a new student. (Giulia—female, STEM, EU)

For Helen, Canada had already captured her imagination through tourist visits, and she took matters into her own hands (with a bit of help from an international connection) to pursue her academic passion:

I just loved it here and so I upped sticks and by March 2006 I was living and working in Canada on a work permit at the UBC [research centre]. I arrived here, no job, no house, didn’t really know many people other than my couple of friends from [home city] but I knew that here is where I wanted to be. I had actually applied for a research assistant position with [“Andy” -- current supervisor]. I basically [said I] was really interested with working with the program in whatever capacity and I just emailed [Andy] and said, ‘you know, I’m always going to be interested in dropping whatever I’m doing and coming to work with you, so if an opportunity comes up, please let me know’. And they must’ve just remembered. I just worked in a clothes stores when I first got here....(then,) my previous employer in [my home country] who is in the same field, so [Andy] and him have a connection, he’d written me a reference letter and there was just one day I went into [Andy’s] office and he was like, well we like having you around, would you like to pursue a PhD with us? (Helen—female, SSH, EU)

These narratives show the potential impacts of global academic mobility on the choices made by international students, but international linkages that facilitate increased international doctoral student flow (especially into North America) are not limited to academic collaborations between faculty members. Policy initiatives, especially the development of state-based scholarship programs that fund doctoral study abroad also appear to be growing.

In the past ten years, new scholarship schemes have been developed by China, Brazil, Chile, Kazakhstan, and most recently, Peru and Russia which have committed, respectively, $136 and $165 million USD to new programs, to fund students to pursue degrees in North America. These programs are usually focussed on graduate study in the STEM and business disciplines, and often
with the expectation (if not explicit requirement) that students return to their home countries to join the workforce in industry or academia upon completion (Schiermeier, 2012; Dyson, 2012). Neither of these phenomena (scholarships to study abroad and the expectation of return) are entirely new, but the scope and volume of this activity, and focus on “close to market” STEM and business fields has certainly accelerated as more nations seek to “compete” in globalized economies. As examples close to home, Canada has recently been a signatory to international academic mobility and scholarship agreements, such as the “Chile-Canada Equal Opportunity Scholarship” which facilitates the annual flow of 100 Master’s and doctoral students from south to north. At UBC, policy directives to “make a significant increase in the number of international graduate students” has led the institution to sign agreements to host and partially fund Chinese doctoral students sponsored by the China Scholarship Council and to contribute scholarship funding to the MITACS Globalink Graduate Fellowship program, the stated goal of which is to “introduce Canada as a world-leading research and innovation destination to top undergraduate students from around the world.” This program is exclusively for students in STEM and business fields and includes an industry internship component. Most of these international scholarship and mobility schemes are reflective of a globalized “neoliberal social imaginary” applied to education policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009) as funding is connected to industry and allocated to areas with the greatest potential return on investment.

How has this phenomenon begun to influence the opportunities that international doctoral students imagine and seek for themselves? This is a significant and worthy research question that goes beyond the scope of this study and was not investigated directly in student interviews. However, three of the student participants in this study were on home country-sponsored scholarships and another referenced a new program that he had just missed out on. Two other students were explicitly supported by their home universities, not by scholarships but by maintaining their positions and stipends as teachers, to gain doctoral education with the expectation that they would return to these positions. In one instance, this was a clear strategy on behalf of the home institution to build not only its human capital in terms of skills and knowledge, but reputational capital, as described by the student:


They want their staff to pursue higher education. If possible, everybody has a PhD, but then it’s costly and they don’t have the funding to send people abroad to pursue higher education and so here is an opportunity. The university abroad will pay for my expenses and they don’t have to match the funding, so it’s good. I think when we go back with a PhD, it’s good for the university. It helps improve the profile of the University so in the long run they also reap the benefit, not just individuals who go and, so. They want to be one of the world class universities in Times Higher Education ranking and they’ve been in 200 something level at this point and if they believe that research and more PhD, staff with PhD will help boost the profile of the University…(interviewer) Have you had those discussions with the administrators there? No, I know because it’s an official policy of the University. It’s part of their vision and mission. And everybody knows. (Sheddy—male, SSH, Asia)

In this excerpt, Hoda provides a useful account to demonstrate the progression of how a scholarship acts to initially channel the imagined possibilities to a specific location, leading the student then into a process of gathering additional information from globalized information sources (via technology and mobile others) and ultimately making a specific choice of educational path:

It was a scholarship from [my] University also. They just ask if I can go, they have the money and they offered it and I said yeah, I want to. I wanted to travel abroad and do my PhD in another university …(interviewer) how did you sort out where you would go?…The scholarship was for Canada. Like the known fact it is Canada, so I applied for seven universities within Canada…Also [Canadian University] and [Canadian University] accepted me and the supervisors accepted me but UBC ranked higher so I chose UBC…(interviewer) o.k., so back home, how did you find out all this information about the ranking and the supervisor?…There was like 500 best Universities in the world, but I also ask someone who is a friend of my brother and he was studying at [Canadian University], and he give me more specifics, classification for universities in Canada…My supervisor, I apply to several supervisor at the department and I looked in how many papers they have,(on) PubMed, you just enter the name and sort out how many papers. So it seemed that he has most papers. So I said perhaps he’s a good supervisor. (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

These accounts and other similar ones found in this study give a student voice and rich description to what mobility statistics and policy narratives are also demonstrating—students and other academic researchers are imagining their pathways and circulating in increasingly globalized networks. Some students are dissatisfied with the opportunities or social/political/educational climate in their home countries, pushing them to explore educational possibilities elsewhere. We have seen how imagined possibilities are shaped through students’ educational habitus, through the flow of images, stories and “mobile others”, through global ranking schemes and collaborations, through policy-driven mobility initiatives. These dynamics create the possibilities; the next section asks, in a world of options what secures the choices?
6.4. Choosing a path

In the previous chapter, I introduced four “discourses of purpose” for doctoral study – capital accumulation, academic, social contribution and personal meanings and motivations. Although not investigated in this study through a formal correlational analysis, there is a de facto and evident relationship between the purposes students have in pursuing doctoral education and the choices they make about where to do so. Obviously, all the students in this study ultimately chose the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. How is this choice seen by students as advancing the purposes they have determined for their doctoral education? Looking at purpose is perhaps an alternative way of viewing what have been called “pull factors” affecting international student educational choices, although there were also influential choice factors (such as funding and other more practical concerns) cited by students which were not necessarily directly related to purpose. Both will be described in this section. It is instructive to look closely at the application and ultimate enrolment choices of students (especially those who had multiple admission offers across more than one country) as they reveal more about how students perceive the global field of higher education, the place of Canada and the particular institutions in this field, the role of the United States in the educational imaginary, and the major (and sometimes surprisingly minor) factors that guide student choices. They also provide further information on how student purposes for doctoral education drive and are reflected in the educational pathways students forge.

A summary of the application patterns of the student participants helps put the subsequent discussion in context. There were eight students who applied only to UBC, either because they made an initial commitment to work with a specific UBC supervisor or because other circumstances led them to consider UBC to be the only acceptable option at the time. Only students from the United States applied to universities also in their home country, perhaps a function of the wide range of quality options in the United States, and none of these students applied to universities outside of Canada and the United States, possibly suggesting the difficulty for American students to imagine possibilities beyond the familiar U.S./North American educational hegemony, an issue that will be taken up in more detail near the conclusion of this chapter. Setting aside the American students and those only applying to UBC, there were seventeen other students who applied to multiple universities. Of the seventeen, two applied only in Canada, ten applied in the United States and Canada, four applied to universities in Canada and outside of North America (but not the United States) and one applied to universities in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.
Almost all of these students had multiple offers of admission; only one of these students received just one admission offer, from UBC.

Other studies on university selection have dealt with international student choices of where to apply and where to enrol and choice of country and choice of institution as discrete dimensions of an overall process. For example, Mazzerol & Souter (2002) found, amongst a largely undergraduate, Asian student population, that students normally go through a process of first deciding to study abroad, (driven by factors such as perceiving a better quality educational experience elsewhere and desiring a different cultural experience), then selecting a country to study in, and then selecting a University (which were both affected by factors such as information availability, personal referrals from others, and cost of living concerns). Chen (2007), who investigated Canadian graduate school choice by Asian students, found that “pull” factors such as quality and safety of social environment, and relative ease of visa and immigration processes helped draw students to Canadian universities, while “push” factors such as lack of opportunity or poor social conditions in the home country, were not strong.

Many of the findings of these two studies were generally supported in this current study, although the more diverse composition of the participant group, the focus on doctoral study and the qualitative methodology employed here also led to some contrary and more nuanced and complex findings. Many of the doctoral student narratives about coming to enrol at UBC seemed to significantly intertwine considerations about initial application and subsequent enrolment choices as well as broad country and specific institutional choices, creating multifaceted and non-linear story lines. This report will treat these dimensions as parts of an integrated whole, rather than attempt to separate and analyze factors. This is more aligned with what appears to be the nature of the students’ experiences of navigating multiple influences and issues in real time and in transnational space. In general, most students contemplated a complex combination of practical and purpose-driven factors in charting their paths. Their accounts reveal the academic, capital accumulation and personal discourses of purpose for doctoral education as well as the practical realities and compromises inherent in their choices. Some students’ narratives involving their choice of Canada, Vancouver and/or UBC were presented in the previous chapter to offer examples of student discourses of purpose. Other examples will be used as illustration and evidence of similar points in this section.

6.4.1. Institutional considerations at the forefront. Not surprisingly at the doctoral level, academic and other university-based considerations, including the fit between their interests and the UBC
program, funding offers, and matching up with a willing and suitable supervisor, were prevalent in student narratives about how they came to choose UBC. Twenty-five of the thirty-one student participants referenced these issues as significant in their choice, although not all weighed academic concerns with the same importance. A higher percentage of SSH students (50%) cited the influence of a general fit between their interests and the overall graduate program and its intellectual community than STEM students (38%). The opposite was true with regard to connecting with a supervisor, which was mentioned as an important factor by 75% of the STEM students in contrast to 50% of the SSH students.

This finding affirms some general assumptions about academic cultures and sources of reputational capital in Universities. (I should note here that these assumptions are not necessarily reported in the research literature; they are evident to me in my professional immersion in graduate education at the site of this study.) STEM students tend to work in more enmeshed, financially dependent ways with their supervisors, making the relationship more important to establish from the start, and top-notch STEM supervisors tend to be a more significant source of reputational “capital by association” for students than is generally the case for SSH students. The significant organizational unit for most STEM students is the “lab”, run by a powerful faculty supervisor (or “Principal Investigator”) and somewhat separate from other labs and organizational units. SSH students, on the other hand, typically work in less financially and academically interdependent (yet still influential) ways with their supervisors, and the more pertinent organizational units, resource providers and source of reputational capital are based in the overall discipline or “academic department”, rather than in an individual supervisor and his or her resources. Some of these contrasting dynamics bear out in examples of student comments about choosing a program:

*I was also concerned about the library holdings because that’s a good way of knowing the caliber of a program. For [my discipline], the library is extremely important. And [the Department Head] was able to verify for me what I suspected, which was that the [disciplinary] collection here is excellent. And it really is. I also applied to [other Canadian university] and I got in, but UBC offered me more money, there was more enthusiasm. But you know I think mostly it was, more than that, it really was the department here. It’s a large [disciplinary] program, very respectable. Lots of enthusiasm, they called me up and said we would really like you to come. (Ross—male, SSH, USA)*

Ross, in fact, never mentions his individual supervisor during the entire interview. Kim, on the other hand, is very attuned to the role and influence that a supervisor and his or her specific research program plays in her STEM discipline. The funding available through the supervisor is a major
consideration as well. She frames the academic considerations of her choice of University mainly in
terms of her prospective supervisor and shows a great deal of savvy in weighing this factor:

I remember I was [asking my prospective supervisor], “would you want me in your
lab, could I work on those kind of things?” and he, one was super excited about it
and two, he’s kind of loaded, which is an important thing in a supervisor...
(interviewer) Do you mean loaded financially?...Yeah. I mean for my opinion,
there’s three things you should be looking for in a grad advisor and that’s good
science, is not going to be mean to you and make you cry, and has enough money
for you to do things...And [my supervisor] has fabulous science and he is loaded and
I might cry from neglect but it’s not like he’s going out of his way to crush my spirits.
So it kind of works. (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

Both Ross’s and Kim’s narratives demonstrates the interplay of purpose discourses and practical
considerations in student choice. Ross emphasizes the academic resources he’d have available to
him as a scholar, while being swayed also by the academic community and funding available in the
department. Kim refers to the academic discourse of purpose in her desire to pursue “good
science”, while also wryly referring to the assurance she needed that she’ll have both funding and
emotional well-being needs met.

Wanting to maximize academic and reputational capital through a renowned supervisor was
also at the core of Christopher’s choice narrative. In his case, the attractive location of the
university was an added positive factor, but the supervisor was the most crucial factor:

I was ready to move somewhere different, try something new. And I really liked
how cosmopolitan the city looked...I really knew nothing about Vancouver besides
what I started reading once I had heard about [prospective supervisor]. So once I
heard about him I started looking into the city and seeing pictures, of course none
of them are with the rain but (laughing), they really make the city look good. It’s
just like ‘Wow, this place is spectacular, and the school is spectacular’...I actually
only applied to UBC, because I said to myself, ‘I want to work for the best guy I can,
and if I can’t work for him, I’m going to take a year off, travel, and then try grad
school again’. I don’t really want to settle for grad school, because I settled for
undergrad... even though it worked out amazing, better than I ever could’ve hoped,
I felt like I settled on where I went. And so I really wanted a degree from someone
you know, from a professor that really held a lot of weight, for my graduate career.
And that’s who [my supervisor] was and that’s what UBC was, and if I couldn’t do
that, well, I’d just go bum around South America for a year or so. (Christopher—
male, STEM, USA)

For five students, meeting a prospective supervisor abroad, as discussed earlier, was the decisive
factor. By choosing the supervisor, they were by default choosing the country and institution, and
aligning their choice with both the academic purpose of prioritizing excellent academic mentorship,
and also with the symbolic/reputational capital of studying under a well-known faculty researcher.
These students didn’t apply to multiple institutions, so didn’t have to face choices beyond that. These examples contradict the Mazzerol and Souter (2002) finding that international students normally start by selecting a desired destination country, although it makes sense that that finding is less prevalent among doctoral students who have more specific academic interests. Esteban, who met his supervisor at a summer school program in his home country, speaks of how quality of supervision and his supervisor’s reputational capital were important considerations:

*Other professors would say o.k., go with him because he is a very well known person and he’s also well known that, because he has a big group, like he usually has at least four students, five, six sometimes. So he spends a lot of time with his students. And so they said, well that’s a guarantee that he’s going to pay attention to you. He’s not going to leave you there, like floating in the air without any support.* (Esteban—male, STEM, Central/South America)

In addition to supervisory mentorship, the academic discourse of purpose also surfaced in students’ consideration of the intellectual community they would be joining, the significance of the research they’d be able to undertake and the teaching opportunities they’d have, given a particular institutional choice. Like other students, these considerations were often intertwined with capital accumulation and practical concerns, especially funding. Below are some examples of how students weighed these factors. Jason was swayed by a combination of funding offer and a community of scholars in his subdiscipline:

*Out of the six or seven universities I applied for, UBC had the best funding that was guaranteed through four years. Most other universities could only guarantee through the first year or second year, if there was any guarantee at all. So that played a big role... And I kind of realized there is a pretty big community of scholars at UBC. So when I was at [other area university] I’d come over to these talks and realize there’s actually six or seven big scholars at UBC and you look at the main conference for the [subdiscipline] and UBC was probably one of the most represented universities in the world. So just, it’s actually, it’s one of the top places to study [subdiscipline]. So there’s two factors.* (Jason—male, SSH, USA)

For Simon, it was the pull of university rankings (reputational capital), the ability to pursue his specific research interests, and a competitive funding offer:

*So basically at that time, I just want to get into a top university for PhD where I can continue my interest in [subdiscipline]. So I search in the internet for the famous scientists that are working on this field. And of course I have to consider where they are coming from as well, what university they are in. I applied for several different universities as well. And then I would say this is the best offer that I have... (interviewer) What made it the best?...Well, UBC is ranked pretty high in terms of the academic performance and research output in the world. This is the most, what I’m concerned with, seriously... And course, I need to get funding to come here.*
Also UBC is good because they don’t need the international student to pay for PhD tuition. And we got pretty good studentship in here. (Simon—male, STEM, Asia)

The standing of UBC on global ranking schemes was also decisive for Ravi, along with having utilized global academic networks to make contact with a supervisor. Like a few other students from warmer climes, Vancouver’s comparatively mild weather was also in the mix:

Well I looked at the offers, UBC was the top ranked University out of the list...and back at home, there are a couple of professors who studied at UBC and in fact he’s the Vice-Chancellor right now. So he did his PhD here and so he advised me to look for opportunities at UBC so that was another factor... and of course through searching the internet and then you see nice pictures and I also got an offer from [another Canadian university] and I got a brochure and it said minus 40 degrees C, that could be one of the factors. So various things, but I think the ranking was one of the key factors and also the fact that I was able to contact one of the professors here, the current supervisor and I had a good impression about that. (Ravi—male, STEM, Asia)

In comparing offers of admission, it was the combination of a first offer, a clearer funding picture and an opportunity to engage in teaching that drew Mallory, who started at UBC in the Master’s program before moving on to PhD:

So basically UBC came first in terms of receiving my letter and I was very excited about it (but) I also got, it was, I didn’t get any sort of offers of funding...at the M.A. level then, it was like no, there’s not really any funding but I did have an offer of a teaching assistantship which I was thrilled about because I love to teach, or wanted to at least. [Other university options were] way more expensive in terms of tuition as well and so that factored into my decision and in my acceptance letter for UBC they also explained about the University Graduate Fellowship process and how I’d be encouraged to apply and explain that a little bit more whereas the funding situations at the other schools were a little bit fuzzier. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

Overall, 10 out of the 31 students specifically mentioned the funding offer from the university as a persuasive choice factor when selecting a university. Funding/financial aid was found by Chen (2006) to be a significant factor as well. This concern was strongly represented among the SSH students; 7 of the 10 SSH students weighed it heavily, while only 3 of the 18 STEM students without a home government scholarship did. While data was not collected in this study about specific funding offers to students, one reasonable interpretation of the disciplinary imbalance of concern about this issue at the time of choosing an educational pathway can be traced back to neoliberal ideologies and the associated privileged funding of STEM disciplines. It could be the case, an assessment supported by the data here, that students in STEM disciplines are generally in a
better position than SSH students to assume (“imagine”) secure funding options, and/or to receive strong funding offers with all offers of admission, regardless of location. STEM students may be more of a valuable “commodity” because of the elevated importance placed on their research by policymakers within and outside of the university, and can command more comfortable and secure funding scenarios. This possibility is also related to previously discussed differences between STEM disciplines in which individual supervisors control more funding and can exert more individual agency in making funding offers.

SSH students appear to be more at the mercy of departmental funding policies (and perhaps politics), with less agency available to both themselves and their supervisors to negotiate funding options. As has been argued, SSH students’ value to the university is more tied to their teaching labor than research productivity (Rhoads & Roaades, 2005; Bousquet, 2002), and teaching assistantships for doctoral students tend to be both less lucrative and more policy-bound than research assistantships and stipends common in the STEM disciplines. These dynamics may be at the bottom of what made SSH students in this study apparently more sensitized to funding offers when choosing an academic path. However, funding was expressed as a difficult issue for more students across both SSH and STEM categories after they arrived at UBC, reflecting the differing but perhaps equally substantial funding risks and trade-offs for international doctoral students in both disciplinary contexts. These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.

Receiving UBC’s offer first (before those from other universities) was noted as a persuasive choice factor for three other students in addition to Mallory, who referenced it above. This phenomenon has also been noted in (unpublished) survey research conducted in my professional role. With the additional insight of interview data, I speculate that receiving the first offer may be a watershed moment for some students, perhaps especially international students who are assessing their options at some distance, during which vague imagined possibilities snap into focus and provide momentum for students’ considerable reservoir of personal agency toward more tangible realities.

6.4.2. Influential personal considerations. In addition to the overall prevalence of academic considerations in student choice narratives, the discourse of personal meanings and motivations was also strongly referenced by students. In the previous chapter I described this as the “hidden discourse” of personal motivations, private yet highly influential on student choices. Of course, these motivations, such as wanting to have new social and cultural experiences or needing to accommodate family obligations were also frequently intertwined with capital accumulation and
academic purposes in the course of charting an educational path. However, for many students, personal considerations appeared to be equally if not more important than any other factors or purposes.

The most frequently mentioned personal consideration was the attempt to fulfill the desires or best interests of immediate family members. More than half, seventeen of the thirty-one students, had a partner and/or children who accompanied them on their initial arrival at UBC, which was itself a somewhat surprising finding. Large-scale surveys don’t typically ask this question, and the scope and influence of this factor is likely to be underestimated by institutions and therefore poorly understood and addressed. Two other students had significant others who remained in home countries and another two met their mates during the PhD program. Balancing individual academic aspirations with family obligations in the graduate school choice process takes several unique forms for those crossing borders and cultures. Maya constrained her choice to locations where previously mobile members of her family could provide her and her daughter with social support, and fortunately was able to balance this priority with finding a suitable academic mentor. In the context of being a single parent from a developing country, funding was also especially important:

*There were several factors. One was of course going to be funding because, because of the exchange rates. Funding makes it possible I think. And the other thing was, my child at that time was not even three, very young, so I didn’t want to go anywhere where I would have no support system at all in terms of extended family. So I applied only in two cities where I had extended family...UBC came to mind because one of my cousins had gone here for her undergrad and spoke well about it. And then when I looked at the faculty profile I found somebody that I really thought I wanted to work with.* (Maya—female, SSH, Asia)

Five students had partners who were also seeking graduate school opportunities at the same time. This is an early stage of the well-known academic dual career couple challenge (Granville, 2010), perhaps made more difficult for students crossing borders. This exchange with Carl shows the compromises made by some students; in his case, compromising academic fit and some measure of reputational and career capital to fulfill personal purposes:

*My wife was thinking about going to graduate school as well and so we sort of agreed that I would come up with some Universities, she would come up with some Universities and we would look at which ones would be a good place for both of us to go. And so through this process of looking at what places we could both go to, UBC actually emerged as the only option...(interviewer) OK, what about on the academic side?... I tend to look at international rankings that are released every now and see sort of where the schools are. I don’t think UBC would’ve been my first
choice from the sort of strict, further-my-career standpoint. Just because I think maybe I had illusions about getting in some place that was even higher on the ranking. I mean I wanted a school that was really, really good, I wanted an excellent University and UBC met that criteria and it was a good enough school. I don’t mean to suggest that I would’ve been able to get in anywhere or anything like that, but in terms of the decision making process, I wasn’t really thinking that much about how is this going to affect future job prospects. I mean this is not a centre of [activity in my field] or anything like that…I knew that I would have people at UBC that could help me but none of them are doing sort of exactly the kind of stuff I’m doing. (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

Carl seemed to say that his compromises were acceptable to him, but his wistfulness about scaling back his academic ambitions and his anxiety about what it meant for his career prospects were evident in the interview. Ross wanted to choose a location where his wife would be comfortable and where he could enjoy immersion in the multicultural, transnational space of Vancouver:

"My wife is from [Asian country]. My partner. And we had been living in [a warm climate], and I was a little bit worried that Montreal in the winter would be really brutal and difficult for her. So some of it was climate. I was thinking ‘Hmm, at least the climate here in Vancouver is a little bit more mild. She’ll probably have an easier transition to North America.’ Also the Asian community here. I’m a Mandarin speaker and a Japanese speaker. I love being in a community with so many Asians. I can go to Richmond and speak Mandarin all day, go from store to store. You know, it’s kind of neat to feel connected to Asia still, through the population here. I also thought that might be good for my partner." (Ross—male, SSH, USA)

There were many examples of the needs of students’ families shaping educational choices, ranging from Mallory (female, SSH, USA), whose husband watched skiing films of British Columbia and wanted to move here to pursue a career in the outdoor recreation industry, to Chela (female, STEM, Central/South America) who faced a balancing act in accommodating her partner, a Middle Eastern man who was not successful in gaining permanent residency in the United States following 9/11. Canada was their solution, and Chela applied only to UBC due to its strength in her discipline and finding a willing supervisor in advance. Reza experienced a related dynamic. He chose Canada first, because of its progressive immigration policy, and then applied only to UBC for a combination of reasons reflecting a desire for mobility, reputational and academic capital, as well as family reasons:

"When I finished the first year of my Master program, I started to think about the PhD. And at that moment, I said we go to Canada because I would be apply for immigration, and then I found I like Vancouver. UBC is a very good university, very good reputation. The research that I’m conducting is quite good here and also we really loved, myself and my wife, the nature, the natural surroundings. So we found it like a very exciting place so we said it’s good. In fact I just applied one place and it was UBC. I said UBC or I just wait until the immigration things happening. And then, even at that moment I was thinking to go to Vancouver, because I found it"
here, it’s very good place for like in terms of different things, especially in natural things and also multiculturalism. (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

A final example of the “hidden” motivations behind some international doctoral student choices comes from Ira, who was an outlier in this study in more ways than one. I’ve referenced previously a couple of examples of students who blended academic or capital accumulation purposes with the desire to pursue a certain lifestyle or enjoy leisure activities (the reader may recall from the previous chapter Jackie, the Frisbee-playing student and Farjad who maintained that half of the students from his country study in the West for “fun”). Ira seemed to have no discernible purpose for choosing to pursue a PhD or motivation for choosing a particular location or institution beyond its facilitation of his desire to “live an interesting life” with his wife. Discourses of capital accumulation and academic generativity purposes were almost completely absent from his choice narrative. This abridged exchange demonstrates his unique view:

I wanted to live overseas and that (PhD study) was a means to live overseas. I was interested in [my field] but I could’ve also done other things. It’s not that it was obvious to me that I definitely wanted a PhD. If my wife would’ve been very, very interested in doing something else I would’ve been willing to give that up, but we were both interested in going overseas so that worked out...If I had been accepted to both, to say [American university] and UBC, I might’ve chosen Vancouver because [other city] sounded less interesting to me because the weather is similar to [my home country]. It doesn’t have skiing nearby and it doesn’t have the mountains nearby. It does have interesting desert, but most of our hiking in [home country] is also in the desert. So it was kind of similar whereas by going overseas to study, I was looking for something different...We live only one life and many people have things that they would like to do and they don’t do them. They say well, we’ll do that when we retire. What if you don’t even live until then? It makes more sense to do these things now.

(interviewer) I have to admit, you’re presenting a bit of a puzzle for me. A doctoral degree is a lot of hard work and not always very fun and it takes a great deal of effort to accomplish a PhD, and I feel like I don’t know why you’re doing it. Do you know why you’re doing it?...Why am I doing a PhD? Why don’t I get up tomorrow and say o.k., I don’t want to finish this PhD? I’m almost at the end, basically, and it doesn’t make sense now to stop doing it. But then again also, completing the degree will not be, I don’t think, a very important event in my life. (Ira—male, STEM, Middle East)

Ira’s carpe diem attitude is, in a way, a refreshing departure from the entrenched and “acceptable” narratives about purposes, motivations and choices related to doctoral education pathways. It asserts the fact of individual agency in making meaning of one’s experiences, and serves as a reminder, along with other student voices aired here, that student choices are navigated
from very wide-ranging personal standpoints which include gender, class, regional, disciplinary and other dimensions of identity and social/global positionings. Some students have the relative luxury of being able to choose from a wide range of options, some of which emphasize personal interests, while others must make significant sacrifices to create a single opportunity that will enable them to step into a better future. For some students, earning a PhD is the most meaningful achievement of their lives, while others find it nearly inconsequential. This is not a moral judgement, but an instructive view into how all students, regardless of binding forces, make choices (and meaning) within the range of agency available to them in an attempt to fulfill their purposes. I consider this insight a significant finding of this study.

6.4.3. Choosing Canada vis-à-vis the United States. A final and perhaps inevitable area of discussion in this chapter about imagining and pursuing educational pathways relates to the role of the United States in the international doctoral student imaginary and choice process. Given the hegemony of the United States across most global social fields and especially in global higher education via its most famous institutions (Marginson, 2007, 2004), the spectre of studying in the United States was an area deliberately explored in this study. This analysis gives particularly keen insight into key questions at the heart of globalization theory, such as “When do nations matter?” and “When is the global more influential than the national?” Marginson describes Canada, along with the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand as “sitting in the American slipstream. These nations gain a referred power as lesser English-language educational providers and sites for migration, often as a transitional stage in passage to the USA” (2004, p. 202). While this argument has merit in some broad contexts (there is little doubt that the world’s most influential universities are clustered disproportionately in the United States and that they attract very outstanding students from around the world), the findings of this study tell a more nuanced story of how students construct and navigate their choices in relation to the United States.

There were several influential factors mentioned in students’ accounts of how they came to choose to study in Canada vis-à-vis the possibility of doing so in the United States. Sixteen of the thirty-one students had applied for doctoral study to universities in the United States, including five of the eight students who are from the United States. For those who did not apply to any schools in the United States, most were those students who applied only within Canada or at UBC to work with a specific supervisor, or for agency-binding personal/family reasons, or in the case of one student, because her scholarship was only tenable in Canada.
However, there were also several students who made a deliberate decision to not apply to schools in the United States due at least in part to negative impressions about the United States or actual policy barriers which dissuaded them. Interestingly, two of these students stated that their primary reason for not applying to the United States was that they did not want to take the GRE (Graduate Record Examination), a type of standardized “entrance exam” more commonly required by U.S. universities. One other student who did apply in the United States also stated that the GRE, and difficulty in obtaining adequate scores, was a barrier to receiving admission and funding from desired U.S. schools. It is intriguing to learn that an application hurdle can be more powerful in an individual’s imagination (and choices) than a dominant global narrative about where potential for capital is the greatest and what “should” be desired and pursued.

For other students, negative sociopolitical impressions about the United States or policy barriers were more influential, as these examples show:

*I just didn’t have a very good picture of the United States as a place to live. Especially I think through the more recent political history of the States and the Bush administration and so, the States have gotten a very bad reputation in many European countries and so that certainly added to that, not necessarily wanting to be there and not wanting to live there. It’s also, I don’t know, some people are really excited about the States and I just could never feel that for myself.* (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

*I’ve been to the U.S., it was really a rewarding experience. I loved it there but after 9/11, going to the U.S. with a [my nationality] passport, you were looking for the trouble...(interviewer) And did that cross your mind when you were thinking about where to go? ...Yeah, after 9/11 it was like I swore to myself that I would never go to the U.S. until the situation really changes because I would be considered a potential terrorist. From age 16 to 65 male with a [my nationality] passport.* (Sheddy—male, SSH, Asia)

Diego was pressed by his superior, who had adopted the “U.S. is best” hegemony, to choose an option there, but his analysis of the overall situation led him to a different choice:

*Well when I was collecting all of this data and I take a look about several international rankings and I saw UBC in top 30 or top 10, I realized ‘wow, I was absolutely wrong.’ Because [university in the U.S.], it was lower than 100 but it was USA and my dean told me, USA, USA. I made a small Excel worksheet and I compared the tuition fees; and my wife she’s always concerned about the problems with violence which are happening in U.S. and all the things; and my (UBC) advisor told me that I can get nice degrees, and my tuition fees are going to be smaller. So I compare all of the things and I realize, wow, there is only one disadvantage which can be the weather. But [my advisor] told me Vancouver is like [my home city] so it’s just about rain and our town is very rainy. So I said in the same conditions with higher quality, with a country where we never heard about violence and which is*
In this lengthier excerpt recounting his attempt to study in the United States at the Master’s level, Reza reveals his initial view that an education in the United States (especially at ‘top’ universities) would provide more career capital, an attitude shaped by previously mobile faculty members, but describes the geopolitically-driven barriers he encountered in pursuing that option:

*I wanted to be in the real world and at that moment my first preference was U.S. and second preference was Canada and then my third preference was Europe. And this also comes from what we experience in the universities because in my university, many of our professors graduated from the American universities, like from the U.S. or from Australia or Canada. Almost all of them were from the U.S. like MIT, UCLA, very top universities... So my preference was go to U.S. We don’t have American Embassy in [my country], so I went to American Embassy in [neighboring country] and I applied and they rejected. They didn’t give visa. This is a normal practice in Middle East. If you go to U.S., even Canadian Embassy, many students are applying for a student visa but this is highly depending on the political situation at that moment...If there is no intensity between the governments, they don’t care, they give visa, or they are nice. But if there is a sort of intensity between them, they started to reduce the visas. At that moment was a time that was lots of intensity, not only between the U.S. and [my country] and also [my country] and Canada. I went to U.S. Embassy and they didn’t give me visa. That day I remember we were at least 20 students. We queued outside in the street and we talking together ‘what you are applying, what are you doing?’ I knew some of them in my university because I recognized the faces and they had also admission from very good university. That day out of 20, they approved one person and rejected 19. And all of them were similar to me, they said ‘o.k., if they don’t give a visa, no problem, because we have a backup in Canada. So if they don’t give us, we go to Canada.’* (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

Reza’s story reflects Chen’s finding (2008) that for the students in her sample, an inability to gain either admission to or a visa for study in the United States was a significant “push” factor to Canadian options. One other student affirmed this issue as being one factor as well:

*So basically when I was about to finish my undergrad, I was attempted to apply for a better school in the States actually. First of all it’s really hard to get a visa to go to States. Secondly, my mom was really worried about me because I’m going to be in a foreign country by myself and luckily my aunt, her sister, actually lives [in Canada]. So my mom told me why don’t you just go there for a few years and if you really want to go to the States, you can go afterwards. (Li—female, STEM, Asia)*

However, thirteen students (from all regions except the Middle East) received offers of admission from U.S. universities that they passed up to attend UBC. Their reasons for doing so were in some cases due to personal binds (such as three students who received admission offers in U.S. only in
locales that were distant from where their partner was accepted), and for one student largely a matter of distaste for the U.S. government policies at the time:

Well this was in 2003 so this was at a time that, like George Bush was talking about like the axis of evil, Iran, North Korea and stuff like that, and I mean if I had to go to the U.S., that’s no problem, but I actually much preferred to go to Canada in the context you know what I mean, 2003 and I thought that there was a lot of uncertainty in terms of the political future of the U.S. I really didn’t know the way things were going to actually work out there and I mean maybe I was being paranoid or whatever, but I was looking at living in a country that could potentially be at war with Iran and North Korea as well as Iraq and Afghanistan at the same time and it’s [the University I was accepted to] in Texas. (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

This same issue was notably present amongst the U.S. citizens themselves, as was cited earlier, but their reasoning for not accepting an offer in the United States did not appear to be anchored in sociopolitical concerns about the United States. The more dominant reasoning expressed by several students had to do with the global ranking of UBC, and/or global reputation of the UBC program or individual supervisor vis-à-vis their U.S. options. As noted earlier, this was expressed by Ravi and Simon who stated that a major factor in their choice was that UBC was ranked higher than their U.S. options on global ranking schemes. Simon affirms the point directly:

(interviewer) Did you have any concerns in coming to Canada that maybe it would be better to go to the US in terms of the value of the degree?...The value of the degree? I wouldn’t say to US particularly. I would say for other universities that are higher rank than UBC. That I may consider. I mean even if I got acceptance in the lower ranked university in the US, I won’t choose that. I prefer going to the higher ranked one ...(interviewer) So the most important thing was the ranking?... To me it was the ranking. And also the reputation as well. That’s linked to the ranking.

(Simon—male, STEM, Asia)

For some students, it was not that UBC (or their department or supervisor) was superior in rankings or reputation, but strong enough in a globalized field to neutralize concerns about the perceived “U.S. advantage”. Two American students provide examples:

(interviewer) What about any concerns about the stature of a Canadian university compared to an American university?...I wasn’t concerned about UBC and I didn’t really look at any other Canadian schools. UBC has a good reputation, especially in [my subdiscipline]. It has a very strong [disciplinary] department, so...I'm not that worried about it. Yeah, I mean especially if I continue in academia because my advisor is so well known and I think UBC in general has a pretty good reputation that it would kind of wash any concerns of that out. (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

I don’t know if it was really when I decided I would come here, but I was very impressed with the standing of the school, I mean hearing things like it was top three research in Canada if not top two probably. And I’d just seen things on the international level that was ranked in the top 30 or 40 or something like that. And I
wouldn’t say I worried about this, but I probably did consider like if I went back to the States, if they would know the school, but I think that having such a good international ranking I think that certainly got that out of my mind. (Jerry—male, STEM, USA)

A slightly different mindset was expressed by Rico who suggested that Canada and the United States have become indistinguishable in one “North American” field that has reputational dominance within science:

(interviewer) Do you have any concerns about getting a degree in Canada versus the U.S.?...Not at all, why should I? I think that the criteria and how the system is thought and structured is very, very similar and I don’t see any big gap or any big discrepancies between the two countries so and nobody said that we cannot have any collaboration with the U.S. or to do any visiting there or doing my PhD over there for a postdoc, I mean it’s completely open and there is all possibilities out there. It’s I would say completely no problem plus this side I can add the fact that generally speaking, even if we will have to come back to Europe at some point, a PhD especially or even a postdoc degree in North America, either Canada or the U.S., is highly, highly evaluated. It’s very, very top rated. (Rico—male, STEM, EU)

This view of an amalgamated North American field was also reflected in Tina’s comments:

Actually the first offer is from [Asian university] about half a year ago. More than half a year ago, but I don’t want to go to [there] because I think that UBC is in a country in North America and English environment is much, much better, I think...(interviewer) So why is North America better?...I think in the academic field, of science the first place should be North American. (Tina—female, STEM, Asia)

It is notable that it was largely STEM students who were comforted by the notion of gaining a “North American” degree or one from a highly ranked institution, suggesting a more globalized field in the sciences where national location is trumped by global positioning of the institution. United States predominance in reputational status appeared to be more on the minds of a few SSH students, especially those from the United States, who had concern about potentially relinquishing career capital by choosing a Canadian option over an American one. These students didn’t seem quite as reassured by the notion of a globalizing field or institutional rankings. Jason and Ross express a more measured view:

The first thing I noticed in comparing programs was that the course work requirements are far less than their American equivalents so I was worried if I’m still open to applying in the U.S. for jobs, is this going to be a handicap? Because maybe the Canadian programs aren’t seen as competitive or as rigorous as the American programs. So that was one initial concern that definitely made me hesitant to come up here...I wrote to the grad chair who is in charge of recruiting us as well as the supervisor I’d worked with and they all said reassuring things which sounded good to me. In retrospect, I mean their job is to tell us reassuring things and my (M.A.)
supervisor, after I graduated, kind of told me his own thoughts about the Canadian programs which actually shared some of my concerns. I don’t think he realized it but his initial response to me wasn’t his actual accurate opinion of what he thought. (Jason—male, STEM, USA)

I did ask the director, I said ‘this is a difficult decision for me to make, to come to Canada.’ I said, ‘What is the value of a [discipline] degree, and especially one from Canada?’ It’s a good question to raise about what is the actual value in the job market once I do have to look for a position. How strong is this degree going to be respected? I don’t know the answer to that. He seemed to feel that at least for Canadian universities, UBC is extremely well-respected. But as an American getting a degree here, then I have to compete with people getting degrees in other North American universities... I don’t know. I won’t know until it’s time to look for work. I mean I certainly hear a lot of attitude from the American side, that the US degrees are generally of better quality or something like that...(interviewer) Who do you hear that from?...My father is a professor at a small, liberal arts university and that was one of the things he mentioned to me, that occasionally he hears this attitude voiced, that U.S. PhDs are stronger. (Ross—male, SSH, USA)

The concerns expressed by these SSH students, as well as hesitations of other students do show that there is still a perception of country-based capital favouring the United States in some quarters. It’s true too that students exhibiting a more optimistic view of the value of a Canadian/UBC degree may be motivated to justify to themselves the wisdom of their own choices so as to reassure themselves of a positive future. Still, the fact that ultimately many of these students chose a university in Canada despite having an option in the United States is largely an affirmation of the emergence of a supranational global field of higher/doctoral education in which national borders (and the capital associated with national locations) diminish in importance as a more globalized system of doctoral education (and the capital associated with, for example, global rankings and globally mobile research and researchers) ascends (Marginson, 2008, Nerad, 2010; Luke 2007). The United States does continue to figure as a comparator for students once they commence their studies at UBC, as well as in the imagined futures of some students, which we will see in coming chapters. However, at the time of choosing a doctoral institution, this study finds that students are making more complex calculations about value, fit and feasibility than simply looking at the country in which Universities are located.

6.5. Conclusion

This chapter has traced the multiple and complex ways in which international doctoral students journey from early imaginings about pursuing higher education, through accessing and sifting the vast sources of information and influence that shape their imaginations in an increasingly
globally networked society, to ultimately making choices about how and where they will pursue doctoral education “otherwise and elsewhere”. Discourses of purpose, including capital accumulation, academic generativity and personal meanings and motivations are threaded throughout student narratives of this process. Many students show themselves to be savvy evaluators and agentic creators of their educational pathways, sometimes navigating bounds on agency including family obligations and visa restrictions to chart a course that will enable them to pursue their purposes. Students take these actions from the personal vantage points of their unique life circumstances and identities, not in any monolithic manner as “international graduate students”. However, that these diverse students, making choices from locations across the globe, across ethnic, gender, class, disciplinary and other lines, all end up living and learning amongst one another on one parcel of land at the edge of the North American continent is undoubtedly both the product of and a reproductive source of the pervasive and destiny-shaping forces of globalization in doctoral education. In the next chapter, attention turns to the lived experience of these global migrants as they enter and negotiate doctoral study at UBC.
CHAPTER 7
Living and learning in transit

7.1. Introduction to chapter

Studies of international student experiences have sometimes described their journeys as “sojourns”, referring to “temporary between-society culture contact” (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001; Brown, 2008, 2009). Not all students in this study expect their cross-border experience to be temporary, but the term introduces a useful conceptualization for this chapter of movement between spaces and places. This chapter will explore participants’ navigation into, through and across social, cultural and academic contexts and seeks to reveal and understand students’ experiences of motion, negotiation of spaces, transformation and learning, and the meanings they make of these experiences.

Doctoral study, especially internationally, is by design, a transitory experience (Kashyap, 2011) during which international doctoral students are in a liminal space, maneuvering between “home” and abroad, between novice and expert, between education and career (Szelenyi, 2006). A growing body of literature is developing around aspects of the international student experience and both qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted on specific dimensions of the international graduate student experience, including on the development of social networks (Kashyap, 2011; Trice 2004), anxiety around immersion in English language environments (Brown, 2008), relationships with supervisors (Egan, Stockley, Brouwer, Tripp and Stechyson, 2009; Cadman, 2000) and cultural and identity adaptation in a “host society” (Myles & Cheng, 2003; Mostafa, 2006; Szélenyi & Rhodes, 2007). While utilizing the insights provided in these studies, it is beyond the scope of this chapter (and research project) to examine the international student experience with comprehensive depth. The focus here will be analysis of student narratives about how they encounter and navigate Canada, Vancouver and UBC as examples of “transnational social fields” (Gargano, 2009), how they experience shifts (or not) in their national and cultural identities through the experiences embedded in their “sojourn”, how they connect from here to their home countries and construct the notion of “home”, and how their learning experiences (both academically and personally) reflect globalizing higher education, research and career fields. This analysis provides a response to the research questions “How do international doctoral students construct and navigate educational and personal experiences?” and “How do these experiences
reflect the influence of processes of globalization?”. The major thematic findings of this study, agency and its bounds, mobility and transnational space, neoliberalism and market logic, globalizing social fields, as well as student discourses of educational purpose emerge strongly throughout these student narratives.

7.2. Living transnationally—here, home and in-between

While navigating the physical environments of a specific geographic place, migrants and sojourners, including international students, live also in the emotional, cultural and social spaces that traverse where they have come from and where they have arrived. The concept of “transnational social fields” has been advanced by migration scholars who theorize that while nation-states represent the foundational unit of political and economic power, human lives are permeated by social and cultural processes that extend beyond national (indeed geographical) bounds. A transnational social field is “an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks that extends across the borders of two or more nation-states and that incorporates its participants in the day-to-day activities of social reproduction in these various locations” (Fouron & Schiller, 2001, p. 544). They encompass “those who travel abroad and those who remain in contexts of origin” and are “spaces for the exchange, organization, and transformation of ideas, practices, and social networks” (Gargano, 2009, p. 332). The participants in this study have been navigating the geographic places and the sociocultural spaces of Canada, Vancouver and UBC for a few years, while also remaining connected to other locales and spaces, and part of the study’s investigation was to explore how they experienced and made sense of living in transit—here, home and in-between.

In her incisive application of transnational social field theory to international student experiences, Gargano has called for higher education researchers to recognize this construct as one which can “deepen the understanding of international student sense making so that student perceptions and identity reconstructions are placed in the center of a dialogue on international student mobility” (2009, p. 332). Although her work is specifically focussed on undergraduate students, it is equally relevant to doctoral students. The narratives found in this study demonstrate that international doctoral students are profoundly influenced by living and learning in the transnational social fields found in the multicultural country, cosmopolitan city and “internationalized” university in which they are transplanted, within their peer networks and living arrangements, and within their globally networked academic disciplines. At the same time, links to “home” territories and affiliations were meaningful and durable. Further, the transit at the heart of
international doctoral students’ experiences was also evident in the fact that their learning experiences extended well beyond the academic milieu and that their lives take place across multiple locations, including cyberspace. In this chapter I heed Gargano’s call to “(illuminate) student voices and the impact of cultural flows and processes on student-inhabited transnational spaces, identity negotiations, and networks of association” (ibid).

7.2.1. Canada, Vancouver and UBC as multicultural, transnational social spaces. In the previous chapter, we heard students’ recollections of how they had imagined “education elsewhere”, and particularly Canada and Vancouver, and learned how their imaginings were influenced by mobile others and the stories, images and information that travelled back through network and transport technologies. Upon their arrival and over time spent in their new location, students experience and make sense of these contexts (Canada, Vancouver) in new ways, grounded in real experience. In their narratives, students didn’t always differentiate between their impressions of Canada and Vancouver, or even between Vancouver and UBC. For some, Vancouver or UBC was their only lived experience of Canada, and they conflated these locations into one overall “Canadian” experience. Overall, in one of the more distinct finding of the study, most (but not all) students conveyed that they had strong positive impressions and experiences of Canada and Vancouver. This perspective was often framed in reference to perceived shortcomings (or at least differences) in students’ home countries.

The contextual attributes of Canada/Vancouver/UBC most frequently cited as highly valued by the students had to do with multiculturalism, diversity, an open and friendly society, their ability to “feel at home”, and/or to learn about other cultures and connect with diverse people within the spaces they inhabited. As mentioned previously, many students referenced the opportunity to develop more intercultural exposure and understanding (cultural capital) as a core purpose for their doctoral study abroad, and several students expressed that Canada, Vancouver and UBC provided a unique context in which these purposes could be realized. However, students constructed and interacted with the notions of social diversity and multiculturalism in many different ways. Some students found social diversity to be a sort of uncomplicated “good”, providing them with a pleasurable living environment in which they can learn about other cultures. Interestingly, it seemed to be primarily Americans (all White) who expressed their experience in this way:

*I mean Vancouver is so diverse. Growing up in [U.S. state] it’s not completely un-diverse, but there’s definitely less ethnic influences especially less Asian influences and so Vancouver obviously has a really big Asian population, so that’s been fun.*
Just getting to see all the different restaurants and try different things and meet friends from many different places. Vancouver is pretty global so it’s fun to have friends from all over the world which has been really cool. So I definitely have enjoyed that aspect of things. (Jackie—female, STEM, USA)

Canada seems to be a much more open-minded place, more embracing of diversity. Not to get too political, but it’s a little bit more liberal mindset than where I came from, (which) is a very conservative place. Whereas here, differences are not necessarily looked at under a microscope, they’re just sort of accepted, like, ‘oh yeah, this is great, you’re great because you are different, tell me about that’ is what I get from Canada as a whole. To be honest with you, I got here, and this is going to sound like such a little southern boy thing to say, but I’d never met so many Iranian students in my whole life! So to see that was just like, ‘whoa, this is complete culture shock for me’…(interviewer) So tell me more about that, what’s it like to encounter this diversity, and Iranians in particular?…Iranians in particular, but I mean also the Asian population here is amazing, it’s great, right? There’s just so much diversity period, it’s really great to experience all the things that Vancouver has to offer as far as culture is concerned. I mean there’s all these little communities that have all their own restaurants and shops and I’m a big fan of like any kind of different food I can eat, so I’ve travelled around the world in Vancouver in my stomach, right? (Christopher—male, STEM, USA)

A similar, if slightly more nuanced and purposeful academic viewpoint was offered by another American student:

I mean I feel like really cheesy all the time when I talk about like diversity and so on, but where I grew up, it really wasn’t very diverse and I didn’t have a lot of multicultural experience and Canada has a self-conscious multiculturalism which I can be critical of in my own work, but I still find it to be useful being around people who have come from elsewhere or who grew up here and hear about different ideas or sameness or whatever and think about what makes us all the same, what makes us different from one another. How to be respectful in those situations. I mean I grew up in a place where I don’t think it would ever have happened that I would have met a Native American person, for example, and here I know many First Nations people. That’s been interesting for me on a research level and a personal level. Yeah, I think that it’s significant and I value that a lot. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

These students seemed to have a mainly appreciative but “untroubled” view on life in a culturally diverse transnational social space. Perhaps it is telling that each of the students quoted above cited coming from a relatively small and culturally homogenous home community and their unorthodox pursuit of doctoral study in another country (few American students do so) may reflect a particular personal purpose for studying abroad of expanding their sociocultural horizons. Or it could be that any diverse, urban environment in North America would have resulted in similar awakenings about social diversity.
Some studies have found a culturally inward social tendency in (some) communities of international students, and that seeking the company of one’s own countrypeople (and attendant segregation from host and other cultures) is still dominant in international graduate student life in North America. Factors such as religious and social identities that are less compatible with Western social norms and poor English proficiency appear to widen the gap. (Kashyap, 2011; Mostafa, 2006). Farjad notes that some students from his home country tend to stay within their cultural “comfort zone”, but explains his choice to reach beyond this zone to engage “otherness” as part of his learning experience and overall purpose for studying abroad:

Some people realize that if they want to stay in touch just with [countrypeople], they are not going to improve their language. That’s the same feeling we had in [my home country] so what’s the point of coming to Canada if you are just spend all of my time with [countrypeople]? Some of them, they don’t care, they just spend most of their time with [countrypeople] friends. But I always have tried to make new friends from different countries. I’m really eager to know about other countries’ culture. When I make a friend from, for example Spain, then I know their cultures, their society, their dance. Right now I’m taking salsa classes. That’s my favorite dance. Friends from Germany, from Canada, U.S., so one reason is improving your English, another reason is that you meet new people from different cultures, different backgrounds, so you learn new stuff beside your research. That’s why I call it experience, not just coming here for a degree. (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

A few other students from countries that are quite culturally different from Canada reported that their social network at UBC was grounded in a home-country group. However, there was an important nuance noticeable even in some narratives from students whose background might seem to be highly aligned with the dominant Eurocentric society associated with Canada. Two White students who reported having highly diverse social circles still seemed to circulate within a limited range of diversity. From the narrative below, it is difficult to know how far afield these students’ engagement in the transnational social field extends:

I’d say one thing that helps with the whole community feel is that virtually no one is from Vancouver. I can maybe think of one who is from Vancouver. And I think that helps a lot because everybody came from somewhere else and came here not knowing anybody. So within those first couple weeks or months is just instant friends because everybody is in the same boat...(interviewer) Where did some of the people come from?...Um like eastern Canada like Ontario but also the States, Europe, I mean I can think of quite a few from Ontario, Alaska, Washington, Florida, the UK, Scotland, Germany, Belgium, Italy, and one guy from Columbia, so yeah, definitely. (Jerry—male, STEM, USA)
All of our friends are mixed. There are a lot of people that are from Canada, they’re Canadian born and grown here and we also do have quite a few friends that are coming from the European countries, even here on this floor, there are quite a few people come from Germany or England. And now in our lab there is a postdoc from France and of course it’s a little bit easier to bond with them because they find the same problems here. They have the same challenges we have encountered. (Giulia—female, STEM, EU)

Perhaps even for these students, the highly diverse social environment of UBC is not an entirely comfortable context, and they maintain a social circle that is racially fairly homogenous. However, a sense of sociocultural isolation was not the norm; most students expressed an experience of connecting across multiple nationality groups. Jun has highly valued and learned from the open and multicultural environment of UBC, but found it challenging to access it fully, and took comfort in Vancouver’s strong Asian cultural presence:

(In) Vancouver there are many [Asians] here so you don’t feel too lonely ...there are many [Asian] restaurants here, so I think that’s for us very, very important...But for life, you need to try to really understand, get along with different people from different regions of the world. You can see some people like to eat sushi, some eat curry, and they have different habit and I can say, ‘oh why?’, because if I don’t know the real reason I would say, oh this is stupid, why talk with them? So yeah, I try to know the difference between us and to appreciate other people.. I study abroad, I want to see different people, I want to see real Canadians. So if all is [Asian], I wouldn’t have studied here. And I feel most Canadians are friendly, I would say the feel is good I think. Actually it sounds good that you have so many people from different region but actually you want to make friends, it’s not, I think it’s quite difficult. It’s not that easy. (Jun—male, STEM, Asia)

Jun speaks of his desire to meet “real Canadians”, and a few others did the same. While not explicitly defining who a “real Canadian” is, there was a sense that these students were referring to people (likely White, native English speakers) who were not themselves immigrants, and not necessarily Indigenous people of Canada either. Other student narratives problematize that concept. Many previous studies on international student isolation focus on the access of international students to a “host” culture and “host” nationals, linking poor contact with host country nationals to student dissatisfaction and negative academic impacts (Trice, 2004). However, what does “host” nationals or “real Canadians” mean in a highly globalized, transnational social space like Vancouver? Or in student family housing at UBC? Or in an academic department where students come from more than 20 different countries? Overall, there were several nuanced twists to students’ experiences of Canadian/Vancouver/UBC “multiculturalism” and intercultural social
networking that tell a more complex story than the isolated vs. assimilated discourses in some research on international student experiences.

Some students experience their social context in Vancouver/UBC very vividly as a transnational social field in which interaction and friendships across cultures are the norm and the “host culture” has deep complexity. Li expresses her social affiliation as a “foreigner” among a diverse group of other foreigners:

*Luckily, especially here in Vancouver, there are so many different people, there are different immigrants so I have a lot of close friends, they're all immigrated from different countries so I feel like I’m more comfortable with them, yeah... (interviewer) you don't experience feeling like a foreigner?...Everyone is a foreigner here, I feel. There are so many people in my lab that are from, they're originally from different places but we all fit in here quite happily. So I don't feel quite strong in that sense.* (Li—female, STEM, Asia)

In Li’s social network, “foreign” is the dominant cultural affiliation. Jason provides a fascinating example of how, in his experience, national borders dissolve and notions of ethnic affiliation become recombined in the increasingly transnational sociocultural environment and relationships in which he finds himself, particularly in Vancouver:

*There's an odd thing, because I don’t feel the Northwest is, it’s not all that American, or all that Canadian. Like the first time I felt I was in Canada is when I went to Ottawa to do research and it was like, oh, I’m finally in Canada. Because Vancouver is somewhat cosmopolitan and I think a lot of Canadians from my understanding also feel Vancouver is a little bit separate from Ontario or Toronto... I feel denationalized here to some degree. I don’t feel too tied to Canada, maybe still tied to America as well as China and other places... (interviewer) How China?...My partner is from China and my housemates are all from China. I do most of my grocery shopping at Chinese grocery stores. Most people in my household speak Mandarin. I’m the only English speaker and so in that regard, it’s yeah, so I feel closer to China. I mean Vancouver is sort of an Asian city to some degree.* (Jason—male, SSH, USA)

The untethering of personal identity from national or other place-based affiliation through the experience of living in transnational space was a phenomenon that several students reported, and will be explored further. While Jason was able to immerse himself socially in Vancouver’s Asian spaces, others made interesting observations about the challenges of connecting across these cultures. Diego places his personal experience at UBC in the context of what he sees as a multicultural Canada, yet it is unclear whom exactly his understanding of “Canadians” includes:

*Canada is for me like a very multicultural place. People are interested in Spanish and in our culture and some Canadians are very knowledgeable about what things happen [in my country] and Canadians used to travel to [my country] so it’s feel*
very familiar sometimes. Yeah, it’s not really complicated. Sometimes there are a lot of people from China or from Korea or whatever. These things sometimes look like more complicated for us as a culture than even Canadians...(interviewer) What do you mean?...I mean it’s more complicated to establish relationship with Chinese people or Korean people than with Canadians. They are pretty closed and they are very shy, they cannot speak very easily. For us it’s been more complicated to establish relationship with this sort of people than Canadians. But they are good people. They are very nice people. When you have the opportunity to talk with this people, to help or to establish some more deep relationship, they are very quiet, they are very nice people. But at the beginning, they are a little bit...
(interviewer) Hard to?...Exactly, yeah. (Diego—male, STEM, Central/South America)

For a couple of students, it wasn’t so much a matter of engaging across cultures, but the experience of Vancouver as a “wealthy city” that left them feeling socially disengaged. Shane, who as we’ve seen, comes from a working class economic background, expressed particular sensitivity to this issue in Vancouver, which cuts across ethnic lines:

It’s such a kind of wealthy city that if you don’t have money, you do kind of feel kind of sort of, like UBC is full of very wealthy students. The cars they drive and all that and people kind of, people shine when they walk here. They have, from my perspective anyway, I would call it kind of upper class institution which is grand, that’s the way it is but when you’re kind of the poor student amongst people like that, then you don’t exactly feel like you’ve, like you kind of match up or you fit in easily either you know. (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Overall, while only a few students reported difficulty in engaging with a range of cultures and classes embedded in their social environments, the students quoted above do reveal the complexities of social affiliation in a highly heterogeneous, dynamically evolving transnational social field. Terms like “foreign”, “Canadians”, “Asian”, “diverse”, “wealthy” are used to characterize groupings to which one does or does not belong or affiliate, yet their meanings are fluid constructions based on one’s own positioning in the social space.

The most pronounced case of sociocultural isolation amongst participants was reported by the sole Muslim student in the study, Hoda. But Hoda’s story is not a simple example of cultural alienation. She faced challenges in feeling connected socially at UBC due to multiple facets of her identity in a complex interaction of gender, family status, religion and cultural factors that place her on the margins of both her diasporic community of fellow Middle Easterners and the presumed “all-embracing” multicultural social fabric of Canada. Hoda wears the hijab, signalling her Muslim identity publically. Several excerpts from her interview are necessary to tell her complex and very compelling story:
Yeah, there is a lot of challenges, like culturally. At the time that I came here, I was not married. My husband was not with me, but I was not single, so I was not this way or that way. I don’t know where to go. You need to have a social life but it’s not here, not there.

Usually, like families, they have a social life with their children and they go somewhere while singles do something else. After I got divorced, I have my children. So I still was not single. I have children, I cannot go where a single people go with two children. Usually when you are divorced you are not, I mean not accepted, but you just wouldn’t go with other family which there is the husband and wife and children when you are only single mother and it is not that easy.

When like my faculty or my department, when they want to socialize they go to the pub which I don’t, I don’t go to the pub. Or they go to the nude beach. I mean this is a fun thing? (incredulous laugh). I didn’t make so many friends and I would like to have it. When I first worked, there was a bunch of Iranian people in the lab and we were friends. One of them, she was already married and have children but we work with each other, we knew each other and there was another guy, because we work closely together, so we were good but then they graduated and they moved.

When I go to the street sometimes someone spit on me and they call me bad names. It didn’t happen all the time, but it happened. Like there are people who have like... (interviewer) Just overtly said negative things to you?...Yeah. When I’m just walking the street... (interviewer) What do they say?...’Fuck you’ sometimes. I didn’t do anything, I’m just walking in the street. I mean there are crazy people all over the world. There also in my country there are a few crazy people...but yeah, just walk on the street and someone say something, why? I mean I didn’t do anything for you. And there was someone else, I was just taking the bus and actually she work here... (interviewer) At UBC?...Yeah and I recognize her and once she moved from her chair and she start looking me and saying so many things. I even don’t know what they are saying, but it seemed that she is saying bad words for me. So I mean it happens not like continuously, but there is some. (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

Hoda’s account punctures the dominant narrative of an unproblematic, “self-conscious multiculturalism” in Canada (and UBC) which perhaps is less easily accessed by students who appear more transgressive (such as by wearing the hijab). Still, despite the racism she encounters, living in a highly diverse cultural environment seemed truly transformational for Hoda, a powerful way to question old beliefs:

[My home country] is very culturally homogenous. We are all, nearly the same. We look like each other, like mostly the same values. Anyway there is like kind of a standard. But here, there’s so many different things and you start to be aware, o.k., I can see where this come from. Like, I met so many [ethnic group] people. In my home country, they were always the enemies, I never met any [ethnic group] people in my country. They were like, these are all the borders and they were the
enemies, and well here you can meet them and you find out that they’re like regular people, so they are not totally the enemy. And there’s many, like just being open, there is other people in the world. Like there is other culture, other people.
(Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

Hoda, like six other study participants, lives in a campus housing complex for students with families, populated largely by international graduate students. Especially in these close quarters, living in a pervasively multicultural environment with other students navigating new cultures (“Canadian” and those of their neighbors), students appear to truly engage and learn within a larger transnational social field.

Stefan is an individual from a very different social background than Hoda—male, white, Judeo-Christian and European—but, like Hoda, is also a parent and from a culturally homogenous nation. He provides an example of the potential of such spaces for engendering movement from personal theory about “global citizenship” to actual transformative change:

I’m at home wherever, like I would consider myself being a global citizen with a European background... I think a lot of the life theory I had has now been backed up by life experience. It was always natural for me that you should respect other people in their cultural context and all that. Respect minorities, co-exist, get along with each other and focus on what is communal or what is uniting maybe. I think living here has just given me practice in that because now all of a sudden I’m living in an international community again, like [UBC student housing complex] is hugely international and I see our neighbours who might be from Pakistan and Israel and Northern Ireland and England and you know all those potential conflict-ridden areas. I see them co-exist and I see myself as being part of this community and actively try to contribute to getting together well. Like a good co-existence of the people in our neighbourhood. So I think the theoretical skeleton has some experiential flesh on it now, so I, now know what it means not only in theory.
(Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

These narratives, whether expressing a story of learning a dance from another country or eating and shopping in an ethnic enclave or encountering xenophobia or learning to “see” those whom our social habitus has conditioned us to consider “enemy”, illustrate the multiple ways international doctoral students are moving and learning within transnational social fields. As Gargano argues, and these narratives demonstrate, this concept “recognizes various power dynamics and outcomes that manifest when individuals with a range of cultural identities encounter each other; however, it does not limit or predict how spaces, identities, or networks of association are created or negotiated” (2009, p. 335). They also affirm the enabling context of such spaces to allow students to become, retuning to Rizvi & Lingard’s evocative phrase, world-making collective agents.
7.2.2. **Enduring and shifting identities and notions of “home”**. As the last section began to explore, living in transnational spaces can engender transformative learning experiences. It can also interrupt people’s established senses of who they are and where they belong in the world. This phenomenon has been referred to as the “deterioralization” of identity, or the development of “hybrid” or “multi-level” identities (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Cohen & Kennedy, 2007) in which individuals embrace multiple discrete dimensions of identity associated with specific locales or develop identity affiliation with a sense of the global or transnational. That internationally mobile academics and others can undergo changes in personal identity and place-affiliations and have associated experiences of “in-betweenness” has been documented by several scholars (e.g. Tharenou, 2010; Brown, 2009). In a study of international doctoral students in the United States, Szelényi & Rhoads (2007) found varying patterns of change in citizenship affiliation, ranging from becoming more globally-oriented in response to exposure to diverse cultures (or for the purpose of maximizing career options) to becoming more nationally-oriented in response to viewing (and perhaps defending) one’s own country through the eyes of others abroad. Kim (2010) argues that on the far side of the identity flux spectrum, some “mobile academic intellectuals living such transnational lives cannot inhabit an immutable ‘nation-home’ once they become cosmopolitan” and that they develop “transnational identity capital”, described as an orientation that is “generally expansionist in its management of meaning, and it is not a way of becoming a local, but rather of simulating local knowledge” (pp. 584-585). Towards the other side of the spectrum, it is also acknowledged (by many of the same scholars) that affiliations with home nations and other place-based identities are persistent, not often fully jettisoned, but perhaps re-shaped and multiplied in broader context.

The findings of this study support and bring the unique voices of international doctoral students to the notions of both the durability of national/cultural identity and affiliation, and the potential for de-centering or de-territorialization of identity among these globally mobile individuals. As stated earlier, doctoral study, especially when undertaken internationally, is a temporary, discrete chapter of one’s life, characterized by transit in-between life phases and geographic spaces. Many students in this study (13 out of 31) articulated in some way that this has led them to question or shift their sense of national/cultural identity affiliation and sense of geographic belonging. Permutations of global, national, regional and even municipal (city-based) identities seemed to shift, persevere and recombine throughout student transit in transnational space.
Even as many students were able to access a valued sense of multicultural community, some found that living in transnational social space left them unsure of where they belong and where is “home”. The evocative term “liminal world” was used by Shane to describe his experience of living in-between, suspended in transnational space, especially in the highly transitory environment of Vancouver and UBC:

*Well the thing is that you’re in this kind of liminal world. Because I left my country, you don’t fully fit in back there to a certain extent and also because I now live in Canada, but I’m always the [nationality] guy that you don’t fully kind of fit in here...Vancouver is a weird city. It’s full of people who are just kind of passing through. So you do exist in this kind of liminal kind of space and the weird thing about it is that I know that Vancouver isn’t a kind of permanent stop for me either. I mainly hang out with people from UBC. So everyone is coming and going and you become friends with someone for two years who is doing a Master’s here and then they finish and then they go off to New York or something like that. Nobody is kind of staying here, really. That’s why I’m saying, you don’t belong anywhere.*

(Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Another student also picks up on the theme of the cosmopolitan, transnational city as both a geographic place and space for identity affiliation, if only temporarily. In contrast to Shane, who seems wistful, Jerry finds the possibilities of identity in transit exciting:

*I was always a [inhabitant of specific city], you know, whether I was in [U.S. state where he went for Master’s Degree] or in Vancouver I was always [from that city]. And now, that’s probably still what I most think of myself as, but it’s kind of falling away. And you feel almost more like you’re just kind of living in a city, and I think, that that’s what also excites me about moving on somewhere else to another new city. It’s like just keep exploring new cities and I think it’s a neat thing because you get to feel like that city has left its imprint on you...(interviewer) so if you’re not a [inhabitant of that city] anymore, what are you?...Yeah, I guess you’re just living in a city, and you’re just experiencing life, I guess?* (Jerry—male, STEM, USA)

A couple of other students from the USA discussed the persistence of regional affiliations. One of them (Jason) places this in context of changing national identities, while the other (Kim) seems to want to hold fast to a primary regional identification. Both indicate that there is certain social and cultural capital in their unique regional identities and that others perceive their identity differently depending on where they are physically located at any given moment.

*In most conversations I say I’m [a citizen of my home U.S. state] but I think that’s partly because there’s an exotic element of being from [that state] which a lot of the people don’t quite understand or they’ll have certain notions of and so when I’m away from [state], I identify with [state], and when I visit home, I’m the guy that lives in Canada and other places around the world. So I guess it depends where I’m at as far as identity.* (Jason—male, SSH, USA)
I want to talk like a [person from my home state] forever but I know I have that sympathetic, I talk to people and I just start talking like them and I can’t stop it. But I like my accent I want to keep it, it’s mine... (interviewer) Do you feel like you have a pretty strong identity as an American or a [person from your home state]?... It’s kind of context specific. I would say yes, I have a strong identity as a [person from my home state]. I mean certainly I like to tell people about [my home city] and things that happen in [my home state] that don’t happen in other places, well the good things anyway. I don’t really want to talk about the bad things. I think it’s something that makes me unique and valuable just for the sake of that too... (interviewer) What’s valuable?... Being [a person from my home state]. In Vancouver being [from my home state] is unique and interesting. (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

Li expressed a strong sense of being in-between affiliations and social worlds with her home country and with Canada, where she hopes to stay for awhile:

I feel I’m sort of in between [home nationality] and Canadian people. I’m not entirely Canadian but I’m no longer entirely [home nationality] anymore, so...(interviewer) How did that happen? How did you get in-between?... I don’t know if it’s just me or it happens to a lot of people. I just feel like, for example, I go back to [home country] every year to visit my family but every time I go back, I feel like I don’t belong [there] anymore and when I come here, I don’t entirely belong to Canada. I can give you an example, I can talk to people in a lab fine but once we have a party when they talk about music, books, I just feel like very not included at all because we don’t have the same background... Where I belong in the world? I can tell you I don’t belong anywhere anymore yeah, I’m just in between somewhere. (Li—female, STEM, Asia)

In addition to revealing her experience of being in-between national affiliation, Li also makes an interesting point when expressing her feeling that she can affiliate within the culture of her research lab (indicating the “global language” of science), but less so in social settings. Like Li, Giulia also finds herself “between” homes, shaped by her home country, but having become mobile and anticipating further mobility, she is questioning where in the world she could belong:

Now I’m in a weird spot because home is still home because I lived there for a long time but I cannot call it home anymore. When I go there for Christmas, I know as soon as I walked inside the apartment I was living in for 22 years, it looked like I never left. But when I’m there I realize it’s not where I belong anymore. When I’m here I’m happy because when I walk here into our apartment, I feel like it’s home because I’ve been living there for three years but at the same time, it’s not home, right, because it’s not where I think I will stay in the future. So I do not belong to [my home country] anymore, but I do not belong to here 100%. If you think about a final place I want to go and live, I’ve really, I have no idea because I’m always between ‘oh, I should find a place closer to home versus no, I’m here’... I think that if you grew up in a country and you lived there for a long time, you get all of your schooling there, it’s very different. If you move somewhere else, you always keep a strong bond with your roots. (Giulia—female, STEM, EU)
The experience of these two students seem to affirm that life in transnational social space makes some new affiliations accessible, but cultural habitus is persistent and may keep us at a distance from the “new” as well.

A similar point about the durability of home country affiliation is made and very insightfully analyzed by another student, Reza. Reza may be taking a longer view on affiliation because he is in the process of immigrating to Canada, and reflecting deeply here on what it means to “become Canadian”:

For me it's very complicated how it’s possible to feel like as a Canadian. What is this feeling, you know. Because whatever I know are like information, but whatever I have from my country, they are not information, they are like my identity. For example, literature, art, music or stuff like that, they are the thing that I grew up with. When I was a kid, right? But here, I know a little bit about Western culture, but I didn’t grow up with that. I think these are the thing that forms the identity of the people and not just being in a place for a certain time. I have to be going to this society and sort of dissolve in that society. This is a process that, if I want to feel as a Canadian, I think I have to spend at least 10 years here and really engage with the Canadians and also from internal things, I also have to try to be part of that, then I start to feel like a Canadian. But from the internal things, I guess I need more time, you know, it’s like two years, I’ve been here for two years, it’s a very short time.. (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

Reza provides a compelling argument for the stability and deep entrenchment of identity over time, and its representation in the cultural markers of a country or society. He sees the potential for identity and affiliation change over time, but is thinking of it in terms of from one country and culture to another, not in “globalized identity” sense.

Some students expressed a feeling of liberation in becoming untethered from a home country. Both Jaro and Stefan put their experience in the context of gaining human and mobility capital through their doctoral study and other experiences abroad which would give them the agency to go and ability to be successful ‘anywhere’:

Because when I was in Europe, in [my home country] and when I went to study in Sweden, and within Sweden, I was not a [home nationality] person, I was a European. That opened my door to anywhere like within Europe, let’s say. Because I had this experience, I felt different. Now, being in Canada, I feel similarly but it’s wider. I feel part of the world, I feel like, when I want, I can go to do postdocs almost anywhere in the world, where I decide to go. Not where they decide to accept me because I believe they will, with the knowledge I will have, they will want me and so the world became smaller. (Jaro—male, STEM, EU)
Stefan expresses a similar feeling of the world being open to him (aside from agency-binding family obligations) due to globalizing social and academic fields, but is insightful about the fact that globalization is uneven, and his privileged relative economic status gives him opportunities not available to most:

I do have the impression that the whole world is open to me/us in terms of, I can pretty much choose wherever I go next for a postdoc, and then, if there weren’t family ties, for a following career. I have the impression that it’s up to my decision where to go. So I think that gives a lot of freedom, a lot of freedom always is a little scary too, but, yeah, so I think that I’m a privileged person. I grew up in one of the richest countries in the world and I got a good education so I think this is why this is all open to me. So this is why globalization is really true for me in terms of the possibility to go anywhere and probably start work anywhere I’m very well aware... (interviewer) and it wouldn’t be that way, globalization doesn’t play out that way for everybody?...Oh no, by no means. But I think in my concrete case, I’m not sure whether I’m being naïve here, but I think I could essentially go anywhere, probably apart from North Korea. (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

The imagined futures of study participants will be explored in further detail in the following chapter, including variations in the global possibilities imagined by students in different academic disciplines and from the various global positionings of their home countries.

A fascinating finding of this study was the extent to which some students had already begun developing a “global” or “nomadic” sense of self and belonging prior to embarking on being an international student at UBC. A few students cited the notion that their place-based identity was a pastiche of prior locations, leaving them with a multi-layer or deterritorialized sense of home and multiple sources of national/cultural identity. As cited earlier, Jason has an affiliation with his home state in the USA, but is also increasingly immersed in the cultural dimension of Vancouver as an “Asian city” in Canada:

I’ve recently thought about how I’ve lived in Canada five years and it’s starting to become like a big percentage of my life, actually, so am I starting to identify with Canada, as well as America, as well as Asia, or? I mean it seems at this moment I have a tri-, I’d say transnational, but almost tri-national identity between Canada, U.S. and Asia. (Jason—male, STEM, USA)

For Suzanne, “home” was ultimately tied to her current location with her spouse and children, not a particular location, a sensibility developed from her extensive prior mobility:

Well, I think I’m a kind of nomad. Culturally confused (laugh), but I guess I’ve accumulated different cultural bits and pieces from many different places, but obviously my accent is very [tied to where she grew up]. I don’t really identify very much with any one country. I don’t think if people say, ‘where’s home?’, I mean, home is where I live with my family. And I’ve also absorbed things that
make me partly Chinese, although no Chinese person would recognize that necessarily, but I’ve spent such a lot of my life absorbed with things Chinese. And I spent 10 years living in Hong Kong. So I don’t identify with any particular place. (Suzanne—female, SSH, USA)

Ross expressed a similar experience:

(interviewer)...Tell me about how you do identify, where do you feel you belong in the world?...I belong in the world (laugh). Yeah, at this point, I’ve lived in so many different places. I’m not very fond of this notion of belonging to a nation-state. And, in any case I really would like to see past, I mean we’re not going to get immediately past our tendency to see race, but I don’t feel that we’re making enough of an effort to get past it. And there are different cultural values, we need to reckon with these, we need to have dialogue. In any case, I just see myself as a human, you know? I’m part of this human population on the planet. Yes, I have, I can point to [home state], the U.S., [state where he lived for several years], Japan, Taiwan, the PRC, I mean, I have to point to all these places in order to construct an identity for myself. (Ross—male, SSH, USA)

Ross, Jason and Suzanne’s stories require us to reconsider what being an “international student” can mean. They are also revealing of the ways, in a globalizing world, individuals consciously construct multidimensional cultural identities from their mobile experiences, echoing Kim’s (2010) notion of developing “transnational identity capital”. The assumption that international doctoral students are traveling a direct path from their home country to Canada without significant periods in other countries, while certainly true for many (and for about half of the students in this study) is denying the complexity and multiplicity of many students’ lives and identities in a globalizing world. That each of the highly mobile students cited here was from the USA may be an indication of the relatively greater economic means of Americans than many other students, but several other students, and even some from developing countries had fairly extensive mobility prior to becoming doctoral students at UBC. Not all such students develop a self-identity as global, multiple or deterritorialized as these examples; several would perhaps be more accurately characterized as having a citizenship affiliation that Szélenyi & Rhodes termed a “globally informed nationalism” (2007). Their phrase refers to those who maintain a primary affiliation with their home country, but after an international educational sojourn, place that affiliation in a more global context. Still, the extent to which participants in this study reported shifting senses of identities is a dimension of the international doctoral student experience that has been underemphasized in research literature and merits further study.

This study found that regardless of whether students are experiencing profound or subtle shifts in their national affiliations and sense of “home”, nearly all of them maintain contact with
home countries, cultures and family members at home through the use of information technologies. In her study of international graduate students in the United States, Kashyap (2011) found that many students were using such communication technologies at the expense of connecting with “local” people, keeping them socially isolated within their current “place” while connecting them across “space”. This finding was not strongly supported in the current study, with one or two exceptions, as most students here seemed to characterize connecting back “home” using technology as just one dimension of their overall social milieu. Email, cell phones, social networking sites, home country news webpages, satellite and internet-streamed television and, most notably, Skype, were all cited by many students as vehicles for maintaining ties across space. Simon expresses a common view, although not all students are from countries with as developed information technology infrastructure:

(interviewer)...how do you stay in touch with [your home country]?...Internet. Only in the night. It’s free. I can have video conferences...(interviewer) So, do you keep up with the news in [home country]?f...Yeah. I keep very up to date news in [home country]. Yeah. And I will, I usually fly [home] once a year...(interviewer) So you use the internet to stay in touch with your family and friends. Facebook or Skype?...Skype, but all of them. All possible ways. (Simon—male, STEM, Asia)

Despite the wide availability of such technologies, it was also expressed that they cannot bridge all distances. Suzanne expresses some of the social losses that can result from extensive mobility:

I think it’s inherently very hard to maintain a relationship with friends who you haven’t seen for many years and then people scattered all over the place and how do you visit them more? You’d spend all your time and money visiting. It’s hard. So inevitably you lose people and that’s very sad... Email as a medium, misunderstandings are so easy and then the time delay. I can see that especially within my family where we’re all separated often, you can generate this whole pile of stuff around some unintended remark. Which if you were there and you would say, ‘did you mean that?’ and they say ‘No!’ and it’s gone. So I don’t think it’s easy, and I always tell people, ‘Watch out, you! I’ve done it, I did it, I’ve, you know, lost all my friends’. And you don’t even think of that if you’re planning on, you know, embarking on becoming a nomad. (long silence) (Suzanne, SSH, USA)

Suzanne’s statement reveals a dilemma of life in transnational space, and perhaps a painful effect of Kim’s (2009) statement that one “cannot inhabit an immutable ‘nation-home’ once they become cosmopolitan”.

An additional finding related to shifting identities and notions of “home” came from within students’ narratives about parenthood and family. Eight students were parents at the time of interview and a few others spoke about becoming parents in the future. Without delving here into
the extensive literature on children of immigrants, a few students offered meaningful insights into how their children’s experiences as fellow educational sojourners in Canada impacted their evolving sense of home and belonging. Parenthood is an often invisible aspect of doctoral student lives which is clearly a rich source of meaning for many, and provides a fascinating example of how parents embarking on international study is a unique iteration of life in transnational social spaces which serves to expand the global social imaginary for future generations. Stefan, a father of three, mentioned several times in his interview how much he valued the opportunity for his children to engage in a multicultural society. He references the established term “third culture kids” to describe the phenomenon of “children who grow up in a culture that is not their parents’ culture so they develop a sort of in-between-the-cultures understanding of culture.” Maya experiences a shift in her sense of where home is, in part due to her daughter’s embrace of Vancouver:

It was always [home country]. I had never imagined myself living anywhere else. But now that I’ve been here for so long, especially for my daughter, I mean this is the only home she has known. And that does cause some anxiety sometimes, because when I say home it’s, it’s always [home country], but for her, even the few times that we’ve gone back, she always refers to Vancouver as home. So for her, this is home, I think. And regardless of where we live, I think it will be in some ways. Especially when I think of where I spent most of my childhood, that part of [home country] is sort of always connected to that sense of home. I think that’s the big change that I’ve felt, that I never, ever thought that I would live anywhere but in [home country]. But now, that sense of where I live is not as much as, you know, what I’m doing. (Maya—female, SSH, Asia)

Maya expresses pangs of anxiety as she contemplates where “home” will be for her and her daughter in the future, but most students in this study seemed to be moving relatively comfortably within shifting senses of home and identity. As a strong counterpoint, I return to Hoda, the student who had experienced social isolation and outright racism as a visible Muslim woman at UBC. Hoda relates a story about speaking with a fellow Middle Easterner at a social gathering, who did not know she was not an immigrant to Canada. This story and her following remarks make it clear that for some students, life in transnational space, being between fully “home” and fully “here” is fraught with ambivalence and threat of identity loss, perhaps compounded in Hoda’s case by her identities as a mother and a scholar as well:

I didn’t tell him that I’m not a permanent resident or that I’m just a student. He didn’t know and then also because I wear Hijab, of course, so he said that ‘you are not Canadian yet in heart, your heart is not Canadian, your heart are still in [home city] or in [home country] but your children will be Canadian and they will follow the Canadian rules and Canadian living style.’ So I wonder to him what is the Canadian living style? Is it just drinking at home, getting drunk? And spitting at
people? So there is always like this, I don’t know what they call? Accommodation or adaptation, like they always saying that the newcomers should follow us. If you wear differently or if you behave differently, then you are not one of us. And we are better so you are worse. It is not that you are different, no, we are better. We have the money and we have the science and we have all, otherwise why did you come to our country? You come because it’s better for you so it’s better that you follow all the [customs] ... (interviewer) Almost like it’s all or nothing? Like you have to embrace all or?...It is not all that drastic, I mean you can, but you will feel isolated...I want to, have to feel that in my research I am competing with the best. I want to feel that. If you care about your work you always want that. You are on the top of things. If I went home I wouldn’t be able to do it. But I still, if I continue here, either I have to completely assimilate with the culture, or I have to be must one of the like background people. (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

Hoda’s voice in this study is extremely important, as a student who is not experiencing the dominant narrative in the study about a (relatively) happy mutual embrace between students with globalizing identities and a country/city/university with a global self-image. That her children are experiencing a multicultural upbringing is a source of both pride and anxiety for her. Although a fairly singular voice in this study, she surely represents the view of others who were not willing to come forward as participants. She raises the question, do all international students need to “go global” as the UBC slogan suggests? Is it legitimate for international students to want to access resources of the West without being willing to “globalize” their world view? Such globalization of world view seems to be happening to an extent to Hoda, and she embraces aspects of it, but perceives it to be at a high cost to her identity.

The student narratives presented in this section embody the critique advanced by Gargano, that “cross-border education literature, specifically the international student mobility discourse, is bereft of significant and robust concepts that bring into view international student experiences and identity reconstructions, thereby homogenizing and generalizing the negotiations of international students when great dimensions of difference actually exist” (2009, p. 331). Her introduction of the “transnational social field” concept to the domain of international student experience helps us to understand these experiences as reflective of the complex influences of globalization on the higher education field. The rich narratives also provide insights that support her argument that scholars should “place student voices at the forefront of a discourse on student mobility” (2009, p. 343). While more general themes such as shifting and deterritorialization of national identities, preservation of core cultural identities and the use of networked technologies to bridge transnational space were evident in the data, it is also clear that student experiences in this regard are highly diverse, individualized and linked to particular sociocultural positionings. Similar patterns
of general themes brought to life and differentiated through the particular lived experiences of individuals also emerge in the next section, which focuses on the (primarily academic) learning and support encounters students have with the University and within global academic/research fields.

### 7.3. Learning in place and space

As outlined previously, students expressed that their primary purposes for pursuing doctoral education in Canada and at UBC were to gain capital of various kinds that would help them advance in their careers and lives, to participate in academic stewardship through teaching and research production and application, to better enable them to make positive social contributions, and for a variety of personal motives. This section will explore student learning experiences as they relate to these purposes and take place within globalizing (and as many have argued, increasingly neoliberal) fields of research and higher education. Students’ evaluation of their learning experiences were mediated by considerations such as their relationship with their supervisor and interactions with larger academic communities, as well as the opportunities and challenges they encountered in pursuing their goals. The learning experiences assessed here are focussed on the academic context of the university, but include some aspects of personal growth as well. Given that learning experiences related to multiculturalism and national/cultural identity were a focus of the previous section, they will not be included here.

In a pronounced finding of this study, a large majority of participants (23 out of 31) characterized their overall learning experience at UBC in highly positive terms, with the other eight students reporting a more mixed, or in one case, quite negative overall experience. Although this study is not meant to generalize to the overall student population, it is important to consider whether the high level of student satisfaction found among participants in this study may mean that the sample, due to self-selection, skewed towards over-representation of a particular kind of experience. Studies employing self-selection may draw participants with strong opinions, possibly polarizing the results towards more extreme ends of the continuum of opinion. Students in the current study may also have felt more comfortable participating in an interview if they had positive things to say. Given that all students invited to participate in the study had spent a minimum of two years in the PhD program and had met the academic milestone of advancing to candidacy, we can expect that many PhD students who had had a less positive learning experience at UBC had already withdrawn from study. Still, there was enough diversity of experience expressed in the student narratives to explore multiple perspectives on student learning.
7.3.1. Supervision and academic communities. Many studies have investigated the relationship between academic supervision, immersion in academic communities and the success and satisfaction of research graduate students (see e.g. Trice, 2005; Ives & Rowley, 2005; Egan, Stockley, Brouwer, Tripp & Stechyson, 2009). The influential role of the supervisor and his/her resources and reputational capital in student choice of a graduate program was discussed in the previous chapter; this section explores further how this relationship had developed and had influenced learning for students during their studies. Given the central role that this individual plays in the opportunities and resources doctoral students can access, it is not surprising that the supervisory relationship was discussed by almost all study participants and was a clear influence in how they perceived their overall learning experience at UBC. Supervision and student learning also take place within a broader scholarly community in a graduate program or research group. For some students, their narratives expanded to include the academic guidance and scholarly community engendered throughout their program or research group, not just their direct supervisors. Because of their centrality to doctoral students’ academic experience, I begin the exploration of student learning with a discussion of student narratives related to these elements of their environment.

Of the thirty-one students in the study, seventeen (11 STEM, 6 SSH) characterized the support they received from their research supervisors and the overall academic community in their programs or research groups in entirely positive terms. Positive impressions cut across gender and regional groupings. They also were tied to several different factors; students valued different things about their supervisors and academic communities, including support of research independence, opportunities to develop further skills and access networks, a stimulating academic milieu, support of personal endeavors and plain interpersonal liking. Several comments illustrate the range of positive views (and provide a catalogue of “best practices” in supervision):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Quote</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reza—male, STEM, Middle East</td>
<td>I really like my research group and especially my supervisor. He is very good in his work and I really appreciate working with him. He really pays attention to my research, puts time, these are very good experience, yeah. He’s really concerned about my research and puts time and this is very good.</td>
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<td>Li—female, STEM, Asia</td>
<td>I love this place and I love my lab and my supervisor, I love it. I can tell you why I’m so happy here. I mean I like the people in my lab and they have been good people working with me and especially my relationship with my supervisor is a big factor... She’s fantastic and I like her a lot so that’s the most valuable thing. I feel like I can, for example, when I was in [another university], my [previous] supervisor, you basically, you cannot talk to him on an equal level. But with my current supervisor I can talk to her, I can tell her honestly what I want and she will understand.</td>
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Table 7.1 Sample student quotes on supervision and academic experience
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<tr>
<th>Name—gender, STEM, Region</th>
<th>Statement</th>
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<tr>
<td>Giulia—female, STEM, EU</td>
<td>So far it has been really, really great. I really like the program. I’ve been also very lucky with [my advisor], because he is very nice as a person and this is very important for me. Because you know especially in science I found that the advisors can be really good as advisors but from a personal point of view, it might be really difficult, because they might be really tough on you and they might ask you to work a lot and if you’re not here every weekend, it’s not good....[my advisor] is great in giving a lot of tasks to the grad students that in [my home country] would be completely impossible even to imagine, so here I got to be part of committees that invite speakers from Universities in North America so you have the opportunity of expanding your ability of doing things that are a little bit outside science but are important on your career.</td>
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<td>Helen—female, SSH, EU</td>
<td>Hard to find a negative. I’ve had a very, very good experience at UBC. I feel incredibly supported in my research life. I can’t speak for the rest of the University, but the graduate program that I’m in nurtures you in a way that allows your independence. So the students run the program basically but the faculty, the three members that are in charge are there as often as they can be given their extensive travel schedules. But they’re incredibly supportive of all of us. Constructively critical, but it always ends in a positive, so I think we’re really challenged. They work us incredibly hard but it’s all positive...they have very high expectations of the quality of your work and to publish and to become pioneers of our discipline.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chela—female, STEM, Central/South America</td>
<td>(interviewer) I heard you say you connected to this idea of global citizenship (at UBC) but how did that enter your consciousness?...Well initially it was my supervisor, he is involved in many different initiatives and thing like that on campus so he is on the advisory board of the [global health organization]. He is now on the steering committee of the [research initiative]. He is in many, many different things. So I’m very curious about everything so I just go and sit down and listen and then those ideas start coming out and everything started.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maya—female, SSH, Asia</td>
<td>This is what I wanted to do and I’m being able to do it in the way that I wanted to. My committee, they’re just fabulous and hugely supportive. The grad program is a hugely supportive program. I don’t know about other departments here at UBC but my experience in the department itself has been really good. And the kind of intellectual environment that makes it possible to go through long years of graduate study has been so sustaining and having people to talk with and be able to share ideas and you know, those kind of things has been, has been really good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira—male, STEM, Middle East</td>
<td>I chose a guy who was a very good choice, my supervisor, because he’s nice, I get along with him, he’s got his own life, he cares about his family, he works set hours, he’s not a workaholic. So he works 8-5 or 9-5, will take off days for skiing on the weekend. He spends time with his family, he takes vacations. So that was very important to me because I didn’t want to be in a stressful kind of work relationship where I would be expected to work more than I wanted to. I wanted to be able to take vacations, to take time off. Oh and also, our work relationship was very good. He was very helpful as a supervisor. He didn’t only talk about the big picture. He was willing to study the details of whatever I was working on and help me get unstuck...we’ve published five papers I think something like that and I’ve been moving along at a reasonable pace the whole time.</td>
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Table 7.1 Sample student quotes on supervision and academic experience
These comments (and others) demonstrate a range of ways the discourses of purpose for doctoral study are engaged by students through their experiences with their supervisors and broader academic communities. Giulia gains the human capital of skills development and social capital of academic networking through opportunities supported by her supervisor, enhancing her overall career capital. Helen develops valued “independence” as a researcher and gains opportunities to publish and represent her discipline with the guidance of her advisors, engaging the academic discourse around research productivity and stewardship. Maya, who stated she wanted to pursue graduate study primarily because she “had too many questions” about particular social phenomena affecting her professional work, finds dialogue within the academic community of her department to be of deep value in pursuing her academic purpose. Li, who places high value on social connections and enjoying life in Canada as personal purposes of doctoral education, appreciates the close interpersonal relationships she develops with her supervisor and labmates. Ira finds a supervisor who reflects (or at least indulges) his heavily weighted balance towards the pursuit of personal hobbies with academic productivity. Chela, who as a doctoral student founded an educational advocacy organization for developing countries, is inspired by her supervisor to adopt a purpose of positive social contribution for her doctoral work. In another excerpt, Chela expands the attribution for her development of a more global consciousness (and imagination of how she can contribute) to the entire institution:

*I am feeling really lucky and happy and blessed of being here at UBC because I mean when I was in the States, in these two Universities that I told you, even though I was with other students, I was never being challenged or being pushed or the idea of global citizenship and how to bring that parts of your own country to share with other people. So when I came to UBC and you start listening everywhere to get involved, and the vision of UBC of promoting global citizenship. I went to the student leadership conference that they do at UBC, that is mainly undergrad students, and I feel like old, surrounded by all teenagers almost, but it was really interesting to listen to all of that and see so many engagement and I kind of felt connected or infected by that sense.* (Chela—female, STEM, Central/South America)

Students undoubtedly come to doctoral education with purposes in mind, and likely seek out advisors and experiences that confirm and support these purposes. Each of the students cited above demonstrate that dynamic, but they also show, perhaps most vividly in Chela’s story, that influential people, experiences and purposes mutually influence one another. Chela’s story is a powerful example of how institutional policy, influential advisors and specific experiences within institutions can shape student purposes, imaginations and experiences in positive ways.
Not all students in the study were participants in highly (or wholly) positive interactions with supervisors and/or academic communities. Nine students (6 STEM, 3 SSH) reported mixed, passable or ambivalent experiences with supervision and/or academic community. Again, there was a complex range of reported dynamics and characterizations in the narratives of these students. One STEM student (Esteban) had a supervisor who suffered a health crisis necessitating leave which led to a difficult period of drift for the student. For another student, it was largely matter of a weak academic connection with his supervisor and department:

*When I was at [university where I did my Master’s], that’s where I sort of found what I wanted to study and I was very natural there. Like people knew what you were referring to if you used certain concepts or if you referred to certain authors and it’s not quite the same here because they’re talking about different people and different topics and so it’s been a little bit of a challenge, at least with my supervisor and some other people in my community ...* (interviewer) *You’re in a different camp...Yeah, exactly. I would say it’s been o.k. I wouldn’t say it’s been a sort of fantastic match.* (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

The issue of academic ‘harmony’ with one’s supervisor was also a defining factor in Arvind’s learning experience. He recounts a story of beginning his program with a particular supervisor with whom he develops a close personal relationship. But as his research interests evolved, a philosophical rift between them widens. In this passage, Arvind expresses both his passionate academic purpose and the complex challenges it raises:

*When I came here, I came to study with [supervisor] and we developed a very good relationship and friendship. Just wonderful... (however) slowly our differences grew, friendship remained but intellectual differences grew and that was very challenging for me. I had my first comp meeting. That was the most challenging thing that I experience here. There was some personal things going on, so those created little difficulties for me. But this was the most challenging thing that happened...* (interviewer) *The intellectual clash?...Yeah and that I was very personally related with [supervisor] and his wife, like very well connected with both of them. So the first committee meeting it became clear that my interest in [particular philosopher] was being suppressed , so that I can get a good job in [discipline] because people might not like [philosopher from home region] in North America. So after the first meeting, I just went into a total conflict. Meeting was wonderful, my questions were approved, (but) with some changes. They wanted me to make some changes in the questions to be approved and then I really went into a big conflict. Now what the hell should I do? Because this is the research I can do. I’ll be able to do it. But my heart is not there. Heart, it’s completely missing. I can do it intellectually, but I’m not passionate about it. And then I remained in conflict.* (Arvind—male, SSH, Asia)

Arvind ultimately went on to redevelop his entire committee and pursue the research topic that he was passionate about, demonstrating the agency that some students are willing to exert to
fulfill their purposes. What could have been an irresolvable impasse was effectively navigated by Arvind largely through his own initiative in locating supportive supervisors.

Diego faced a particular challenge in adapting his expectations of “supervision”, which were largely developed through a long previous professional career in his home country, to the academic culture he encountered at UBC. It was an initial “cold shower” for him to learn of the expectations of independence on PhD students by his supervisor in particular, but ultimately he found himself adapting to and valuing the approach:

When I just came here, I thought that this is gonna be like my last master. I'm going to have to take a few courses and then I have to attend to a lot of seminars and write some proposal and this is gonna be closely supervised by my advisors. But no, no. That was the first cold shower. I went to talk with my advisor and he told me, ‘Well it's up to you. Tell me, what are you going to do?’ So this switch between this close supervision that I was working in the past, to where I have to figure out by myself, I have to come up with my research questions and I have to come up with my method, it was a big change for me. I can tell you that I suffer a lot. I said to myself, no, no, this is not possible, this is not the way, why I am here? The university is not helping me in anything. Why I am paying tuition fees if nobody is telling me anything, if nobody is giving me any advice?...(interviewer) Do you still feel that way?...Mmmm, a little bit. I think it's changing very much. When I write my proposal, present my proposal to my committee, when I really create my own ideas, when I really understood that I had to create my research questions, my objectives, I realized that this is the way that I have to do. I realized that my professor cannot tell me in a PhD what things I would like to do, because at the end of the day, in the comprehensive exam or in the final exam, that's going to be my problems and I have to be able to answer for myself. (Diego—male, STEM, Central/South America)

Diego’s supervision conflict, Carl’s academic mismatch with his department and Arvind’s philosophical rift with his original supervisor each reflect dynamics that can occur with any doctoral students, domestic or international. However, their accounts also demonstrate the additional complexity that some international doctoral students can face in a new learning environment. They each brought research interests and intellectual sensibilities that were tied to their home regions which they found difficult to translate (at least at first) to the North American environment. They each experienced (perhaps well-intentioned) pressure to adapt their academic sensibilities to better fit a model or area in favor with their supervisor, within their department or in the North American job market. For Arvind, this compromise to his self-identity as a scholar was unacceptable, while Carl appears to resign himself to it, and Diego grows and adapts.

Their stories reflect differing purpose discourses. Carl was willing to compromise where he went to graduate school to serve the purpose of accommodating his wife’s interests. Diego’s
primary purposes were to obtain a high-quality PhD and engage in new learning experiences, so he finds a way to adapt. Each are concerned with succeeding academically and ultimately developing career capital, but for Arvind, the meaning he constructs around earning a PhD is deeply embedded in an intertwined cultural, personal and academic identity and purpose:

(interviewer)...So in the end, what does it really mean to you to earn a PhD? To be Dr. [last name]?? That I could do the work that I wanted to do. I realized that you should do the research which you are really passionate about. That gives the strength to do the research and to your own being. So I think that would be the most valuable thing that I could do. That intellectual development is not disassociated from myself. It is very much part of it. If I decided to do the research (project) that I was thinking of doing earlier, that’s not such a dovetail kind of thing. But I feel very together when I’m doing this work. There’s no gap, so I think that’s excellent. If you don’t do that, then you are not doing justice to academics. With intellectual and for your own self. If you continue to do work out of some fear or some pressure, then that’s not good. You should change. If you really want it and I see people who just continue to do work here as well, they don’t question or challenge their supervisors and that’s not good. I think I, it might have been a disaster as well, but I think I made a wonderful choice. (Arvind—male, SSH, Asia)

It is possible that in some disciplines, and perhaps in more philosophical disciplines in particular, the globalization of research and ontological orientations has not been as homogenizing as in, for example, engineering or other science-based disciplines. This may leave more room for the sort of philosophical rifts (and diversity) that Arvind experiences, and also the potential for students from various cultures to experience pressure to abandon their intellectual viewpoints, as Arvind initially did. This has been a criticism raised by critical race theorists and Aboriginal scholars (e.g. Thomas, 2009; Cram, 2009) but perhaps not applied as broadly as it could be to the experiences of a wider range of “international” scholars and doctoral students in particular. In a different context, the “rift” in supervision style experienced by Diego, perhaps reflects a different sort of “culture clash” more evident in his discipline—that between industry and academia.

While Diego (and his supervisor) ultimately embraces a more academic sensibility to his learning experience, rather than a more managerial approach, some students (mainly from STEM disciplines) did speak about issues that touch on (or directly confront) the influence of neoliberal, market-based values such as commodification, mass production and competition in research. Tina and Quon, each STEM students from Asia, provided interesting insights into the learning contexts and research production systems at their previous universities in Asia and how their experience at UBC has differed (and not). Each of them characterized the environment in their home countries as somewhat stifling of student initiative, and focussed on generating sheer
quantity of publications at the expense of creativity. They both came from universities and systems which are striving to advance in the increasingly globalized field of research universities, where publications are perhaps the most influential currency. Quon explains:

(interviewer) So how would you describe your experience at UBC so far?...the first word I want to describe is different...(interviewer) Different than [your previous university]?...Yeah, and the second word maybe I want to use to describe it is initiative. OK so I explain it to you. Different here, probably is because of culture difference. You can, student here can always have a lot of different kind of thinking. They are more initiative, maybe that’s related to the second word. I think here we are really dealing with the frontier of this track of research. But previously when I was in [home university], we are doing things that maybe not so close to the frontier. They just some kind of repeating, you just do some very, maybe very small revision. I mean the initiative, they have lots of original (ideas) here. You deal with a lot of things you have never encountered ...(interviewer) I think I understand, so here students are expected to have more initiative and more their own ideas...Yes, yes. (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

He goes on to describe the great value he has placed in being able to be “bold” in his thinking as a doctoral student at UBC, where:

You dare to think about something, you dare to encounter with something that is brand new and totally new to you, but you can. You can think about how you saw it, there’s no, no kind of to be scared. (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

Quon felt that UBC provided him with a learning environment that maintained the academic discourse of curiosity and discovery, a refreshing change from the mass production mindset of his home university. Tina came to UBC from a similar research environment and has an even more direct critique (and insightful explanation) of the research production mandate she found there:

In scientific research, many stuff need time, for example, 5 years, 3 years. You couldn’t finish by months, but I think in [home country] now a lot of students and also the teachers, they want to have the stuff very quickly so they couldn’t just calm down. Actually attitude is very important and how you treat your work, how you treat this research stuff. You should have a right attitude... (interviewer) Let me make sure I understand. So are you saying that here in Canada you’ve learned more about doing research in a certain kind of way?...With the right attitude. First you should calm down, slow down your mind. More careful, think about it. Instead of just go, go, go...(interviewer) In [your home country] why do you think people are moving so quickly?...I don’t know, it’s the style, too many people, too many competition. You couldn’t imagine. There are so lot of people just to compete for one job...but if you are sick or something, boss pushing you to do this stuff dumb, that’s just don’t work in science, right? They have some rules for this stuff, right? Because if you push, you must do this stuff, you must have a paper published in three months, what a student is going to do is duplicate. Just waste of the student’s time and a waste of money of the school and finally the student couldn’t
learn, not say at all, but couldn’t learn the most important part of what you should teach. (Tina—female, STEM, Asia)

Tina’s trenchant criticism of how the productivity mandate may compromise student learning demonstrates the potential educational losses of the global “publication arms race”. Both she and Quon seem to indicate that the drive for research productivity as a means for institutions to develop reputational capital and for individuals to pursue personal career/academic capital in a globally competitive academic research field is particularly blatant in their home universities. However, these dynamics are certainly evident throughout the global field of higher education, including at UBC. Although Tina felt she was learning a different “attitude” towards conducting research at UBC, she also reported having her vacation time being so limited by her UBC supervisor (for the sake of maximizing productivity) that it was very difficult for her to travel home. She also was restricted by her supervisor (whom she refers to as her “boss”) from presenting at conferences, an important professional development activity, because, as she puts it, “my boss wants to keep my stuff confidential” due to competition in her field.

A couple of other students also reported experiences at UBC, filtered through their supervisors, that reflected a form of commodification of their research labor at the expense of their learning and/or personal agency. Jaro found himself at the center of an unspoken (at least to him) agreement between his UBC supervisor and his supervisor at the research institute in his home country. This relationship was cited in the previous chapter as an example of global research networks which facilitates the mobility of students, and this was certainly true and valued for Jaro, but there is also a dimension of this relationship that compromises his personal agency and leaves him uncomfortably beholden to his supervisor and uncertain of his rights. This important and complex story has been abridged to provide the core of Jaro’s dilemma:

I was a research assistant there at [home country university research centre]. And I didn’t quit the job. I took a leave and I, if I want, I can return and work there again. I don’t want to return there, at least not now, because the research is not very well developed and I disagree very much with some things going on there which are related to the Communist era. I wanted to quit the job. I wanted to just say thank you, good-bye, I’m not coming back. Surprisingly I was not allowed to do that. By my supervisor [at UBC]...It’s hard to understand. The guy, the great guy, friend, colleague of mine who invited [my supervisor] to [my home university], he eventually became a member of my supervisory committee. And apparently [my UBC supervisor] and that guy are very close friends which I didn’t really realize. I didn’t realize the consequences that there could be for me if I decide to say to that colleague, well, it was great working with you, I hope you will collaborate but I’m not going back. I want to go somewhere else. And that was a disaster.
I was told [by my UBC supervisor] that that is the stupidest thing I can do and if I do it, I will lose all his respect whatsoever, and what can you say to that? Does it affect your defence? Does it affect recommendation letters you get? Because they are friends and maybe [my UBC supervisor] is afraid that if the connection is broken between me and [the home supervisor], the connection will be kind of broken between [them]. But it’s so hard. You ask yourself, why is not possible? What’s going on? How will it affect your studies?...So I decided not to quit and I be a nice boy because probably very strong bond between them. It’s a great contradiction. [My UBC supervisor] tells me, you should not go to [an EU country for doctoral studies], go to North America, it’s much better. But then he forces me to go back to [my home country] to that University where I don’t want to go back for many reasons. I do very much want to stay in touch with my colleague and who is my supervisor, committee member, because he’s great, he is the one who helped me get here and he is the one who developed the ideas with me during my PhD program here. I know that quitting that job would not at all affect that, but they feel that they will lose me as, as a potential, I don’t know, paper producer or, I don’t know? (Jaro—male, STEM, EU)

In their 2002 study, Slaughter, Campbell, Holleman & Morgan found that students working in industry-supported research environments were sometimes seen as “tokens of exchange” through which companies could obtain “cheap labor” and academic supervisors could gain research funding. Jaro’s story suggests that students can also function as tokens of exchange within the networks of a globalized research field, where research supervisors in more developed systems gain access to excellent prospective doctoral students, while supervisors in partnering institutions which are less developed gain access to more co-authored publications and reputational capital by association. The student creates the bridge between the two worlds. As Jaro himself indicates, there is value for him as well in this dynamic, but in his case, he feels it is at the expense of his personal agency and under threat of negative academic repercussions. An added twist to this story is Jaro’s experience of his UBC supervisor reneging on his funding promise, pulling back some funding after Jaro’s arrival at UBC, another indication of the control that some supervisors may have when students are dependent upon them.

I said we had a deal about this and I don’t want to complain, but just, it was an agreement between us. And he returned to the office and say oh [Jaro], now you really, really rich, you’ll be getting $22,000.00 and I had no word to say to that. It was $3,000.00 less than we agreed. I was told I was getting to be really rich. I didn’t understand this, but how can you complain?

Jaro feels like he can’t protest, but it was clear in the interview that he was bitterly disappointed. This was not only because of the difficulty of his specific situation, but because it betrayed his sense of what “Canada” should be.
And the thing changed the perception of Canada because [my supervisor] is a part of Canada and he’s one of the few people I’m in touch with every day. It just felt weird. I was deceived...(interviewer) And like that is something that shouldn’t happen in Canada?...Yes, exactly. Because in the Eastern Block, after being transformed from the East to somewhere between over to the West, there still are a lot of corruption. And I hate it. And I didn’t expect that from Canada. I don’t see anything like that. So from my point of view [my supervisor] is still great, but this was something, this was something that should not happen in Canada, for me. Because I don’t know what’s going on behind the scenes. Which is something that I didn’t expect from UBC and Canada in general.

Jaro captures the dilemmas and trade-offs that may be inherent in a globalizing world, and in the higher education/research field. He values greatly the personal gains of being able to access resources across borders and to participate in global academic research partnerships, yet feels stung when he realizes that his imagination of a country “elsewhere and otherwise” doesn’t live up to his ideals. As academic research is globalized, the academic market for talent, perhaps to be purchased at the lowest possible price (and the related potential for corruption), also has global reach.

Two other students reported similar dynamics in their STEM disciplines, where the production of data trumps student learning. Hoda speaks about her UBC supervisor:

*I mean you are not his concern. He just wants some papers, so it is from you or from someone else. Just papers for getting funding. But this is not science. Some professors see themselves in the students, so they try to help the students, they try to make them progress. They care about that and want to invest in your students because you believe that it, like science depend more on students, like the mind more than the machines. But for him, he just want the money to get machines and to get funding.* (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

Rico doesn’t encounter this dilemma with his own supervisor, but sees it among others. However, he doesn’t object to (and in fact supports) the notion that universities should adopt more corporate sensibilities of accountability and productivity. He embraces the competitive nature of research science and the capital one can earn from it. Still, he asserts that student learning must be at the forefront of institutional concern:

*I had recently a conversation with a professor in our faculty and he told me ‘listen, to me graduate students come in a lab to produce data’. I was really astonished. First of all, that’s the role of a machine, not a person, I mean when I put my sample in the instrument, in the evening and I leave what I’m expecting in the morning is to get results out of the samples. That’s a machine, not a person. There must be the ability to become independent in your knowledge, in your judgment, in your practical experience, in deciding the route to lead here from where you are to where you are going. So graduate school is that, first of all, not generating data...*
I don’t see why companies and private industries are business and profit oriented in terms of money or general productivity and why the University shouldn’t be as well. I mean, pretty much this is a non-profit organization by definition, so it’s not going to make money but you want to make your name well known abroad and you want to be publishing on the best journal of the field before other groups of other Universities. So there is anyway competition, right, so it’s again a matter of productivity. It would be measured in graduate students that takes a degree per year or number of publications or whatever. Millions of dollars of grants per year in the faculty, you can take it from different angles, but what you’re here for is to learn and produce, right. I also honesty recognize that it’s a time where there is not many money granted for scientific research even here in North America at least compared to past years so yeah, I accept a little bit of a comprise from that point of view. (Rico—male, STEM, EU)

Overall, commodification of student labor was not a pervasive theme reported in this study, but these students provide important examples of an undercurrent in an increasingly neoliberal, competitive, and market-oriented “academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime” (Slaughter & Rhoads, 2004). There were three other STEM students (Diego, Reza & Ravi) who were engaged in research with corporate sponsorship, and found it to be in alignment with Mendoza’s finding that these experiences provide “valuable opportunities to interact with the industrial world, to be involved in projects that might have a real impact on society, and to find jobs upon graduation.” (2007, p. 89). Some of these cases will be explored in the following chapter on imagined lives and careers.

7.3.2. Academic mobility, global engagement. Students noted several other experiences and resources that enhanced their learning experiences and advanced their educational purposes. These were often through but sometimes separate from their affiliation with their supervisor, academic department or within support units on campus. Particularly noteworthy in the context of this study were the extensive opportunities some students had to engage with global research networks. Developing international networks was a noted component of the academic discourse of purpose, as well as a source of career capital. A majority of study participants (19/31) reported that they were supported to attend international conferences or training workshops, and/or were collaborating on research with partners outside of Canada. It was somewhat surprising to see that the percentage of SSH students reporting this activity (70%) was higher than STEM (57%) although not all students were directly questioned about international engagement; some may have been engaged without reporting it. Some examples demonstrate the extent of some of these experiences and the value they have for students:
I met many people here which are all over the world and these connections make it easier for me to go anywhere. So now contacting anyone in New Zealand, it’s just so easy. I’m doing something that other people somewhere else do and, well [when I was in my home country] who could I contact then? Well I did speak English a bit, maybe worse than now, but I did. But I didn’t have the knowledge to establish these good connections and to really exchange. So it opened my eyes and that’s why the world, in my perception, became smaller. Because it’s, everything is easily accessible for me now. (Jaro—male, STEM, EU)

I really think this is a very, very good environment. A lot of fundings for me for training, for travel. I can never imagine that I can go to that many places, to do like conferences in different countries. I’ve been to Singapore, Chile, Toronto, UK, and then, what else? Sweden... (interviewer) Wow! That’s quite a lot of places! How has all this been paid for?... Usually I would just apply for a travel award and I got them, either from the institute that I’m working in (or) the travel award from the conference itself. (Simon—male, STEM, Asia)

I went to [a research facility] in Chicago for a month for a new project that’s starting there. The summer institute was on [topic] and so I applied and got supported to go there. My housing costs and travel costs were all covered by UBC and the program and I met with 10 students from 10 different universities all across the U.S. and we’ve maintained relationships since then and we’re going to be seeing each other in May for a conference. That was really good, it just created sort of a broader networking ability and that was awesome and I really enjoyed it. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

My supervisor once paid for my travel from her SSHRC, and then the second year I travelled to Malaysia for an international conference and the organizers paid for my expenses. The third year I went to Japan and they paid the expenses. I went to Indonesia last June in the summer and [UBC research centre] paid for my expense because I also collected data for research with [the centre] that I am participating in. It seems that everything has been provided for me. (Sheddy—male, SSH, Asia)

Rico exerts considerable personal agency (and resources) to ensure he can access the social and academic capital of international academic engagement and networks, even though his supervisor is a more passive participant in the global field:

Well my supervisor is a nice person, a bit of an old school person. He doesn’t do many collaborations on a regular basis with other labs, he doesn’t attend many conferences, he doesn’t have many connection outside. But I very much believe in team working and I think that nobody will never ever have all of the knowledge and all of the people in one lab to be independent. And so I insisted to attend conferences on a regular basis to present my data. I’m there to get people to know who I am and what I’m doing and to get in touch with people and know in person. We were short in money because of limited grants last springtime but it was a very, very interesting international conference in Japan. So I got a travel award which covered half of the expenses so I almost spent one whole stipend of mine to go to the conference...I said it’s too important for me. Especially when you’re
starting the career and you’re young and nobody knows about you and there are hundreds of other PhD students at least North America and Europe, of course, in the same field, so you want to try to step up a little bit from the background noise. (Rico—male, STEM, EU)

Not all students were supported or had the personal wherewithal to engage in the global research field in their discipline, but the scope of engagement demonstrated in this study is further evidence that collaborating and networking across borders and educational systems is becoming a de rigueur mode in academic research and doctoral education, at least at a globally connected university like UBC. Such interactions “may be beneficial for both the visiting researchers and their hosts as well as for the sending and receiving institutions and countries more generally” (Jöns, 2011, p. 187), and providing students with opportunities to engage in international learning experiences is specifically cited in the UBC International Strategic Plan.30 Students clearly benefit from such mobility, while the institution’s purposes of building global influence is also served through this activity.

Literature on “academic mobility” has mainly focussed on limited-term scholarly sojourns of faculty or other established intellectuals, but there is little identifiable research that quantifies or characterizes this activity as part of doctoral student experiences. Perhaps doctoral student academic mobility is viewed as a simple extension of the global movement of faculty and reach of academic professional associations, and a new dimension of the “socialization” of doctoral students into increasingly globalized academic disciplines. While it is surely true that these conditions enable the possibility of greater student global academic mobility, some of the examples cited also demonstrate that the agency that some students exerted to pursue doctoral education abroad continues to extend into their educational experience as doctoral student as they seek experiences to build capital for the next stages of their careers and lives.

7.3.3. Other purposes, other learnings. In addition to (and often intertwined with) learning and developing as researchers and scholars in global context, several students cited the value they placed on other learning opportunities which enabled them to pursue purposes of developing capital, making social contributions and experiencing personal growth. For some students, gaining skills and experience in teaching, project management, communications and professional

networking, or developing self-understanding, confidence, independence and maturity seemed to be of equal or greater value than the “academic” learning and capital they gained.

As mentioned previously, teaching their discipline to new learners was a particularly evident presence in the academic discourse of purpose for SSH students, although several students across both disciplinary groups expressed that they valued their teaching experiences. For Shane, teaching undergraduates is a good way to build his career capital, but as a man who strongly links his purposes for pursuing doctoral education to proving that the child of a poor family can achieve, an opportunity to teach non-university students in Vancouver’s lowest SES neighborhood through a UBC outreach program is deeply meaningful to him. The following two quotes show how he has utilized teaching opportunities to realize multiple purposes:

I really like teaching and I don’t like research, I much prefer teaching any day than research, right. And the thing is that because I had the TA for four years, I always had my own seminar and it actually gave me great experience in terms of teaching. I suppose that was the main thing, really, that kind of kept me in here. I knew that I was getting valuable experience, getting confidence as a teacher, learning how to put courses together, deal with students and I mean, I like working with people.

...and so I’ve volunteer taught, I think about four years in that particular [community outreach] course and I love it and one of the reasons why is I definitely kind of feel at home in that sort of milieu. I suppose I see myself as coming from the same background as them. I want to be able to give back but not to students who are overwhelmingly wealthy. I mean I love my (UBC) students, and I’m very dedicated to them but just looking at purely in terms of socio-economic status, in my mind, it makes a difference. I suppose the reason why it makes a difference doing the [outreach course] is that I know my class, they’ve all been through the shit loads of times and they know what it’s like to have life hard and a lot of them a lot harder than I had it. But I think they totally appreciate it and in my opinion, they’re far more independent minded than a lot of the students I meet in UBC. A load of them, they think for themselves and they very quickly let you know if what you’re saying sounds like rubbish to them and for me, its wow, they actually have their own thoughts to a certain extent. They’re more independent minded like and that’s pretty cool as a teacher because then they’re not just going to sort of be docile and they’re worried about their grades and all that kind of stuff. (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Shane’s view of education might be described as emancipatory, a channel through which individuals can experience release from the binds of pre-ordained social expectancies and ways of thinking. This seems to have been his own personal experience, and as a doctoral student, he has come to adopt an identity as a teacher who can facilitate this process for others. His evolution as a teacher is deeply embedded in his experience as a doctoral student, and not coincidentally is his primary
source of income. To greater or lesser degrees, teaching as a meaningful learning and growth experience was reflected in every SSH student narrative, and its prominent role in their imagined future careers will be explored in the next chapter.

In Tina’s case, she arrived at UBC with a full scholarship and the primary purpose of quickly achieving a PhD, generating publications and returning to a medical residency in her home country as part of an MD/PhD trajectory. Still, she states that one of the most valuable experiences she’s had as a doctoral student is developing a teaching philosophy. This was not through actually teaching, but through learning from being taught by instructors using a different pedagogy than she was accustomed to:

*I found that the teaching masters [in my department] is not very good, the teacher I don’t like very much. I think it’s basically how they teaching us is a little bit like (in) [my home country]. They basically just like stuff the duck (both laughing). But [in another department] I like very much. Just to have one class just have no more than 10 students, and every class just discussion. Before every class, the teacher assigns to us a new paper published in Nature or Science, and you must write something about it so tomorrow you talk with all the students and the teacher will ask you some questions and if you have something wrong he will correct you. And the exam I like it very much too. It’s like a presentation. It’s like a talk between the two professor and you. And you have a blackboard behind you, you can draw something to help understand each other or help communicating...(interviewer) So you really prefer those classes where there was more interaction...Yeah, I’m not high school, right? I think the best approach is to inspire students to create or to think themselves. So when I come back to [my home country] I want to introduce and how do you say, spread this teaching method. (Tina—female, STEM, Asia)

Tina’s experience as a learner challenges her academic habitus, and perhaps her understanding of her purpose in pursuing the PhD. Jerry also discovered a love for teaching while in his PhD program, calling it the “best thing I have done”. He expresses a similar shift in his perspective on the value of doctoral education, engendered through learning experiences outside his research environment:

*The opportunity to teach, the opportunity to go to conferences, I think all of that, for me, the further I’ve gone on in graduate school, I realize that, when you first start off, you think that it’s all about your research and that’s part of it, but I think it’s more, it’s like professional development. So I think all of those other activities is what’s really important and is what you’ll really carry away from it. I’m actually astonished at all the opportunities which are available through the school for all these workshops and everything. Everything from time management to presentation workshops, conflict management workshops, team-building workshops, all kinds of stuff. It’s really amazing. (Jerry—male, STEM, USA)
The “alternative” learning experiences described by Jerry are increasingly integrated into doctoral education (and the academic discourse of purpose), in recognition of the various forms of human capital that are valued by students and sought by future employers of PhD holders. Learning these types of more “professional” skills, often through attending and organizing conferences, was cited as important dimensions of doctoral study by several other students as well.

What remains largely hidden still are the opportunities doctoral education (perhaps especially abroad) presents for meaningful personal growth and learning, which were explicitly stated purposes for taking up doctoral education for many students in this study. The significant extent to which students develop deeper intercultural understanding and awareness of one’s own national and cultural affiliations is part of this purpose and was discussed earlier. Students also expressed their engagement in doctoral study abroad as a means of becoming independent and agentic in charting their own paths, for taking responsibility for one’s self and “growing up” (Tina, Giulia, Christopher all used this term), of gaining confidence in their intellectual abilities and their ability to “compete with the best” (Esteban, Rico) as well as their competence in adapting to new situations.

While many students expressed these purposes throughout their narratives, it is perhaps Hoda who best personifies the personal striving and challenges encountered and navigated to achieve her goals. She wants to be everything she can be and is, a Muslim woman, a scientist, a mother, and a learner in transnational space, and is struggling to figure out how she can integrate these parts of her whole self. When asked about the value and meaning of her doctoral education, she expressed this challenge and how she’s risen to meet it, as a scholar and a person:

(interviewer) Overall, what does it mean to you to earn a PhD?...That I am good enough in research. That I have tried something. I mean I could have easy, by that time, have finished my PhD in my home country. Like at least two or three years ago. But just preparing to come to here and spend that much time here and doing research at higher level than what I was trained to do, it mean that I have progressed. It means that I have accomplished a goal that I aimed for. I said I want to do it and I did it and it is important for me...(also) to take responsibility and to be ready to suffer a little bit. Like to accept the frustration and to accept that my life back home was so, I wouldn’t say easy, there was suffering, but there was nothing I can do to change it. But here, because I make more choices every day, every day there is something that you can do, or you can change, and you can go from this supervisor to this supervisor or you can change the house from here to there. You cannot always make the best choice but you have to make them and then you have to say ‘o.k., I learned from that’. So I think that I became more, I don’t know if it’s mature, but I became more willing to make choices and to take responsibility for my choices. (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)
These sorts of learning experiences—personal transformation and growth, proving one’s own mettle on a global stage, “professional” skill development including teaching—clearly loom large in many students’ assessments of the value and meaning of their doctoral education, yet are largely absent from both research literature and from university and policymaker discourses of purpose which presume that students find the greatest value from their doctoral study in their research training. To the extent that universities grasp and respond with support to the fact that students hold these often hidden, yet perhaps complimentary purposes for their doctoral education, they may be more likely to achieve institutional goals of research productivity as well.

This is not to say that academic development is not also of crucial importance to students; for those going on as researchers in particular, their human capital and much of their career capital is located in the disciplinary and cross-disciplinary knowledge, and research skills and habits of mind they develop during their doctoral education. Does UBC make good on its institutional posture of “providing an exceptional learning environment”? To a significant extent, the student participants in this study affirm that it does, with several important exceptions. The majority of students felt they had excellent opportunities to develop this capital at UBC, in large part due to outstanding mentorship by supervisors and engagement with academic communities, but this is not a particularly striking finding of the study except perhaps in its relative uniformity. Even most students who had difficult experiences with their supervisors had found ways to be academically successful and build their knowledge and skills base. It is not overly surprising, perhaps because it is expected, and in full alignment with core and long-standing discourses (of both students and Universities themselves) about what doctoral education is for. What may be new findings of this study are the ways students are experiencing and creating trends such as global learning and collaboration that are becoming more normative and integrated into the fabric of doctoral education; the ways market-based logics are influencing some student experiences, both positively in the form of productive academic-industry partnerships and negatively in the form of the commodification and trade in graduate student research labor and drive to mass-produce research publications at student expense; and the ways students pursue and make meaning of other types of learning experiences that are personally and professionally influential.

7.4. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the international doctoral student experience of living and learning within and across borders of geography, cultural and academic communities and personal
and professional identities. The student narratives tell us that international doctoral students are whole, growing, learning individuals in multiple dimensions of their lives, and they negotiate the opportunities and challenges provided through doctoral studies abroad from both unique and shared positionings. Transnational space is their shared context in which they question, affirm and reshape their cultural identities, sense of belonging and social relationships, and reach “back” home to the familiar and “out” to the broader world. UBC is their shared place within which they learn, exert agency, and accumulate many forms of capital as scholars, teachers and globally mobile individuals. These findings support and extend Gargano’s (2009) argument that international students have for too long been seen as a monolithic, undifferentiated population at universities, with their unique trajectories obscured in statistics or simple regional analyses. This exploration of their “student experience” narratives surfaced common themes across most students (such as largely positive sentiments about their experience and high level of global engagement) and also some among the disciplinary groupings, such as research labor commodification among some STEM students and emphasis on teaching experiences among SSH students.

However the most significant overall findings could be the multiplicity of paths and experiences students had within these generalities and the growth and learning that takes place for these students outside of their research training. The presumptions that “international students” can be seen as a cohesive population or that “academic” learning is at the forefront of all doctoral students’ valuations of their PhD education could be added to the list of “outdated assumptions” about doctoral education that Nerad (2009) presents, which includes for example, the assumption that all doctoral students want to become professors. That particular assumption will certainly be debunked in the next chapter, in which we return to the realm of students’ imaginations—about what lies ahead in their lives and careers as holders of the PhD degree—as they begin to emerge into a new phase of transition beyond their transitory period of doctoral education.
CHAPTER 8
Imagined careers, imagined lives

8.1. Introduction to chapter

As completion of the long process of earning a PhD comes into sight, students are at another precipice of change; they are moving between student life and a first or next step into a career, between accumulating career capital and attempting to “spend” it in finding a career position, and between staying in Vancouver, returning home, or moving on to a new location. At the time of their interviews, the doctoral candidates were at varying distances from the finish line of graduating with their PhDs. Some anticipated another couple of years of study, while others were awaiting an imminent final defense of their dissertation. When asked about their imagined careers and imagined futures, some students had clearer plans for their next steps than others, but all were in some phase of deliberation about questions like, what comes next? What do I want to do and achieve? Where do I want to live? What are the possibilities and challenges I’ll face? What would make a good life? This chapter will delve into students’ considerations of these questions, the answers to which tell us a great deal more about how students construct the purpose of doctoral education and the influences of globalizing forces on their imagined future trajectories. As reported earlier, while some students undertook doctoral study abroad in part just for the actual experiences inherent in doing so (such as encountering new cultures, enjoying life in Vancouver, digging deeper into a research area of personal interest), almost all students also referenced the idea that pursuing a doctoral degree was a mechanism or investment to facilitate a desired future.

Students were concerned with the types of careers they could build as PhD holders and also understood their careers to be part of larger imagined lives. Careers are ways to “make a living” financially, as well as an anchor for one’s identity (Fisher, 1990) and a means to advance positive social change or make contributions to a profession or discipline. Also, in a globalizing context, careers and lives have become imaginable in and across multiple locations, especially for the highly skilled such as doctorate holders. Yet there are also many constraining factors—social, political, economic, personal—on the future trajectories that even the highly educated can imagine and pursue. Like in the other stages of the student pathways, there was again significant variability in student orientations to and imaginations of the future, which stemmed from both individual sociocultural and personal positionings, as well as from how their particular disciplines are
positioned in global career markets. Linked to the notions of purpose of doctoral education and imagined careers are the responsibilities soon-to-be PhDs ascribe to holding this degree. Given policy and institutional discourses about the purposes of doctoral study and public investment in this highest level of education, it was of interest to learn student views on whether PhD holders have any particular responsibilities to the social institutions which have supported their study.

This chapter presents findings related to the research questions how do international doctoral students construct options and navigate choices regarding their imagined careers, futures and responsibilities as PhD holders and how do their choices and imagined futures reflect the influence of processes of globalization? Findings are presented in three sections; the first is imagined careers which covers the types of careers students imagine and are planning for, the career development choices and next steps they are taking, and the barriers and constraints they face in pursuing careers. The second section explores students’ reflections on their desired career achievements and the responsibilities of PhD holders that they assume. The third section delves into students’ imagined lives and locations; while noting that careers are not separate from “lives”, the focus in this section is on issues of future mobility/stability, place and home, as well as careers in context of desired work-life balance and family obligations and desires.

Some of these topics have been addressed in previous research literature, especially career trajectories for PhD holders and choices regarding post-degree migration. However, most such research has relied on survey or demographic data; there is little if any documentation of student perspectives on how they make these decisions, the factors they consider, and the meanings they make of their options and choices. This chapter is not a comprehensive view on all elements of post-degree plans, but focuses on student voices with special attention paid to how and why futures are imagined and choices are made in the context of a globalizing world. Like in the previous chapters on stages of the student pathway, themes related to discourses of purpose, globalizing and transnational social fields (such as research, work and policy), personal agency and its bounds, mobility in transnational space, and neoliberalism and market imaginaries appear in student narratives about their planned and imagined futures.

8.2. Imagined and planned careers

Developing career capital and enabling access to a desired career were fundamental reasons the majority of students gave in their narratives of why they chose to pursue doctoral study, and to do so at UBC. In their recollections of these earlier choices, some students appeared
to have clear career paths in mind from the beginning while others had more vague ideas or viewed doctoral study as simply a good “next step” to enable suitable career options later on. In her chapter on “confronting common assumptions” about doctoral study, Maresi Nerad (2009) suggests that despite growing evidence to the contrary, there remain “a number of common erroneous assumptions that are still in the minds of faculty and higher education policymakers and are perpetuated by the dominant media” regarding the career aspirations and paths of doctoral students (p. 80). She lists five such assumptions: “all students who study for a PhD want to become professors”, “professorial positions are highly desirable and the best doctoral recipients become professors”, “the career paths of these people are linear and smooth traditional academic careers, moving from PhD completion to assistant professor, with perhaps two years of postdoctoral fellowship in between, then to associate professor and on to full professor”; “everybody who successfully completes a PhD will most likely choose the very best academic job offer, unconstrained by relationship and family concerns” and “professors enjoy the highest job satisfaction compared to any other employment group” (Nerad, 2009, pp. 80-81). Student narratives in this study support Nerad’s contention that these assumptions do not apply to all PhD holders, and frequently were not adopted by study participants when considering their own options.

The career paths that study participants were imagining and/or planning for can be characterized in a few clusters: a) academic—research focus, b) academic—teaching focus, c) industry; d) other public sectors, and e) “hybrid” careers. Most students had a preferred option (although many were not necessarily convinced that that option would be available to them) while a few were still open to a wide range of options. Disciplinary differences in some preferred career paths and the perceived options available were evident. Here is a summary of the options students imagined:
### Table 8.1. Preferred career options of study participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career option</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>discipline/region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic-research focus</td>
<td>Hoda</td>
<td>Female, STEM, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Female, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female, STEM, Asia</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Esteban</strong></td>
<td>Male, STEM, Central/South America</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stefan, Rico</td>
<td>Male, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ravi, Simon, Jun, Quon</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Female, SSH, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Helena</strong></td>
<td>Female, SSH, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Female, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arvind</td>
<td>Male, SSH, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic—teaching focus</td>
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<td>Female, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Jason, Ross</strong></td>
<td>Male, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carl, Shane</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shedly</td>
<td>Male, SSH, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Male, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>industry</td>
<td>Li</td>
<td>Female, STEM, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giulia</td>
<td>Female, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Female, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Farjad</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Esteban</strong></td>
<td>Male, STEM, Central/South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Male, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other sectors</td>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Female, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mallory</td>
<td>Female, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Female, SSH, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Jason</strong></td>
<td>Male, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“hybrid”</td>
<td>Chela</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diego</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reza</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>open, undecided</td>
<td><strong>Jackie</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ira</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jaro</td>
<td>Male, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Christopher</strong></td>
<td>Male, STEM, USA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8.2.1. Academic career paths. Just more than two-thirds of the study participants (21/31) preferred to pursue a career in academia. While students recognized that most academic positions would entail both teaching and research, they tended to prioritize one or the other. Fourteen of

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31 When a name appears in two categories, the student was seriously considering both and their name is in bold font in their preferred option or dominant standpoint.
these twenty-one students were looking to enter a research-focused academic career and this group was fairly balanced with regard to disciplinary grouping (40% of the SSH students and 48% of the STEM students desired academic research careers). Most of these students envisioned the “traditional” academic career in the professoriate of a research-intensive university where they may do some teaching, but the focus would be on pursuing a research agenda. A couple of the STEM students said they’d prefer to work exclusively in a “research centre” affiliated with a University where they would not be required to teach.

Maya and Simon each had settled on pursuing an academic career with a strong research focus, but for somewhat different reasons. Maya is driven by her deep curiosity and desire to translate ideas into “conversations” that can happen in both research and teaching:

I realized that I love research. In the process of doing this PhD, I realized that I love being in that sort of, ‘I can’t figure this out, I need to figure this out’, kind of place. It’s very unsettling, but I think once you like it, it’s for life and right now I can only think about all the other ideas of research that I have that my committee keeps telling me, no, no, no, you can’t include this in the dissertation. Keep it for your next project, so I’m really looking forward to being able to do all that. I think in terms of teaching, as well, and based on so many different kinds of experiences, I think conversations are really important. Especially the kind of stuff that goes on in Universities, conversations across difference...so it’s all these thoughts in my head, but to be able to actually put them out and see, you know, make them more a reality. (Maya—female, SSH, Asia)

Simon had also professed his love for research earlier in his interview, when describing why he chose to pursue a PhD. However, when explaining his choice of an academic research career path over other options, his reasoning is more pragmatic and about fulfilling his own personal interests:

I’ve come to a decision that I’ll go to academic path... (interviewer) Why?... Most secure. Once you get the position it’ll be more secure than in the industrial path. In the industrial path, that would be very competitive in terms of the research output. If you don’t have enough output they will kick you out. And I don’t want to have that kind of insecurity... (interviewer) Do you think very much about your kind of potential for salary expectations in your career?...Never really thought about this. Of course if I can get good salary it would be great. But I know that academic path wasn’t really high in terms of the salary compared to business, but I like the security in the academic path. I mean after all those education and the things that I’ve suffered I have to have some security (laugh). I’m not a very ambitious person. The only goal that I really want to achieve is to get tenure to be a full professor optimally. Doesn’t necessary to be a very famous scientist as long as I can do the thing that I’m interested in, that I like to do. I just like doing research. I like solving problems. (Simon—male, STEM, Asia).
These two examples reveal the contrasts inherent in student discourses of purpose for doctoral study and views of academia in general, even when the overall career path chosen is the same. The academic discourse of purpose is at the core of Maya’s narrative in which earning the PhD is fundamentally about engaging the realm of ideas, knowledge and intellectual community, while for Simon, the basic concern shown throughout his interview is about accumulating enough academic career capital to enable a career option that will provide him with a desired sense of security and personal autonomy to pursue his interests. However, they are strikingly similar in their deep-seated desire to “figure things out” and “solve problems” and feel that an academic research career is the best context in which they can pursue these aspirations. Most students aspiring to an academic research career reflected similar core reasons—they enjoy the process of learning and discovery, they want the autonomy to be able to pursue their own academic interests and value participating in scholarly communities of like-minded people.

The other seven students who were aiming for an academic career were hoping to find positions which focused on teaching first, with a secondary or no research component. Six of these students were in SSH disciplines; this is perhaps an unsurprising extension of phenomena commented on earlier, such as the lesser emphasis placed on research funding for SSH students compared to STEM, the value placed on teaching labor and predominance of teaching-based funding schemes among SSH students, and the distance of most SSH research from industry-related careers. One student’s desire for an academic teaching career (Sheddy) reflected his commitment to returning to his previous institution in his home (developing) country, where the academic culture and limited resources are focused on teaching. While Sheddy’s career trajectory was singular among the students in this study, it reflects the findings of Robinson-Pant (2009), who reported that while PhD education is almost invariably focused on research, students from developing countries often return to institutions which lie outside the dominant global research system and are expected to refocus on teaching careers.

For five of these seven students (all SSH) their career ideal lies in the “small liberal arts college” in North America, a somewhat idealized location where teaching reigns supreme in the institutional mandate. It is not surprising that the students who are most interested in teaching want to pursue a career at an institution that reflects their own values, but it was striking that half of the SSH students overall envisioned this as their most desired career path and used the phrase “small” to characterize the kind of institution that they hoped to develop a career in. There seemed to be a desire among these students to opt out of the dominant research productivity/capital
maximization discourse and global academic competition that they see playing out among those around them at UBC.

I’ve become more disenchanted with the job market over the last couple of years, but I really am still compelled to teach and I still would really, really like to do that. But I know that teaching is not as valued as research in some upper level, research driven institutions and so it’ll be a combination of what’s available first of all in the jobs and then also whether I feel prepared to go to some place where teaching is not as valued. I’d want to go to a smaller school, for example, if I could get a job there where teaching, is like a very big part of everyday life and it’s something that the people there take very seriously and so on. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

An ideal scenario for me would be a kind of to have these small kind of liberal arts colleges in the U.S. that aren’t these kind of gigantic Universities like UBC. I know there’s advantages to having a huge University like UBC as well, but I’d actually like to have I mean like basically, an undergraduate teaching focused kind of University or liberal arts college job in terms of work so that you can focus mainly on teaching. It’s not looking for you to kind of publish or perish kind of idea. That’s what would be perfect for me. (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Ross seems to feel almost subversive and potentially at risk in some way in revealing his desire to work outside of the research university paradigm:

(interviewer) And what sorts of jobs are you interested in?...Um. This is a question... yeah, ok. (long pause) This is anonymous, so. I’m aiming for a small liberal arts college job. I think that’s an appropriate working environment for doing the kind of things I’d like to do, living the kind of lifestyle I’d like to live. I’d like to get back to [working on and teaching his particular intellectual interest]. If I can do that in a research university that’s maybe not too large... I guess part of it is, I look at my professors here, and UBC is a very good research university, it really is. My professors are so busy, they’re really good at what they do. But they are SO busy. And I’m not sure I want to be THAT busy. (Ross—male, SSH, USA)

Ross’ desire to strike a more balanced approach to work and his personal life was echoed in several other student narratives, both SSH and STEM. Jason hopes to build a career that has equilibrium between teaching and research, and expects that the academic career capital he has built in attending a highly ranked research university will provide him with more options, but still sees the “small liberal arts college” as the best context in which to build the career he imagines:

I like university life, or college life. I think you kind of can escape to a degree from the industrial rhythms of life, but you’re also doing, intellectually engaging. I mean the work is just as hard, but there’s a certain autonomy to where you can manage your own time, pursue your own research projects, hopefully teach your own courses and I’ve learned all of this knowledge, so it seems like it might be natural to bestow this knowledge on students as well. So, some of it might be a bit idealistic but it just seems like for somebody who just loves to read and loves to study and do
research, it seems that it’s the best career choice... (interviewer) Where could you imagine doing that?... At one point it was community college, but now I’m, I think because I’m at UBC it’s kind of a bigger university, you get a PhD, I mean it definitely opens up jobs basically anywhere if your dissertation is of high quality, you could potentially get a job anywhere. I guess university, college, anywhere, wherever I could pursue teaching goals as well as some research goals. I guess I haven’t decided what would be the best option. Maybe the ideal would be a liberal arts college. (Jason—male, SSH, USA)

Jason’s comments about “escaping” industrial sensibilities through working at a teaching-oriented institution seem to reflect a theme common to each of the students quoted above. Not only is actual corporate industry completely absent from their career imaginaries, they also are seeking refuge from the increasing production/industry aspects of contemporary academia. In affixing themselves firmly to the teaching element of higher education, especially at a “small liberal arts college” they seem to want to retain purchase on the personally edifying, even “traditional” academic discourse of purpose, education as constitutive of citizen-subjects with Western liberal values rather for the primary purpose of capital accumulation (Ong, 2004). None of these students imagined teaching at, for example, one of the burgeoning number of private, for-profit credential purveyors. In this way, these students can perhaps be seen as wanting to reproduce their cultural values around liberal education through their career paths, even as they find themselves navigating in an increasingly neoliberal global higher education field.

The narratives of many of these twenty-one students who preferred an academic career, whether research or teaching oriented, SSH or STEM, were suffused with concerns about the academic job market and competition for limited positions, both in Canada and elsewhere. Many students made remarks signaling that commitment to an academic career would require them to relinquish personal agency and desire around where they will live. For some this seemed like a painful compromise, while others were more embracing of the challenge and strategic about charting a career course despite their concerns. A few SSH student comments demonstrate this common anxiety, as well as concessions students are willing to make. Carl, another student who would prefer a teaching career at a small university, has a strong desire to remain in Vancouver, but is not very hopeful about his prospects:

Well there certainly, at least in theory, are teaching options. Like you could go get a job teaching at a small college or University in the area. That would be an option and teaching is ultimately what I want to do with my degree more so than doing research so that would be absolutely perfect. But, I don’t know with the economy and what not, or at least what you hear about the academic job market, it’s not like it invites a lot of hope in terms of feeling like you’re going to be able to go where
you want to go. The opportunities seem a little bit more limited than I would like
them to be. I mean there’s two components and they’re both really important and
the problem is that they might be incompatible, right? So one is doing something
that I enjoy and love doing so ideally it would be teaching, probably a pretty heavy
teaching load at some sort of small University or college, but still with enough time
so I can do at least some research on my own. And, and the second part, where I
want to be would be just a place that I enjoyed living. Like a good city. (Carl—
male, SSH, EU).

Two other SSH students, Mallory and Suzanne, make reference to the constraining effects of the
rising tide of neoliberalism in higher education on their academic career prospects and agency.
Suzanne’s concerns reflect two interesting issues touching on neoliberalization of universities—the
precarious impact of University dependency on shrinking government funding, and the notion of
academics being commodities for universities:

*I’d be interested to go back and live in Europe for awhile, because all my siblings
and my mother and quite a lot of friends are living in Europe. But that seems sort
of unlikely in a way. The conservative government in the UK just announced 80%
cuts in the universities, and I think that the salaries may be very low and they may
not be hiring anybody at that rate. They may be sort of cutting back on possible
programs, so the UK seems rather dodgy for the next few years. So it’ll depend on
what comes up. And then the mostly likely is the US, most of the jobs are in the
US... (interviewer) So, other than the fact that openings are only going to pop up
where they pop up, are there other obstacles you perceive for pursuing what you
want for the next part of your career?... Well I’ve mentioned my age. I think there is
a kind of hidden discrimination in academia that I’ve heard people talking about.
I’ve heard that people who start into academia as a second career might be less
well looked upon than people who are younger, perhaps because the university
thinks they’re not going to get as much out of you if you’re starting later than
somebody’s who’s started early... I guess I’m worried that it might not be a smooth
process and I may end up having to going somewhere not ideal and then move
again. I might be fairly likely to find a job that seems okay but not really the one
that I would love. Or the place that we would love to start and then have to start
somewhere all over again. (Suzanne—female, SSH, USA)

Suzanne fears her career agency being compromised by both her potentially lower productivity
potential (in the eyes of an employer) due to her age, as well as cuts in government funding overall
for higher education. Mallory also reflects this latter concerns, citing the “casualization” of
academic teaching, in which less expensive tenure-track academic positions are being replaced by
lower-cost, lower-commitment temporary positions, keeping many PhD graduates in a constant
cycle of unsecure jobs with few benefits (Bousquet, 2003).

*But I also am trying to be realistic about the prospects in academic careers right
now and knowing that there is a higher reliance on adjuncts and sessionals and less
entrance into tenure track positions and trying to be cognizant of that reality and
thinking outside of the box a little bit. I’ve made connections with the City of Vancouver and I’ve thought about maybe working at municipal levels, for example... (interviewer) What options are available to you outside of academia?... Well to be honest, it’s really hard to say because we’re groomed so much to kind of keep going in the academic tradition. I feel like all my skills and credentials or whatever you want to say, are really tailored to that. So I feel like I’ll have to be fairly creative to go outside and try to position myself differently. (Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

Mallory references career possibilities in a government setting, and other SSH students were also trying to imagine various public-sector positions if their “Plan A”, the academic job market, is not accessible to them, Still, for some, these alternatives seemed equally difficult to access.

I think about [my discipline], I wish there was like an equivalent of “Doctors without Borders” or “Engineers without Borders” for [us], but as far as I know, there’s not although there are a lot of NGO’s which I can certainly see myself doing some work for. All these groups that do work in various countries either with human rights or development or something like that would be amazing to work with and contribute to. That’s certainly something that I can see myself doing although those aren’t really based in Vancouver so that would mean change priorities or a decision to go in a different direction... Since I decided to study [my discipline], the idea has been that I want to teach the stuff. That was always sort of the first priority and then the idea of working for an NGO or doing that kind of work has emerged and that would be a great option. Sometimes I consider that maybe it would even work. But yeah, it doesn’t seem likely that that’s what I’ll end up doing, so. (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

Jason also is concerned about job market constraints on his career agency. He describes his strategy of trying out the academic job market and the alternatives should it prove too tight. He also recounts the challenges inherent in citizenship restrictions when trying to find a public sector job in Canada after finishing his MA:

I feel it’s going to be decided for me eventually, because you know the job market, you kind of apply where there’s jobs and you take the best offer and so it’s a question of just my own decisions, or, there’s my own ideals and then there’s the reality... [After finishing my MA in Canada] I had the post graduation work permit. There was some public [sector] jobs which I interviewed for and I would’ve had a job with them, however most of their contracts were with the Federal Government and it required you had to be either a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident. And so I’d interview and they’d go ‘we like you’ but then they’d discover that I was American and I wouldn’t be able to work on the contracts that they had. So that was somewhat disappointing... I mean the big [deciding factor] is if you get the job or not. Right now, there’s only been a few [academic] positions in the past year, but I’ve heard within a couple of years there might be many more. So my initial goal would be to try to get the, a job as a professor and if that doesn’t go well, then my priorities will shift towards other things. (Jason—male, SSH, USA)
Helena, like a few other students, is facing the career dilemmas of the dual career couple. She seems somewhat resigned to the difficulty of finding an academic job and is employing her considerable sense of personal agency to try and create a position that will enable her to both continue to pursue her passions and accommodate the career of her partner:

A lot of it is tied up with what’s feasible. I guess now that I’m with [my partner] I can’t just be selfish and consider myself. So, if the most amazing faculty position comes up in Dalhousie University at the end of my PhD, [my partner’s] job was created for him, he’s doing exceptionally well for someone his age. He’s got a permanent position with them [here] and you know, I would never want to ask him to forfeit that to follow me…I love teaching, so I would love to be an academic. I’ve come to realize that that particular choice would come with its challenges. Academic positions, for the one that you really want, you might need to just be in the right place at the right time and either the timing will work out for me to stay in Vancouver or it won’t. And so the current [public sector] organization that I work with is putting forward an application for another director position. I guess that’s an avenue that’s potentially going to be open in terms of applying for that, and I’ll write a proposal for them to employ me from Vancouver. I think it’s an organization that needs fresh people and so I would be happy to be one of those people. (Helena—female, SSH, EU)

Helena is noteworthy in that she was the only SSH student who followed a version of the trend seen more commonly in the STEM disciplines, which is to connect her doctoral studies to an outside (in her case, public-sector) organization, and gain professional experience and networks that she can leverage in her career development. We’ll see shortly how this has occurred for a few STEM students and their ties to industry partners.

Overall, for several SSH students, there seemed to be a significant desire to find shelter from (or a perceived necessity to develop alternatives to) a declining academic job market and the increasingly competitive research productivity expectations in major Universities. This was seen in students’ somewhat idealized imaginations of teaching-oriented careers at small liberal arts colleges, or the consideration of alternative, perhaps less desired careers outside of academia. Other students faced issues of “forced mobility”-- the prospect of having to move to a less-than-desirable location in order to pursue an academic career, or navigate the dilemma of being in a dual-career couple. Still, it was striking that several students were imagining options and taking action within the limited scope of agency they perceived they had.

There were also a few STEM students who were anxious about the academic job market, although the overall level of concern seemed lower than for the SSH students. This may in part be because of the prominent interim role that postdoctoral fellowships play in academic science
careers. Several of the STEM students anticipated that their next step would be to pursue a postdoc position, rather than seeking a tenure-track academic job. Postdoctoral fellowships are by no means guaranteed, and many of the same capital accumulation concerns that were evident in pursuing admission to a PhD program are at play in trying to secure a postdoc position, but the “market” for such positions seemed perhaps more open, amenable to personal choice, and less anxiety-producing for students than the idea of going straight into the market for a faculty position. A study of postdocs may show that academic job market anxiety for STEM researchers is equal to that of SSH doctoral students, only deferred a few years. Still, some STEM students were worried about their prospects, especially in the context of overwhelming competition and pressure to produce publications, and some were considering alternatives. Kim gives a blunt assessment of her chances, and insight into her imagined options:

*I'm likely to try for staying in academia, doing the whole PhD, post doc, maybe two, get a lab, get some students, that whole traditional. And it sounds cool, but the problem with that is that every prof trains 40 students to replace them. There's way more students that are trained for that than there are positions available. And I'm not the smartest one. I mean you could get a job in Oklahoma but who wants to live there?... (interviewer) Are there other barriers that you imagine?...Sure. Well first I have to publish a lot in really good journals which seems, at this point, an enormous barrier. I'm thinking about this a lot recently because they are doing interviews for professors, three in the department. These people are coming in and giving their job talks which are all very polished and impressive and then you look at their publication record and it's Science, Science, Nature, Science and it's extremely discouraging. The average interviewee has ten high-level publications from their PhD work. And it was like, oh God. That just seems impossible...I'd like to hedge my bets a bit more than that. So I'm thinking, maybe science writing because I'm a pretty good writer. Or maybe government. I think I would enjoy that because it has even more of a direct impact on the world. (Kim—female, STEM, USA)*

Kim provides another example, this time from a STEM discipline, of students perhaps wanting to opt-out of the increasing competition/production regime, which is linked to the overall rise in neoliberal ideology in higher education. Similar pressures were perceived for a few students who intended to return to their home countries outside of North America. In these cases, the competition for academic jobs was coming from the increasing numbers of other students like them who had gone abroad for doctoral study, many of whom went to global elite universities. The reputational capital inherent in global university ranking schemes reverberates strongly throughout the academic career search for some students, as described by Quon:

*(interviewer) So if you stayed in research, would it be at a university, like being a professor?...Yeah. That’s an ideal job. But it’s not so easy for us to get job like this*
kind because there are more and more people who got overseas degrees, they come back to [home country] and work in their research institutions or universities and this kind of position is limited. Already they have been taken, taken up by these guys... I think at least for [my home university] most of the professors they have all the same background and they graduated from the very top universities, MIT, Stanford...and because UBC maybe not as well known, so I have some difficulty to get job in the top 20 universities but if you go to the top, maybe 50, there’s not big problem. (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

Quon’s comments demonstrate Marginson’s (2007) point about how the power of the “global super league” of universities “rests upon the subordination of other institutions” (p. 305). Coming with a degree from the next rung down in the “league standings”, Quon can really only hope to obtain an academic position in the second rung of institutions in his home country. The reputational capital of the super-elite drives the global circulation of academic research “talent”, reproducing and reinforcing the global institutional pecking order and making it difficult to cross from a lower tier to a higher one.

Ravi and Tina each make related points, not about the “global super league”, but about the hegemonic preference for North American-educated individuals for faculty positions in developing countries. They also each suggest that they are able to utilize contacts at their previous universities to help them to vie for jobs in this competitive context:

There are certain barriers, actually the first thing is finding the opportunity, particularly the area that I’m working in. There are a lot of graduates who want to join the institute so it’s a big competition thing. But having a degree in North America is, I think, a plus point and so I might have an advantage over certain other candidates. The reason is North American degrees are well recognized compared to some of the Asian degrees because there are a lot of people who graduate from Japan and they try to come back so I might have a healthy competitive edge over them but I’m not sure still. I just want to contact the professors over there and see if there are any opportunities. (Ravi—male, STEM, Asia)

Tina is able to leverage several forms of capital to facilitate her academic job search—a North American degree, “high impact” publications (“impact factor” being an important currency of academic publications in her field) and the social capital of her previous supervisor’s professional network. Her goal is a University faculty position which combines clinical practice, research and teaching. This rather lengthy exchange is abridged for better clarity, given my challenges in understanding Tina’s story completely:

I go to see my tutor in [home university] who is a professor in neurology. She ask me about my future direction and I told her I want to be a surgeon very much. So she just introduce me to, I think the chief of neurosurgery. Yeah. I have an interview.
(interviewer)...Oh, so your tutor has helped set up an interview for you for a job?...Yeah and he already interviewed me. I think after I graduate I will go to that department. I think there will be no big problem. To everything go as planned... (interviewer) so there’s lots of competition in [home country] but you seemed to have an “in” because you know this person, is that right?...No the person just introduce you but you still need to reach the standard. How to say, my merit. I will have the PhD degree and in [home country] now they put more and more emphasis on the research and they have very strict evaluation system. How many papers you published. And what’s the total impact effect of the published paper in your department. They want to put the academic reach to a higher level, you got my meaning? Like in the world. Have more influence...

(interviewer) So was there already sort of an open competition and you just were better than all of the other applicants?...There should be an open competition but even in open competition if I have a degree, for example, UBC PhD and published paper and usually the paper is high impact factor so you already stand out... (interviewer) OK, but aren’t there many other students like you who have gone to North America and gotten degrees?...Now [the government] starting to sponsor a lot of students to go to North America, Europe, to study. But most of them, is for associate study or something which means that [students visit North America for a short period], but don’t get a degree. That’s why the whole procedure for me is so simple. Because I stand out...(interviewer) And that’s because you came to North America and got a PhD and got good publications?... That’s why I endure separation from my husband. (Tina—female, STEM, Asia)

Tina’s comments are revealing of a dynamic, mentioned previously, where Universities that are striving to advance in global standing are measuring prospective faculty members in term of the capital those individuals can confer back on the institution through their participation in globalized research fields and production of publications. North America, and the top-ranked universities clearly hold and confer significant reputational capital in the global research domain. Tina’s story reveals the compromises, in Tina’s case living away from her husband for four years, that some students are feel they must make to gain this capital and advance in their desired academic careers.

Academic careers, whether in teaching or research focussed institutions loomed large in the imagined futures of the students participating in this study. While two-thirds of them said it was their preference to work in academia, their well-founded skepticism about the academic job market suggests that students know that not all of them will find these desired positions. A recent survey and report from the U.S.-based Council of Graduate Schools, *Pathways through Graduate School and Into Careers* (2012) reports that only about half of all PhD recipients in the United States go on to work in academic jobs (with a higher percentage in SSH fields and a lower percentage in
STEM fields) and that graduate students generally did not have comprehensive knowledge about career options either before or during their graduate studies. It is speculated that this leads graduate students to consider (imagine) mainly those careers that they see playing out around them while in their graduate studies, and which are endorsed by their faculty mentors. In the SSH disciplines, this means mainly faculty jobs. The narratives in this study suggest that SSH students may have to exert more personal agency if they are to uncover career options outside of academia, or even teaching positions in different kinds of institutions, since these careers may not be readily visible to them from within the academy, or endorsed by their academic mentors. Helena provided one example of a SSH student imagining a career path outside of academia, and it is notable that her faculty mentors are also significantly involved in public sector policy development as well, presumably making this path more imaginable to their students. In STEM disciplines, academic jobs are still desirable and subject to intense competition. However, the increased cross-pollination of academia and industry in some of these disciplines may give graduate students a view into a wider range of career options, which will be seen in the next two sections.

8.2.2. Industry research careers. The U.S. National Science Foundation report on their Survey of Doctorate Recipients (2010) shows that one-third of all U.S. doctorate recipients in science, engineering, or health fields (which include all STEM students in this study) were employed in private, for-profit businesses post-degree. Comparable data for Canadian PhD STEM recipients is not available, but the increasing link between Canadian university research and industry is evident in recent reports from the National Science & Engineering Research Council (NSERC) stating that university research contracted by businesses increased fivefold between 1999 and 2008, to $1.97 billion. In 2010, NSERC allocated $260 million to programs involving partnerships between universities and industry.\(^3\) Clearly, careers in industry are becoming more imaginable to PhD students in Canadian universities, at least in STEM disciplines, and six of the twenty-one STEM students in this study were either committed to or considering careers in corporate environments. Two additional students were imagining careers that had industry components which will be discussed in the next section on “hybrid” careers.

Of the six students considering an industry research career, three were fully committed to it as their primary goal. They each cite their impression that industry offers them more career flexibility, which is something they each say they value. This is notable as a contrast to Simon who, as cited earlier, considered and rejected the idea of an industry career because he placed high value on the perceived stability of an academic career. Giulia and Farjad both seem unconcerned about job stability, placing higher value on mobility (both career-wise and intellectual) and avoiding what they see as the “boredom” of an academic career:

*In industry they can tell you anytime goodbye but at least you don’t have the stress to find your own money, right. You’re in industry, the money is there, you are developing a new drug for, oh I don’t know, [a particular disease], and it works, it doesn’t work, if it doesn’t work, they give you a different job. And then something that I also like about industry is the idea that you can change what you are doing because in academia after you start a certain line of investigation, you will keep on investigating that. You can expand it a little bit but you will be on that track almost until the end of your career. In industry you have always the option to change what you are doing which is important because you never know, you might get bored of what you are doing.* (Giulia—female, STEM, EU)

*To me I think being a faculty is boring. You have to, every day, I think you are actually doing routine things. At least, for example, for industrial job, maybe you go for a mission to another country and go to different conferences and you know, and it’s more competitive. I love, I mean I like vibrancy environment. Because in industry you have to be very fast, intelligence, quick in your job, or you lose your job. I like there to be a push behind me. But in faculty I don’t think, there is, well I don’t want to say they don’t have, there is push, but at least it’s not that much as compared as the industrial job.* (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

Li expresses directly what Giulia and Farjad imply, that she simply feels industry is a better match for her personality and skills than an academic job. She also echoes their embrace of the perceived flexibility of an industry career.

*If you want to go to academic track for me as a PhD, I either go do a post doc and eventually be a P.I. which I don’t see any quality of me being a P.I. Because that means you’re going to be teaching, you’re going to have to write a lot of grants, I don’t think the language is my real strength here. It’s actually a limitation. So I don’t see myself doing that. So you can be a research associate in an academic field but it doesn’t have a lot of space to grow. So that’s why I prefer companies. I also see more flexibility there. If you don’t like the job you can find another one. But here, if you, a P.I., I mean you’re going to be a professor.* (Li—female, STEM, Asia)

These three students imagine thriving in careers which offer fewer constraints on free movement. Esteban would prefer an academic career but like other students, is concerned about the high level of competition for jobs. Even postdoctoral position are difficult to get in his field while industry
jobs are perhaps more accessible, which makes the private sector a viable fall-back position for him. He offers an interesting contrast to the previous students in that he views academia as having more flexibility than industry, and offers him a better chance to build the professional networks and social capital that will be important for him to fulfill other purposes:

_Basically there are two choices. Academia and industry. So academia, I have to apply for postdoctoral positions. The problem with this is sometimes it takes you one, two postdocs, maybe three to get a permanent position. It’s difficult to get a permanent position as a faculty. The other choice is to go to industry. I’ve seen some people going into finance companies in Toronto or here in Vancouver. It would be more immediate, maybe better paid. So basically what I’m going to do is apply for postdocs. If I get it, I’ll probably take it. If I don’t, then I will have to look for a job in industry..._(interviewer) it’s sounding like your preference would be to continue in an academic realm. Why? ...I like research. I still like doing science. Maybe a faculty member is not paid as well as in a company, but your hours are kind of flexible. You can work mostly on what you want to work. Usually there is some freedom to work and there is also the teaching part. I like to keep doing that. And in my idea about trying to improve education in [my home country], I think I can do that better as a professor in a University rather than working in a company where I wouldn’t have ties with any government agency. Like a University professor, it’s more natural to try to collaborate with the Minister of Education, or with a program or initiative, or international organization. I like that more. I think that matters more. That’s more important than just getting a good salary._ (Esteban—male, STEM, Central/South America)

Esteban’s explanation of how he sees and attempts to navigate the next steps in his career development shows an engagement in the academic and social contribution discourses of purpose. These purposes are more important to him, and apparently worth the longer investment of time in career building than the more immediate potential financial gains of an industry career.

Farjad spoke about having ties within his PhD program to industry already. In fact, his “corporate imaginary” seemed to begin early in his education in his home country, where it was commonplace for faculty members to be engaged very closely with business. His Master’s degree supervisor was a manager in a company and Farjad would sometimes meet with him in his company office. In a way it was surprising to learn that the academic-industry partnership trend so scrutinized in North American universities over the past two decades was also very well established in a quite under-developed country. On the other hand, this should not be a complete surprise given that in such countries, the infrastructure development needs are very great and expertise in areas such as science and engineering is quite limited, so the “double use” of human capital in the form of doctoral-educated individuals in both the academic and industry realms should perhaps be expected.
Farjad makes a point about the corporate ties to his PhD work providing him with capital in the form of networks to advance his desired career in industry. It is interesting to note that he cites working with an “industrial professor” within a government ministry, an indication of the close ties forming in his discipline within a triumvirate of academia, industry and government partners:

So I have two supervisors. The second one is an industrial professor so he has a lot of connection with the industry. So one opportunity was to start working with [a Canadian government ministry]. So I think it could even help me for my future job because right now I’m working with people that maybe they can offer me a job later if I can do my research good.

His entrepreneurial vision reached far into the future; he was strategizing to become a permanent resident in Canada, gain industry experience and related capital over time, and ultimately start his own company:

My consideration would be starting a job with a company. Doesn’t matter it’s a government or it’s a private company but it’s just a company that I’m sure I’m going to learn new stuff, newer stuff then just about the regular job. Some people just prefer to have a work but maybe their work is just very boring and you are not learning new stuff, so I prefer not to go for those. So first consideration start a job and after that, if it’s possible, if I know right people, have enough knowledge, maybe I set up my own business, yeah. (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

Farjad can be seen as the ultimate accomplishment of recent Canadian “innovation” policies. A highly intelligent and well-educated young researcher in a struggling nation, he was attracted by Canada’s “friendly” visa and immigration policies which made it relatively easy for him to come to Canada as a student and ultimately to immigrate. Once here, he engaged in industry/government-sponsored research with commercial applications and is becoming a “highly qualified person” available to the Canadian industry workforce. If he reaches his ultimate goal of starting his own company, he is likely to create new jobs for other Canadian workers and possibly new commercial products. His trajectory so far could hardly conform more to the Canadian policy plan.

The two other students giving serious consideration to an industry career (Jackie and Christopher) seemed to see industry as just one of many options that were available to them. They were notably confident about their prospects for finding a good job in a variety of sectors, but were also two of the students furthest away from their degree completion, and were more in a mode of imagining possibilities than planning concrete next steps. Both of these students were tempted by the salaries and better work-life balance they thought might be available to them in industry.

I could see going into an industry job, I could see myself working in some sort of manufacturing plant or other plant, overseeing a manufacturing line or systems engineering type job...jobs that would specifically be stemming from my PhD would
be something like going and working for a government regulatory agency [goes on to describe various options related to that]...(interviewer) It sounds like you perceive there being a lot of different options and opportunities...There are. Sometimes I think I would be most happy running a research lab, so not necessarily being a professor but overseeing the technical aspects of a research lab. I think I would like a job that is not an overwhelming expectation in terms of hours. I think that’s what makes me shy away from academia, seeing the hours that good professors have to put in, in order to be successful. There are considerations like money, in terms of how much you’re getting paid. It sounds really superficial, but if I’m going to be working fifty or sixty hours would I rather be paid fifty thousand dollars to do it or a hundred thousand dollars to do it if there’s no significant difference there? (Jackie—female, STEM, USA)

When asked about his career aspirations, Christopher touches on everything from teaching at a small college to being an academic research lab manager to working at various types of companies. He can envision challenges and satisfying aspects of each of these paths, and is confident that he could succeed in any of them. He’d like his work to be meaningful, but in the end, he seems swayed by the opportunities of a career close to market, despite its risks:

Like if I’m pulling in a million dollars a year and I am able to produce something that a lot of people are able to enjoy, heck yeah I’m going to do it. Because I’m making really good money and if the job’s not hell...That’s a very important thing. I think the most important thing to me is, it has to be fun. It has to be something where, at least, one of the five or six or seven days that I’m at work a week I’m enjoying myself and it’s fun. It’s not work every single day, you know...Just from what I’ve heard, the salary cap of a professor that’s not a research professor is nowhere near what the salary cap that someone from industry would make. But a research professor, their lives are a lot more stressful because not only do you have to teach, you’ve also got to write grants, you’ve got to manage a research group. In industry, to some degree you have a 9 to 5 day, but industry is pretty volatile. And if your product line doesn’t work, you’re out of a job. But if I’m enjoying what I’m doing, it’s a fun atmosphere, that’s the really important thing... I feel very confident and set up for any of these challenges. I’ve known a few graduate students that have gone off into each of these different avenues, and I don’t really feel any less prepared that they were. I feel like I have the same knowledge base, so that makes me feel good. (Christopher—male, STEM, USA)

It was striking that students who felt that industry careers were an option for them had little of the anxiety that almost all SSH students and the STEM students who were interested in academic careers had about the job market. Christopher’s prioritization of having fun in his career, while hard to fault, seems like quite a privileged imagination, compared especially to students in other fields where the ability to find any job is almost as far as most are able to imagine. The direct relationship between being highly skilled in certain disciplines and the strong presence of related
industries such as biotechnology, high-tech manufacturing, financial modeling, and pharmaceuticals clearly gives these students options and the luxury of career agency that others who have prioritized more academic purposes and/or are engaged in non-market fields must work very hard to create—they don’t “come with the package” of a PhD in humanities, for example. The neoliberal policy shifts towards the privileged funding of close to market fields (almost entirely STEM), policy structures enabling close relationships between universities and industry, along with the reduction of tenure-track academic jobs, make the career pathways of students with “industry friendly” career capital such as Farjad, Giulia, Jackie and Christopher that much easier to imagine.

8.2.3. Hybrid careers. Perhaps the most intriguing imagined careers, and the ones that most reflect the globalizing fields of education, research and work, were the few I will refer to as “hybrid” careers. The three students I’ve grouped in this category are each looking to blur boundaries between sectors, combine career areas in new ways or otherwise take advantage of already established intermingling of work domains.

Reza could be categorized as primarily wanting an academic career, but he wants such a career to be deeply engaged with industry as well. In many ways, this simply reflects a growing model of academic careers in his discipline, one that is squarely situated within the overlap between academic research and industry.

> Even though I want to be in the academy, academy here gets funding and research motivation from the companies, from the business, right? What I see in the future is to work for like research institute or for a university and put my main effort for research and but at the same time, to have a connection with the companies so that I can get feedback from what is happening in the real world and also to give our feedback to the companies. I don’t want to just be isolated either in company or in academy, like to have a sort of relationship between them. I want to be in a challenging environment, like situation to innovate things, to deal with the cutting edge science but at the same time, contribute in the real world. This is what I see, my supervisor or the other professor, they have their own research but they also have their own like consultancy to the companies. (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

Reza envisions a seamless flow between academia and industry, with the blurred boundaries creating an innovative, well-funded research environment that will enable him to contribute to solving “real world” problems that are meaningful to him. In this way, his vision of bridging public and private sectors for public good aligns with policy and educational purpose discourses of the university and government, although Reza’s imagined career has less of a commercial gain purpose
than the government discourses tend to reflect. However, he also notes as a potential barrier the difficulty of obtaining a job that is anchored in academia:

*I guess the barriers are like, it’s like competition to get a job in the universities are much more difficult than to get a job in the companies, I guess, because the availabilities are very, very low, you know. It’s not too much places for. I mean there are not too much demand for researchers in universities. I feel much fewer opportunities rather than demands for consultants in the companies.*

Reza’s comment suggests that the limited academic job market may force people who would prefer to focus on academic research and disciplinary stewardship out into purely commercial sectors unless more of the hybrid-type positions he imagines can be developed within academic contexts.

Diego envisions a similar type of position, but situated in what Amy Scott Metcalfe (2010) has described as an “intermediary organization” which facilitates relationships between sectors as they “operate in the spaces between institutions of higher education, industrial firms, and government agencies” (p. 504). Having come to doctoral study after career stints in both industry and academia in his home country, Diego astutely recognizes the limitations of both academic-only and industry-only careers, as well as the creative possibilities of a career that bridges both and which could use the knowledge and other capital he has already developed. In this rather long and abridged passage, Diego works through a description of what he imagines, as I struggle to fully understand this new possibility:

*I can see that there are a lot of opportunities here in, especially in BC...(interviewer) Especially in companies?...Let’s say that in the [particular] industry in general. But not working for these guys. I mean creating knowledge from the point of, for example, testing new manufacturing policies...(interviewer) So are you saying creating knowledge from an academic position? But connecting with the industry?.. I don’t want to come back to the industry again. Maybe the things are different here in Canada than [in home country]. But [at home] we used to be like a soccer player. If you are not making goals, forget it. You have to produce big improvement otherwise you are not going to be here anymore. The companies are concerned about profit and you have to follow this orientation...In the academic life, you are free to create your own knowledge or to follow your own ideas... (interviewer) that’s what you would pursue, an academic research job?...Well, I think you can create knowledge from the academia and from another organization, not the ones which are paper producers...*

*(interviewer) So what would be the ideal sort of career for you?.. I think with this knowledge that I have about [particular] industries because I work in the [particular] industry for a long time. With the knowledge that I have in the academia, there is a big opportunity in the one which can create a beautiful bridge between this two worlds. I’m not talking about consulting job, I’m not talking about just papers. I’m talking about something like, have you ever heard about MITACS?*
This sort of organization can bring them together close ... (interviewer) So you don’t want to be a pure academic just producing papers and you don’t want to work in industry just being an engineer. You want some way to bridge those two....Exactly. I can see that there are a lot of opportunities there. Because academic life here do you think somebody like me, with [40+] years old, can get a position here at UBC? No, never, because upstairs in the 4th floor, there are more than 20 postdocs walking around. Every single day. Apply for positions around Canada. There are people working as a postdoc for more than four years. So that’s not for me.

(Diego—male, STEM, Central/South America)

Diego goes on to describe how, by working in an intermediary organization, he may also be able to add another, global dimension to his desired career within the “triple helix” (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1998) of academy-industry-government (AIG) by ultimately linking Canadian AIG research to his prior university and industry employer in his home country. This is a quintessential exemplar of the dynamics Metcalfe cites in her argument that:

External organizations are already serving as interorganizational bridges between universities, industries, and governments. Post-secondary institutions are becoming increasingly interconnected with their counterparts around the world. Corporations are also continuing to operate in multi-national economic markets governed by global and regional trade agreements. As a result, organizations that serve as boundaryspanners and culture-brokers are rising in significance (2010, p. 504).

However, Diego’s narrative contributes an additional important facet to Metcalfe’s analysis—the role that individuals (and the boundaryspanning knowledge, networks and capital they bring) can play within these sorts of organizations, and vice-versa, how these organizations can shape, utilize and increase the particular capital of individuals to expand the influence of both the individual and the organization. Fisher and Atkinson-Grosjean (2002) referred similarly to such individuals as “brokers on the boundary” (p. 449); managers responsible for translating academic science across the blurring lines between academia and industry. Investigating career paths of international doctoral students into such organizations and other “in between” places in the AIG triumvirate, would be a fascinating extension of these lines of inquiry.

Chela, another STEM student from Central/South America, imagines a very different type of “hybrid” career, one that appears to be much less supported than that of Diego largely because it lies outside of the industry funding realm and beyond the imagination of pure academia. As reported in the previous chapter, during her PhD studies, Chela founded an educational organization that helps make scientific inquiry more accessible within local communities in developing countries. At the same time, she is an outstanding scientist and has been the recipient of major scholarships which were granted, in part, based on her global leadership potential.
However, when investigating next steps towards a career that would enable her to marry her passions for scientific research and non-profit community education and development, she finds that such hybrid career spaces are not yet developed:

Before I was like only doing research and that’s what I was seeing myself do in the future but now I really love and enjoy working with the community and giving the knowledge to the community and to the people that need it and people that be more aware of science in general. In a conference that I just went last year, there was a round table discussion about woman in science and the different non-academic careers so I was asking the leader of the round table like, ‘how I can mix non-profit like organizations working with that and working with research at the same time’? She like, ‘no, you cannot do that, you work on non-profit or you work on research but you cannot do both things’. But no, I do want that, like I do really like both things and I’m trying to figure out that because I somehow I want to combine both things. I was thinking initially to like somehow do two PhD, two postdocs and one in working with a community itself and the other one working with research and then after that probably get into an academic position where I can actually manage both things. (Chela—female, STEM, Central/South America)

Even more than Reza and Diego, Chela is trying to strategize to create a career path that does not quite exist yet and that others cannot imagine. The intermediary organization that would facilitate her desired career is not in place, to her knowledge. Perhaps in her desire to combine scientific research with a non-profit educational project in the social science tradition, she is caught between two academic and professional cultures. It may be the case that she is a forerunner of a trend that will evolve with deeper interpenetration of disciplines and further networked interconnectedness between global universities and local communities. Both of these developments would be predicted by ongoing globalization of social, educational and research fields, but perhaps only to the extent that there is an economic payoff to drive them. Chela had spoken earlier of being inspired by her supervisor’s global reach in science and UBC’s vision of global citizenship. She and others like herself need to be the world-making collective agents who create new notions of what a “scientist” can do and be, and new career pathways within universities like UBC to bridge the imagination gap that she is encountering at this stage.

8.3. Desired career achievements and perceived responsibilities of PhD holders

Chela’s narrative of combining research science and education outreach in her home and other developing countries begins to paint a picture of not only what form she wants her career to take, but what she hopes to achieve through her work and the sorts of responsibilities she may feel as an individual who has reached the pinnacle of formal education. Student participants were
asked these questions directly, “is there anything in particular you hope to accomplish” and “do you feel you have any particular responsibilities” as a PhD holder. These were felt to be essential areas of exploration in this study as the answers to these questions continue to reveal more about what, ultimately, students believe the purpose of doctoral education to be, how their purposes align or not with the dominant institutional and policy discourses of purpose, and the extent to which desired achievements are imagined in a globalizing context. Their narratives illustrate how students make meaning of the opportunities and responsibilities that underlie the statistical trends of “career pathways” which reveal only broad outlines of the sectors students hope to work in. If education is both an aspirational and a formative endeavor, understanding students’ imaginings of what they want and feel adequately prepared to accomplish, and the responsibilities they have adopted as they near completion of their studies tells us much about the successes and failures of doctoral education in achieving both its stated (through institutional and policy discourse) purposes and those that students construct for themselves.

By far the most prevalent sentiment expressed by study participants, when asked about career achievements and responsibilities as PhD holders, was a desire and/or sense of obligation to making a positive contribution in some realm. This outcome was seen to be available through the full variety of career sectors reviewed in the previous section—through teaching, research, knowledge translation and public advocacy, and creating new products in industry settings that would have social benefit. For most students, this was ultimately expressed as a desire and/or responsibility to promote a public good. It is, of course, probably very reassuring to one’s own self-concept to express one’s career desires in terms of being of service in some way, and easy to embrace such motives. Some students may feel pressure (external and internal) to adopt and express the socially acceptable desire to “do good” as at least one of their career objectives. Not all students who did so emphasized making a positive contribution as a primary focus of their imagined careers. However, it was clear and striking that most students had put thought into specific ways they could benefit others in their careers and felt some responsibility to do so. The wide variety of ways, means and contexts students imagined for making such contributions were equally remarkable. For a few students, this was expressed primarily within the academic discourse of moving the knowledge in their discipline forward, even slightly. Quon represents this sense of responsibility:

*You are the professional in this field so you should understand more. And with respect to responsibility, yeah because you take up the resources then you should do something for human beings. To some extent you should contribute to this field.*
You should do something new, you should improve it. You should always try your best, that’s what I mean about a PhD... (interviewer) I’m interested in what you said that you feel a responsibility to contribute to human beings?... Maybe that’s too big, too general. Even though I don’t have so big a contribution, once I can improve it, o.k. the people in the future, they don’t have to think about it anymore, they don’t have to try it any more. (Quon—male, STEM, Asia)

Quon expresses a rather humble (and perhaps realistic) way of living up to the responsibility he feels to help others through advancing disciplinary knowledge. However, when asked about what he’d like to achieve ultimately in his career, he tells of his “bold” idea to design and manufacture robots that can assist people with disabilities. While in part he certainly sees this as a good business opportunity, he is also animated by imagining his research evolving into an ability to produce something that has social benefit.

Some of the other students who envisioned a career within companies or in collaboration with industry also framed their desired career achievements in terms of potentially making a positive social contribution. For Giulia, Li and Christopher, this was in the realm of supporting human health through the application of industry research to new products. Li’s comments are representative of possibilities imagined by all three of these students:

Well there are certain things I’d like to contribute because currently I’m doing basic research. That’s another reason why I want to go to a company because the translation from a basic research to something that you can really use, applied science, there is a huge gap there and I feel that if I go to the company for example, you can develop a drug that people, it will really contribute or change peoples’ life and that is more important for me. So I would love to contribute in sort of like finding the cure for a disease or maybe develop a drug that will change peoples' quality of life, something like that. (Li—female, STEM, Asia)

Reza is concerned with environmental sustainability issues, especially in his home country, and envisions a role for himself in working within academia to partner with industry at home to address pressing problems:

I want to contribute to the environmental protection in the real world... I’m considering in my mind, like to also have connections and try to help especially to increase the awareness of the people about the environmental issues and pollutions, yeah. This is something that I’m thinking. One of the reasons that I’m thinking academic work is because there are not obliged to be certain hours in your office, you can do your research wherever you are so this, give me this flexibility. If I want to do some lectures, or workshops or to help to consult companies in [my home country] about the environmental issues, I can do that. (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)
Like Reza, Kim, Jason and Helena all have a deep concern for addressing particular social and environmental problems but envision possibly working within policy realms to make meaningful contributions to their solutions. While they each speak at length about the responsibility they feel as experts, Kim perhaps can express the commonalities of their views on behalf of them all:

*I mean not to freak you out, but it's a big freakin' problem and it gets way less press than climate change. Not that climate change isn't a problem, it is. But so is this other thing....(interviewer) so, do you feel a responsibility?...Yeah. I mean I know more about it than a lot of people. It seems like the people that are experts on the topic should do something about it. If it's not the people who read and thought and learned about it the most then who would it be? You know i guess some people who get a PhD and feel like their only responsibility is to their own personal fulfillment and not necessarily responsible to the world or to use their knowledge... I mean you could leave it to policymakers to be, 'oh well, I guess people don't want to go to this park anymore so we won't bother spending money on it’ or something. You could just let that happen or you could be, ‘well actually, I've spent 30 years studying the [wildlife] here and I can tell you x, y and z and why that's really important’ and if you didn't do that then who would? Nobody would, it wouldn't happen and if you have this knowledge, you have to use it or leave that kind of decision to people who have less knowledge? That doesn't make sense.* (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

The responsibility of being an “expert” was cited by other students as well. As a social scientist, Maya sees a “huge responsibility” in being someone entrusted to “create knowledge” from other people’s experiences, which drives her to adopt a deep reflexivity in conducting her qualitative work. Adopting the academic discourse of stewardship, she understands that claims to knowledge give power and responsibility:

*It scares me because of the huge responsibility, I think it places on me. As people who hold PhD’s are considered in many ways more than anybody else, as producers of knowledge, and so, what you say is taken seriously because of everything you’ve put in to come up with something...there’s going to be people out there who are going to hopefully read it and, and you know, want to put it into action, but then that’s a huge responsibility because it’s real people and real lives that those things might affect, potentially.* (Maya--female, SSH, Asia)

Stefan, who, while imagining possible careers in both academia and industry, chose the word “leadership” to describe his view of what PhD holders are responsible for, which also aligns with the disciplinary stewardship aspect of the academic discourse of purpose.

*Well, PhD holders are the next generation of leading people, and as a leader you have a responsibility. You have a responsibility for whatever area you’re working in. If you’re a scientist, you have a responsibility to do your best to make new materials, new drugs, new forms of energy, conservation or preparation. Like as a PhD in economics, you have the responsibility to read the available financial or*
material resources in administrative or politics. I think for me it’s quite obvious, I
don’t know. I know it’s not to everybody. I know that probably leadership is often
seen as a place of power where you can gain a lot. That’s not my philosophy of it at
all. I think being educated to become a leader means that you also need to be
willing to take the responsibility that comes with leadership and that, I think, is a
considerable responsibility. (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)

An interesting variation on both the stewardship and social advocacy themes came from Ross, who
linked the notions of retaining and learning from ancient cultural forms to address what he sees as
the acceleration of contemporary social problems. Ultimately, he wants to achieve positive social
change through his career (which he sees primarily in teaching) as well as through other forms of
collective social activism and feels a responsibility to do so:

I don’t expect to solve anything on my own. It’s an effort. I just want to put my
energies into this combined effort to think through the issues of culture, cultural
forms, of civilization and what we really mean when we say ‘civilized’. I’d like to
give back to our society something that helps young people to feel grounded, to feel
they have healthy opportunities....I guess I’m a little bit of an activist and getting a
PhD gives me some credentials to have more clout and say I think we need to keep
working on these issues. We haven’t achieved true civilization yet, it’s a work in
progress. There are real issues we have to address about how we’re choosing to
live our lives. I’m trying in my PhD to start dealing with some of those issues.
(Ross—male, SSH, USA)

Not surprisingly, the several students who saw teaching being a part of their careers, envisioned
their primary contributions, achievements and responsibilities as being through the education of
new generations of students, another aspect of the academic discourse of purpose. Carl has an
abiding belief in the social importance of people understanding concepts inherent in his academic
discipline and believes he can make a contribution through the teaching of these concepts:

I do see my subject as extremely important for people to know and understand. I
think [these] ideas and the assumptions that are formed are tremendously
important and it’s a subject that is relevant to what goes on in the world. I’m
biased, but I still think it’s true that the world can be a lot better off if people really
understood [disciplinary] theory better. Which is partly why I want to teach it. To
me it would be very meaningful and it would serve a very good purpose to teach
[disciplinary] theory not to get people to become academics, but just so that people
have a better understanding of the ideas and assumptions that inform [public]
discourse. (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

Mallory sees her contribution less in terms of passing knowledge in her discipline along, but as
fostering a consciousness in new learners that enables them to apprehend the world around them
in expansive and active ways:
I don’t like to think of teaching as like an indoctrination of any sort, in fact I like the expansive models of teaching and I think that’s why I’m drawn to teaching, because I have found that through education my brain is expanded. I’ve learned to think more critically about things, that I have my own mind that I can use and explore and I get really excited about being able to do that. And I feel that I would want to be able to guide people in similar directions, you know? Just help people find the tools to be curious and critical, I guess, about the world that we live in and think about it. And not just think, but to do, acting on it, as well. Like volunteering and other kinds of things. But like to do that in a very aware and conscious way.

(Mallory—female, SSH, USA)

A responsibility related to teaching that two other women scientists offered as a desired career achievement was to act as a “role model” for younger women. This was expressed by Giulia and also by Jackie, who is in a very male-dominated discipline:

I think especially as a female in engineering I feel like there’s a responsibility in some ways to younger females to make sure that they see examples of role models who are pursuing higher education. Part of the reason that I think I was like ‘I can do engineering’ was because I had a female TA one of my first terms and she didn’t think anything of the fact that she was female, it was just like that’s what I’m doing to do. So to help fight those stereotypes that we get about who an engineer is and you know what an engineer should do and be. (Jackie—female, STEM, USA)

This was the only specifically gendered finding within the narratives on desired career achievements and perceived responsibilities. However, one might see a gendered interpretation in that while a couple of women felt they needed to act as “representatives” of their gender, Esteban saw himself as a potential symbol of his home country’s ability to produce outstanding scientists. Actually, Esteban expresses a modest hope related to his research contributions, but reframes his potential contribution as a complex set of desired career achievements, ranging from research discovery to supporting new scholars to reflecting positively on his home country:

The ideal would be that I would make contributions that actually make us know more about the field where my group is working. Like everybody wants to discover something interesting, new, and that they say oh, a [citizen of my country] discovered this, right? That would be the ideal thing. But I try to be realistic. There are so many bright people working in this topic and so maybe I can make more impact helping others to have the same opportunities I have. To get education and to get an opportunity to create the work rather than just putting all my money in what I can do or cannot do personally. So that’s why I like to emphasize more what I can do for other people rather than, ‘I’ll find something good’…One thing I can imagine is trying to improve relations between our countries and funding agencies. Maybe create a program that can fund people to come to Canada to get trained. One problem we have is that all the people with training and higher education stay abroad. But I think if we generate as many as possible that’s one part solved of the problem. So like organizing the resources between the two nations and trying to
help people to get a Master’s or PhD. Maybe also as a professor here in Canada I have access to these super computer. Maybe there is a way we can make it available to colleagues in [my home country] or we can do joint projects or something. (Esteban—male, STEM, Central/South America)

Esteban’s imagined career touches on an important topic that was also found in several other student narratives. The idea of benefitting one’s own home country (and career) through developing increased academic networks and opportunities was also a desired contribution and/or perceived responsibility for seven other students, all from developing countries. This finding is significant, as it suggests that many students from developing countries want to directly address issues of “brain drain” through how they develop their own personal careers and how they can build and utilize the potential of interconnected academic networks across transnational space. The desire to facilitate “brain circulation” to retain and return human capital to developing countries, is present amongst some of these students.

Chela provided one earlier example of how she is exerting agency to create partnerships between scientific research in North America and educational outreach in her home country. Another example is from Arvind, who is strategizing to build his career in the West in part to eventually give him more capital and more agency to advance scholarship (and his career) in his home country:

[One of my professors] just asked me, ‘What about, what will happen to [my home country]? I’m not thinking of [home country] at all.’ This is not the case actually. I really want to bring students from there to do PhD as long as I’m not going back there, and I also want to develop the connection so that if they are willing, then I can take people from here to give seminars there or do presentations there, because my entire family is in [home country], so every year I will be visiting them as long as I’m here. So, I’m happy to go and teach there and collaborate with them on the research project but see if they are willing. So it’s not that I’m totally abandoning [home country]. And after I’ve spent some years here, I can make a good case there to open a centre for me. Then I will come or I go to this University, not to that one. If I go immediately, I will be just a level with everybody else. So I was in a bit conflict because of this, because I wanted to go back and then I realized that maybe it’s not a good idea to do that immediately. I should take some time. (Arvind—male, SSH, Asia)

Arvind is looking for ways to strategically increase and deploy the capital he has earned in Canada to potentially support development in his home country. Likewise, Hoda feels a both a strong responsibility to her home country and a desire to be able to advance her own career without having to abandon it. She wants to develop research partnerships between her home institution and UBC, but feels such opportunities are not well supported enough, at least for her region:
I wish that UBC can do something where we can still be connected to Canada. I mean you cannot expect, or it’s not even the best for Canada, for all the people just come and be like settle here. You still need that other part of the world and you still need to develop it and you still need to have ties with it but I’m not sure what can be done so that we can. There are some funds for like working in developing countries but usually they just helps like African country and just like AIDS, or something. There are a few things that need to be more organized so that we can have the feeling that we are doing research at the top and we are also doing it from back home. (Hoda—female, STEM, Middle East)

Hoda’s comments both reflect and critique the social contribution discourse gestured at in UBC “vision” phrases which assert that the University “fosters global citizenship, advances a civil and sustainable society, and supports outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada and the world”. While global research collaborations are growing prevalent at UBC and at other universities in its same echelon, some new PhD holders like Hoda who are aspiring to return to developing home countries and build highly productive academic careers may lack the infrastructure and network support needed to fulfill their desired career achievements. This suggests that while individual student agency can carry them a long ways toward their goals it may not be enough to realize the potential contributions these talented scholars are capable of making.

The several examples shown above demonstrate how discourses of purpose for doctoral study, particularly academic discourses related to knowledge production, disciplinary stewardship and teaching, and capital-based discourses such as functioning as “highly qualified personnel” in knowledge economy and innovation-driven careers, were adopted by students for their imagined careers. However, what these narratives have also revealed is that these purposes are framed very frequently by students as ultimately being in the service of the larger purpose of social contribution. This reflects, to a large degree how policymakers, researchers and University institutions also frame the benefits of graduate education—teaching, applied research, “innovation”, even corporate profit is always positioned in such discourses as being for the public good in the name of social prosperity. “Promoting the social good” is an implicit aim of most discourses of education, so it may not be surprising that doctoral students in this study fundamentally want and feel a responsibility to serve some aspect of the public good in their careers. However, what these student narratives demonstrate is the multiplicity of avenues and options students perceive for being able to make such contributions. These findings are significant in that there seems to be little detail previously available on how this aim is adopted, constructed,
envisioned and acted upon by those who, arguably, are positioned with the greatest capacity to actually deliver on it.

As a contrast to the narrative of social good, and a coda to this section, there were a few dissenters, students who, while desiring careers that would give them satisfaction in some way, rejected the notion that they have or should prioritize fulfilling any particular responsibilities as PhD holders to anyone but themselves. It was not that they opposed having a positive social impact, through teaching, research or otherwise, but did not feel it was an obligation of them. One might predict, given trends of commodification of education for private gain, that such students would be “free marketers”, looking to advance their own capital above all else. However the students referenced here had more of what could be characterized as a “to thine own self be true” attitude towards their careers, perhaps a desire to opt out of discourses about what they are “supposed” to want and do as PhD holders.

So if you want to say what every PhD person should do, I would say follow your passion. Not your supervisor’s passion, not the passion of the market. You can, you got to be intelligent to make your work anyway so that the market also accepts it. Because market may be full of stupid people but because of them you should not kill your passion or interest. So that would be a thing for everybody and for me, being a PhD has a value because I could emphasize the understanding that I consider important in my dissertation. (Arvind—male, SSH, Asia)

Well I don’t see it very much in terms of responsibilities but in terms of opportunities and this is in the sense that you can hold whatsoever degree or so, but you still the real owner of your life. So you can still decide every day what you want to do with your life and you can realize suddenly that what you have been doing so far gave you a lot of satisfaction but you realize that it’s not leading towards a direction, it doesn’t satisfy you that much anymore or not as much as a new direction so you get across and now you feel better for yourself, right? (Rico—male, STEM, EU)

No, I don’t feel any, like (responsibility). I think that’s maybe, that maybe a sense of responsibility was probably one of the reasons to get it in the first place, but I don’t feel as though, not in terms of responsibility. I mean, I don’t see why people who have PhD’s should be leaders to be honest. I mean what makes a good leader then? Because you’ve got three University Degrees? That for me, that’s inconsequential. I don’t think that’s necessarily what makes a good leader, or social leader or whatever. So, yeah, I do feel some sort of social responsibility, but not, as a logical (follow on to getting a PhD). (Shane—male, SSH, EU)

Well maybe, I don’t know what I want to achieve in life, so I can’t say for sure. I mean, I don’t have any huge ambitions in the normal sense of ambition. So often people will have an ambition to become rich, or to become famous, or to at least externally they will say that they want to, you know, do something good for society
or something like that, you know. *I don’t hold those ambitions right now.* (Ira—male, STEM, Middle East)

In a way, these students seem to be insisting on their own right to create meaning from the PhD degree. This is not to suggest that other students were not sincere in adopting discourses of purpose around social contribution, responsibilities and leadership. However, both those narratives and the candid counter-narratives by Arvind, Rico, Shane and Ira remind us that international doctoral students are active agents in making their own meanings and charting their own paths both within and outside of dominant social, institutional and policy narratives. Their implicit argument is that what doctoral education “ought” to provide them, and the purposes they “should” adopt for their education and careers are personal definitions to be constructed and negotiations to be had, not prescriptions to be followed.

### 8.4. Imagined lives in place and space

The students in this study (and all international doctoral students) have uprooted themselves from their home country to come to Canada to pursue their various purposes in doctoral study. Having lived and learned in a new environment and in the spaces between places, and as they imagine and create career trajectories, where do they see themselves next? As they have experienced mobility in an increasingly globally interconnected world, what locations draw them and what considerations inform and bind their agency? As they finally emerge from formal education (if one doesn’t consider postdoctoral training as such) and into the rest of their lives, how do they imagine continuing to construct futures that include their careers but in the context of creating “good lives” for themselves? Since none of the students here had made absolutely firm plans about these next steps, their reflections on these topics were purely speculative, but findings in this area seems a fitting conclusion to tracing how international doctoral students construct and navigate their lives in global context.

#### 8.4.1. Staying, returning and moving on

Interest in issues such as “brain drain”, “talent circulation” and “stay rates” for international graduate students who have crossed borders to study has been growing, especially for policymakers and policy researchers in countries like the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, which increasingly rely on foreign students to fill “knowledge economy” jobs post-graduation. The same issues are relevant in Canada, although research on international graduate student post-graduation mobility trajectories here appears to be
underdeveloped. To review from Chapter 3 there have been a few previous survey-based studies from the United States and United Kingdom in particular which have utilized factor analysis to investigate variables which are influential in international students’ post-graduation location decisions, although only a couple of studies were found that included doctoral students. The dominant factors noted in this research are career opportunities (and related salaries) and social/political climate (and student integration) in the host country as compared to home country, as well as strength of social and family ties in both home and host countries (Masumba, Jin & Mjelde, 2011; Baruch, Budhwar & Khatri, 2007).

Both Masumba, et al and Finn (2010) found that “stay rates” in the United States by foreign graduate degree recipients were significantly higher for STEM students than for those in social science disciplines. This was attributed to superior scientific research funding, infrastructure and job prospects in the United States as compared to most other countries. In data from 2007, Finn (2010) found an overall one-year stay rate (2006 grads) among doctoral recipients of 73%, declining to a five-year stay rate (2002 grads) of 62%, and levelling off at 60% after ten years (1997 grads), suggesting that a solid majority of international doctoral students ultimately relocate permanently to the United States, while a sizable number stay in the United States for a limited period of time to gain additional work/training experience before eventually leaving. Wadhwa (2009) has suggested based on his interview and social-media based research with corporations and graduate students that a new trend is emerging where students educated in the United States from India and China in particular are planning to return to their home countries in greater numbers than in the past, due to their expanding home economies and attendant career opportunities. In other results relevant to the current study, Masumba, et al found that women had a 15% higher probability of preferring to stay on to begin their careers in the United States than males, which was attributed to more favourable social and career conditions for women in the United States than in some other countries, and that students from “developing countries” were not more likely to prefer starting their career in the United States, but did tend to be more sure about whether or not they would.

Some of the findings from these studies were reflected in student narratives in this research, although this sample was much smaller than the survey research samples and also distinct in that it included six students (19.4% of total) from the United States, who might be expected to be less motivated to consider living permanently outside their home country than others. Student voices add insight into the complexity of the options students imagine and how they are negotiating the choice of whether to return to their home country immediately upon graduation or after further
work or training experiences, to attempt to remain in Canada indefinitely by immigrating, or to move on to another location altogether, at least temporarily. Below is a summary of students’ preferred plans, although it should be noted that the actual options some students were considering were more nuanced than these categories convey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imagined next location</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>sex/discipline/region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Return to home country immediately (5/31 – 16.1%)</td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Male, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sheddy</td>
<td>Male, SSH, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female, STEM, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quon</td>
<td>Male, STEM, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Male, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to home country after another training/work experience or mobile stint in Canada or elsewhere (6/31 – 19.4%)</td>
<td>Mallory</td>
<td>Female, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chela</td>
<td>Female, STEM, Central/South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hoda</td>
<td>Female, STEM, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ravi, Jun</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stefan</td>
<td>Male, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrate to Canada or otherwise stay in Canada indefinitely (9/31 – 29%)</td>
<td>Helena</td>
<td>Female, SSH, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carl, Shane</td>
<td>Male, SSH, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Li</td>
<td>Female, STEM, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arvind, Simon</td>
<td>Male, STEM, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Esteban</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Central/South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reza, Farjad</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open/mobile/uncertain (11/31 – 35.5%)</td>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>Female, SSH, ASIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suzanne</td>
<td>Female, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>Male, SSH, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giulia</td>
<td>Female, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kim, Jackie</td>
<td>Female, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Central/South America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rico, Jaro</td>
<td>Male, STEM, EU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>Male, STEM, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Male, STEM, USA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2. Imagined next locations of study participants

Perhaps the most striking finding here is the wide range of and reasons for students’ imagined next locations and the mobility inherent in this range of options. The large majority of students intended to either relocate indefinitely to Canada, remain mobile for a period of time before repatriating at home, or were entertaining a range of options in various countries. Only a few expected to return to their home countries right away. In a previous section of this chapter, we saw that several students who planned to pursue academic careers felt that they had little control over
where they ultimately could move due to a restricted job market, which seems to be one factor in
the significant sense of mobility (unwanted for some) in students’ imagined futures.

The five students who expected to return home immediately did so for a variety of reasons.
Quon and Tina had little choice, because they were recipients of scholarships from their home
countries which stipulated that they return after PhD completion. Each of these students also felt
strong cultural ties to their home countries and was optimistic about their job prospects in their
rapidly developing country, affirming Wadhwa’s (2009) findings about higher return rates to such
countries. Jerry and Jason both believed that their immediate career opportunities were best back
in the United States, and Jason was also particularly drawn to the climate of his home region.
Sheddy still had ties to his home institution as an instructor and felt a responsibility and desire to
return to engage in teaching and community activism there.

Almost one in five students expected to eventually return to their home country, but
wanted to (or felt that their career development required them to) first extend their mobile periods
to obtain further training or work experience. This was particularly true of STEM students who
anticipated undertaking a postdoctoral research position. For many of these students, while
embracing an extended period of mobility to continue to build career capital, better career options
and strong ties to family and a sense of belonging in their home countries appeared to be very
influential in their eventual plan to return. Mallory, a SSH student considering a postdoc experience,
exemplifies this dynamic:

*I could look at postdoc positions in Europe for a bit, or Australia. I’m kind of still
having some idea of the world out there but still being drawn back to the States.
Partly it’s our family connections. We’re both happy with the fact that we could
move if we wanted to. I will probably apply for postdocs and (faculty) positions and
that’s a very unsteady position to be in right now because the job market is iffy. But
if I get a postdoc or even a position somewhere, we have no idea where that will be
and so we’re trying to maintain maximum flexibility. Still it somehow seems to
hover around the U.S. and Canada and then those other ones are kind of more
outliers. Maybe if they present themselves we’ll go for it, but we’re not seeking
them actively...*(interviewer)* What do you think will be the most important
considerations to ultimately shape your path from here?...Partly it’s just a feeling
about a place. The U.S. seems a practical place because there are so many cities
and there’s lots of different universities. And our parents are getting older. They’re
still quite young but these sorts of considerations will be present in our mind as we
move forward with our lives. In terms of my own academic career, most of the
universities where I would want to work if there were positions available are in
cities around North America, Canada. There are some all over the world but I speak
English, so that will limit my mobility in some way. *(Mallory—female, SSH, USA)*
Like Mallory, having some limits to mobility based on requiring an English-speaking work environment was also mentioned by three other students. Even more prevalent in student narratives was the theme of family ties, particularly to parents, as mobility-binding for students. Several students felt an obligation to support their parents with their presence or expressed a desire to raise children near family. Two interview excerpts further demonstrate how this motivation factors into student career and location plans:

*Our plans are to go back to Europe because my family is there, my wife’s family is there and we enjoy life here but I think for the time that our parents are getting older, until they die, we will probably be somewhere around them, i.e., Europe...So my plan is to go back and to start a scientific career there. Like a career which is beyond then a postdoc. So the next step would be a Post Doc. which would probably, again, be somewhere else. Not necessarily Europe. Maybe then we get to go to New Zealand. But then I guess would be considered a phase of settling, that would probably happen in Europe. (Stefan—male, STEM, EU)*

*I have two main goals, my career goals and my family goals. I want to have babies, I want to be a Mom, and for sure we want to have babies surrounded by family. We don’t want to have babies and only have the nanny to take care of the baby and you go to work or take it to childcare or something like that. We have discussed about going back home, probably to [my home country] and live there for a couple or five years or something like that where we have babies and babies are growing at least surrounded by family. (Chela—female, STEM, Central/South America)*

In addition to the students quoted above, family obligations or desires were also cited by Ravi, Tina, Jun, Jason and Hoda as significant considerations in their mobility decisions. This reflects the findings of Tharenou (2010) who reports that skilled professionals who have strong “affiliation needs” and a related strong family identity are more likely to return to their home country. However, her finding that women tend to repatriate for family reasons more than men was not found in this study. Other students, who were not planning or were unsure of whether they’d eventually return to their home countries to settle also referenced family ties as a meaningful consideration, but it had not led them, at the point of interview, to commit to repatriation.

Nine students were clear that they wished to settle indefinitely in Canada. Unlike the findings of Finn (2010) and Masumba, et al (2011), the proportion of SSH students desiring to do so (40%) was higher than the STEM students (23.8%). The regional affiliations and reasonings of the SSH and STEM students with this goal were distinct as well. Three of the four SSH students who wanted to relocate to Canada were from the EU, and their reasons for doing so were largely based on their personal lives and relationships. Shane and Helena had both partnered with Canadians after arriving at UBC and planned to immigrate, while Carl and his wife have a strong desire to maintain
their lives in Vancouver. Although Carl thought it was possible to imagine returning to the EU to be near his family, he felt subject to “undesired mobility” because of limited job opportunities in Vancouver. His goal was not mobility but stability, in a place he would really enjoy living, and unlike his peers, he felt willing to abandon some of his career capital to enable him to do so:

*It’s almost like priority 1, 2 and 3 is trying to find a way to stay and the reason is that I absolutely love Vancouver as a city. And then the second reason is my wife’s job. She loves it. So for that reason, it’s a very high priority to find a way to stay. I mean the big “x” factor is can I find work here that will keep me happy in the long run? Which is probably going to be quite tricky. There are small Universities and colleges here, so it’s not impossible but there aren’t that many and they would have to be hiring and they would have to pick me and so forth, right?...The people I talk to here certainly seem to be very much career oriented. Barely any of the friends that I’ve made that are at the University, are thinking in the same ways that I’m thinking about staying here or trying to find a way to be at least in this area. They all want to go to the best place to do their postdoc or the best place to get a tenure track job. So, yeah, it does seem like other people look at it a little differently. If we can’t stay here, I mean we’ll be forced to go somewhere else, but it’s not really open options at this point. This is sort of like, let’s try to find a way to stay here and really try and then if it doesn’t work out, it doesn’t work out. But let’s try to find a way.* (Carl—male, SSH, EU)

That Carl felt so strained to “find a way” to live and work where he’d prefer was a notable contrast to the STEM students who planned to relocate indefinitely to Canada. Four of the five STEM students who intended to immigrate to Canada were from developing countries, and all seemed to be quite optimistic about their career prospects here, especially if they chose to pursue an industry-linked career.

However, somewhat surprisingly, superior job prospects did not seem to be the dominant motivator in this group. Both Farjad and Reza, students from the Middle East, imagined that they could secure high-paying jobs in their home countries, given their discipline, expertise and capital earned from a North American PhD. However, they both emphasized personal factors and oppressive social conditions in their home countries as their primary motivators for wanting to stay in Canada.

*[My home country] government doesn’t have a really good political relationship with many countries, and the situation, it’s not predictable. If you look at it in the long term, in 20 years maybe the government would change, you know. There will be lots of turmoil and I don’t want to be in the middle of that turmoil...At the beginning when I was in [my home country] I decided to go for graduate studies and I was thinking about like having a much better future, because having a PhD in [my home country], it’s very different from having it here. University professors in [home country], or if somebody has a PhD in science or in engineering, they have a
really luxury life because they can earn really, really huge money because there are lots of demands for them. Either from the university or consulting with the companies. But now, I’m more like to have more contribution to science and have a relaxed life, not a very like luxury life. To do something which is important to satisfy myself internally. To work about something that I really care about that, now I think is more important. I guess maybe six, seven years ago, I was younger and I was more into getting certain things, but now, I’m must thinking more like self-satisfaction. Yeah, in [my home country] we were middle class and here I will be again middle class, if I’m lucky. (Reza—male, STEM, Middle East)

Reza’s comments reflect several ideas about where and how to create a “good life”—that he is willing to give up financial capital and relative wealth in his home country to have a more stable life and pursue his own academic interests in Canada. Farjad expressed a similar sensibility:

I don’t think I’m going back to [my home country] because of the economy situation. It’s getting worse and worse. It’s not stable so and I have done a lot at least to have a stable life. So I don’t want to go back there, there are lots of pressure on people every day. So I prefer to stay here, I mean I’m not looking for a very fancy job making lots of money, no. I’m just for a simple life, but at least there is not very much pressure on you. So back in [home country], I don’t think it’s an option on table for me right now. Maybe when I graduate, I don’t know, government decide to change but it’s not going to happen for sure. (Farjad—male, STEM, Middle East)

Simon (male, STEM, Asia), who is not from a developing country, nonetheless also emphasized that the less desirable political situation and social benefits in his home country were primary reasons he’d prefer to stay in Canada. Interestingly, none of the students from the United States who had cited political reasons for considering coming to Canada for doctoral study mentioned those issues when considering whether to return to the United States. The political leadership change that occurred in the United States in 2008 may have neutralized that concern for these students.

Li, like some of the students who felt sure they’d eventually return to their home country, felt pressure to return to care for her parents, and also seemed quite secure about her job prospects there, given the recent location of several multinational biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies in this quickly developing region. However, she decided to pursue permanent residency in Canada largely due to lifestyle preferences and to maximize her flexibility (mobility capital) for the future.

Immigrating may be an option. I don’t know. I may not consider just to live here forever because I’m the only child and I need to take care of my parents when they are old. And it’s going to be hard for them to come to Canada to live with me because everything is so different and they don’t speak English. So I may go back to [home country]. I haven’t made the decision yet. I can also look for a job in a
company in [home country] because there are a lot of biotech companies there because the labor is cheaper there and a lot of them are actually from the States or from Canada and they would like to have some people who got trained in Canada to work for their company so they know both...But I think I will apply for immigration because that way I have more options. I can either stay here or go back. I like North America, but for the States, the problem is it’s hard to get a visa. I don’t want that and I really don’t see any difference between the States or Canada. Maybe there will be more opportunities because there are more companies there but currently I like Vancouver so I would love to stay here. I don’t really care if I’m going to a very high university or not. I want to just work and enjoy my life so it doesn’t really matter where I am. I think, yeah it does because I need to be where I really like and I like Vancouver. (Li—female, STEM, Asia)

Li plans to stay in Canada indefinitely and views obtaining permanent residency in Canada as a type of capital that would maximize her mobility and agency later. She was also one of only a few non-USA students who mentioned the possibility of moving on to the United States. It was somewhat surprising that the United States did not loom larger in the imagined futures of students in this study, given findings in other studies (e.g. Baas, 2009; Chen, 2007) that international students sometimes “triangulate” their ultimate goal of arriving in the United States by first gaining capital in easier-to-access countries such as Australia and Canada.

Of this group of students intending to stay in Canada, only Esteban stated directly the motivation of better career prospects, including better earning potential. This, combined with better social living conditions, make him motivated to stay abroad. He cites the profound dilemma that he believes many students from developing countries face--that they want to continue to contribute to their home country as PhD holders, but also want to advance their own careers and personal interests:

[In my home country] We don’t have that many faculty positions. We don’t have that many jobs in industry for engineers, physicists. And the ones that we have are not as well remunerated as here, or in the U.S. or for that matter, or probably in Europe. And even if I have the chance to go back, I still feel like I would like to stay here because in [home city], if you go from one place to other in the city it takes you a couple of hours driving. It’s more insecure. It’s much more complicated so you think well maybe I would like to raise a family here. So even though I feel [like a national of home country] and I want to help [my home country] in any way I can, I have my personal feeling now that I like Vancouver, that I like Canada. So definitely my stay has changed the way I feel about where I belong and what I want to do in the future. But I don’t know how somebody from, for example, the U.S. would feel. I think people from developing countries coming here would have a much more confused time than a person from England or from Germany...it’s a confusion in the sense that even though you feel you are a patriot, but I’ve seen people going back home and getting disappointed, because we don’t have the resources. If I were a
faculty in Canada, I would probably have a computer, five times bigger facilities than I would get in [home country]. Like once you get good opportunities, you say well if I go back I may not get the same opportunities. Although I like my country and I want to help, but then if they offer me a job here, I’m not going to say no, but at the same time, I want to help [home country], so this is what I call the confused. And maybe if I were German, it wouldn’t matter, like they have big computer in Germany too like in Canada. (Esteban—male, STEM, Central/South America)

Like several other students who are coming from developing countries and intend to immigrate to Canada, Esteban also holds on to the idea that perhaps someday he could return to his home country. Although Finn’s (2010) research showed that there was relatively little attrition from the host country (the U.S, in Finn’s study) after two years spent there post-graduation, “going home” remains a powerful presence in the imagination of immigrants. (Tharenou, 2010). For students like Esteban (and Farjad, Reza, Arvind, Hoda, and Chela), who feel some additional pull to “help” their home countries, a balance may be sought in their careers where they can continue to enjoy the better social and career conditions of Canada, while leveraging the possibilities of networked interconnectedness within academia and/or industry to bridge the space between “here” and “home”.

The largest group of students (almost 40%) were those who were less certain of where (in which country) a more settled phase of their lives might be located. Again, for some, this was largely a function of an uncertain academic job market, but students in this group were willing to consider at least two different national locations, and did not anticipate (at this juncture at least) immigrating to Canada. Maya, Ross, Jackie and Diego were primarily weighing whether they’d stay in Canada or return to their home countries. Each of these students cited family ties for a desire to return home and for Americans Jackie and Ross, Canada seemed to be a viable extension of their consideration of settling in “home territory”, given its relative proximity to family and familiar culture. For Maya and Diego repatriating home would mean the compromise of major career options. Diego, a family man who had been compelled to make a promise to his home country employer that he’d return, expresses the complexity of navigating this choice as he begins to see his future in a more agentic way and in a global context. Like fellow Latin American Esteban, Diego also sees his choice as being more complicated than students from other countries, but not because he has a motive to “help” his home country, but because his country is now becoming more prosperous.

I have to sign papers and guarantees that I’m going to come back to [home country] to my university and I have to continue teaching there. But here, many
things are changing in my family, in my wife, in myself. I think we can see that there are very beautiful opportunities here in Canada. We can see another culture, another country, we can see that the life is quite expensive here. The democracy is quite beautiful and we have [at home] a beautiful country which is growing, we have our roots there, our culture, even our house which we built by ourselves. But after four years, our views are changing. I’m learning a lot of things and I’m feeling more independent in my own capacity to create knowledge which was my original objective...Every Latin American which is coming here, well the point of view are a little bit different. For example, if you compare somebody which is coming from Venezuela, or from Central America, from El Salvador. These guys are in big trouble right now. The economies of these countries are not doing very well and there are a lot of violence. But if you compare somebody from Argentina, or from Brazil, or from Chile, the conditions in this countries are right now much better so for us it’s more complicated to take a decision to just left our own countries and came here to start a new life here.  (Diego—male, STEM, Central/South America)

As discussed previously, like other students who are also considering remaining outside of their home country, Diego hopes to craft a career that will include linkages between institutions in his home and “host” countries. This may help him to span transnational space (and perhaps provide opportunities for him to travel frequently in-between), but his wife and children, who are in-between spaces along with him may not have the same agency and mobility. Diego’s narrative of the evolution of his sense of place as he considers his next steps adds texture and depth to the survey findings that career opportunities, social conditions in home and host countries, and family ties are all part of a complex mix for any individual student who must navigate a literal world of options.

The other students in this grouping (Giulia, Rico, Jaro, Ira, Kim, Jackie and Suzanne) characterized themselves as quite open to a wide range of locations, so long as they met some primary considerations. A good career opportunity was fundamental for all of them (except Ira). Suzanne, the only SSH student in this group of “free movers” felt her next location would be dictated by the scarce job market, but felt she could work in North America, Europe or Asia. The others, all STEM students, were focussed, to an extent, on finding a place that would enable them to have the “good life” they envisioned. This goal in itself is not different than the other students in the study, but these students’ status as Anglo people from developed countries and in STEM disciplines perhaps gave them a greater sense of mobility due to their relative means, social status and confidence in how their career capital will be valued in a global job market. Giulia and Rico were both considering the U.S as their preferred next destination for postdoctoral training, but
were open to settling various places in North America or Europe after that. For Rico, his goal is to have a good work-life balance in an environment that reflects his own values.

*I'm not looking for any specific place because of the place itself. I'm looking at conditions. The place would be in a community of people who have the same positive mentality for the future that I think to have. So I will feel more comfortable with them...I want to keep these three ingredients well blended together. The people, the job and the private life. Wherever place offer, what seems to be the best opportunities overall mixing these three ingredients. I would like to go in a place where I think that I will feel glad with the people and I like to travel and explore and I'm very much an outdoor person so but I want also to go in a place where the job I'm going to face and the people I'm going to work with, will make me roll down the bed as a happy person every morning...(interviewer) So where do you imagine this happy, satisfied life to be available for you?... Well that's hard but, I have been in the Southwest of the U.S. and California and overall I liked some places everywhere. Also because my girlfriend as well is in my same shoes. We came here together, we're hopefully going to go together, so we have to find a place where it fits both of us. (Rico—male, STEM, EU)

Like Rico, Kim also is looking for a place that would reflect her lifestyle interests. She wants to be somewhere she feels she fits in socially and considers “cool”, perhaps echoing Richard Florida’s theory about cities attracting the “cultural class” to build up their capital as destinations for highly talented people (2002):

*I've always sort of wanted to end up in whichever place I thought was the coolest, in the cool ranking in my head. The city I grew up in, inarguably is a really awesome town so everywhere else I've lived has sort of had a high bar to clear for me to even put it on an equal likelihood that I would end up there. So Glasgow's really awesome too and I could maybe live in Portland, Oregon... (interviewer) What makes a place cool?... Hmm, I think the attitude of the people that live there. I like (Vancouver) but I don't think I would live here forever. The cost of living is so high and there's so many people that are, because they can afford to live here, are miles beyond my social class. Like, ‘I'm going to go do sunrise yoga on my yacht’...I don't know, it's just like the mood of the city. I'm gonna go hang out with the skater bums in Portland and drink beer you know? (Kim—female, STEM, USA)

As we’ve seen in previous comments from Kim, she is very serious about her academic work and about making a meaningful contribution to global environmental problems. Yet when asked what will be important to her as she contemplates her exit from PhD study at UBC, she foregrounds lifestyle concerns. Ira, an outlier from beginning to end in this study imagines a variety of location options, but stays along this same theme of putting his personal interests first in charting life beyond the PhD:

*Well for a year or two, almost anywhere would be acceptable. I would prefer not to live in an urban environment that is kind of all encompassing. I guess there are
places that I would prefer not to go. On the other hand, for a year or two I’d consider going to some other country. I wouldn’t mind going to live, at least for a few years, in a lot of other countries. I’d go to Brazil, to Argentina, to Mexico, I’d go to Spain, France, many places, Australia, New Zealand. In the future? It depends. I guess, I’ve gotten used to the standard of living in a Western country. On the other hand, I’m increasingly becoming aware of the fact that my free time is very important to me. I would prefer to be in a position where I can work less and make less money and just consume less and live more for our lives, like we do now. And one way of doing that is to live in a third world country. So that would be an option. (Ira—male, STEM, Middle East)

These narratives show another facet of what I’ve referred to throughout this study as the “hidden discourses” of purpose, which include career and location pathways that are outside of those that are known and supported in dominant discourses about what PhD holders do and want and where they go. Realities of the job market, family obligations or other issues may ultimately make Kim, Ira and other students abandon some locations or potential careers, but their stories provide us with a richer sense of the possibilities they imagine.

8.5. Conclusion

While policy and institutional discourses focus exclusively and narrowly on what society and social institutions gain from PhD graduates, and survey research reveals in broad strokes the career and mobility pathways international doctoral students tend to take and the influential factors in doing so, the student narratives in this study provide insight into the multiple ways they are negotiating opportunities and challenges to try to create conditions that will bring them (and for some, their families) professional opportunities and personal satisfaction and security. These pathways often do conform with dominant discourses around the pursuit of academic careers and policy initiatives that encourage industry linkages and immigration of “highly qualified persons” to Canada to join the knowledge economy workforce.

However, some students envision alternative futures, and their narratives lend credence to Nerad’s (2010) argument that some old assumptions need refreshing, including “all PhD students want to become professors”, that academic career paths for PhDs are “linear and smooth”, that “everybody can take the best academic job offered, unconstrained by family concerns” and hints also that the assumption that “professors enjoy the highest job satisfaction compared to any other employment group” will not be the case for many (pp. 80-87). Students are imagining new forms of careers that mix sectors and rely on (or build) global networks. Many wish to opt-out of academic careers that focus on maximization of research productivity and publications, the
lifeblood of global academia, in favour of teaching. That very few students in this study spoke of aiming for academic jobs in institutions in the same “global league” as UBC may have been a quirk of this sample, or a reflection of realistic and guarded hopes in a hypercompetitive global academic job market, but it does suggest that many PhD students are looking for alternatives to the dominant narrative about academic career pathways. Regardless of imagined career pathways, the large majority of students wanted and felt a responsibility to make a positive social contribution as a PhD holder. As in the findings related to previous stages of the student pathway, students showed significant agency in constructing opportunities to utilize and making meanings of their educational experiences as they endeavoured to chart their courses forward in a globalizing context.
CHAPTER 9
Discussion and conclusions

9.1. Overview of research

This chapter begins with a summary of the study—the research problem, theoretical framing, research questions and methodological approach—as well as an integrative presentation of the major findings. This is followed by an overview and discussion of the significant themes explored in the study: discourses of purpose for doctoral education, globalizing imaginations and social fields, mobility and transnational space, individual agency and its bounds, and neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education. The chapter concludes with discussions on implications for doctoral education policy and practice and for further research which could extend the findings reported here.

9.1.1. Summary of study. This study asked broad questions about how and why talented individuals from around the world imagine and choose to pursue doctoral education in a particular location (the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada), their experiences as international doctoral students in constructing and navigating their lives and studies in place and space, and their imagined careers, accomplishments, responsibilities and locations as they emerge from formal education with its apex of achievement, the PhD. These trajectories into, through and beyond doctoral education were viewed through the lens of globalization theory with the purpose of understanding further how the phenomena and pressures associated with increasingly globalizing and networked social fields (including higher education, research, policy, work and migration) are reflected in student imaginations, experiences, and choices. Exploring the narratives of students who come from many different “home” locations, cultural affiliations, genders, socioeconomic classes and academic disciplines (but who are all, nonetheless, highly educated and relatively well-resourced), gives us a rich and unique vantage point for understanding processes of modern globalization as they relate to the development and mobility of ideas, networks and human capital.

The specific research questions asked in this study were: What purposes and meanings do international doctoral students at a large, North American, research-intensive public university ascribe to doctoral study and the attainment of the doctoral degree? How do these students
construct and navigate their educational and personal choices, experiences and responsibilities in pursuing doctoral study and in their imagined future careers and lives? How do these choices, experiences, desires, imagined futures and discourses of educational purpose reflect the influences of processes of globalization? These questions were pursued with a case-study design that focused on a single-institution and a multiple, embedded case research method with emphasis on the analysis of the personal narratives shared by interview participants. Interviews were conducted between autumn 2010 and spring 2012 with a sample of 31 international doctoral students who had advanced to candidacy (the final phase of doctoral study) that was representative of the broad regional, disciplinary and gender makeup of the overall doctoral candidate population at the University of British Columbia (UBC). UBC was selected in part due to its status as a research-intensive institution with global reach and reputation, its high and diverse enrolment of international doctoral students, and its institutional ambitions for further internationalization and global engagement. Locating the study at UBC also provided an opportunity to understand dynamics specifically related to the positioning of a Canadian university in the international student imaginary and the global higher education, research and policy fields, as well as how international doctoral students experience UBC, Vancouver and Canada as actual places and spaces in global context. The higher education, research and “talent acquisition”-related public policy framework of Canada, and UBC’s institutional rhetoric around internationalization and global engagement were also presented as contextual elements for understanding student experiences, and for presenting dominant “discourses of purpose” for doctoral education, in relation to which, student narratives of purpose were explored and contrasted.

9.1.2. Summary of major findings

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<th>Thematic area</th>
<th>Core finding</th>
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<td>Discourses of purpose for doctoral education</td>
<td>Students seek to accrue globally valued capital for public (and private) good.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Globalizing imaginations, social fields and transnational spaces</td>
<td>Students can imagine being anywhere, choose elsewhere, and live everywhere (and in-between).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neoliberalism and the market/production imperative</td>
<td>Students are wise to and wary of (with few winning in) the academic marketplace.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agency and its bounds</td>
<td>Students strategically create and navigate opportunities of a globalizing world, but family ties and compressed job markets impose real limits.</td>
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Table 9.1. Summary of core thematic findings
The study found that international doctoral students pursue PhDs with many purposes in mind as they choose what and where to study and that these purposes evolve with their experiences and as they look ahead to their future lives and careers. They anticipate and experience opportunities to develop capital in multiple forms through their educational sojourn—the symbolic capital of the PhD degree itself, as well as the reputational capital which is associated with their university, graduate program and faculty mentors; the human capital of skills and knowledge within their discipline as well as from other types of learning and work experiences (especially gaining English proficiency and teaching experience); the social capital of professional and personal networks; the academic capital of research publications and other elements of production in their discipline; and the cultural capital of immersion in and acquiring competencies from new cultures. The purpose of developing other, more recently theorized forms of capital, such as motility/mobility capital (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye, 2004) and transnational identity capital (Kim, 2010) also surfaced in student narratives. These are inherently globalized forms of capital which enable students to circulate or re-locate (including immigrate) in global context and adeptly encounter cultural “otherness”.

This capital is not an end in itself, but enables students to pursue other purposes that are important to them, including accessing desired careers, advancing knowledge production, application, translation and scholarly community in their disciplines, and making valuable social contributions. Making a positive social contribution in some sphere, through teaching, research, building capacity in one’s home country, policy work and/or working in industry to create products with social value, was expressed by a large majority of study participants to be the ultimate purpose of earning a PhD, a responsibility of PhD holders to society, and a desired career outcome. Personal purposes such as gaining new experiences and intercultural exposure for oneself and one’s family, re-locating to Canada, and enjoying life in a cosmopolitan, naturally splendid location were also significant elements of purpose for pursuing doctoral education abroad, in the particular location of UBC.

These student “discourses of purpose”, as they’ve been termed in this study, reflect some aspects of the dominant discourses of purpose for doctoral education that exist in academia and in institutional and public policy. In particular, many students do adopt dominant academic discourses about doctoral study as being for the “formation of scholars” and “stewards of the discipline” (Golde, et al, 2006; Walker, et al, 2008). Fewer reflect the predominant neoliberal, production-market imperatives of provincial and federal public policy discourses of advanced
education and immigration which focus on the generation (or attraction from abroad) of “highly qualified personnel” to “compete and succeed in the global knowledge economy”, as governments continue to expand research funding and industry partnerships primarily in established priority areas with clear market ties. Three or four students in the study are situated right in this public policy “target zone” in that they are considering (or in the process of) immigrating to Canada and plan to pursue research with industry ties and/or entrepreneurship that is in a particularly valued and well-funded area. These students are the true focus (and to an extent, the products) of public policy in Canada, but still represent a small percentage (less than 15%) of the participants in this study. The rest operate largely outside of these policy discourses of purpose.

Perhaps the discourse of purpose which is most resonant with students’ own is the UBC institutional discourse, as reflected in its vision statement and other aspects of the institutional strategic plan. While not specific to doctoral education, the UBC vision statement titled “Place and Promise” promotes global citizenship, civil and sustainable society and research that serves the world, and quite closely reflects what students indicated as their purposes in pursuing the PhD. If the UBC vision statement included “and helps students get good jobs”, it would be an almost perfect match with students’ visions, but this is not likely to be a promise UBC can make. This is also not to say that students always felt that UBC upholds this vision, or that all students will be able to fulfill their purposes, but the resonance between student and institutional purposes is striking. Questions related to how institutional vision does and does not concur with practices, and how (or whether) institutional discourses of purpose shape individual discourses would make interesting inquiries in their own right.

At every phase of their educational pathway, students are influenced by (and agentic actors within) globalizing social fields which are connected and constructed through networked communication and transportation technologies. In imagining and choosing to pursue doctoral education abroad, they access information through their own and others’ global mobility and globally transmitted images and stories which expand their canvas of the possible. They rely on mechanisms of a globalizing higher education field such as global ranking schemes and publication outlets, cross-national scholarship programs and pervasive academic mobility in which they can come into contact with prospective supervisors from abroad to inform their choices. As students, they engage in multi-national academic research partnerships, attend international conferences

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and summer schools, and interact deeply and broadly with people, customs and cultures previously unknown to them except through images and stories.

Many experience UBC, Vancouver and Canada as both actual places in which they navigate challenges and opportunities of living and learning, and transnational spaces in which boundaries between nations, cultures, affiliations and the edges of their own identities and ideas of “home” become blurred and subject to re-negotiation (Massey, 1993; Jackson, Crang & Dwyer, 2003, Vertovec, 2009). As they imagine and prepare for their lives and careers as PhD holders, students weigh global possibilities against local connections to place and responsibilities to people. They strive to exert personal agency in charting their courses toward the fulfilling, socially contributing careers and “good lives” they envision, but some also find themselves bound by larger pressures related to neoliberal globalization of higher education such as research production mandates and compressed and fiercely competitive academic job markets which force undesired mobility. In a complex and mobile world, some students embrace a wide range of global possibilities while others seek the stability of setting down roots in place and engaging in careers that lie outside of highly competitive global fields.

Perhaps the most fundamental conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that while large scale forces of globalization are clearly shaping international doctoral student trajectories and, quite incredibly, funneling students from every region of the world and in a diverse array of academic disciplines all into a particular institution that lies on a specific geographic peninsula on the far edge of a continent, these forces are not homogenizing nor fully controlling of student experiences. Students are navigating these forces with agency and strategy within their scope of influence. These student narratives provide evidence of claims that “lump[ing] together or homogeniz[ing] the experiences of international students based on the assumption that as a collective, international students experience educational sojourns in a similar way, proliferat[es] generalizations where great diversity at the intersection of cultures actually exists” (Gargano, 2009, p. 339) and that, ultimately, international doctoral students have the power and the capability, more than most, to act as “world-making collective agents” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, p. 35) in a globalizing world. The uniqueness of paths and multiplicity of narratives provided by students ultimately are a manifestation of the creative potential of globalization—for those who can access and navigate its “spaces of flows” (Castels, 1997).
9.2. Discussion of thematic findings

Four thematic strands which had been identified *a priori* within the theoretical framework of globalization as being potentially relevant to international doctoral students’ experiences were explored as they emerged in the student narrative data. These themes were: **globalizing imaginations and social fields, mobility and transnational space, neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education** and **agency and its bounds**. In addition, another, overarching thematic strand which infused and was infused by all the others also emerged as an organizing concept in the analysis. This theme was the **discourses of purpose for doctoral education** which emerged both in student narratives and from the public and university policy frameworks which shape the national and institutional contexts in which students are living and learning. These discourses of purpose were considered to reveal the fundamental reasons why students pursued doctoral education (in particular in Canada) and the outcomes they desired, as well as the outcomes expected by universities and policymakers in supporting doctoral education (and particularly international student engagement in it). These five themes in all were reflected throughout three phases of the student pathway (**becoming an international doctoral student, living and learning in transit, and imagined futures**) and analyzed in chapters five through eight. In this section, I will offer an integrative view of each of the thematic findings across the student pathway, with discussion. Student data is not presented here, as thematic findings were noted and substantiated with student narratives throughout the previous four chapters.

9.2.1. Discourses of purpose—core finding: students seek to accrue globally valued capital for public (and private) good. International doctoral students construct and adopt purposes for their education which guide their choices and shape their experiences at each stage of becoming and being a doctoral student and as they imagine their next steps as PhD holders. In some ways, these purposes reflect dominant (policy and university) discourses about doctoral education, such as the development of skills and knowledge to pursue fruitful careers (human capital), the advancement of knowledge through research, and engagement in industry and economic development through innovation. However, other purposes for doctoral education were also expressed by students. The capital they expected to develop through doctoral education took many forms in addition to the narrow sets of skills and knowledge valued in policy discourses about “highly qualified personnel”, a discourse which is largely about scientific and technical skills which can be translated to commodification imperatives. The contributions they hoped to make through and after doctoral
study also went, for many, beyond “advancing knowledge” and “being a steward of the discipline”, the cornerstones of the academic discourse of purpose for graduate education. These were certainly prominent purposes for pursuing doctoral study found in student narratives, but many students (perhaps especially international students) come looking for more.

In terms of capital, students strategize to accrue the symbolic capital of the PhD degree itself and the related reputational capital that is linked to the relative status of the specific institution, academic department and research supervisor they are associated with in the global fields that encompass them. This is apparent not only in how they decide where to pursue enrolment (and under whose supervision), but also in matters such as how they manage their relationships with their supervisors, the “clout” within academic and professional circles they feel they can exert as a result of “coming from UBC” or being associated with a particular supervisor or department, and how they perceive their value in the job market they will be entering. Students who were intending to pursue academic careers identified generating academic capital, primarily in the form of research publications, as a core purpose of doctoral education. Ensuring opportunities to accumulate this capital was in some students’ minds even as they chose their doctoral program and supervisor, while others learned over the course of their studies that publications (and their relative status in the global English-language journal hierarchy) are a form of currency in academia that is converted into funding, opportunities and prestige. Students are well aware that it is often the combination of symbolic/reputational and human capital that makes them stand out in competition for limited positions.

However, students almost as frequently referred to accruing other forms of capital as a purpose with which they entered doctoral study, or that had evolved over time. These were perhaps less intuitively obvious purposes than gaining symbolic, human or academic capital, but were very much related to gaining advantage within globally interconnected social spheres. These included the social capital of entering networks of influential (and often globally distributed) colleagues, cultural capital in the form of encountering and gaining fluency in new cultural practices, and mobility capital (“motility”) defined as the ability to be mobile in global context, to be able to leave and enter desired places and spaces and to carry and translate other forms of capital into new locations. I include under mobility capital the ability to immigrate to a new country, an overt purpose of pursuing doctoral education in Canada for only a few students at the outset of their choice to become an international graduate student, but a desired outcome for more as they near the close of their studies. Additionally, Kim’s (2010) theorization of mobile
academics developing transnational identity capital which manifests in competency to “encounter otherness”, is useful in framing students’ expressed desires to interact cross-culturally through PhD study abroad as the pursuit of another form of globally tenderable capital.

The “academic” discourses of purpose generally reflect the formative, scholarly mandate that universities and think-tanks such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) ascribe to doctoral education. At the forefront of this discourse are purposes around acquisition, discovery, preservation, transmission and application of knowledge. Academics associated with CFAT call this purpose of doctoral education “the formation of scholars”, and is largely aimed toward academic faculty renewal (Walker, Golde, et al., 2008). This orientation to doctoral study, one which envisions academia as a “life of the mind” endeavor in which intellectuals have free reign to pursue new ideas and engage in dialogue within academic communities, is an ideal that holds powerful sway in the imaginations and actual experiences of many students and probably remains the dominant view in the social imagination of “what PhDs do”. For some students, this purpose survives intact from their initial motivations to pursue a doctoral degree, through a supportive and stimulating learning experience as a student, to imagining a career in academia.

However, academic purposes, as students learn, are also suffused with market ideologies and capital exchange. The idyll of academic life comes crashing down to earth for some students when they encounter dynamics within their programs such as intense pressure around the research publication production mandate, poor funding, and commodification of their research/teaching labor at the expense of learning. For those wishing to pursue academic careers, a diminishing and intensely competitive academic job market, fed in part by the overproduction of PhDs by Universities looking to benefit from their labor and capital, leaves many anxious and discouraged about their future prospects. Students in social science and humanities (SSH) disciplines in particular, but some science/technology/ engineering/mathematics (STEM) students as well, imagine a refuge from the growing competition/production dynamic of higher education in teaching or public sector jobs, where they can still enjoy the intellectual engagement of teaching and conservation of ideas, while largely opting out of the high-stakes knowledge production mandate. These students find themselves pursuing the capital of obtaining a degree from a highly-ranked, competitive, research-intensive university, paradoxically hoping the capital will be valuable enough that they will be able to exchange it for jobs that shield them from these pressures that continue to grow in the global academic research field.
While capital accumulation for career entry and advancement was a predominant purpose, students also linked capital earned in doctoral education to their purposes of making positive social contributions. The desire to contribute to some public good, whether through research, teaching, community engagement or even through industry-based innovation was a highly prominent finding of this study, and in fact was framed as being the ultimate purpose and responsibility of doctoral education by many students, across categories of discipline, region and gender. This finding, to an extent, suggests that doctoral education bridges the binary that Ong (2004) suggests is developing in how purposes for higher education are being framed—that a new trend of education as a consumer product (with credentials serving as private capital) is overtaking the more traditional view of education being a public good for promoting democratic citizenship and social participation. Students in this study seemed to be saying that they indeed are pursuing doctoral education to increase their individual capital; they want and need the doctoral degree and related skills and networks that will best position them to advance in their careers. However, these outcomes were not seen by most to be ends (or the only ends) of doctoral education in themselves. By and large, students wanted to use this capital, often imagining doing so in collective ways with others, to promote the public good in some way. For some, this was at the expense of strategizing to maximize their personal wealth, calling into question the extent to which motives of pure consumerism and private interests have penetrated the doctoral student imaginary.

Student narratives also suggested a “hidden” discourse of purpose for pursuing doctoral education abroad which focused on private gains—personal growth, family development, simply having new social and cultural experiences, and enjoying life in a desirable location. I’ve termed this a hidden discourse because it lies well outside the established ideas of the purpose of doctoral education—to gain and create knowledge and to accumulate career capital. It is certainly part of the undergraduate mythology, at least in the West, that a core purpose of university is for young people (who are often from privileged social classes) to “grow up”, “expand their horizons” and generally have a good time socially, along with learning and gaining valuable credentials. Perhaps because PhD students are more fully-formed adults and doctoral study is a particularly focused, demanding endeavor, these more personal purposes are presumed to be vague undercurrents in their lives, if present at all. However, they were common and significant themes in students’ decisions to study abroad, to choose UBC and throughout their student experience.

It may be tempting to assume that such “personal development” motives might be prevalent among students from more wealthy countries who perhaps would expect (and be
resourced) to mix academics and personal growth or social enjoyment. It is true that some of those who most overtly foregrounded these purposes in their choices seemed to come from more privileged backgrounds. However, students across all regions, and prominently, students who came from more globally isolated regions, expressed that opportunities for cross-cultural contact, personal growth and recreation were meaningful and important to them. While these desires may have also been covert educational purposes of previous generations of doctoral students as well, students from all locations of the world are now more able to imagine and realize the social and personal (as well as the academic and career) opportunities of doctoral education due to the global transmission of ideas and information.

Overall, the prevalent focus of the study participants on making contributions to society begs the question of whether there is something unique about doctoral education, and doctoral students, which motivates a purpose of social contribution. Is doctoral study a last bastion of formal education where academic discovery and the public good of education still outweigh credential commodification and individual capital maximization? Perhaps the small subset of the university-educated population that decides to pursue doctoral education represents the relative attrition of those who have a more direct need or desire to pursue individual capital, and the relative higher inclusion of those who are attracted to making a social contribution through their careers. Perhaps it is the process of reaching the pinnacle of education and becoming an expert that instills a sense of social responsibility, a particular form of noblesse oblige, in doctoral students. Maybe Canada and its do-good global image, or UBC with its vision for “foster[ing] global citizenship, advanc[ing] a civil and sustainable society, and support[ing] outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada and the world”\(^{34}\) attracts more of those international graduate students who hold a social contribution purpose at the core of their life endeavors. Without comparative studies that explore the purposes that other levels of students (undergraduates, Masters) or students going to other locations for graduate study have in pursuing those degrees and imagining their career achievements, it is difficult to substantiate those provocative suppositions.

Perhaps most students, at any level, when asked about their educational purposes, would cite a desire to make a positive social contribution, even as they seek to maximize their own capital. In any case, we should not be surprised that individuals tend to seek purpose beyond

maximizing their own personal resources. In his popular-press book *Drive*, Daniel Pink (2009) surveys a range of research and leadership professionals and asserts that “the most deeply motivated people—not to mention those who are most productive and satisfied—hitch their desires to a cause larger than themselves” (2009, p. 131). It is perhaps simply human to strive for larger purpose and meaning in one’s endeavours, but doctoral students may be especially equipped and enculturated through long experience in education to adopt such purposes and motivated to find larger meaning in their massive investment of time and effort.

International doctoral students overall are (and must be) highly motivated, highly resourceful and highly resilient individuals to successfully enter and thrive (or at least survive) within a foreign, globally leading academic environment, and for many, not in their native tongue. It is not a stretch to apply the well-worn adage “the best and brightest” to the majority of these students. Adopting as a core purpose of doctoral education the ability to become better prepared, positioned and capitalized to make a positive social contribution is what we might expect from those who are truly the best, the brightest and most well-educated of global society. While perhaps most people, from all education levels, have a desire to be positive contributors to society in some way, these students are uniquely positioned to do so with broad impact. It is gratifying to learn that so many of them hold that purpose as they emerge into careers. Further study into the actual career achievements and social contributions of these students (or PhD holders in general) would be a fascinating exploration into the extent to which these purposes turn into tangible realities.

9.2.2. Globalizing imaginations, social fields and transnational spaces—core finding: students can imagine being anywhere, choose elsewhere, and live everywhere (and in-between) . The themes of a globalizing social imaginary and social fields and the phenomena of transnational space blended in student narratives and are integrated here. It was apparent throughout the data that students are living, learning, imagining and strategizing in an increasingly globally interconnected network of information and social fields. This was true across all phases of the student pathway. In first imagining education “otherwise and elsewhere” students were influenced through phenomena of the globalized “network society” (Castels, 1996) including the return of mobile individuals to their home countries with stories and contacts, televised images ranging from Esteban watching Carl Sagan’s “Cosmos” as a boy in his Latin American home country, to Jaro from Eastern Europe seeing Canada for the first time through the 1988 Winter Olympic games in Calgary, to Quon watching a
program on the “World’s Best Universities” from home in Asia, and of course, through the internet, email and social media, available across all regions. Even where such information access is banned, students described “workarounds” that the savvy among them were able to establish and share. Almost anywhere can now be imagined, because it can be accessed, in one way or another, through flows of images, information and people. To make manageable the vast options that are now imaginable (but still difficult to know at a distance), students turn to networks of friends and other students abroad, as well as the well-known global rankings as a shorthand for quality and prestige. The existence of these rankings are themselves both a product and producer of a globalizing field of higher education in which universities and individuals both collaborate and compete with one another in more configurations than ever.

Many students had already been significantly globally mobile themselves prior to deciding to come to Canada for graduate study, through earlier study abroad programs, Master’s degree study or other international travel, although for a few, arriving in Canada to start PhD study was their first foray out of their home country. A somewhat surprising number of students met their eventual doctoral supervisors through their own or the supervisor’s international academic networks and excursions, and international academic travel and collaboration was a significant part of many students’ PhD experience. A few students were beneficiaries of a growing trend of scholarship policies in some countries that have the explicit purpose of “circulating” talented individuals through high-status institutions in North America for training and networking and then, often, back to home countries which can then benefit from this global penetration. These are all signs and results of the increasing interconnectivity within the global higher education field.

Students generally viewed this interconnectivity as highly positive, providing them with opportunities to expand their global social and academic capital and their sense of possible careers in a broader global context. The globalized higher education field also appeared to diminish the importance of national borders and locations, challenging a hegemonic view of the United States as the always-superior choice for graduate education. The status of individual institutions, graduate programs and specific faculty supervisors were largely measured by students in terms of their reputation in the global field more than by their national locations.

As students were thinking about their next steps and future careers, several saw their potential scope of movement as being global. Postdoctoral positions in particular, and academic, industry or “hybrid” careers could be imagined as taking place in many locations around the world, so long as those locations and careers were integrated into globalized fields. As mentioned
previously, some students were highly motivated to contribute to the further engagement of their home countries and universities in global networks by establishing or maintaining research partnerships and training schemes with UBC. Overall, although various social, cultural and personal constraints may come into play to limit the actual realities of students as they move through their individual educational pathways, it was clear throughout the study that the canvas of the imaginable, of the possible, for these students was global in scope.

Related to globalizing social fields, transnational space in which physical (particularly national) places become subordinated to “spaces” that span or transcend geographic locations was a theme that animated student narratives about their evolving senses of belonging, home and identity, both as international students and in imagining their futures. Vancouver and UBC were experienced by many students as being a transnational space in that the cultural diversity and strong ethnic enclaves that are present gave a sense of (nearly) the entire world being within these localized places. While the notion of Canada as a nation was meaningful to students, and specifics of Canadian policy around immigration, foreign affairs and social services were known to and largely appreciated by students, students in search of what they called “the real Canada” or “real Canadians” found these national entities difficult to locate. Students spoke of “everyone being a foreigner” at UBC, of “travelling the world on their stomachs” in the restaurants of Vancouver, of Vancouver being an “Asian city” in a “Pacific Northwest” that is neither Canadian nor American. For several students, Canada melded with the United States in an undifferentiated “North America” that had particular meaning and capital, especially in their home countries, demonstrating the dissolution of national boundaries that is at the core of theorizations of transnational space. Canada itself (at least as experienced within Vancouver and UBC) had an identity for some students that was more global than national.

Gargano (2009) argues that viewing international student experience through the lens of transnational social fields allows us to acknowledge the “simultaneity of locality and multiplicity in identities” that such students are negotiating (p. 339). This is a helpful framing for this study’s finding that some students’ experiences in the transnational spaces of Canada, Vancouver and UBC had a “deterritorializing” impact on their sense of social belonging and place-based identities, leaving them with an “in-between” or “liminal” sense of personal locality. Cultural identification with an ethnicity or home or regional area remained strong for most, but several students also spoke of their experience here as leaving them unsure of where they ultimately “belonged”, and of what their national affiliations meant to them. They had been physically located in Canada long
enough to adopt new outlooks and customs that set them apart from those who remained “at home”, but not long enough to be more than thinly assimilated into Canadian culture. The additional impact of being exposed to the world (or at least much more of it) while in a cosmopolitan, multicultural location and a globalized, internationally networked academic field provided an even further expanded canvas on which they were situating themselves. For the most part, students seemed to embrace, even sought, this destabilizing of identity, even as it caused some anxiety about where they would ultimately “land” both in terms of actual location and sense of self and belonging. However, there were some students who did not have this experience, remaining more closely knit within home cultures, which perhaps happened more easily in a city that has well-established diasporic communities.

Compared to previous generations of international doctoral students, those in this study could perhaps more comfortably occupy the spaces between “here” and “home” through the ubiquitous availability and use of electronic communication technologies. Students far from their home countries did not have to rely on imagination and occasional (and slow) contact with home cultures, events and relationships; they could integrate actual contact in real time with these entities on a daily basis, and many did. In this way, the “network society” in which these students operate both expands their social and identity fields towards their full global reach, creating almost endless possibilities for connection and therefore perhaps more destabilization of place-based affiliations, while at the same time compressing time and space to the extent that they no longer have to entirely choose between one place and another.

However, choices of physical location, especially looking ahead to future “settling” life phases are still necessary and challenging for students. After all, one’s body can still only be one place at a time. Several students hoped to utilize the human, social and mobility capital they accumulate during doctoral study and the mechanisms of globalizing social, academic and research fields to bridge between locations. Establishing or maintaining cross-national research collaborations was a commonly expressed desire for students. In this way, international doctoral students typify and are active proliferators of transnationalism, as described in its early theorization by Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton (1992): “a new kind of migrating population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies. Their lives cut across national boundaries and bring two societies into a single social field” (p. 1). In the global higher education field, and in the mobility possible for highly skilled workers, the binary of “home” and “host” is surpassed to include an expanded
multiplicity of locations and societies. Some students, particularly STEM students operating in deeply globalized and interconnected disciplines (and industries) expressed optimism that such bridges could be built. Others appeared to have the perception that they, their discipline or their country, lie too far on the periphery of global fields to fully participate in their flows. It is also important to note that several students seemed to have little interest in actively participating in the possibilities that transnational space affords. Although to an extent, every international sojourner inevitably lives ever after in a type of transnational space that integrates the experiences of having been “elsewhere”, some students were seeking stability, a sense of home and place, not mobility and space, after their educational sojourn. The diversity of vantage points and meaning-making among the international doctoral students in this study is evidence that this population offers a rich context within which to view the larger phenomena, possibilities and limitations of transnational space.

With regard to institutional policy, Terri Kim (2009) has argued that while “the official role of internationalization” in higher education “may sound as if it is for international understanding and the development of interculturality, but in fact is not...interculturality disappears and...transnational academic mobility and internationalization are enclosed by the market” (p. 395-396). At first glance, Kim’s critique seems that it could be true of UBC. Rhetoric about promoting intercultural understanding as part of institutional discourses of purpose is certainly present at UBC; it is a key tenet of the University’s “Place and Promise” strategic plan. The increased recruitment of international students (especially undergraduate and professional Master’s students) by the BC Provincial Government, UBC and similar universities is primarily a market-driven phenomenon that is also clearly documented. It is without question that part of the drive at UBC to increase institutional internationalization through global partnerships and alumni engagement through off-shore offices is to maximize both reputational and funding capital for the university. The market imperative is clearly ingrained in the policies that guide the institution both from within its bounds and from its government funders. But what of intercultural understanding? Is it really the empty trope that Kim suggests? Student narratives suggest it is not. Many students stated that encountering and learning from new cultures and different people was a specific

purpose of their choice to study abroad and a highly valued aspect of their actual experience. Not all students found the university fully supportive in facilitating intercultural understanding (some Asian students, and Hoda, a Muslim woman found particular challenges, for example). Yet, in the main, students found opportunities for significant cultural exchange to be deeply meaningful and quite available in their labs, classes, city life and living arrangements. This may be a happenstance occurrence, something that can’t be attributed to any university initiative, but rather an inevitable by-product of the social agency of students in a cosmopolitan city and a diverse university. Whether or not universities are sincere in their purpose to foster intercultural understanding (and there is no reason to believe UBC isn’t), students certainly are, and many choose and navigate UBC to fulfill this purpose.

9.2.3. Neoliberalism and the market/production imperative—core finding: students are wise to and wary of (with few winning in) the academic marketplace. To name but a few trends that have been linked with the rise of neoliberalism over the past three decades, higher education has undoubtedly become more commodified, competitive, entrepreneurial, production-oriented, managerial, interdependent with industry, and subject to ‘stakeholder’ accountability expectations. Scholars have examined multiple aspects of these trends (which are both product and producer of the globalization of social fields), including policy convergence, impacts on the professoriate and academic job markets, commercialization and branding of Universities, university-industry partnerships, corporatization of university administration and many others. Rizvi and Lingard (2009) argued that we now live within a “neoliberal social imaginary” in which all social institutions have a market value. However, little research has been undertaken to understand how the pressures and activities related to neoliberalism and the market/production imperative in higher education impact what university students imagine, adopt and experience within the higher education institutions which are so profoundly influenced by these trends. The few related studies that include doctoral students focus on their experiences within industry-sponsored research projects. While this study does not offer a comprehensive view of this large topic, it sought to learn more about if and how doctoral students experience these phenomena as they enter and progress through their studies and imagine their careers afterwards.

The impacts of neoliberalism and market imperatives on doctoral education were subtle yet pervasive in student narratives. The most significant and overt references were to the compressed academic job market and overwhelming competition for tenure-track positions, a
concern that crossed disciplinary lines, but was especially pronounced among the social sciences and humanities students. This points to a difficult combination of over-production of PhDs in some disciplines (presumably for the labor, funding and prestige they may contribute to the university), the erosion of tenure-track academic jobs in favor of more economical and non-committal sessional teaching roles, and the failures of doctoral programs to prepare students for or expose them to careers outside of academia. While the students in this study (with some exceptions) felt they had had an excellent academic and social experience in their doctoral program, only those in close-to-market fields and those not committed to an academic career expressed a high level of optimism and agency about their career prospects. This is not necessarily a concern that is specific to international doctoral students. In fact, such students may have an advantage over domestic doctoral students in that they are already globally mobile and may have (or at least perceive) a wider range of locations in which they can establish a career—at home, in their “host” country or elsewhere. Those that are multi-lingual may have further viable options.

Although Slaughter, et al. (2002) raised concerns that students involved in industry-sponsored research could be subject to exploitation or limits on academic freedom, it is telling that the few students in this study who had an industry connection to their doctoral work reported no related problems or challenges. Their narratives instead supported Mendoza’s (2007) findings that such situations provided them with positive opportunities for skill development, networking and job prospects. This is not to say that there isn’t potential for exploitation in industry research arrangements; in my professional role I have encountered some eyebrow-raising scenarios. However, in this study, the challenges that were tied to exploitation or commodification of research labor were all within purely academic sphere, pointing to the extent to which academia itself has become a competitive, production-driven domain. Perhaps this is predictable in the sense that as public (non-industry) funding for research becomes scarcer, competition for public research dollars becomes more fierce. The capital in academia that can be exchanged for scarce resources is prestige, which in turn is built on the currency of publications. Publications, at least in STEM disciplines, are produced in large part from doctoral student labor. The experiences of a few STEM students in this study reflected a cycle of research/publication production being prioritized ahead of student learning and autonomy.

Academic research, perhaps particularly in STEM fields, is a progressively more hybridized endeavor, still taking place largely within higher education institutions, but increasingly being asked to function according to corporate sensibilities (competition, negotiation of contracts, high levels of
productivity, accountability to the “bottom line”). However, academic research is undertaken mostly without the management structures that are in place in many innovation-driven companies that support this kind of corporate activity and the performance of high-skill employees that carry out their core work. This may leave both doctoral students and their academic supervisors grasping for effective ways to successfully navigate the increasing “industrial rhythms” of academic research and falling back on intimidation and control mechanisms that undermine educational imperatives. Tina’s narrative of the “production-line” mentality of academic research and graduate education in her home country was an extreme example of educational purposes being subordinated to production imperatives, but a similar dynamic appeared in other student stories based in Canada, as well. This pattern should not be overemphasized here, as only a small number of students in this study reported dynamics of this nature. The majority of students found the learning environment to be supportive, stimulating and conducive to intellectual autonomy. Still, the increasing competitiveness and pressure to produce academic capital in the form of publications, paired with supervisory approaches that do not respond to these generally highly competent individuals’ need for both supportive mentorship and a sense of greater purpose to their work, may result in lost opportunities to facilitate the potential contributions of students and ultimately may betray the fundamental educational purposes of doctoral study.

Another related systemic issue had to do with the funding of international doctoral students. Surprisingly few students specifically mentioned having significant struggles with obtaining sufficient funding to support their doctoral study. However, some did struggle, and others experienced serious power dynamics and inequities related to funding that reflect the particular vulnerability of international graduate students in an increasingly public resource-constrained environment. Of course it is possible that relatively low numbers of students reporting problems may reflect the fact that only students who were quite far along in their programs participated in the study, so had survived financially in one way or another until then. Attrition for financial reasons may have occurred earlier for other students. STEM and SSH students seem to have different vulnerabilities in the funding dynamic. SSH students without scholarships normally carry heavy teaching loads. While this is an appreciated professional development opportunity for many, it may draw them away from scholarly productivity in their own work, extending completion times, and therefore the financial resources required, as seen in Shane’s case. STEM students normally have access to more research funding, but it is under the control of supervisors, making students dependent on supervisors in ways that are not always in their best interests, and may set
up doctoral study as more of an employment contract than a learning experience, as seen in Jaro’s case. But then, students who bring their own scholarships, as Hoda did, may suffer from neglect from their supervisors because they are not financially “invested” in the student.

Further constraining international graduate student control and agency with regard to funding, Canada’s public graduate student fellowship programs are only available to domestic students and federal funds for graduate student research stipends are disproportionately spent in STEM disciplines and for industry-linked projects. International students may wonder (as SSH student Suzanne did in this study) why international students are aggressively recruited to Canada but not given access to federal scholarships. This is a dilemma, especially within non-market oriented fields, at the heart of the rise of neoliberalism in higher education in Canada. There is (apparently) political pressure at the federal level to spend limited public scholarship funds on domestic students. Meanwhile, industry funding for academic research is limited to certain fields (largely STEM). In addition, UBC scholarship funding (which generally comes from provincial sources and is accessible to international doctoral students) is capped at four years which is over a year less than the average degree completion times at UBC and elsewhere. With many international students having families to support, being from modest means, and more constrained in their ability to work in Canada while studying, the compression of student funding into unrealistic time frames and towards “priority” research areas, many international students in particular may be at risk of non-completion or exploitation. However, these speculations were not deeply supported by the student narratives in this study, as most of the international student participants were relatively comfortable with their funding situations.

As noted in the section on discourses of purpose, students did understand the PhD degree (and its particular pedigree) as being a commodity of sorts that has certain capital in the job market. Gaining this capital was a primary purpose for pursuing the degree and selecting UBC as an “education provider”. However, emphasis on converting this capital into financial gain was quite muted. This was one important factor for the few students who were focussed on or considering careers in industry, but on the whole, to the extent that the degree was seen as a commodity, it was to enable careers that facilitate personal satisfaction and social contribution. Most students were wise to the market aspects of various types of careers and understood that if they wanted to compete for jobs they needed to participate in the economies of particular job markets by accumulating capital that has value in that market—publications, teaching experience, networks, etc. In this way, they did adopt a market-based imaginary in a competitive employment-seeking
context. However, an overriding sense was that many students were reluctant participants in such economistic thinking about their education. Several wanted to opt-out of the most competitive career contexts, such as research intensive universities, and only a small percentage of even the STEM students had their sights on industry positions in Canada, perhaps undermining the neoliberal policy framing of higher education as “the production of human capital to ensure the competitiveness of the national economy in the global context” as Rizvi and Lingard have characterized contemporary educational policy directives (2009, p. 16). In other words, international doctoral students are perhaps inevitable objects of (and sometimes willing) participants in the neoliberalization of higher education, but that doesn’t mean they have embraced it.

9.2.4. Agency and its bounds—core finding: Students strategically create and navigate opportunities of a globalizing world, but family ties and compressed job markets impose real limits. This study paid attention to the ways in which international doctoral students from a wide range of social and geographic backgrounds exert personal agency (the ability to act within a particular social field) in the imagination, creation and navigation of educational and career pathways, and how social formations, including microstructures such as individuals’ educational habitus and macrostructures such as pressures of globalization, both enable and constrain this personal agency. Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of habitus as being the fundamental sociocultural conditioning which defines the range of perceptions and actions an individual can deploy was countered with Rizvi and Lingard’s (2009) argument that in an increasingly globalized and networked society, the range of the imaginable and therefore the actionable, becomes exponentially expanded, and individuals have growing capacity to act as “world-making” agents. On the whole, this study’s finding supports Rizvi and Lingard’s view.

Students generally viewed processes of globalization as enabling to their personal agency and repeatedly demonstrated examples of imagining and strategizing “how things can be otherwise” in a globalized context. Quite a few students described coming from families or social strata where doctoral education (especially abroad) had not been part of the typically imagined possibilities, but after first accessing a more globalized social imaginary through network technologies, mobile images and individuals, they could then take the next step of exerting personal agency to pursue the possibilities posed by a globalizing field of higher education. The early actions (prior to entering doctoral study) that students took included designing and pursuing
global educational experiences for themselves, contacting prospective supervisors abroad, leaving established careers, obtaining scholarships, even simply insisting on departing from their home territories to pursue educational opportunities despite family protestations. The basic action of choosing to leave one’s familiar environment and travelling across borders to, for some, profoundly different societies and engage in the most challenging level of educational endeavor is a substantial act of personal agency, made more imaginable and possible through global interconnectedness.

The agency to go beyond what their immediate circumstances or habitus might dictate continued through the student experience and into imagined careers for some students. Sometimes supported by institutional offerings, sometimes not, students pursued or created opportunities for building professional skills and for global academic mobility and exposure. They reconstituted supervisory committees to better fit their interests and sought out occasions for cultural exchange and learning. With regard to imagined careers, some students demonstrated agency by contravening pressures within their graduate programs to proceed into research-intensive careers and instead planned to pursue teaching or other careers. One student, Ross, felt he could reveal this plan only under assurances of confidentiality. Other students imagined new forms of careers, built on interconnections between employment sectors, disciplines and global locations, although time will tell whether their agency is sufficient to overcome barriers within the institutional habitus.

The examples cited above do not apply to all students, in some cases only a few. Not all students exerted notable agency in charting their educational courses after their initial choice to go abroad to study, and instead followed relatively well-worn paths created by previous generations of international doctoral students. For many students, their personal scope of agency was shaped if not fully bound by their sociocultural backgrounds and positionings, their disciplinary areas, pressures exerted by neoliberal policies and the market/production imperative in academic research, and significantly, by family ties and responsibilities. Some students (primarily from countries with developing economies) conveyed that going into any field that did not lead to a high-status, lucrative profession was almost unimaginable.

While the women in this study had largely overcome any cultural restrictions around their agency in going abroad, there were a couple of references by students of the difficulties women in particular face in freely making educational and mobility choices. What was more notable in this study was the significant level of agency the women exerted in becoming mobile and navigating doctoral education abroad. There seemed to be few gender-related bounds on agency particular
to women. Two of the women in the study were single parents of young children from developing
countries who made almost astonishing choices to uproot from family support and come to Canada
for study. Socioeconomic status bound the educational agency of some students earlier in their
education, requiring them to attend lower-status universities than they may have been qualified
for, and financial strain compromised choices for a few students during the program. However,
doctoral education may be the only remaining segment of higher education that prioritizes student
merit over institutional profitability in admitting promising international students. While one may
need money to access education and/or achieve at a high standard in earlier education, excellent
students without significant financial resources can still, by and large, access the highest quality
doctoral education.

Several students perceived that their career agency was bound by very tight job markets,
or that their insistence on a particular type of career would significantly bind their mobility agency.
This was especially apparent for those pursuing academic careers; most of these students expected
to have to “go where the job comes up” or, if they prioritized a particular location, to have to
“settle” for less ideal academic job prospects. This tension was a significant source of anxiety for
many SSH students in particular. In this way, some doctorate holders, while undeniably “highly
skilled” in their discipline, lie outside of the increasing global mobility flows of “highly skilled
workers”, typically defined along the science and technology (S&T) lines as that found in the 2008
World Migration report:

Highly skilled persons are mainly in high value-added and high productivity activities
that are essential to the global knowledge society. S&T workers, physicians and
business persons bring different competencies and their professional activities at
various levels combine to advance economic and social development and national

The compression of the academic job market (across both disciplinary groupings) appeared to lead
to a sense of curtailed global mobility, especially for those who are monolingual in English, at least
in the early phases of one’s career. One can speculate then that landing a first academic job may
be subject to significant binds on mobility or locational agency, but then if that job/University is
well-situated within the global academic field, opportunities for further mobility agency may open
up from there. Individuals who were considering careers outside of academia seemed to have
more of an agentic sense of career location mobility (although perhaps still constrained by
language proficiency issues), given increasingly globalized industry development.
It is perhaps not surprising, but still not commonly addressed in either research literature nor professional practice, that the most significant bounds on agency (especially with regard to mobility) that students discussed were their family obligations. The more well-known phenomenon and mobility challenges of “dual careers” for highly skilled couples was a factor for several students in both the choice and entry phase of doctoral education as well as in their imagined futures. However, other less well-examined family dynamics also affected students’ choices and agency, including the desires of student parents regarding the social milieu within which they wish to raise their children, and the obligation some students had (especially those who were only children) to return to their home countries to care for parents. It had not previously occurred to me that national policies such as China’s one-child law could in part be an effort to control (or at least have the effect of curbing) “brain drain” due to strong social customs that adult children will return to care for their parents in that region. Although Canadian immigration policy liberally enables them to do so, most students rejected the possibility that their parents might instead immigrate to Canada due to a sense that older generations were too socially entrenched in their home countries. Therefore, it could be the case for many international doctoral students that while the capital they accumulate through their advanced education may make them “eligible” to join the globally mobile elite in transnational space, the more traditional bounds of family and cultural habitus (even a generation removed) will keep them in place, in their home countries, after their educational sojourn has ended.

9.3. Implications for doctoral education policy and practice

The student narratives explored in this study demonstrate that international doctoral students have vast potential to realize and expand the purposes that institutions and policymakers set for doctoral education, and likewise, policy and institutional practice can evolve much further in their ability to enable and fulfill the purposes that international doctoral students bring to their endeavor. To the extent that policy and practice can align with student purposes, doctoral education can be a more successful and fulfilling experience for students (although policy generally seeks to shape the desires and purposes of those at whom it is directed, not respond to them). Regardless, several dimensions of policy and practice are explored here as areas where the productive potential of doctoral education—for society, institutions and students--can be better supported. Many of these areas have already been identified in the research and professional literature on doctoral education.
9.3.1. Careers for PhD holders. A primary area of joint concern between all parties is in how doctoral education prepares students to enter and succeed within a variety of careers. This topic was the focus of a recently released major report from the U.S.-based Council of Graduate Schools, *Pathways Through Graduate School and Into Careers* (CGS, 2012). This report emphasizes several points that the students in this study made, including the fact that traditional tenure-track academic careers are being reduced (at least in Western universities) yet many graduate programs and faculty members remain nearly entirely focused on preparing students for only these careers. In the CGS study, few students reported they had sufficient information regarding career options prior to entering graduate school and that while in graduate programs, influential faculty mentors primarily encouraged careers that closely mirrored their own, leaving alternatives poorly understood by students. Universities have yet to effectively address the gaps between what its faculty knows, does and encourages, what students want, and what the job market offers. Policymakers and universities have attempted to expand student exposure and preparedness for industry jobs through partnership, internship and scholarship programs related to industry—not necessarily for the purpose, but with the effect, of giving students insight into and skills for industry careers. The CGS report suggests that the ties between industry and graduate education should deepen and expand, including through further student funding and faculty interactions with industry, to make graduate education more responsive to employer needs. The students in this study who participated in such opportunities valued them and in fact appeared to be both more optimistic about and better positioned within a broader range of career opportunities.

The problem, of course, is that these opportunities generally only benefit those students who are in fields that are tied to industry. Students in other fields (primarily SSH) require other types of opportunities to broaden their work-related skills and experience for career alternatives to academia. The CGS *Pathways* report suggests that similar collaborative research projects and internship programs between universities and non-profit and government employers could close this gap for these students, but offers few concrete recommendations for how this could be realized, especially outside of STEM fields. The fact is that such programs cost money, and research in the social sciences and humanities is rarely tied to the commercialization potential that drives project funding. This impasse leaves room for little optimism that the model which has been successful in broadening the career opportunities for STEM students can be successfully applied in other disciplines. In an increasingly neoliberal policy environment in which public sector careers are
de-valued, we can continue to anticipate that SSH students, even highly-skilled doctorate holders, may struggle to establish careers related to their discipline, even within academia. However, surely there are more opportunities for partnerships between, for example, universities (and the faculty members who mentor students) and NGOs, policy organizations and government branches to develop collaborative projects in which doctoral students can contribute, learn and network in ways that will open new career paths. Student narratives revealed a thirst for these sorts of opportunities. In a related challenge, unless universities (and graduate programs) find ways to expand the development and application of skills and engagement in collaborative work for students in these disciplines beyond that which are primarily relevant to university teaching and research, those students who look towards alternatives in non-profit and government sectors will continue to experience a major disconnect between their doctoral training and the expectations of employers outside of academia.

9.3.2. Bridging distances, circulating talent. Career development and opportunities are clearly issues for all doctoral students, not just international students. However, some international students intending to return to their home countries (especially developing countries) face particular issues in remaining connected to the global research field in which they train at UBC. Several students in this study indicated that they wanted to continue to be productive researchers, to publish in globally recognized journals and to advance the standing and capacity of their home universities and countries through careers back home. They were concerned, however, about the ability to do so, given the lesser research infrastructure (especially in laboratory science), funding and focus on research in many locations. Many highly-ranked universities such as UBC are working to further international research partnerships with universities around the world, but the strongest interest in doing so clusters around other high-reputation or “rising” universities and countries; those in less developed countries or reputational positions (where several of this study’s participants come from) lie somewhat outside the primary collaboration interest zone. UBC’s current international strategic plan has a major focus on India, China and Europe as significant or emerging economic and academic powers. It also acknowledges interest in Africa as a perennial focus of aid and development work, and aims to increase research engagement there. But what of Iran, Colombia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and many other developing countries to which the students in this study may be returning as PhD holders and scholars? It is understandable that a university like UBC (or even a country like Canada) cannot take strategic interest in every location across the globe,
but there may be potential for initiatives that help individual PhD students returning to home countries to remain engaged in the mainstream of their global research discipline. Funding for a post-graduation, “new circuits” scholarship which would enable outstanding new PhDs to establish or strengthen ties between their home locations and more globalized networks through international conference participation, journal subscriptions, return research visits and ongoing collaborative projects, could go a long way in aiding the ongoing global engagement of these individuals in which so much has already been invested. This would be a powerful way for UBC to operationalize and extend its institutional policy statements around being a “globally influential” university that “promotes civil and sustainable society” and produces research that “serves the world”.

For those students who intend to settle outside of their home countries, federal immigration policy is well-structured to enable them to remain in Canada and likewise to allow Canada to retain highly skilled PhD graduates. Students who utilize doctoral education to facilitate immigration are well aware of these policies in advance of making their educational choices and Canada’s liberal policies in this regard are effective in drawing some students to choose Canada. Other desirable locations such as the United States, Australia and the EU are under political pressure to restrict immigration; Canada is presently in a very advantageous position regarding “talent acquisition” through immigration, although this could certainly change over time. Canada’s main interest in highly skilled immigration is economic development, and developing countries will continue to primarily lose human capital through brain drain if there is not an economic interest to be had in supporting such immigrants to “circulate” back to home regions. Developing ways to leverage shared economic interests through partnerships that involve these highly skilled individuals are critical in enabling countries to share in the benefits that advanced education confers.

9.3.3. International doctoral student funding. Funding for doctoral students is a perennial challenge and especially so for international students who face the additional expenses of maintaining connections with their home countries. There were several issues at play among the students participating in this study, including difficulty securing sufficient level of funding to afford the cost of living in an expensive city like Vancouver, lack of access to major funding sources (such as federal scholarships for which international students are not eligible), the lack of a provincial graduate scholarship program in British Columbia (unlike other provinces), funding that typically expires after four years even though doctoral programs are routinely quite a bit longer, and the
influence that research supervisors are able to exert over students (sometimes not to their benefit) due to their control of funding sources.

Issues of quantity and access of funding could be addressed through both government and institutional policy initiatives. Currently, the federal policy approach leaves it to university and in some cases, provincial government scholarship programs to attract and fund international doctoral students, with federal immigration and work allowances in place to support the retention of PhD graduates in Canada. The federal research agencies do provide research grant funding that is accessible to international students through their faculty supervisors (most commonly in STEM fields), but restrict most student scholarship programs to Canadian students. This not only deprives international doctoral students of a crucial funding source, but sends a mixed message, as conveyed by some student narratives in this study, that Canada wants them to come and wants them to stay, but doesn’t consider them meritorious enough for federal scholarships. The availability of research dollars but not scholarships for international students also reflects public policy priorities where research itself is seen as a public good that can directly benefit Canada (in economic, social and/or reputational terms), so there are no restrictions on who can be paid to conduct research, including international doctoral students; the overall goal is research productivity and it doesn’t matter who does it. However, direct investment in individuals, through scholarship funding, is seen perhaps as supporting a private good of education, and the government prefers to (or finds it more politically viable to) make this investment only in its own citizens or permanent residents.

Not unlike other countries which have strings attached to scholarship funding, Canada is protecting national interests in the highly globalized higher education and research fields, which is perhaps not surprising but may ultimately be counterproductive to Canada’s effort to attract more highly skilled PhD students in the first place. Making all scholarship funds accessible to international doctoral students would send an important message about the value of these students to Canada and would complement immigration policy which favors them. One other action the Canadian federal research granting agencies could take to respond to the student concerns surfaced in this study is to make cost-of-living adjustments to research stipend maximums and scholarships to recognize that in highly globalized cities such as Vancouver, costs are much higher and maintaining level funding across all jurisdictions in Canada, provokes inequity in relative funding.
Doctoral student funding policy at the institutional level itself could also be revisited to address student concerns. Given that degree completion times in SSH disciplines are generally longer than in STEM fields, and that time-flexible research grant funding for student stipends is less plentiful in SSH disciplines, there seems to be an inherent and disproportionate disadvantage to SSH students in institutional policies that limit funding availability to four years. Some of this funding discrepancy is made up for through extended teaching assignments, but this often just serves to further slow academic progress towards degree. Extending scholarship funding to a fifth year would address some of these concerns (and an approach that has frequently been proposed by student advocates), but this ties into larger issues of how to slice up a limited pool of institutional resources that is facing the same public funding contractions as has been increasingly seen in other Western jurisdictions. One solution is for universities to attempt to increase their campaigns for philanthropic fundraising for graduate student scholarships, which UBC is doing in earnest as of this writing. The UBC “Start an Evolution” fundraising campaign is the largest in its history and an example of similar campaigns that most large public universities in North America are now routinely conducting to cope with declining public funding.\(^{37}\)

Another approach, which perhaps flies in the face of most globally ranked universities’ ambitions for expansion of influence and prestige would be to begin to slow, even reverse the massive increases in doctoral student enrolment seen over the past decade. One way to make a limited source of funding go further (and in this case, make it an appropriate level of funding for international doctoral students), is to divide it up among fewer individuals. Universities like UBC have been in unabated growth mode, in part funded by increased Provincial government investment, presumably to drive the HQP and research production mandate and institution reputational capital accumulation prerogatives of the global higher education field. However, this growth has also resulted in what students perceive as an overproduction of PhD graduates in fields with shrinking career opportunities. Universities ought to seriously take up the question of whether their efforts to grow their own capital by becoming more “research” or “doctoral” intensive are at the expense of adequate funding for the students they admit and career opportunities for (some of) those they graduate. Given the long completion times for doctoral students in North America generally (5.9 year average in Canada in 2004/05 \(^{38}\) to 7.5 year average in the U.S. in 2002/03 \(^{39}\), with

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U.S. measurements including time spent at Master’s level), it is challenging for doctoral enrolment to be responsive to quickly evolving labor market needs and projections. However, the responsible management of doctoral student enrolment, rather than growth for growth’s sake, is an issue gaining credence in organizations dedicated to excellence in graduate education, but has yet to be taken up seriously at UBC.

9.3.4. Enhancing the student experience. Finally, with regard to the living and learning experiences of international students, the students in this study tell us of their powerful and deep-seated desires to connect with others across cultures and to make positive social contributions. They want to gain and utilize capital in many forms—knowledge, skills, networks, prestige, clout, mobility, intercultural understanding—in the service of careers and other endeavors which will enable them to do positive and meaningful things in their scope of influence. Universities can likely do more to foster and advance these purposes. Study participants living in campus family residences uniformly spoke of the outstanding social support and cultural learning they and their children experienced by living in a communal environment. The opportunities for community-based living for students, both with children and not, can be expanded on campus through more living spaces which are designed for this effect. Opportunities for community, civic and international service and engagement can be expanded for doctoral students, to enable them to build upon and realize their desires for social contribution. International students can bring a wide range of skills, networks and perspectives to such endeavors. These opportunities are increasingly being established for students at the undergraduate level, but there is a persistent belief that the doctoral education experience should be single-minded and focused only on research productivity and capital optimization, that doctoral students are not “here” to do anything but become experts in their discipline. This mistaken belief ignores the “hidden” discourses of purpose that students in this study revealed, and along with the pressure to maximize research productivity, handle heavy teaching loads, and scramble to make ends meet through outside employment, restricts students’ abilities to learn from and contribute to similar, stage-appropriate efforts. This dynamic fails our students’ purposes and wastes an opportunity to fully enable these outstanding students’ willingness and desire to contribute more to the university and broader local and global communities.

9.4. Implications for further research

This study sought to fill a gap between what is known about large-scale trends in international graduate student mobility, student satisfaction with their experiences during doctoral study and their career trajectories, and the lived experiences, choices and meaning-making processes of international doctoral students at a globalizing research university in Canada. The study provided insight into how students imagine, choose and navigate doctoral education (and lives) “otherwise and elsewhere” and how they imagine and act to realize possible careers (and lives) in a world with increasing possibilities and interconnectedness in global context. An obvious extension of this work would be to take a longitudinal view on how the futures these students have imagined actually evolve and how the individuals involved continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities they face and make meaning of their options and experiences. A follow-up study to see how and why student plans for their careers and locations materialize or change would provide further insight into both personal and global influences on the trajectories of highly skilled and mobile individuals. Just as this study provided retrospective insight from students on how their prior expectations were realized (or not) during their doctoral study, a similar approach to having early-career PhD recipients reflect on their doctoral experience should yield insight into whether their education delivered the forms of capital they had sought and how they evaluate its outcomes. Did their degrees open the career and mobility doors they had hoped? Are they moving towards making the social contributions they anticipated or imagined? Why or why not? Findings from this sort of investigation could supply needed guidance for policymakers, universities, doctoral programs and faculty members to further structure doctoral education to fulfill student purposes along with their own.

This study was limited by its location at a single institution. Research that explored similar questions to those posed in this study, but included international doctoral students from multiple peer universities (meaning similar in size and global rankings) in Canada (e.g. University of Toronto, McGill University) would help us to understand whether and how municipal/regional factors and institutional or provincial policies and practices have differing impact on students. A comparative study at multiple peer universities across several countries within the global field (e.g. University of Texas-Austin, University of Melbourne, University of Edinburgh) would underscore national policy contexts and their impact, while one that compared international doctoral student experience at universities at different strata of the global field either within the same country (UBC, Simon Fraser University, Brock University) or across countries (e.g. Stanford University, UBC, University of Cape
Town) would provide meaningful insight into how institutional (and therefore individual) positionings within the global field influence student imagination, experience and trajectories. Globalization theory may predict that such global positionings would be the dominant influence on the capital sought and obtained as well as on much of the student learning experience and options in globalizing career fields. However, as Luke (2007) reminded us earlier, the influences of globalization are “only intelligible from a local site, a place, a point of view” (p. 101) and a comparative study of multiple “local” sites should reflect unique vantage points on and experiences of global and personal situatedness that further demonstrate the personal agency of individuals and the multifaceted localities within global space.

Several interesting questions that received only brief exploration in this study could be expanded on much further. One possibility would be looking more deeply at the experiences of students from any of the specific regions or cultural groups included here. Regional analysis wasn’t a core focus of this study, and much more could be understood about, for example, the experiences and imaginations of students from Central/South America in Canada. I’m not aware of any research that looks specifically into that group, while there have been some studies on Asian and Muslim graduate students in Canada. In a similar vein, a more comprehensive analysis of the choices students from developing countries make in charting their career development and the role their home country plays in shaping their outlooks could shed further light on how mobile academics may bridge the “global knowledge economy” gaps between countries and between universities in the global field. Yet another undeveloped research area is the experience and choices of international graduate students who are parents. It was evident from this research that the several students who were parents of young children had complex needs and particular challenges, as well as unique opportunities and considerations at play when making mobility decisions and in their cultural affiliation processes. Some student-parents came to Canada in part to expose their children to a new environment, but later faced unexpected dilemmas around whether to return to their home country after their children had acculturated to Canada. This issue should be of interest to both policymakers and universities seeking to attract and support international graduate students, some of whom are, or become, parents while in PhD study.

9.5. Concluding remarks

Doctoral education, and perhaps especially the experience of international doctoral students is an important and fruitful context for understanding the increasing globalization of
fundamental social fields such as education, citizenship, cultural affiliations and work. Viewing globalization through the eyes of these students provides significant insight into how fields are expanding to connect and include more locations, institutions and individuals than ever before, offering new opportunities while also continuing to exclude some from its range of productive possibilities. These individuals demonstrate creativity, initiative, passion and fortitude in crossing borders, engaging with otherness, resolving barriers and pursuing expertise at the pinnacle of formal education. Most adopt purposes of social contribution that go beyond their own personal enrichment. These students were, and wanted to be, transformed, to be made “otherwise” and make the world otherwise, through pursuing a PhD “elsewhere”. They don’t want to abandon where they’ve come from, or what they bring from there. They don’t want to be here or there. They want to be here and there, and in fact, they already are. The deep potential for these ambitious and courageous travelers to contribute to the global good and their wide spectrum of motivations and experiences as they imagine and navigate their way into, through and beyond the PhD process makes this population worthy in its own right of exploration and understanding, beyond what they reveal to us about larger processes of globalization. Doctoral study in a globalizing world provides abundant opportunities to these students, but also poses many challenges. The extent to which these opportunities can be maximized and the challenges mitigated, is the true extent to which both universities and students can fulfill their ambitions to be globally influential.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1 – Interview guide

1. Please tell me a little bit about where you grew up, and the formal education you had prior to graduate school. Follow-up questions:
   a. Was it always expected in your family that you would go to University? Was it typical amongst your friends to do so?

2. Please tell me about how you decided to pursue a graduate degree and how you came to study <field> at the University of British Columbia. Follow-up questions:
   a. Why <field>? Were there other fields you considered studying?
   b. How did you access information about potential universities?
   c. Did you apply to/have offers from other universities for PhD study?
   d. How did you decide to come to UBC? Was there anyone that had a influence on your decision?
   e. What did you know about Canada and Vancouver before you came?
   f. You chose to come to Canada for your PhD. Was that a common choice among your peers?

3. How would you describe your experience at UBC so far? Follow-up questions:
   a. Have you faced any particular difficulties or challenges here at UBC so far? Prompt for academic, career, research and personal challenges
   b. What kinds of opportunities have you experienced here? Prompt...
   c. What have been the most valuable aspects of your experience at UBC so far?
   d. What is like for you, being from <your home country> here in Canada/Vancouver/at UBC?

4. I’d like to talk a bit about how you and your life may have changed since you came from <home country> to UBC. How would you say things have changed for you, if at all? Follow-up questions:
   a. Has your experience here changed your sense of where you belong in the world? How? Where is home for you now?
   b. How does your home country figure into your future plans?
   c. How do you maintain your ties with <country> from here in Canada?

5. I’d like to talk about what you think the future might hold for you, after you finish the PhD. What career paths do you prefer/can you imagine for yourself in the future? Follow-up questions:
   a. Where can you imagine yourself pursuing those career options?
   b. Are there any particular challenges you imagine you could encounter in pursuing that option?
   c. Has your experience here changed how you think about the opportunities available to you in the world? How?
   d. Do you think PhD holders have any particular responsibilities in the world?
   e. Are there any particular contributions that you think you would like to make in the world?

6. In the end, what does it mean to you to get a PhD, to become Dr. <last name>?
APPENDIX 2—UBC International PhD students by world region and disciplinary area (data snapshot taken December 20, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ASA</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>CSA</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>AFR</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>OCA</th>
<th>% region total</th>
<th>Intl total</th>
<th>% intl total</th>
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<tr>
<td>SSH</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
<td>48</td>
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<td>42.1%</td>
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<td>30.4%</td>
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<td>STEM</td>
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<td>88.9%</td>
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<td>48.2%</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% intl total</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>21.1%</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1115</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASA (Asia): Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand,

ME (Middle East): Cyprus, Egypt, Gaza, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates

USA: United States of America

EU (Europe): Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom

CSA (Central & South America): Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guyana, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela

AFR (Africa & Caribbean): Botswana, Cameroon, Cuba, Ethiopia, Ghana, Grenada, Jamaica, Martinique, Nigeria, South Africa, Trinidad, Uganda, Zimbabwe

OCA (Oceania): Australia, New Zealand, Samoa

CAN: (Canada): Canadian citizens and Permanent Residents

Notes: data is based on reported citizenship and includes only students who require a study permit in Canada; only countries that had at least one citizen enrolled in a PhD program at UBC on November 1, 2008 are included

SSH (BUS, EDU, HUM, SOC, PRO): Business Administration, Education, Humanities, Social Science, Professional (Planning, Law)

STEM (ENG, HSCI, SCI): Engineering, Health Sciences, Sciences
APPENDIX 3 – UBC PhD students by world region, disciplinary area and sex (data snapshot taken December 20, 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>ASA</th>
<th>ME</th>
<th>USA</th>
<th>EU</th>
<th>CSA</th>
<th>AFR</th>
<th>OCA</th>
<th>Field Totals</th>
<th>Field %</th>
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<tbody>
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<th>TOTAL GRAD</th>
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APPENDIX 4 – Invitation to participate in study

(On letterhead of UBC Department of Educational Studies)

Invitation to Participate in Interview for Research Study

Study Title: International Doctoral Students in Globalized Transnational Space

It is easy to see how the world is becoming more interconnected through advances in technology and the greater international mobility of people. Research is likewise becoming more globalized and doctorate holders face greater opportunities and challenges than ever in charting their educational and career paths in a global context.

A research project is now taking place to better understand the experiences and aspirations of international doctoral students at UBC, especially in light of a globalizing world.

As an international doctoral candidate at UBC, you are invited to participate in this study as an interviewee. Interviews will require approximately 75-90 minutes, and will take place on the UBC campus or another convenient location. If you are interested in participating, please email globalphdstudy@gmail.com by April 15th, 2011 to learn more.

Participants will receive a $20 gift voucher to Amazon.ca.

Eligibility requirements: Must be an international (requiring study permit) doctoral student at UBC who has been admitted to candidacy.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences and aspirations of international doctoral students and recent graduates, especially as they are affected by modern processes of globalization. Interviews with doctoral students and recent graduates from many regions of the world will help us to better understand the challenges and opportunities you have encountered in pursuing doctoral education and anticipate in your future career and personal development. This information will in turn help universities and other interested parties to better attract and support international doctoral students.

How Results Will Be Used: Your identity will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation is voluntary and will not affect your standing with the University, access to university services, or your academic program. Data collected will be used in a doctoral dissertation which will be publicly available from the UBC library.

Principal Investigators:
Dr. Donald Fisher, Professor, Educational Studies, 604.822-5295
Dr. Amy Scott Metcalfe, Assistant Professor, Educational Studies, 604.822-5331

Co-Investigator: Jenny Phelps, Assistant Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Doctoral Candidate, Educational Studies, 604.822.1336

Contact: If you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions about the study, please contact globalphdstudy@gmail.com or jenny.phelps@ubc.ca or call 604.736.1987
APPENDIX 5 – Interview consent form

(On letterhead of UBC Department of Educational Studies)

Interview Consent Form
International Doctoral Students in Globalized Transnational Space

Principal Investigators:
Dr. Donald Fisher, Professor, Educational Studies, 604.822.5295
Dr. Amy Scott Metcalfe, Assistant Professor, Educational Studies, 604.822.5331

Co-Investigator: Jenny Phelps, Doctoral Candidate, Educational Studies and Assistant Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies 604.822.2934

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences and aspirations of international doctoral students and recent graduates, especially as they are affected by modern processes of globalization. You have been invited to take part in this research because you are a doctoral candidate at UBC who is a citizen of one of the country groups that has been selected for inclusion in this study. You were selected due to your fit with study eligibility criteria, with consideration for gender, academic discipline, citizenship and status of being admitted to doctoral candidacy at UBC.

Consent: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to your academic record or your access to services for students. It is normal for some research subjects to decide not to participate, and you will not be penalized in any way for not participating.

Study Procedures: You have volunteered to participate in a one-on-one interview with the co-investigator of this study. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes and will be held in a public building on the UBC Vancouver campus or other mutually agreed upon location. The interview will be digitally recorded for the sole purpose of making an accurate transcription after the interview is over.

Data collected during the interview may be included a doctoral dissertation which will be publicly available from the UBC library.

Potential Risks: As a result of participating in this study, you may experience some emotional discomfort or be inconvenienced due to time spent. However, participating in this study will not affect your standing with the University, access to university services, or your academic program. No one outside the research team will be informed of your participation.

Potential Benefits: There are numerous benefits to participating in this study. Your participation may help the university to better support international doctoral students and recent graduates in managing challenges and maximizing opportunities. Your responses may help other universities and colleges work more effectively with their international doctoral students. You can have the personal
satisfaction of knowing you assisted another UBC doctoral student in conducting her dissertation research, and that this research may help other students to be more successful in their university experience. You will be provided with a summary of the findings by email and will be able to access the thesis through the UBC library.

Study participants will receive a $20 gift voucher from Amazon.ca.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept strictly confidential at all times, excepting in a case if you were to reveal information that may be perceived as indicating serious breaches of academic integrity. In such cases, a report to proper authorities may be required by yourself or the investigator. Subjects will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. All documents and recordings will be kept in a locked, secured location for up to five years, at which time they may be destroyed.

Contact for information about the study: If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, please contact globalphdstudy@gmail.com or 604.822.2934.

Contact for concerns about the rights of research subjects: If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research subject, 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.

(subsequent page)

Interview Consent Form – Signature Page

International Doctoral Students in Globalized Transnational Space

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.

_____________________________________________________________________

Subject Signature      Date

_____________________________________________________________________

Subject Name      Student Number