

# A SELF DETERMINATION THEORY PERSPECTIVE OF THE WORK-LIFE ADJUSTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL IMMIGRANTS

by

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ABSTRACT

New professional immigrants, who are accepted to Canada explicitly because they have desirable skills and professional training, are often unable to find employment or are forced to accept employment below their skill level. This study was part of a larger Canada Research Chair project exploring the career experiences of new professional immigrants to Canada. Using a grounded theory approach, this current study examined the role of the fundamental psychological needs posited by Self Determination Theory (SDT), namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and their influence on immigrants' vocational motivation. Results indicated that when circumstances thwarted the satisfaction of these needs, immigrants experienced greater difficulty adapting to their work-life in Canada. However, immigrants also were able to find creative and self-determined ways of at least partially fulfilling these fundamental needs. These results have theoretical implications for career psychology, and practical implications for helping professional immigrants successfully adapt to the challenges they face.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

For all of its history, Canada has utilized immigration as a key strategy for nation building and economic growth, and this continues to characterize the country's approach to growing and maintaining its labour force. In recent decades, low domestic birth rate and an expanding economy have resulted in labour force shortages that the government has sought to remedy through encouraging foreign workers to migrate to Canada. Between the years of 1991 and 1996, immigrants accounted for 70% of Canadian labour force growth, and this was projected to account for 100% by 2011 (Human Resources & Skill Development Canada, 2002; Kenny, 2009). Interestingly, if Canada were to stop accepting immigrants over the next two decades, the labour force would begin to shrink as of 2017 (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Immigration is not only an important part of the Canadian economy, but also its identity. Indeed, Canada prides itself on being a multicultural nation that accepts people from diverse backgrounds and supports the maintenance of their cultural identities while living in Canada (Berry, 1984). Thus, individuals considering immigration to Canada often view it as an inclusive nation where individuals from diverse backgrounds have the chance to attain a high standard of living through access to vocational opportunities, as well as political and economic security (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007).

Many highly skilled and educated immigrants come to Canada, hoping to benefit from the opportunities for career development and enhancement available in this country. In fact, recent immigrants are bringing higher skill and educational levels to Canada than previous generations of immigrants, and are now more than twice as likely to have a university degree than the Canadian-born population (Statistics Canada, 2008). Furthermore, immigrants typically exhibit what is referred to as *the healthy immigrant effect*, which is the phenomenon of recent



immigrants demonstrating greater health (based on a variety of indicators) than the average population in Canada as well as their own country of origin (MacDonald & Kennedy, 2004; Newbold, 2006). However, even with these advantages, immigrants often deal with substantial difficulties while establishing themselves in Canada, particularly in their careers. Indeed, despite being more qualified than immigrants in the past, recent immigrants' success in the Canadian labour market is declining (Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Wald & Fang, 2008).

The majority of principal applicants for immigration to Canada are accepted under the Federal Skilled Workers Program, which seeks to fill employment shortages in the market by recruiting professionals in those fields from abroad (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2010). These individuals are selected based on their presumed ability to successfully establish themselves within the Canadian economy. To qualify, applicants must meet multiple eligibility criteria, such as English and/or French proficiency, education level, and work experience. Ironically, it has been well documented that individuals who enter Canada under the Skilled Workers Program find it difficult to have their experience recognized upon arrival, and encounter a number of barriers to establishing themselves in their field of expertise (Chen, 2008; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994; Reitz, 2001). Some of these barriers include cross-cultural challenges (Mak et al., 1994), accreditation difficulties (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007), language problems (Statistics Canada, 2004), and increasingly uncertain labour markets (Meijers, 1998; Trevor-Roberts, 2006). As a result, many immigrants dealing with these disappointments experience stress-related reactions, such as frustration, irritation, depression, and anxiety (Dean & Wilson, 2009).

### **Study Rationale**

The present study is part of a larger Canada Research Chair (CRC) project aimed at developing a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the work-life adjustment of

immigrant professionals. The principal investigator of the larger project is Dr. Charles P. Chen. Participants recruited for this research had immigrated to Canada between 1999-2006 and lived in the Greater Toronto Area. They were required to have worked full-time in their country of origin, and were employed full or part-time in Canada at the time of being interviewed.

The current literature on immigration typically documents the objective aspects of immigrant career adjustment, such as labour market outcomes, earning trajectories, and barriers to finding work within one's field of specialization (e.g., language proficiency, skill devaluation, discrimination) (Zikic, Bonache, & Cerdin, 2010). Based on the nature of these phenomena, research is predominantly conducted using quantitative methods. Recently, there has been a greater interest in capturing immigrants' subjective experiences of their career development after migration, as well as how they make meaning of the barriers encountered (Jafari, Baharlou & Mathias, 2010; Rastogi, 2007). Qualitative methodologies allow for a more in-depth exploration of the experiential significance of immigrant career trajectories in Canada, but represent a small proportion of the research at present.

In addition, research to date has tended to focus on the impediments to immigrant vocational efforts. As such, little research has investigated immigrants who have had positive career outcomes, or who remained resilient in the face of difficulties and continued to pursue their work-related goals (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010). However, as research focuses more on these "success stories," one must be sensitive to the risk of over-attributing immigrants' success to the inner dispositions and personal characteristics of specific individuals, and under-appreciating the role of situational factors that shape these individual characteristics.

A full analysis of the immigrant experience would include both dispositional and situational factors, as well as an appreciation of their dynamic interplay over time. Achieving this level of theoretical understanding requires utilizing a framework that includes situational and

dispositional factors, specifies their functional interdependence, and is cross-culturally robust. A useful theoretical model of immigrant vocational adjustment should also be able to explain both positive and negative outcomes. Being able to examine the difficulties experienced by immigrants, their adaptation to those difficulties, and the rich, idiographic subjective nature of this process, requires an in-depth examination of the *interaction* between the environment and personal meaning making. Thus, the present study aims to examine the subjective career development experiences of professional immigrants using the framework of Self Determination Theory (SDT).

SDT is a theory of human motivation, which posits that humans are naturally active, curious and inclined towards growth, self-organization and integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to SDT, humans have three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfaction of these needs by the sociocultural environment serves as the basis for autonomous motivation, adaptive regulation of behaviour, and well-being, while the thwarting of these needs by one's environment undermines these positive potentials. Autonomous motivation refers to engaging in activities due to personal endorsement in their value rather than feeling controlled by external contingencies, and is associated with greater vitality, persistence, resilience, and positive affect (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). Thus, applying SDT to the work-life adjustment of professional immigrants would entail examining whether their basic psychological needs were satisfied or thwarted by the environment, and the subsequent impact on their motivation and well-being.

The central research question guiding this study is: How does the fulfillment or undermining of basic psychological needs, as conceptualized by self-determination theory, apply to the career development of immigrant professionals? Secondary research questions being explored are: 1) In what ways do professional immigrants experience need fulfillment, and need

thwarting from the social environment after migration? 2) How do need fulfillment and need thwarting impact professional immigrants' well-being and motivation? 3) What personal/social/environmental supports promote need satisfaction?

These research questions were examined using a qualitative methodology, as the purpose was to attain a rich understanding of immigrants' subjective experience. Qualitative methods are useful for capturing the expansiveness and depth of subjective, contextualized phenomena through examination of participants' underlying perceptions, meaning and value systems, emotions, and beliefs (Thompson, 1981).

SDT is an ideal theory through which to elucidate the subjective realities of skilled foreign workers in Canada because it can be used to frame experience at the personal (e.g., behaviours, cognitions, attitudes, perceptions) and environmental (e.g., social, institutional, and cultural) levels. Furthermore, SDT specifies various ways in which these two levels interact (via the basic psychological needs) to produce diverse individual outcomes. For these reasons, empirical research on SDT has been conducted in a number of applied contexts, such as education (Bailey & Philips, 2015; Hagger & Chatzisarantis, 2015), healthcare (Hagger et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2012; Sweet, Fortier, Strachan, Blanchard, & Boulay, 2014), counselling and psychotherapy (Lynch, 2013; Zuroff, Koestner, & Moskowitz, 2012) and environmental sustainability (Sheldon, Nichols, & Kasser, 2011; Webb, Soutar, Mazzarol, & Saldaris, 2013).

SDT has also been applied in career contexts (Guntert, 2015; Mueller & Lovell, 2015; Nie, Chua, Yeung, Ryan, & Chan, 2015), but not with immigrant populations, making this study a novel addition to both immigration and SDT research. The results of this study are anticipated to contribute to: (1) the development of a more encompassing theory of the vocational adjustment of professional immigrants, (2) the application of SDT to diverse social contexts and populations, (3) the consideration of effective counselling interventions and supports, along with

self-help strategies that may be relevant to immigrants themselves. Thus, the ultimate aim of this research is to promote the well-being and smooth transition of immigrant professionals through expounding a more comprehensive understanding of their positive and negative adjustment experiences.

The following chapters provide a detailed exploration of these research questions. Chapter I outlines the context of the Canadian immigration system, followed by the barriers to career development that professional immigrants encounter, such as language difficulties, skill-discounting, discrimination, acculturation challenges, unemployment, underemployment, and physical and mental health challenges. This chapter also explores SDT in greater detail, examining the diverse forms of motivation, fundamental psychological needs, cross-cultural relevance of this framework, and its applicability to career and immigration. Chapter II provides the rationale for using a qualitative methodology in the present study, and explicates the specific methodological approach taken herein. Also discussed in detail are the recruitment process, selection criteria, and participant characteristics, as well as the procedure for collecting and analyzing the data. Chapter III depicts the themes that emerged from the data when analyzed through the lens of the basic psychological needs as posited by SDT. Finally, Chapter IV discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will situate the present research within the existing literature on post-migration career development, as well as SDT. To begin, a brief overview of the Canadian immigration system will be provided, proceeded by an exploration of common barriers encountered by professional immigrants with regard to their work-life adjustment. The underemployment of highly skilled immigrant professionals will then be discussed, followed by a review of strategies for career development. This chapter will then provide an overview of SDT, including its cross-cultural applicability and relevance for career research. Finally, the present study will be described along with the guiding research questions.

#### **The Canadian Context of Immigration**

Canada has relied on immigrants for its entire history, from its initial formation as a country to its subsequent growth. Starting in the late nineteenth century, immigrants from Europe and America were enticed to settle in Western Canada in exchange for free land, thus arriving in Canada in large numbers every year, reaching an all-time peak in 1913 with 400 870 immigrants. In 2014, 260 404 immigrants were accepted to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a). The net result of this continual influx is that recent immigrants comprise 20% of the total Canadian population (Dean & Wilson, 2009), and a steadily increasing proportion of the working-aged population (Kustec, 2012).

In the last two decades, the Canadian government has been actively encouraging skilled workers to migrate to Canada, in order to help address a Canadian labour shortage (Human Resources & Skill Development Canada, 2002). For example, eligibility requirements for highly skilled workers were decreased in an effort to encourage migration (Picot, Hou, & Colombe, 2007). This has led to a shift in the birth country of immigrants, from predominantly Europe and

America, to Asia and other non-Western regions. For example, in 2014, 48.8% of new immigrants were from Asia and Pacific countries, and 25.1% were from Africa and the Middle East, whereas only 12.6% were from Europe and the United Kingdom, and 13.1% were from the United States, and South and Central America (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014).

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (2001) has regulated the Canadian immigration system since 2002. In this act, three basic categories of immigrants are outlined. The Family Class applies to foreign nationals who are sponsored by close family members currently residing in Canada, and includes spouses, partners, dependent children, parents and grandparents. The Economic Class is comprised of individuals selected for their potential to contribute to the Canadian economy. This class includes live-in caregivers, skilled workers, provincial and territorial nominees, and business immigrants. The skilled worker category describes immigrants who demonstrate their ability to enter the labour market and successfully establish themselves in Canada by meeting certain selection criteria, such as possessing English or French language abilities, education, and work experience. Finally, the Refugee Class is comprised of refugees and vulnerable persons.

The distribution of immigrants across these categories reflects the federal governments' efforts to entice skilled workers to Canada. For example, in 2014, 22.9% of new immigrants belonged to the Family Class, 65.7% belonged to the Economic Class, 9.5% to the Refugee Class, and 2% to "Other." Clearly, immigrants are valued in part due to their ability to contribute positively to the Canadian economy (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014a).

Interestingly, immigrants tend to hold higher education qualifications than the Canadian public. In 2006, a larger proportion of immigrants (51%) possessed university degrees, compared to 19% of the Canadian population as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2008).

Unfortunately, although skilled workers are admitted on the basis of their potential

economic contributions, immigrants report that finding an adequate job is the primary difficulty they have faced since coming to Canada (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). Over 40% of immigrants, and 45% of economic immigrants specifically endorsed this difficulty. Furthermore, lack of employment opportunities ranked second only to climate when immigrants were asked what they disliked most about Canada (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). In fact, while 80% of new immigrants find full-time work within two years of arriving to Canada, only 42% find work in their area of expertise (Canadian Labour and Business Centre, 2003). This leaves huge numbers of highly skilled and educated immigrants, accepting employment in jobs that require lower levels of skill and knowledge, and pay lower wages, than their training and experience warrants (Berger, 2004; Yakushko, 2006; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzales, 2008).

### **Barriers to Career Development**

There are a variety of key barriers that commonly interfere with immigrants' careers and professional development, including language and acculturation barriers, and social psychological factors such as prejudice and racial or cultural discrimination.

#### **Language Barriers**

Immigrants who apply to enter Canada under the Federal Skilled Worker Category and the Canadian Experience Class are required to submit English or French test results to Citizenship and Immigration Canada in order to demonstrate their proficiency in one of the official languages (Canada Immigration Lawyers, 2011). However, the daily use of a language in one's life and work typically requires more complexity and nuance than can be reflected in a test score. As a result, professional immigrants often face language barriers despite attaining sufficient language scores for immigration. Unfortunately, language abilities play a crucial role in acculturation, and success in both finding and advancing in employment. It is worth noting



that the present study will focus specifically on English-language proficiency, as all of the participants resided within Ontario, where the official language is English. Thus, a number of studies have found that lower proficiency in English is one of the factors related to declining participation of immigrants in the Canadian labour market (Aydemir & Skuterud, 2005; Chiswick & Miller, 1999; Picot, 2004).

When they do find employment, immigrants' lower proficiency in English may undermine their potential to succeed in their jobs, in a variety of ways. For example, they may often find themselves misunderstood by others, or may have more difficulty expressing themselves well, resulting in feelings of incompetence or lowered self-esteem (Chen, 2006). This may especially impact immigrants who are more highly educated and are seeking more complex, higher-status jobs, because language challenges can be exacerbated in professional environments where a high-level of proficiency is required (Neault, 2005). Furthermore, professional positions often require proficiency in complex, technical language specific to that field, thus posing multiple layers of language challenges (Chen, 2006a). Unfortunately, there are generally few if any resources designed to allow immigrant professionals to master the technical language associated with their field (Brouwer, 1999), often leaving qualified people feeling unable to compete with their English-speaking peers, despite having expertise and relevant work experience (Imberti, 2007; Lee & Westwood, 1996). As a result, professional immigrants face both the informal language challenges that are part of casual conversation and relationship building, as well as formal language challenges stemming from the complex, technical language required for proficiency in professional fields (Suto, 2008).

In addition to the barriers experienced by immigrants due to actual deficits in language proficiency, other barriers are created by the fact that immigrants generally speak with an accent, relative to native speakers. This tends to bias native speakers towards perceiving immigrants as

being less competent, further undermining immigrants' ability to present themselves as having professional skills and expertise that could be valuable to an organization (Imberti, 2007). As a result, individuals with accents may be undervalued during job interviews, despite the quality or content of their interview (Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006; Scassa, 1994). For example, in a study conducted by Hakak, Holzinger, and Zizic (2009) involving Latin American graduates of Canadian MBA programs, it was noted that having an accent was related to others assuming less expertise as well as assuming less language proficiency. Furthermore, evidence suggests that accents that are not associated with White/European cultures are viewed more negatively; for example, individuals with a Japanese accent fare worse on employment related decisions than those with a French or English accent (Hosoda & Stone-Romero, 2009).

The net result of language and accent barriers is to contribute to immigrants being subjected to what has been called "subtle discrimination" – discrimination that is not overt or necessarily intentional, but instead leaks into social interactions and people's perceptions through implicit social-cognitive processes of stereotyping, schema-driven processing and behavioural self-fulfilling prophecies (e.g., Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006; Petersen & Dietz, 2005).

### **Discrimination and Skill Discounting**

One major result of the whole host of social-cognitive processes that may be operating in interview and hiring situations, is that immigrants' foreign education, professional training, skills, and work experience are devalued relative to their Canadian equivalents (Esses et al., 2006; Reitz, 2001, 2003, 2005); their experience is assumed to have less relevance in the Canadian context. This leads to people in positions of power perceiving greater risk in hiring immigrants whose credentials are seen more ambiguously, leading to "risk-averse" hiring practices that may seem justified to those doing the hiring, but are systemically discriminatory. These skill discounting processes and resultant discriminatory hiring practices are primary

reasons for the “skill paradox,” the ironic tendency for immigrants who are more highly skilled to experience greater difficulty finding appropriate jobs.

This difficulty is further compounded by the fact that many jobs require applicants to possess a certain amount of “Canadian experience,” a criterion that is obviously impossible for a new immigrant to fulfill. The reason for this type of policy existing in the first place can be explained by skill discounting as well, for it provides a seeming justification for requiring Canadian experience as a quality control check on applicants’ experience and an attempt to ensure that applicants’ professional training is comparable. However, the net result is to systematically disadvantage immigrant professionals. This is particularly frustrating for those professionals whose very eligibility to migrate to Canada under the Skilled Workers Program would be due in large part to their foreign education and work experience (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007).

Especially concerning is evidence that this form of discrimination is more likely to affect immigrants belonging to a visible minority than those who do not, implying that this may be a form of subtle racial discrimination. For example, two studies conducted by Esses, Dietz, and Dixit (2006) found that participants gave higher evaluations to White, compared to Chinese/East Asian physicians, despite the fact that these were both foreign-trained physicians with identical qualifications who were licensed to practice in Canada. Interestingly, another study showed that subjects who hold implicit prejudicial attitudes, evaluated a foreign trained individual belonging to a visible minority as the least favourable candidate among other potential candidates, regardless of their qualifications (Esses et al., 2006). The overall impact of these processes of racial discrimination on immigrants’ earning potential may be extremely large. In one stunning finding, Alboim, Finnie and Meng (2005) showed that a foreign university degree commanded less than one third of the earning return of a Canadian degree, unless the immigrant was White,

in which case their foreign degree was comparable in earning value to a Canadian degree.

Discrimination against immigrants in the workplace also results from processes other than skill discounting. The social-cognitive biases that operate in skill discounting also likely impact other types of social judgment. For example, research shows that a person's accent impacts how their personal characteristics are evaluated, such as their intelligence, kindness, status, etc. (Purkiss et al., 2006).

### **Acculturation Stress and Cross-cultural Difficulty.**

Other unique pressures new professional immigrants experience in the workplace are related to acculturation stress. The concept of acculturation has evolved significantly in the academic literature. Initially, acculturation was described as the process by which immigrants began to adopt the customs and norms of the host culture; this conceptualization depicted acculturation as essentially a process of assimilation, the emphasis being placed on the adaptation of the individual to the new cultural context. In contrast, newer theoretical models view acculturation as a bidirectional process, whereby individuals adapt to a new culture while also maintaining ties to their culture of origin. This newer conceptualization affords a diverse range of adaptation outcomes, reflecting the more complex challenge of navigating between the demands of a new culture and the values, norms and traditions of the original culture (Sam & Berry, 2010). Thus, it is better understood that the experience of many immigrants is not of mere assimilation, but biculturalism, which includes the process of valuing one's own culture and experience prior to migration, while also developing important skills necessary to flourish in the new environment.

The importance of acculturation extends to all domains of life after migration, including the new work place. For immigrant professionals, the need to acculturate to their new work environment may be particularly pressing, given that they are often seeking entry and growth in

fields that require nuanced, and well-developed interpersonal skills (Mak et al., 1994).

Their difficulties have been demonstrated in acculturation research. For example, in a study conducted by Hakak, Holzinger, & Zizic (2009) on Latin American graduates of highly-ranked Canadian MBA programs, participants described having difficulty adapting to Canadian work-culture, and cited these difficulties, among others, as hindering their professional development and well-being.

Another study found that foreign-trained social workers in Windsor, Ontario experienced discomfort due to the tension between their fundamental family values, and the expectation to conduct themselves professionally in ways that conflicted with these values. Some of these values included the importance of family over the rights of individual members of the family, familial roles, and expectations to maintain strict professional boundaries with clients in ways that felt uncomfortable and detrimental to building rapport (Calderwood, Harper, Ball, & Liang, 2009). While participants adapted, they described feeling uncomfortable, and discriminated against due to these differences.

The impact that this can have on immigrants' career choices and development was clearly demonstrated in a recent meta-analysis documenting the migration and acculturation experience of foreign-trained nurses. It was found that foreign nurses experience a number of difficulties adjusting to work-life in their host country. This was in large part due to the challenge of adapting to new work norms and rules, such as navigating social relationships in a more informal manner than would be normative in their home culture, being given greater responsibility for the total care of patients, and needing to pay increased attention to documentation due to higher professional liability concerns. When foreign nurses were not able to adapt to these changes, they often ended up leaving the profession altogether (Moyce, Lash, & Siantz, 2015).

### **Under/Unemployment of Professional Immigrants**

Despite the fact that the current immigration system disproportionately attracts immigrants with higher levels of educations and health status (Newbold, 2005), immigrant professionals continue to experience high rates of unemployment and underemployment (Bauder, 2003; Camarota & Jensenius, 2009; Green & Worswick 2004; Picot & Sweetman 2005; Reitz 2007a, b).

Underemployment occurs when a person's position in the labour market is lower than the reference standard experienced by others in the market with a similar level of skill (Friedland & Price, 2003; Scott-Marshall, Tompa, & Trevithick, 2007). This is a distressingly common experience for recent immigrants, who are at least twice as likely as the Canadian population to be university educated, yet who struggle to find employment that is suitable to their skill and experience level (Statistics Canada, 2005, 2006, 2008b, 2009). For example, in the 2006 census, the national unemployment rate for immigrants with university educations was 11.5%, more than double the unemployment rate for similarly-educated individuals born in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2007a). Unfortunately, this trend seems to be increasing over time; over the period of 1991-2006 the proportion of university-educated immigrants working jobs with low education requirements increased by 6% (from 22% to 28%) for men, and 8% (from 36% to 44%) for women (Galerneau & Morrissette, 2008). Another study showed that 58% of recent immigrants with university degrees were employed in occupations below their education level (Chen et al., 2010).

Research has generally shown that it takes a minimum of 10 years for new immigrants to reach a similar income and employment outcome as Canadian-born workers (Beiser, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2008b). However, even this mild optimism may no longer be warranted; some researchers have concluded that incomes between immigrants and native-born workers are no

longer projected to converge at all (Frenette & Morissette, 2005; Picot & Sweetman, 2005). The economic losses suffered by the immigrant community as a result of being underpaid relative to their skills are substantial, estimated to be more than \$31 billion per year (RBC Economics, 2011).

### **Health and Stress Impacts of Under/unemployment**

Studies have found that immigrants tend to be healthier than the general public both in the sending and receiving countries, a phenomenon known as the “healthy immigrant effect”. This effect is believed to be largely due to a form of selection bias; the people accepted as immigrants have met a variety of specific criteria in order to be approved for immigration, thereby ensuring that their general functioning, such as their health status, would be superior to the population on average (Beiser, 2005; Newbold, 2006).

Interestingly, it has also been noted that the health of immigrants tends to decline after migration to match that of the general population (McDonald & Kennedy, 2004). There are multiple theories about the causal factors of this decline in mental and physical health; however it is generally attributed at least in part to the unique challenges associated with the migration experience (Chen et al., 2010). For example, the common immigrant experience of unemployment likely exacts a toll on immigrants’ health and well-being; many studies have shown that employment is associated with positive health benefits (e.g., Beland, Birch, & Stoddart, 2002; Frankish, Moulton, Quantz, & Carson, 2007), whereas unemployment is associated with negative health outcomes (e.g., Kraut & Walld, 2003; O’Campo, Eaton, & Muntaner, 2004).

Kirmayer et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of the literature on the prevalence and risk factors for mental illness due to immigration. Multiple factors were found to predict mental health decline during the “resettlement” phase after immigration, including unemployment,

economic strain, social alienation, discrimination and status loss, acculturation stress, loss of social support, and familial strain. Skilled workers in particular face the additional stress of underemployment relative to their skills and training.

The economic losses due to underemployment may have a particularly large impact on professional immigrants, who place high importance on their employment and working conditions, in part due to the financial demands of resettlement (Bauder, 2006; Schallenberg & Maheux, 2007). Furthermore, underemployment may be psychologically difficult for people to adjust to, because it undermines their ability to exercise any agency or control over their employment status (Scott-Marshall et al., 2007). Indeed, a number of studies have found that over-qualification is associated with poor mental health, a decline in physical health, and cardiovascular mortality (Friedland & Price, 2003; Grzywacz & Dooley, 2003; Peter, Gassler, & Geyer, 2007; Smith & Frank, 2005). Using data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants, Chen, et al. (2010) found that respondents to the survey who reported experiencing over-qualification were also more likely to report declines in mental health than other immigrants, 4 years after arrival to Canada.

Researchers have started to try to tease apart the different factors contributing to this decline in mental and physical health. For example, in a study on highly skilled immigrants living in Mississauga, Ontario, Dean & Wilson (2009) found a decline in mental and physical health due to underemployment after immigration; in particular, underemployment was reported to increase feelings of stress, loneliness, depression, and irritation. Participants perceived all of these negative effects on their health to be related to the inability to find secure work in their field. Researchers concluded that certain specific factors related to underemployment were primarily responsible for these negative mental health outcomes: loss of income, “de-skilling” (i.e., loss of employment related skills as a result of underuse), loss of social status and personal



identity, and the spatial separation of immigrants from family members. A worsening of physical health was also reported by participants, including weight loss, physical pain, high blood pressure, and physical strain. Participants believed that these negative physical health outcomes were largely related to strenuous working environments and overall levels of stress.

### **Strategies for Career Development**

There is a dearth of research regarding how immigrant professionals overcome significant challenges to career development, though many do achieve a measure of comparable success (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010). Indeed, it is quite striking that immigrants are so often able to hold onto their motivations and professional goals, in spite of the many barriers operating against them. For example, Zikic and colleagues (2010) studied the response of qualified immigrants in Canada, France and Spain to objective barriers to career development, and found that the majority (73%) maintained high levels of motivation to adapt to the career challenges of the new country, even when they faced serious objective obstacles that made career advancement difficult. These participants were able to adapt their careers to the economy of the host country, or else forge new career paths altogether; in contrast, 27% of their participants were unable to do either, and believed that the obstacles they faced were simply too difficult to overcome.

These findings are highly suggestive of certain psychological factors that may help immigrants maintain the necessary motivation to succeed, and in particular, to push through obstacles and setbacks. Zikic et al. (2010) identified three different types of orientations towards their career challenges that were taken by their participants. Those who adopted an *Embracing Orientation* (24% of participants), exhibited high physical and psychological flexibility and were able to see barriers as challenges that allowed them to reinvent themselves. They approached their careers proactively, so that when setbacks or obstacles did confront them, they were able to persevere or find creative solutions. This ability to “rise to the challenge” seemed to stem from

deeply self-directed motivations; these participants maintained a solid sense of their own personal identity, values and goals, and it was the self-directed nature of their motivation that seemed to give them the energy to not only overcome the obstacles they faced, but to thrive in their new circumstances; the researchers even concluded that this group “extended conventional notions of career adaptability” (p. 676).

In contrast, those who adopted an *Adaptive Orientation* (49% of participants) also worked hard to actively manage their new careers, and searched for ways to adapt to the new labour market, modifying their career aspirations as necessary, gaining additional training and working on developing the local social capital that would provide employment opportunities and advancement. Thus, they demonstrated the characteristics of people that would generally be considered to show strong career adaptability (Savickas, 1997; Super & Knasel, 1981; Zikic & Klehe, 2006). However, their efforts were considered to be more reactive than proactive, and they failed to exhibit the same self-determined creativity and “thriving” that was identified for the previous group.

The 27% of participants who failed to successfully adapt to their new career challenges were characterized by a *Resisting Orientation*, in which career obstacles were experienced as objective barriers, rather than challenges, and were deemed impossible to overcome. These individuals tended to feel discouraged and failed to seek creative alternatives; for example, they felt constrained by their previous professional identity and were unable to try to reinvent themselves. They also tended to feel that their initial career capital should be enough for them to succeed, and therefore failed to proactively invest in creating new capital in their new context. In sum, these individuals lacked the “psychological mobility” to successfully adapt (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

One explanation for immigrants’ ability to persevere and eventually succeed, even when

facing many obstacles, centers around the fact that many immigrants have particularly strong motivations to succeed because of the objective circumstances in their country of origin: after all, they have generally left their home countries in the hope for a more prosperous, or politically and economically stable, life in Canada (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). This enhanced appreciation for how important it is for them to succeed and provide a better life for themselves and their families could be a reason for immigrants' eventual success (Carr et al., 2005)

However, even with all this motivation, not all immigrants succeed in adapting to their new culture, finding employment and making a better life for themselves. Clearly some adapt very well and others struggle, and these findings suggest an important reason for this individual variability, which is that some immigrants are better able to psychologically transform their circumstances, changing "obstacles" into challenges and opportunities. This enhances their abilities to strive energetically for their goals, seek creative solutions, and reach out to gain the resources and local capital they need to succeed in their new context.

The central question therefore becomes, what factors, both within the person and in the larger social context, would increase the probability that a person could psychologically transform adversity into opportunity, motivating themselves to 'rise to the challenge', to maintain their motivation for long periods of time without burning out, and to keep trying and striving for goals even when facing serious obstacles? One leading contender for the answer to this question is that strong, intrinsic motivation, rooted in deep, personal values, would have the motivational power to sustain itself through hard challenges, and may be a key resource underlying individuals' abilities to cope, and even to thrive, in conditions of adversity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Immigrants commonly hold strong, personal reasons for their decision to immigrate; thus, their goals to succeed in their new home are rooted in deep personal goals and values. These deeply held personal goals may provide adequate motivation to be able to

vigorously pursue career development even when facing strong barriers (Carr et al., 2005). It is therefore important to understand the immigrant experience from a motivational perspective, and to examine how the experience of self-direction and intrinsic motivation, plays out in immigrants' careers and professional development.

Research in the field of motivation has uncovered key factors that strongly influence individuals' abilities to motivate themselves intrinsically, and that lead to the same aforementioned processes and outcomes described by Zikic and colleagues (2010) for the thriving immigrants with an *Embracing Orientation*. Self-determination theory (SDT) offers a powerful theoretical framework for understanding the development of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and suggests that the same factors that enhance intrinsic motivation may be key determinants of the degree to which immigrants are able to successfully adapt and thrive in their new circumstances. Conversely, SDT suggests that specific deficiencies in the environment's ability to fulfill certain fundamental human needs, may be key reasons why immigrants may struggle with their careers in their new country.

These insights offer a much larger perspective for understanding the difficulties faced by immigrants in their careers, highlighting both *intra-personal factors* such as the attitudinal orientation people take towards their circumstances (e.g., an Embracing Orientation, involving psychological construal processes such as framing "obstacles" in situations as challenges to overcome), and *extra-personal, contextual factors* (e.g., discrimination in the workplace, language and employment barriers). It is important to explicitly emphasize the contextual factors that shape individuals' behaviours and outcomes, because it can be very easy to overemphasize dispositional explanations, as described by research on the fundamental attribution error (Ross, 1977). Emphasizing the situational-contextual factors that influence immigrants' career trajectories is an important counterbalance to any tendency to over-attribute cause to

dispositional factors of immigrants themselves. For example, some people may hold the view that immigrants who are underemployed in their new country, are predominantly to blame for their circumstances, or conversely, that the people who succeed in society are simply smarter, harder-working or somehow more deserving than the people who do not succeed. It can be true that certain factors promote a psychological orientation that then increases the probability of successful outcomes; but this does not allow one to make simple inferences about the amount of responsibility a particular individual bears for a particular set of outcomes; reality is clearly far more complicated.

However, despite this problem of over-applying theoretical insights in specific cases, it is also a problem to under-apply these insights in society at large. For example, if the best evidence suggests that working with intrinsic motivations is important for long-term success, then it becomes obviously important to examine whether the social and environmental contexts in which immigrants find themselves are conducive to the development of these factors, and how to further promote their development.

### **A Self Determination Theory Perspective**

#### **Self Determination Theory**

Self-determination theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation, personality development and human flourishing, developed by Ryan and Deci (2000) to explain how human motivations affect behaviours and life outcomes. As a developmental theory, SDT outlines the specific conditions that promote healthy development, and connects these developmental outcomes to specific motivational processes, describing overall, how fulfilling the fundamental human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, helps individuals to motivate themselves more intrinsically, thereby contributing to better life outcomes in many different ways.

This has clear applications in the career context. For example, SDT helps to explain why

some of the time, motivation leads to effective and sustained action which can be sustained over the long term, even persevering through obstacles and hardships, whereas in many other situations, motivation burns out quickly and is overwhelmed by difficult circumstances or challenges. The key insight provided by the SDT framework is that human motivation itself is not a unitary construct; instead, there are multiple types of motivation, and having a better understanding of these types provides powerful insights into human behaviour. Therefore, effectively motivating people, can best be achieved by understanding these different types of motivation and how they can be influenced (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

Focusing on motivation as a unitary construct, which has been the general approach in much of the literature, tends to narrow one's conceptual scope, considering only the overall amount of motivation as being relevant to actually motivating a person to engage in a particular behaviour. As a result, research on motivation has predominantly emphasized the rewards and punishments present in the environment (largely the social environment), which may increase or decrease overall levels of motivation. This is built on the fundamental, and seemingly obvious assumption that increased motivation, leads to increased behavioural striving, persistence, and successful outcomes (Bandura, 1996; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007).

However, this seemingly straightforward understanding – that increased reward leads to increased motivation which in turn leads to increased behavioural striving and success – has long been understood to not be true in many circumstances. For example, by the early 1970s, research on the overjustification effect had shown that in some situations, rewarding a behaviour actually decreased the future probability or frequency of the person engaging in that behaviour (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Lepper, Greene, & Nisbett, 1973). Punishments also have been shown to actually reverse effects in some conditions, increasing the likelihood of future behaviours; for example, research under the cognitive dissonance paradigm on the phenomenon of effort

justification (e.g., Aronson & Mills, 1959), showed that negative experiences suffered as part of becoming part of a social club, tended to increase people's motivation to be part of the club and engage in subsequent behaviours related to the club. This classic literature provides an important backdrop to the immigrant experience, grounding this analysis in an understanding of the full spectrum of implicit and explicit psychological processes that influence people's lives.

SDT built on these insights, building a social-cognitive-behavioural framework which helped to explain a wide variety of behavioural outcomes. SDT focuses not merely on the *amount* of motivation, but on the specific *type* of motivation being used to energize particular behaviours. After more than four decades of empirical research, SDT's predictions have largely been confirmed; different types of motivation indeed function quite differently (Ryan, 2012). This can give useful insight into many real-world problems and challenges; in the context of immigration, SDT may help to explain how immigrants cope with the stresses of immigration and acculturation, and how to help immigrants adapt more effectively, such as by promoting the factors that nurture the ability to adopt an *Embracing Orientation* to the challenges of life as an immigrant.

### **Autonomous versus Controlled Motivation**

One of the most important theoretical and empirical contributions of SDT is to distinguish between *autonomous and controlled motivation*. *Autonomous motivation* involves acting out of a sense of self-directedness, of volition and choice; the motivation to act comes from “within” the individual, and thus reflects the individual's inner qualities, such as values, personal identity, goals, and sources of innate enjoyment and fascination. In contrast, *controlled motivation* involves acting in response to a set of external pressures, obligations or standards set by others to which the person is expected to conform; the motivation to act comes from “outside” the individual, and thus reflects the potential rewards and punishments that exist in the

environment. Obviously, both forms of motivation can effectively lead to behaviour: people may engage in a behaviour because of what they hope to attain from the environment (e.g., money, praise, social recognition), or avoid (e.g., disappointment, anger, punishment), or on the other hand, people may engage in a behaviour because they deeply believe it is the right thing to do, or serves a value they hold, or reflects their identity.

What is less obvious is that, even though either type of motivation can effectively motivate behaviour change, the long-term sustainability and resilience of this motivation differ tremendously, and the individual experiences very different long-term outcomes. Across many studies, the general pattern of findings indicates that autonomous motivation is much better sustained over the long-term, and is more resilient in the face of negative outcomes, obstacles and difficulties; after all, if one's motivation to act comes from a deep personal identity or value, then it will tend to persist even if the behaviour is not immediately rewarded by the environment. People who are more autonomously regulated enjoy their goal pursuits more, feeling greater interest, excitement and confidence, which in turn predict greater performance, persistence, and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Autonomous motivation has been found to buffer against burn-out and promote greater productivity at work (Fernet, Guay, & Senecal, 2004), higher grades (Black & Deci, 2000), improved control over prejudice (Legault, Green-Demers, Grant, & Chung, 2007), and greater levels of psychological well-being (Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), among other salutary outcomes.

SDT distinguishes between five major subtypes of motivation, namely, *intrinsic*, *external*, *introjected*, *identified* and *integrated*, each of which plays an important role in individuals' behavioural striving. These five subtypes define a continuum that varies by amount of autonomy. Essentially, motivations range from highly extrinsic (not self-determined) to highly



intrinsic (self-determined). Extrinsic motivations are regulated predominantly by environmental conditions (e.g., operant processes such as reward and punishment); intrinsic motivations are regulated predominantly by internal, cognitive and emotional processes (e.g., personal values and self-identity) (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The most autonomous form of motivation is considered to be pure *intrinsic motivation*, which leads to particular behaviours because engaging in the activity itself is experienced as meaningful, interesting, or otherwise enjoyable. When intrinsically motivated, one experiences a feeling of self-congruence between one's full phenomenological sense of who they are, and the behaviour in which they are engaged at present. This quality of deep self-congruence leading to a full engagement with one's experience was described extensively in research on Flow states as depictions of "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Intrinsic motivation is a powerful source of motivational energy, precisely because it is self-sustaining; the activity itself provides the feeling of reward. The universal human experience is that being fully engaged in intrinsically motivated activities is highly and innately enjoyable, leading people to experience many positive feelings, such as enjoyment, vitality, and feeling "fully alive". In contrast, extrinsic motivation is dependent on sufficient rewards being available in the environment, and under conditions where rewards are low or costs are high, extrinsic motivation would be very difficult to sustain. Thus, intrinsic motivation is expected to be particularly valuable in circumstances in which one needs to sustain motivation over the long-term and make it resilient in the face of adversity or difficulties (Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

However, it is practically impossible to construct a world in which all required behaviours can be motivated purely intrinsically. The four other subtypes of motivation, arrayed along a continuum of autonomous self-regulation, make it possible to autonomously endorse and

internalize behaviours and activities that are to some degree, not intrinsically desirable and therefore, at some level, need to be extrinsically regulated. Thus, there are forms of extrinsic motivation that are more autonomous, based on the degree to which the individual has developed an internalized regulatory system. These forms of extrinsic motivation are plotted on a continuum based on their relative internalization and integration with the individual's sense of self (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Anchoring the “not self-determined”, end of the continuum, is motivation that is entirely externally regulated, simply referred to as *external regulation*. This is the type of direct, hedonic motivation triggered by the classic operant conditioning paradigm and its cognitive extension into social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1963), in which the organism responds in a relatively straightforward fashion to the rewards and punishments provided by environmental conditions. Although external regulation can certainly be very powerful (e.g., think of the many harmful or undesirable things people will do if they are paid enough money), SDT predicts that it would be difficult to sustain over the long term, because in an essential way, the behaviour's reinforcing value is dependent on largely external conditions. This makes this form of regulation both quite vulnerable and, in a practical sense, highly resource intensive; one must maintain a functioning system of reinforcement, contingent on individual's behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Nevertheless, despite the problems associated with an exclusive reliance on external systems of regulation and control, externally regulated behaviours play an important role in the overall challenge of motivating people; for example, in situations in which there are no other motivations to effectively appeal to, focusing on external means of control may be desirable. It is therefore desirable to understand how to best combine extrinsic and intrinsic reward systems in ways that they may mutually enhance each other, leading to the best behavioural outcomes.

The weakest form of partial internalization of the reward value of a behaviour, *introjected*

*regulation*, occurs when the individual's own feelings of self-worth become contingent on their behavioural outcomes. People operating out of introjected motivations feel better or worse about themselves depending on the outcomes of their behaviours; this is the beginning of the internalization of external rewards and punishments, a kind of ego-dependence or self-esteem-dependence (Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When self-esteem is contingent on an activity, then the person's internalized reactivity to the outcome serves as the effective motivator; essentially, self-evaluative cognitive and affective processes become the regulatory framework. For example, this form of motivation results in pride upon success, and contains threats of shame, guilt and self-criticism upon failure.

It is important to note that introjected regulation is still a relatively external framework, given that the person's reactions are predominantly driven by external feedback. Even though the motivational energy itself comes from "within", in the sense that it is an inner experience and not therefore subject to explicit external measurement (compared, for example, to more clearly extrinsic regulators, such as electric shocks, or points scored in a game), it remains under the control of the environment, and thus is seen as the second form of predominantly external regulation.

A qualitative shift occurs in moving from introjected motivation to the next type along the continuum. *Identified regulation* involves the extent to which individuals personally value a behaviour; as a result of their personal endorsement of the importance of the behaviour, they do not feel controlled by an external standard, instead engaging in the behaviour for their own reasons (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This form of motivation is considered to be relatively intrinsic, the motivational 'energy' coming from the individual's own feelings of what is important.

The final, most fully self-determined form of extrinsic control, is *integrated regulation*,

which occurs when the individual integrates the behaviour, or the purpose the behaviour is intended to serve, with deeper aspects of their sense of self. For example, undertaking a behaviour out of a deep sense of personal integrity, religious conviction, or congruence with one's life purpose, would describe a situation of highly integrated regulation. In this case, the motivational energy comes from the person's deep values and personal identity, rather than more superficial features of their beliefs or attitudes, their personal feelings of self-evaluation, or the rewards or punishments provided by the environment. This kind of motivation, grounded in deep personal meaning, functions highly independently from external factors; instead, actions are accompanied by a feeling of volition, and are said to be self-determined (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

### **Basic Psychological Needs**

Through empirical methods and inductive reasoning, SDT proposes that people have three basic psychological needs: the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The fulfillment of these needs by the social environment provides the nutriments for human well-being, growth, and autonomous motivation. Conversely, the thwarting of these needs contributes to ill-being, passivity, and alienation, and results in a reliance on less autonomous sources of motivation to energize one's behaviours. According to SDT, it is the *interaction* between people and the social environment, that largely fulfills, or fails to fulfill, these three fundamental needs (Ryan & Deci, 2008).

The need for autonomy represents the universal desire to feel one's own agency, to experience volition, and to have a sense of personal integrity. This need can manifest in more or less socially functional or desirable ways; consider, for example, the person who acts with compassionate conviction, versus the person rebelling violently against authority figures.

The need for competence represents the universal desire to feel efficacious and powerful,

to have a sense of perceived control. This need also can manifest desirably, as in the experiences of self-efficacy and mastery, or more problematically, as in the experience of interpersonal dominance or control.

The need for relatedness reflects the universal human requirement to experience belonging, love, and social connection. This need to belong is widely understood to be a fundamental need, a basic necessity upon which much of our healthy psychological functioning depends (e.g., Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The extent to which these three fundamental needs are fulfilled or thwarted by the environment powerfully influences an individual's tendencies to motivate themselves more intrinsically or extrinsically. As one's basic needs become increasingly unmet and unfulfilled, these needs become stronger, demanding attention. People who experience a threat to their sense of competence may try harder or become more competitive in order to 'prove how good they are'. People whose need for autonomy is insufficiently supported may assert themselves in rebellious ways, or may stop trying to succeed, as different ways of asserting their autonomy. People who are socially excluded may become preoccupied and anxious about their acceptance by others, seeking to "fit in" at all costs, or may put up defensive barriers and act dismissively, as though they don't need other people. If a need is unmet to a severe degree, the person may attempt to disidentify from that need as much as possible, overemphasizing the other needs in order to try to repair their unavoidably-damaged sense of self. For example, the person who is chronically unable to feel secure with others may become hyper-competitive and construct their personality largely around a sense of power, or may become thoroughly rebellious and focused on asserting themselves in an attempt to construct an identity that makes them feel respectable. Finally, individuals with unmet needs may choose to sidestep altogether the challenge of trying to repair a damaged sense of self, instead succumbing to the easy temptations of short-term

rewards and hedonic gratifications. Many different compensatory outcomes and coping strategies are possible, but the important point is that, in many different ways, as basic needs are unmet, motivations tend to organize around those needs, thereby diminishing people's ability to motivate themselves more intrinsically (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008).

Research has repeatedly demonstrated the impact of the basic needs on motivation. Autonomy supports have been shown to have beneficial effects across multiple domains. For example, in the classroom, it has been shown that teachers who communicated in an autonomy-supportive as opposed to a controlling style facilitated greater learning and performance outcomes in students (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Soenens, & Lens, 2005). Another study conducted by Baard, Deci, and Ryan (2004) on investment companies found that employees with more autonomy-supportive managers experienced greater well-being, were more engaged with their work, and had higher performance ratings than employees with more controlling managers. Similar effects were found at a psychiatric hospital with employees who experienced greater autonomy support (Lynch, Plant, & Ryan, 2005).

The need for competence is clearly demonstrated by research showing that, under many conditions, the effects of negative feedback (e.g., criticism) or positive feedback (e.g., praise) on intrinsic motivation are mediated by people's sense of personal competence (Vallerand & Reid, 1984). Furthermore, social-contextual factors can enhance intrinsic motivation through reinforcing a sense of competence; for example, optimal challenges that properly scaffold skill development, feedback that promotes a sense of efficacy, and a lack of demeaning evaluations all promote an intrinsically motivating mastery orientation (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Interestingly, competence-promoting feedback for behaviours that are not autonomously regulated, does not enhance intrinsic motivation. For example, if people engage in a behaviour they do not like, value, or enjoy, because other people expect or otherwise pressure them to, then

receiving feedback that they are good at the activity will not make them feel more intrinsically motivated; at best, perhaps, it could build an introjected regulation system, but it does not contribute to a more deeply internalized regulation system. This highlights the importance of considering the interaction between the fundamental needs; healthy development is best supported through fulfilling the three needs in a balanced and integrated way.

In one study of individuals participating in a program to improve diabetes care, it was found that participants whose physicians fostered autonomy support and perceived competence in their method of program delivery, had better glycemic control, less depressive symptoms, and greater patient satisfaction (Williams, McGregor, King, Nelson, & Glasgow, 2005). Another study conducted on undergraduates recruited from sports courses found that participants whose need for competence was met through their sport reported greater experiences of flow than those whose need for competence was not met. Another study showed that undergraduates enrolled in sports courses who experienced greater feelings of competence over the course of a semester felt increased intrinsic motivation (Schuler, Sheldon, & Frohlich, 2010).

Relatedness is also strongly implicated in intrinsic motivation. For example, the attachment literature extensively documents the impact of secure attachment on fostering exploratory and self-directed behaviour in children (Bowlby, 1979). In the realm of education, one study showed that students who perceived their teachers to be cold and uncaring displayed less intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Grolnick, 1986). Building on this, Furrer and Skinner (2003) found that students' feelings of relatedness contributed significantly to academic motivation, emotions, and performance. Klassen, Perry, and Frenzel (2012) recently conducted a 3-part study on 1049 teachers' satisfaction of their basic needs as well as their engagement with teaching, emotions, and emotional exhaustion. Results from all three studies revealed that satisfaction of relatedness needs through teachers' relationships with students led to increased levels of

engagement and positive emotion and decreased levels of negative emotions.

Most studies have examined the three basic needs in concert, rather than in isolation, because they are often mutually reinforcing. For example, cross-sectional studies have found that need satisfaction in employed adults is associated with less exhaustion (Van der Elst, Van den Broeck, De Witte, & De Cuyper, 2012). Diary studies have found that daily fluctuations in need satisfaction are correlated with fluctuations in well-being and physical symptoms in both students and working adults (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, Bernstein, & Brown, 2010). The thwarting of these fundamental psychological needs has also been shown to lead to physiological changes, such as elevations in an immunological protein (S-IgA) that are associated with the anticipation of acute stressors (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, Ryan, Bosch, & Thøgersen-Ntoumani, 2011). In acute circumstances, need thwarting has immediate consequences; for example, in an intervention study in which participants were taught to play a game, manipulations that thwarted the fulfillment of the three basic needs reliably negatively impacted game performance, and this diminished performance was explained by the extent to which participants felt that their basic needs were not being met (Sheldon & Flak, 2008).

### **Cross-cultural Relevance of SDT**

The present study is about the experience of immigrants to Canada, many of whom do not originate from Western countries. It is therefore particularly important to consider the cross-cultural relevance of SDT as a conceptualization of motivation and basic psychological needs.

In the literature, some criticism has been lodged against SDT, arguing that autonomy is synonymous with individualism, and therefore is not important for well-being in collectivist cultures where individuals hold a more interdependent sense of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003; Triandis, 1996). Some cross-cultural perspectives claim that striving for autonomy would actually conflict with the development of social harmony and the interdependent relationships



necessary for well-being in collectivist cultures (Cross & Gore, 2003). This argument is supported by research demonstrating that individuals from collectivist cultures are more likely to act based on social norms, rather than individual preference (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004). However, it is important to note that these criticisms require defining autonomy as the cultivation of a fully independent self, motivated by self-interest and not constrained or influenced by the needs or expectations of others. From this perspective, it makes sense that autonomy would appear to be in conflict with relatedness, particularly in cultures that emphasize social bonds (Vansteenkiste, Lens, Soenens, Luyckx, 2006).

SDT theorists have strongly countered this criticism by clarifying that autonomy, as used in SDT, does not refer to independence nor emphasize acting in accordance with one's unique self-interest. Instead, autonomy refers to acting with a sense of volition and personal endorsement of one's actions; those actions may be entirely consistent with promoting social harmony, provided that the promotion of social harmony was experienced by the person as a personal value or something they personally endorsed. For people with a collectivistic sense of self, acting to promote social harmony would generally not be experienced as external regulation, but rather would be so deeply internalized into their identity that acting in accordance with the needs of the group would be a highly value-congruent act, more aligned with the highly autonomous concept of *integrated regulation*. In this way, autonomy is believed to be relevant across cultures, wherever they may lie on the individualism/collectivism continuum (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

A significant body of research has emerged to demonstrate the importance of autonomy as a basic need across cultures, influencing well-being and psychological functioning in a wide variety of ways. For example, in one study, individuals from China, Russia, and the United States who had more autonomy-supportive partners, reported smaller discrepancies between their

actual and ideal self-concepts; smaller discrepancies, in turn, were associated with greater well-being (Lynch, Guardia, & Ryan, 2009).

Similarly, in a study on the motivation for learning in rural Chinese children, autonomous motivation predicted more positive self-perceptions, interest, competence, and perceived choice. In contrast, controlled motivation negatively predicted students' perceptions of interest and choice (Zhou, Ma, & Deci, 2009). Many additional studies on academic motivation among Japanese and Chinese samples have found similar impacts on learning (Hayamizu, 1997; Tanaka & Yamauchi, 2000; Vansteenkiste, Zhou, Lens, & Soenens, 2005).

Other research on Belgian and South Korean adolescents showed that parenting styles that interfere with the need for autonomy were associated with a greater probability of adolescent depression (Soenens, Park, Vansteenkiste, & Mourtatidis, 2012). This relationship was mediated by dependency and self-criticism. Adolescents who struggled with depression tended to experience their parents as being overly controlling or pressuring, stripping them of their sense of autonomy, and leading them to reinforce their own dependency through internalized negative messages such as self-critical judgements.

One style of parenting was characterized as *dependency oriented*, involving the use of psychological control and manipulation tactics to exert physical and emotional control over the child. The other style, *achievement oriented*, involved parental pressure and other manipulative tactics in order to effectively force children into performance-based activities, followed by intense pressure to succeed in these highly competitive activities (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Luyten, 2010). Either of these styles would undermine the developing child's sense of autonomy and in fact, make them feel externally regulated; it would be highly predictable that when these children grew into adolescents, a disproportionate number of them would experience depression.

The specific argument that people with a more collectivistic sense of self would

experience actions taking in accordance with social customs and others' expectations to be self-congruent, is supported by research on Indian and American individuals' perceptions of helping friends and family. In both cultures, the experience of personally choosing to engage in helping behaviours was linked with greater satisfaction; thus, autonomy support was important in both cultures. However, the two samples differed in the extent to which others' expectations interfered with the experience of volition. Indian participants experienced their helping behaviours as autonomous choices, regardless of whether or not others expected them to help. American participants, however, only experienced their choice as volitional when there were no expectations placed on them to help; when others expected them to help, they no longer experienced their choice as being self-determined.

This suggests that the more internalized and personally endorsed (that is, autonomously regulated) people's cultural values, the more satisfaction they will experience engaging in the many culturally-relevant behaviours that comprise their lives (Miller, Chakravarthy, & Das, 2011). This is further supported by a study on undergraduates from Russia, South Korea, Turkey, and America, which found that greater autonomy regarding their particular expression of individualistic and collectivistic behaviours was positively associated with well-being (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003).

The cross-cultural relevance of SDT may shed significant light on the immigrant experience and the transmission of cultural values across the generations. A very common pattern experienced by immigrants who raise children in the new, host culture, is that their children do not internalize the values of their heritage culture, at least not as much as the parents had hoped. Ironically, parents may become strict and pressuring, trying very hard to impress upon their children the importance of their family's cultural values and traditions; unfortunately, this could easily backfire, activating the children's autonomy needs and causing them to be less

likely to internalize their parents' values; indeed, other research has shown that it is the closeness and trust in relationships between children and parents that largely determines the degree to which children internalize their parents' values, qualities which tend to be threatened when parents take an overly controlling, authoritarian approach to raising children (Grusec & Goodnow, 1994).

### **Application of SDT to Immigrant Career Development**

SDT offers a useful framework within which to examine the experience of professional immigrants, for whom it is probably not uncommon to be experiencing unfulfilled basic needs. Consider the experiences discussed earlier, of immigrant professionals who are unemployed or underemployed. The need for competence would certainly be threatened by unemployment or underemployment, by the consequences of language barriers and other difficulties experienced in navigating the many challenges of life in the new culture. Relatedness would also potentially be diminished due to a large number of factors, including the disruption of family, friendship and community networks and the resultant loss of social support, difficulties establishing new relationships in the host culture, difficulties in work relationships, language barriers, and experiences of discrimination. Finally, autonomy needs would likely be threatened by having to do work that is not aligned with one's interests, identity, skills or training, but is necessary for purely economic reasons. Additionally, as material concerns and the desire to achieve financial stability take precedence, immigrants may find themselves primarily working for these particular outcomes, threatening to reduce feelings of autonomy over their work even further.

Therefore, it seems important for workplaces to be structured in ways that are supportive of the fundamental needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. This has been shown to lead to increased motivation levels, performance in the workplace, employee well-being, persistence, and reduced burnout, among other benefits (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Van den Broeck, Scheurs,

Guentz, & Emmerik, 2015).

A study testing the validity of the Multidimensional Work Motivation Scale across nine countries, found that workers' more autonomous motivations were related to the fulfillment of the three basic needs postulated by SDT, whereas controlled motivations resulted from situations in which their leaders thwarted the fulfillment of their basic needs. Autonomous motivation was also associated with greater vitality, performance, initiative, and emotional commitment, and less experience of exhaustion (Gagne et al., 2014). Other studies have found that workers with high autonomous motivations experienced more satisfaction with their jobs, less burnout, and greater enthusiasm for their work (Fernet, 2013; Van den Broeck, Lens, Witte, & Coillie, 2013).

One study compared workers from state-owned companies in Bulgaria, a former Eastern Bloc country with a strong collectivist orientation, and a sample from an American organization. In both cultures, autonomy supportive work environments predicted the satisfaction of the three basic needs, which in turn predicted motivation and psychological well-being on the job (Deci et al., 2011)

Finally, a study of 266 teachers from two government schools in China found that autonomy support promoted more internalized forms of motivation, and this led to employees experiencing more job satisfaction and reduced illness symptoms (e.g., sleeping issues, stomach pain, headaches). On the other hand, external regulation (as well as a lack of motivation altogether), had the opposite effect, leading to greater work stress and more frequent symptoms of illness (Nie et al., 2015).

In terms of unemployed individuals, autonomy motivation has also been positively associated with persistence at job searching (Vansteenkiste, Lens, Witte, & Deci, 2004). Additionally, a study by Van den Broeck, Vansteenkiste, Lens, and De Witte (2010) suggested that being personally invested in more extrinsic values might lead to less flexible adaptation to

the labour market by unemployed individuals.

In sum, SDT predicts that factors that facilitate or threaten immigrants' ability to meet their basic needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, will play major roles in determining their chances of successfully adapting to the Canadian labour market. This offers a powerful framework for understanding how to better support new immigrants and help promote their successful integration in Canadian society.

### **The Present Study**

The objective of the present study is to examine the experiences of professional immigrants in their post-immigration work-life adjustment, using the framework of Self Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This framework includes a thorough analysis of motivational processes, including personal, dispositional factors as well as social, contextual factors that may influence people's behaviours and outcomes. SDT may therefore be useful for providing insight into the struggles and successes of professional immigrants, based on their own subjective experiences.

SDT has been applied to career and workplace settings, and has been shown to be robust across many age groups, settings and cultural backgrounds. However, it has not yet been applied to the specific topic of immigrants' work-life experience, a domain of experience in which SDT may be highly relevant, given the great degree to which immigrants' lives have been disrupted and, presumably, their fulfillment of basic needs have been thwarted.

Therefore, the primary research question guiding this study was: How does the fulfillment or undermining of basic psychological needs, as conceptualized by self-determination theory, apply to the career development of professional immigrants? Subsidiary questions were: 1) In what ways do professional immigrants experience need fulfillment, and need thwarting from the social environment after migration? 2) How do need fulfillment and need thwarting

impact professional immigrants' well-being and motivation? 3) What personal, social, and environmental supports promote need satisfaction?

It is anticipated that conducting this inquiry using a qualitative research methodology will lead to a deeper understanding of immigrant professionals' work-life adjustment, with enriching theoretical and practical implications. The next chapter will elucidate the reasons for utilizing this methodological approach, as well as specific details about the participants and study procedure.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The current study examined in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants, using a grounded theory approach. This chapter will discuss the rationale for utilizing a qualitative methodology, and present the specific grounded theory approach used to analyze the data. The method for selecting participants and participant characteristics will then be described, followed by an outline of the study procedure, including recruitment, data collection, and data analysis procedure.

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Methodology**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) are considered to have developed the first systematic approach for conducting qualitative research, representing a radical shift in research methods in psychology in particular. Until this time, qualitative methodologies were generally utilized in anthropology and sociology (Travers, 2009). Most research utilized primarily quantitative methods, based on the general belief that quantitative methods were superior in important ways, such as objectivity, replicability, generalizability, and the ability to generate empirically derived theory (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

A shift in the research climate over the years has increased the popularity of qualitative methods for their ability to gain access to individual narratives and the underlying feelings, meanings, perspectives, and intentions that ground them. Thus, qualitative methodologies have evolved into a truly interdisciplinary set of approaches, applied in diverse contexts such as political science, education, health, medicine, and psychology (Angell, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009; Brod, Tesler, & Christensen, 2009; Gillespie, Chaboyer, Longbottom, & Wallis, 2010; Jansen, Foets, & de Bont, 2010; Todres, Galvin, & Holloway, 2009). Furthermore, while qualitative and quantitative methods have historically been described as epistemologically at odds (Lincoln &



Guba, 2000), this opposition is being increasingly described as artificial and outdated. Rather than one approach being touted as superior to the other, the growing view is that qualitative and quantitative strategies have different strengths and weaknesses that make them suitable for different research aims and questions (Baban, 2008). Indeed, a growing number of researchers have been calling for studies that combine both methodologies, as they are thought to be complementary (Brewer & Hunter, 2006; Creswell, 2003; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Morgan, 1998).

The aim of the present study was to examine in-depth, narrative interviews in order to gain a rich understanding of immigrant professionals' subjective career experiences, using an SDT lens. Therefore, utilizing a qualitative methodology to analyze the data was deemed to be particularly fitting for this purpose.

Qualitative methodologies emphasize an *emic* perspective, that is, an insider's point of view (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). As such, they are well-suited for exploring questions related to the subjective experience of research participants, in order to reveal their feelings, belief systems, intentions, and the way they make meaning of their experience (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Thompson, 1981). Moreover, as participants' unique perceptions are grounded in varying social, cultural, and historical contexts (Blustein et al., 2004; Stead, 2004), qualitative approaches are able to capture the complex interactions between individuals and their particular milieu (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

Thus, the ultimate aim of qualitative research is to form a comprehensive understanding of a particular phenomenon based on the subjective experience of both researchers and participants in relation to the phenomenon (Williamson, 2009).

This in-depth understanding can allow for the development of theory about that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Indeed, some theoreticians argue that qualitative research

should play a more central role in the development of theory than is generally the case, by broadening perspectives through exploratory methods; this would help to uncover a higher degree of diversity of observation and experience, before narrowing down and simplifying the overall complexity in order to create theory (Ponterotto, 2005).

Qualitative methods are acknowledged to be a favourable framework through which to examine processes of life-career development (Blustein, Schultheisses, & Flum, 2004; Young et al., 2001), and many other questions in career and vocational research (Chen, 2006; Chen & Lee, 2011; Cochran, 1990). Career is a multidimensional construct, intertwined in many ways with the other aspects of a person's life; it is thus dynamic and highly complex, constantly changing in multi-faceted ways. The experience of career is further complexified for immigrants, whose career development and supportive contexts were interrupted and changed dramatically in many cases. The nature of the interviews that comprise the data for this study capture the rich, in-depth meaning-making processes of professional immigrants in order to reflect as much of their full experience as possible. Through narrative inquiry, detailed and candid responses were gathered that require qualitative methods in order to adequately explore the broad range of information available in the data.

Similarly, SDT is a humanistic, organismic theory, which also places precedence on individual experience. The focus of SDT is highly idiosyncratic, seeking to describe the specific types of motivation employed by individuals according to their own unique construction of their circumstances. This theoretical framework is therefore also compatible with a qualitative approach. Thus, this study will employ a qualitative methodology in order to focus on how participants construe and perceive the issues that they encounter in their career development as immigrants (Maxwell, 2005).

### **A Grounded Theory Approach**

Within the family of qualitative methodologies, the present study utilizes the grounded theory approach, which is a popular form of qualitative research (Glaser & Straus, 1967). This social research method allows for researchers to discover theory from within the data, as opposed to imposing preexisting theories or hypotheses onto the data. The strength of grounded theory is that it facilitates the exploration of the relationship between contextual factors and individual experience (Crooks, 2001). Thus, grounded theory advocates that the researcher take an open stance toward unique participant experience before narrowing their research direction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In particular, grounded theory is recommended for the investigation of social issues or external situations that require individuals to adapt (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Furthermore, grounded theory is recommended when the researcher's aim is not only to describe the process, but also to develop an understanding of how the process occurs. Given that immigration and its subsequent impact on individuals' work-life adjustment is a highly complex social situation, with multiple interrelating components that contribute to the lived experience, it makes sense that grounded theory would be an appropriate methodology to apply.

Grounded theory has evolved over the decades and split off into a number of versions which differ on their philosophical assumptions, use of literature, and coding procedures. The classical grounded theory approach outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) emphasized allowing theory to *emerge* from the data, reflecting positivistic assumptions about an objective external reality that could be discovered through coding. In this way, researchers were to refrain from reading literature until the very end of analysis, so as not to influence the theory that emerged from the data as it was being discovered.

Strauss and Glaser ultimately diverged from each other, resulting in Strauss and Corbin

(1990) developing a version of grounded theory (referred to as Straussian grounded theory) that involved a rigid, complex and meticulous approach to coding, designed to *create* rather than *discover* theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990) endorsed the use of existing literature at every stage of analysis, though they encouraged refraining from a thorough literature review, as that could obscure the formation of novel insights. As such, Straussian grounded theory represents a post-positivist paradigm, whereby it is acknowledged that any theory about external reality is provisional and fallible, because theory is formed out of contextually-bound, individual interpretations of reality (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 1998). However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) still affirm an objective external reality, while distinguishing it from the human apprehension that attempts to understand its nature.

Charmaz (2000, 2006), a former student of Glaser and Strauss, developed yet another permutation of grounded theory, organized around a constructivist paradigm (referred to as constructivist grounded theory). Like Straussian grounded theory, this paradigm asserts that all data and theory are created by the interactions between individual perspectives and external contexts and situations (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). However, where constructivist grounded theory differs is in its presupposition that reality is inseparable from its apprehension, and that individuals construct reality (not just approximate theory) through meaning-making; hence, there exist manifold social realities. Therefore, the goal of this version of grounded theory is to *construct*, via interpretation, a conceptual understanding (rather than an exact representation) of the studied phenomena as experienced by participants (Charmaz, 2006, 2008). Constructivist grounded theory endorses conducting a systematic literature review, as a way of explicitly contextualizing the research (and researcher), given that researchers inevitably see out of their own conceptual lenses, and research does not occur in a vacuum (Charmaz, 2006). Coding procedures from this paradigm are also more open and interpretive, to allow for the researcher's

creative and intuitive interaction with the data (Charmaz, 2008).

The current study utilized constructivist grounded theory to analyze the data, as the aim was to begin from a specific focal point, namely, self-determination theory, with the goal of developing a deeper conceptual understanding of immigrant professionals' experience of career adjustment in Canada, rather than explicitly searching for a larger theory of this phenomena. This required a more flexible, and open approach to data analysis. As such, the constructivist grounded theory was deemed to be the more pertinent method for the purpose and context of the present research.

## **Participants**

### **Sampling Technique**

Participants were selected for inclusion in the present study from a pool of 100 professional immigrants who had been interviewed in 2007 and 2008 as part of Dr. Charles P. Chen's research at OISE, the University of Toronto, on immigrant work-life adjustment.

To maintain maximum diversity within the selected sample of archival data, all individuals from the data set were included. This allowed for the career development experiences of individuals at varied life stages, ages, and career situations to be represented in the study. The range of employment fields amongst the 100 individuals also allowed for different experiences to be studied. Participants were from a multitude of cultural backgrounds and had diverse countries of origins, thus ensuring that a diverse array of perspectives, values, and career experiences were represented.

SDT has been applied cross-culturally, and the presumed universal nature of the basic needs has been robustly supported across cultures, ages, and domains. As such, narrowing the data set to a certain category is unnecessary and would limit the opportunity to learn from the widespread applicability of this framework.

The participants interviewed for Dr. Chen's study resided in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Areas (GTA). The recruitment strategy for the original study involved advertising to individuals who used Toronto/GTA-based public transportation and community agencies. The interviews were conducted at OISE, which is located centrally in the City of Toronto.

### **Selection Criteria**

The targeted sample for this study were professional immigrants residing in the Greater Toronto Areas who met the following criteria: (1) they were born outside of Canada; (2) they immigrated to Canada between 1996 and 2006; (3) they had obtained a post-secondary education; (4) they had worked full-time in their country of origin in a professional field before migrating to Canada; (5) they immigrated to Canada under the skilled work category, and had been employed either on a full or part-time basis (i.e., holding paid employment for at least 16 hours a week) at the time of being interviewed; (6) they had been living in Canada for a minimum of one year; (7) they were 25 years or older; and (8) they spoke English with reasonable fluency in order for effective communications with interviewers to be possible.

Interviews were conducted by graduate research assistants who were pursuing Master's and Doctoral degrees in Counselling Psychology, and whose primary language was English.

### **Participant Characteristics**

**Sex/Gender.** Fifty participants self-identified as male, and fifty self-identified as female. No participants self-identified with another gender identity.

**Age.** The average age of the participants was 38.5 years, with a range of 27-59 years. The average age of male participants was 39.4 years, with a range of 27-59 years. The average age of female participants was 38.0, with a range of 28-52 years.

**Country of origin/culture.** In total, 53 countries were represented based on participants country of origin. Three participants were from the United States of America, 17 were from

South America (Peru, Argentina, Columbia, Brazil), 23 were from Europe (England, Ireland, Serbia, Hungary), 15 were from African (Zimbabwe, South Africa), 8 were from the Middle East (Israel, Iran), 12 were from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh), 17 were from Asia (China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan), and 12 participants were from South East Asia (Indonesia, Thailand). Only 7 of the participants stated that their mother language was English.

**Length of time in Canada.** On average, participants had spent 10.1 years in Canada at the time of interviewing, with a range of 5-13 years.

**Pre-Canada educational level.** As outlined in the selection criteria, all of the participants recruited for this study had obtained post-secondary education in their countries of origin, across a diverse range of fields. Approximately 24 of the degrees were in business fields (e.g., business administration, commerce, business management), 10 were in health care (e.g. Medicine, dentistry, mental health), 27 were in technical fields (e.g., chemistry, information technology, engineering), 4 were in the public service sector, 2 were in law, and 13 were in education. The remaining participants held training in non-technical and other fields such as liberal arts, language, and psychology. In terms of high-level education, 37 participants held Bachelor's degrees, 30 held Master's degrees, 6 held college diplomas, 6 held doctorate degrees, and 4 held professional/practical certification.

**Canadian education.** 43% of participants reported completing retraining in Canada.

**Occupations.** At the time of being interviewed, participants were employed in wide diversity of occupations, including business administration, business analysis, banking, marketing, law and legal services, information technology, office administration, quality assurance, sales/account management, insurance administration, healthcare/medicine, and teaching/education. Clearly, the results pertain to a broad cross-section of potential career fields.

**Sample Size.** It has been argued that no rules exist to guide sampling processes in

qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Sample size selection is dependent on multiple factors, such as the nature of the phenomenon being explored, the number of participants required to give the study credibility, and the purpose of the study. Additionally, limitations in time and resources will also affect the sample size in a given research project (Patton, 1990).

For research using purposive samples, Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that there was no guidelines for determining sample size, and thus conducted their own study. In their research they found that theoretical saturation was achieved after 12 interviews, despite their sample size of 60. Saturation refers to the point in research at which the main variations of a phenomenon have been identified and can be integrated into an emerging theory (Guest et al., 2006).

Saturation is highly important and must be reached before theory can be developed and generalized (Creswell, 1998). Many people support smaller sample sizes given that saturation is often achieved quickly and compatible with the goal, purpose, and resources of a study (Creswell, 1998; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Small, 2009; Williams, 2000). However, if a sample pool is more heterogeneous, larger samples may be desirable (Guest et al. 2006).

The sample size for the present study was 100 participants. Thus, for the purpose of this study, it was decided that exceeding the recommended sample size for phenomenological research (Guest et al., 2006; Creswell, 1990) would be appropriate. In part this was due to the fact that the data used for this research were part of a larger study that included in-depth qualitative interviews with 100 individuals. Despite the purposive sampling technique used for this study, the sample was quite heterogeneous in nature, with variations across age, country of origin, culture, educational background, career narratives, etc.; thus, it was reasoned that using the entire sample would allow for better theory development and generalizability, giving the inclusion of maximal variation (Guest et al., 2006; Kuzel, 1992).



In this case, a larger sample size would allow for the discovery of common themes, as well as any disconfirming evidence, should it exist, as well bolstering support for discovered themes across populations, in turn increasing generalizability.

### **Procedure**

All procedures to be subsequently described occurred as part of the original study under Dr. Charles P. Chen on new immigrant professional's career transition and vocational experiences. This research was conducted with the approval of the ethical review board at the University of Toronto. As an extension of this former study, the present study was also granted approval by the ethical review board.

### **Recruitment**

The recruitment for the original study took place over 6 to 9 months. Recruitment posters were placed in public space, such as subways (see Appendix A). Community agencies were also contacted by phone and mail. Once they gave consent, these agencies were given recruitment posters to put on their notice boards. The community organizations further aided in recruitment by distributing the poster advertisement, and stimulating word of mouth sharing of information about the study.

### **Research Interviews/Data Collection**

Interested individuals were instructed to call a recruitment hotline with a voicemail box and leave their contact information. Members of the research team then phoned individuals who left messages in order to determine their willingness to participate in the study, as well as their suitability based on the inclusion criteria. Research assistants were trained to assess potential participants using a script to ensure that the nature and purpose of the research, confidentiality, privacy, and reimbursement information were communicate clearly and consistently (see Appendix B). Prospective participants were briefed on the possibility that discussing their

immigration and worklife adjustment could cause distress. They were offered resources for support should they experience any ill effects from the interviewing process. These supports included referrals for counselling/psychotherapy and psychological services, and were offered in order to minimize possible negative impacts of the research on participating individuals. Once the contact and screening process was completed, suitable and interested participants were offered the chance to take part in the study and their interview appointments were scheduled.

Interviews were conducted at OISE, the University of Toronto, in private rooms. Interview sessions were roughly 2 hours in length, and participants were given \$35 as compensation for their time and travel expenses. In order to ensure participant anonymity, individuals were assigned with identification numbers which were then used on all audio and written records. All materials generated from research were locked in a filing cabinet that was accessible only to Dr. Charles Chen, and the research team members.

At the outset of every interview, participants were re-briefed on the purpose of the study, as well as the general content of the interviews. They were informed that interviews would be audio recorded and were provided with a consent form (see Appendix C) that outlined the limits to confidentiality as well as their ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The consent process involved allowing participants to read and discuss the consent form, ask any questions, and if they wished, to decline to proceed with the interview. Once consent was gained, the interview was conducted (see Appendix D). All 100 individuals completed their interviews, and there were no withdrawals from the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The initial phase of data analysis using grounded theory involved an in-depth reading of the interview transcripts, during which the researcher made notes on their observations, thoughts and impressions. After this, the second phase of analysis involved using NVivo 11, a specialized

qualitative research software program. Each transcript was then re-read and provisional emergent themes were coded using the software. This produced a preliminary set of codes and themes, which guided subsequent analysis. Finally, each transcript was reviewed and recoded a second and third time. The coding process was prioritized according to the basic needs in SDT, namely, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and dominant themes and subcategories were synthesized. These emergent themes will be explored in detail in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

The present chapter discusses the themes and findings that emerged during analysis. Themes related to SDT, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are discussed one at a time, in terms of how they manifest in immigrants' experiences. Interestingly, a parallel finding ran through all three major themes, which was that each theme, capturing one of the basic needs of SDT, illustrated both a set of difficulties faced by immigrants as well as creative possibilities for effective coping. This reflects the power of the SDT framework for providing insight both into the developmental and motivational deficits that hold people back from reaching their full potential, as well as offering concrete suggestions for how to more functionally approach one's circumstances in order to maximize chances for successful adaptation.

#### **Autonomy**

##### **Loss of Autonomy**

Autonomy describes the universal need for people to feel like the agents of their actions, and to structure their behaviours in accordance with their values and interests. 34 participants ( $n = 34$ ) described the experience of having "no choice" with regards to their career pursuits after immigrating to Canada. As P42 explained, "These were survival jobs. I didn't have any other choice. No choice at all." Many participants felt they lacked the choice to pursue a career or job they found fulfilling and in line with their skills, and instead, described having to work at whatever job they were able to get in order to pay the bills and provide for their families. P38, who had a Bachelor's degree in Business and worked in quality control in Brazil, described the experience of working as a building cleaner when she first immigrated to Canada: "This kind of work is so hard to do. But I have to survive, I have to pay the rent, I have to buy the food, and that job was the only thing I had available at that time."

Participants who felt they had little or no choice over what jobs they had to perform often described the work as unenjoyable and below their capabilities. Some participants reported finding it difficult to accept that their “survival jobs” were comprised of boring, repetitive work that involved them following specific protocols with no opportunity for individual initiative or creativity. P59 described her experience working as a bank teller in Canada, after working as an animator and industrial designer in her home country: “I don’t like jobs that are very redundant, because I’m from a creative field, and the creative field is very spontaneous. As a bank teller, the job is so redundant, so methodical.” P42 expressed a similar sentiment when she explained, “Being a telephone interviewer, you just have to read what is in the script. You’re not supposed to give your own explanation about a single word. Everything has to be verbatim.”

Fear of running low on finances was a very real concern that resulted in many immigrants feeling they had to work at any job they were able to find, rather than a job in their field that they genuinely wanted to pursue. Therefore, lacking money was an extrinsic motivator that often controlled participants’ career-related choices. In reflecting on her experience as a new worker in Canada, P38 expressed:

I have a lot of dreams, but sometimes the reality is so difficult, and I cannot change it too much. For example, I cannot go to university here. Oh no, it’s very expensive, and I live by myself with no help from my family. I have to work in what I’m doing now, and maybe change a little bit, but not too much. (P38)

P21 worked as an engineer in his country of origin, and was employed as a colonoscopy technician at the time of being interviewed. When asked about the direction he saw his career taking in the future, he reported:

Actually now, from my view, I’m not concerned for employment experience in my field anymore. I just want some money, and I’m looking to my future after my kids grow up and leave the house. My daughter is already at the University of Toronto. So they will grow up and leave the house, and it will be just me and my wife. Then I need money, and that’s it! My career is gone! There is no more! (P21)

For some participants, engaging in work they did not endorse led to feelings of apathy,

sadness, or depression. For example, when P2 was asked how she felt while working in a job she disliked, she stated: “I felt miserable. I was depressed for a long, long time. I used to cry every morning before I went to work, but I had to go to work.” Other participants described losing their ambition after having their efforts to work in their field of choice continuously undermined, such as P10:

I find myself getting less and less ambitious over my years here. Because when I started, I really believed in myself, and I really thought that things were going to happen. I could still get a student loan and go into an MBA program, but I find it so hard at this point in my life, and I find myself settling for being a sales person. I’ve used up my energy in the previous years, and I don’t want to face rejection anymore. (P10)

Some participants described experiencing the loss of their vocational agency due to settling for jobs that were not commensurate to their experience. In these environments, their ability to implement their personal creativity, skills and knowledge in their place of work was eradicated, leaving them feeling as though they lacked any unique identity. P65 described this feeling as though, “You are in a system, in a mechanization. You are part of machine, and you have nothing else.”

### **Exercising Autonomy Despite External Barriers**

While many of the participants described barriers preventing them from exercising agency over their career development, there was still a significant theme of persistence and self-determination that emerged from the data. In fact, 36 participants ( $n = 36$ ) found ways to preserve and exercise their autonomy despite the challenges they encountered.

There are multiple ways in which participants described enacting their autonomy. A number of participants expressed finding the process of retraining and gaining additional education to be personally fulfilling. These participants construed education as a way for them to pursue their interests and achieve their professional goals. P68, who was balancing full-time work with attaining his Chartered Management Accountant designation, explained: “You know,

studying and working at the same time is very hard. But if you're really motivated, if you really know where you're going, you really know what you want, then you've got to do it."

Furthermore, it became evident that holding onto deeper, guiding values was one way that many participants continued to experience their vocational trajectory as an autonomous effort, despite difficulties. For some participants, this took the form of maintaining a strong desire to work in their chosen field, and holding on to the importance of fighting for what they wanted. For these participants, maintaining their autonomous career pursuits was seen as a way to authorship over their own lives in the face of immense change and environmental control. P6 relayed this sentiment in his statement:

But this experience is hard; it's hard on your self-esteem. It's hard to accept the realities, and find a way to survive, and at the same time, have the capacity to persist, to have a goal and pursue it, to say, "I'm going to work in my profession, even though it's hard." Many, many people don't fight; many people just get a little job and stay there. But it's difficult to persist, and to get a very good quality of life, to be mentally and physically healthy, and to be satisfied, living here in these conditions. You have to develop some kind of hope, and to feed this hope by telling yourself, "Okay, I am getting training, because I want to get a job and develop my skills in my field. (P6)

A number of participants took these challenges as an opportunity to grow and develop. They described approaching the work involved in realizing their vocational aspirations as a chance to enhance themselves. P22 expressed her deep commitment to advancing professionally:

Within 6 months; I studied hard in all four subjects. I got the books and took a private class on Saturdays, which started at about 12:30, and I passed the exam with high standards... There are a lot of opportunities, but the only thing is that you have to take decisions. When you are in one place, you should not take it for granted; you should be on the lookout, or you should be enhancing, going for training, taking extra steps to enhance yourself without getting redundant in one place. (P22)

P61 described a similar focus on personal development, even though her current job was not in her professional field:

When I work, I feel that I'm alive. You feel like you're doing something. You need to work, you need to learn. Because life is not just about sitting and gathering; you have to spend 50% of your time doing something useful for your advancement. And because I studied science, advancement in life is very important for me. (P61)

Maintaining their personal values allowed a number of participants to continue feeling motivated to develop their careers and perceive each work-related step, even it did not match their interests or skills, as ultimately moving them toward their own self-endorsed goals. Some participants described working at a survival job as a necessary precursor to being able to pursue their own career interests, rather than a position they would be “stuck” in long-term. A number of participants working below their skill level in their field of expertise expressed feeling that they would eventually progress to a more satisfying position. These participants reported knowing that it would take time, but used the future potential as a way to sustain motivation in their present work. P70 reflected on his approach to following his dream after migration, as he pursued a Master’s in Education while working as a security guard:

Coming in Canada and realizing that my previous academic and professional life would count for very little, I remember being prepared to do any honest jobs that came my way first. I knew that while doing that, I would, you know, look at the ways of having my credentials assessed and so forth, and follow my dream of working in education. (P70)

## **Competence**

### **Competence Undermined by Others**

This theme was fairly common across participants, and was the cause of negative emotions for many. As discussed earlier in this paper, competence is a basic need to experience a sense of mastery in one’s endeavours, and to feel effective in bringing about desired outcomes through intentional activity.

A primary difficulty described by 43 participants ( $n = 43$ ) in this study was the devaluation of their professional competence. During the search for employment in Canada, many participants reported being subjected to the assumption that they were not skilled enough to work in their field of expertise, despite having extensive work experience and training from their country of origin. Thus, a number of participants experienced mistrust and a lack of



confidence in their competence, and described being required to have “Canadian experience” in order to qualify for professional positions, which they perceived as an affront to the mastery they had spent years cultivating prior to migration. P39 described the frustration of being unable to find a job in his field due to his lack of Canadian experience:

So it’s very disappointing. It’s like, how am I going to get Canadian experience if you don’t open the door for me? Just let me show you that I have the knowledge; just humour me, I don’t ask you for much. Just let me see what I need to do, and that’s all. I have a degree, I can learn. (P39)

Many participants stated that their credentials were effectively erased, and no longer held any worth. Expressed simply, when asked how useful his previous experience and training was for his job search in Canada, P39 stated, “Not at all.”

Some participants were shocked to find that after studying for many years in prestigious universities, their degrees were of no value in Canada. P10 explained the response in Canada to her university degree:

If employers happen to call back, they ask for the Canadian experience, which I obviously didn’t have. My university degree and my training after that didn’t count for anything. My school is a very well known school; it’s like the ivy league of Turkey. It’s a very hard to get into that university, because it’s very prestigious. And when I’m in Turkey, and I say I’m a graduate of Bospros University in business, everyone thinks I must be really smart. And here, people ask me, “Do you have a university degree?” And I say, “Yes, I studied business at Bospros University.” Their response is that it’s not in Canada, so you’re basically a high school graduate. They told me countless times it doesn’t count. (P10)

Many participants described being treated as unqualified and unemployable after migrating to Canada. They expressed feeling ignored, ineffectual, and like their skills and talents were being wasted. P30 described the radical shift in how her professional and educational experience was perceived after immigration:

I felt like I gave up everything to end up like this. I had a very good life. To become an independent immigrant here you have to meet a lot of requirements, you know how the ratings and scores work. So, a lot of people who are independent immigrants get frustrated here, because, you know, we were the cream of the crop, and here we’re just crap. That’s how we felt. Maybe that’s fine for people who didn’t have a good job or

education, but I came from the best school in my country, and here that's equivalent with the worst school. (P30)

P21 reported being unqualified to do anything after coming to Canada:

I want to work in my profession, but I am not qualified for my profession here. And also, I'm not even qualified to be a cleaner. I'm also not qualified to be a machine operator. I'm not qualified for anything here in Canada. Really, the man, woman, or any person who immigrates to Canada is not qualified for anything. (P21)

A number of participants noted the irony that they were considered eligible for immigration based on their training and professional status, and that these very qualifications were considered insufficient once they arrived in Canada. P53 depicted this inconsistent valuing process, stating:

I think I speak for other immigrants – because, like, you came here as a landed immigrant, based on skilled professional points, and then you come here and this is what they tell you: 'Because you are not educated in Canada, you'll be asked to do further studies. (P53)

Once employed, many participants reported feeling that their knowledge was considered inferior relative to others in their place of work. Some participants explained that their opinion was not valued. They described knowing they possessed knowledge equivalent, or even superior, to their colleagues, but not being given the opportunity to demonstrate their competence. Participants relayed the sense that employers did not have confidence in their abilities, preventing them from advancing in their careers even if they were able to find employment (below their actual skill level) in their field. Thus, many participants described having to work harder than others to prove their competence "from scratch" in a profession they already had expertise in, sometimes to little or no effect. P5 explained:

Even if you're very successful with a company, you couldn't have any reasonable expectations to be promoted or advance in your career; if they take you, they take you to use you, and they don't expect you to raise your voice. They expect you to sit and do your job. And they don't understand when someone wants to advance. I've been discouraged many times in my attempts to prove something to employers. I took university courses, I enrolled in the CMA program, Certified Management Accountant. I

did lots of things at work to try to demonstrate my abilities. It has never been accepted. (P5)

All the data within this theme depicted the predicament participants experienced of having their competence undermined by the external environment, thus preventing them from being able to demonstrate their professional skill and knowledge in a way that affected their career outcomes. Overall, this was described as a discouraging and frustrating experience.

### **Language Competence**

Issues related to a lack of competence with the English language was an emergent theme endorsed by 29 participants (n = 29); this included cases in which the lack of competence was fairly objective, and others in which others merely perceived the immigrant to be lacking in linguistic ability. A number of participants reported not being fluent enough in English upon arrival to Canada, despite meeting the language requirements for immigration. Some participants described difficulties with idioms, colloquialisms and conversational English. Others relayed having to speaking slower in English than their mother tongue in order to convey their thoughts, and struggling to understand fluent English speakers when they spoke too fast.

Furthermore, participants often described having trouble communicating the nuances of their professional understanding and work-related insights, hindering their ability to display their expertise. P6 discussed the challenge of conveying his knowledge of participatory research in interviews:

I couldn't make the bridge, how to present this knowledge. I know the theory, I know how to work with this type of research, and this knowledge would be useful here, and many organizations are actually looking for that. When I say I know about participatory research, and that is very well developed in Brazil and Colombia and Chile, I just couldn't find a way to put this knowledge in English to be understood, to explain it in interviews. (P6)

Some participants reported being more knowledgeable than other employees, but not being able to convey this knowledge adequately due to language barriers. P10 described the job-related

impact of language barriers:

You feel like your knowledge is not being appreciated and you just hesitate to give your opinion. I have experienced this specifically in the private school where I was working. It's just that you feel that you're three times more knowledgeable in math than this other person, but this person has a nicer way to say things and express himself because English is his first language. (P10)

A number of participants described having trouble interacting with their co-workers due to their language difficulties. For example, participants described feeling self-conscious around English-speaking colleagues and choosing to be quiet in their workplace. P45 discussed the ways language barriers keep immigrants from asserting themselves at work, thus maintaining their subordinate status:

People who have grown up here, because they have very good communication ability, they can talk with the management quite well. But for first generation immigrants, whatever it is the boss tells them to do, they just do it. They never negotiate, they seldom negotiate, bargain, talk about it; no, they don't do that, they just work, work, work. Because they need money to support their children, to go to school, and to finish university. Immigrants, they cannot talk, they cannot talk quite well. So, even though they have a certain reason, a strong and reasonable reason to argue, but they give up, because they will get themselves into trouble. (P45)

Some participants reported that feeling stressed during interviews made it more difficult to communicate in English, even though they knew how to answer. Feeling embarrassed about struggling to communicate in English exacerbated their stress in a vicious cycle that perpetuated their communication difficulties.

Other language-related challenges had to do with being *perceived* negatively by others, rather than a personal sense of inefficacy with English. Many participants explained that employers in their professional field were not interested in hiring individuals who did not speak English as a first language, and that native speakers were always selected over immigrants. P8 stated, “ It's about native, native speaker. If you have 900 people in the market, candidates for a job, and only one position available, they prefer a Canadian.

Multiple participants explained that other people assumed they were less competent in

their field, or had a poor grasp of English, because they spoke with an accent. P41 pondered the challenge he faced due to having an accent: “I don’t know if it’s my industry or every industry, but here, people don’t like it when a person has an accent. I don’t know what the problem is!”

Similarly, P70 recalled searching for jobs and finding that his accent posed a problem:

I clearly communicate with the person and clearly understand the person, then I was thinking, “What is the big deal with the accent?” But I believe for some it is a big deal, probably depending on the job. Probably was a kind of the job that they didn’t really want an accent, or they wanted to hear the Canadian accent. (P70)

### **Using Experiences to Build Competence**

Another competence-related theme that emerged from the data, supported by 40 participants ( $n = 40$ ), involved using Canadian work or educational experiences as opportunities to build competence. This psychological reformulation of uninspiring work as a learning opportunity served to buffer participants’ motivations, adding a deeper layer of personal meaning, and therefore more autonomous motivation, to the otherwise uninspiring job. In line with this theme, some participants stated that they took as much personal initiative at work as possible in order to increase their experience and credibility.

One way many participants reframed working in jobs that were below their skill level, often not even in their field of expertise, was as a chance to speak English as much as possible and improve their technical and conversational skills. Other participants described any employment in Canada as a way to learn about and adapt to Canadian culture and people. P20 reflected on his experience working in delivery:

The delivery job, it was not so well paid, but it was a real good experience for me. I had a chance to go to several kinds of companies, and several kinds of homes, and I can talk to many people - Canadians, Asians. And during the delivery, I try to speak as much as I can and make conversation, so I can have a chance to talk with people. It’s not exactly like a class for English; you can go to school and learn how to say “Hi. How are you? My name is Michael, and your name is...?” Actually, it’s nothing. You can go anywhere, and if you meet somebody for the first time, you need to communicate with him, and just to talk with him, and you need to understand, “What is he thinking?”, “What is he saying?”. Then you can find the answer to these two questions, and train yourself in the new

culture. So it was a pretty good experience for me. (P20)

P32, a civil engineer by profession, was able to see value in interacting with different people, even difficult ones, through his sales position:

I like my work. It's very challenging, and I make a lot of friendship in different cultures, different people, so different you can't believe it. I have to deal with an 80 year old lady, who doesn't like to come into the store, so I have to find what she needs on the phone. I have to take her credit card number on the phone, and sometimes she yells at me, sometimes she tells me I'm the best. Sometimes I have some young couples come to me, and they don't know anything about what that they want to have, and I have to spend one hour, two hours, for even one small vacuum cleaner. Because the technology changes all the time, people come to me and need information, and I have to explain it to them. And sometimes they come from work, and they are angry, or they have some problem with somebody in their family, or they don't have enough money, and I have to change myself based on the different personalities. (P32)

A number of participants viewed participating in the Canadian work force as an avenue for enhancing their skills and credentials. Some participants achieved this by taking advantage of any learning opportunities made available to them through their employment, such as trainings, workshops, and educational resources. P17 explained:

I try to do my job the best way I can. And there are resources for occasional teachers that are provided, and there are people you can ask if you need help. So I don't hesitate to ask for help or to use different resources. (P17)

In terms of retraining for accreditation purposes, many participants reported finding nuances and new information in their course work, despite studying subjects they had already learned. Along these lines, a number of participants described feeling as though any form of learning contributed to their competence. P24 explored what she gained working in menial jobs:

Well, everything is good, I would say. I would say that the sales job, the sales experience, helped me for a while to work and to accommodate to my next job. And the phone support also helped me, probably to improve my English, listening and speaking, all that stuff. I never considered that learning something is bad; I think of this as a positive move, whatever you learn. (P24)

## Relatedness

### Lack of Support/Loneliness

An experience reported by 31 participants ( $n = 31$ ) was missing their family and friends from “back home” and lacking support after immigration. Many participants described experiencing loneliness and feeling sad as a result. In particular, some participants mentioned having no one with whom to celebrate special occasions, such as holidays and birthdays. P21 depicted his network of relations in his home country, as well as the loss experienced after arriving in Canada:

Back home is back home. Where you grow, you still remember the place you grow. Whatever we have right now is okay, but that is the place you grew up. And the hobby back home is friends and family. It's a big meaning. We lost it here. The family is big support for you. At any time of the year, we celebrate together - birthdays together, weddings together, you know, celebrations like Easter, Christmas. All these celebration, of course, we are together. And the connection between kids – cousins – it's stronger. But now, because we are too far from them, we don't feel it. (P21)

Other participants mentioned finding it difficult to make close friends like they had in their country of origin. Many participants reported having no network to fall back on, and no one to help them, should they be in need.

P30 explained:

I'm in a new country. I'm an immigrant. I don't know anybody to help me out, nobody to support me. I feel everybody is so busy, there isn't somebody to help you. I feel so alone. Because I know I can survive, I survived. The hard life started when I came to Canada. Maybe it's because I don't have the support systems. I don't have the family, both emotionally and things like that, nobody to support me. So it's so hard. (P30)

Some participants expressed feeling that people in Canada were kind, but not personable or open, and that they would never be fully accepted. Others cited cultural differences in social norms as barriers to connecting with Canadian people. P7, who emigrated from Peru, discussed feeling homesick and having trouble connect with people in Canada:

I was missing my home a lot. Oh my god, I was very homesick. I was very sad...Because

I find people in Canada, real Canadian people, are kind of colder, in a good sense, than we are, most of my people... You can feel very depressed, you can feel very sad. (P7)

### **Help from Ethnic/Cultural Community**

36 participants (n = 36) discussed how people from their cultural/ethnic community helped them adjust to their new life in Canada. A number of participants reported staying with relatives or friends from their home country for some period of time upon arrival, before establishing themselves independently. Some participants described this interim phase as a time to settle in, and search for employment without the pressure of paying for accommodation. In some cases, family and friends helped participants with basic skills, such as how to take public transportation, or connect to employment agencies. P43 recalled living with friends when she first arrived to Canada from the Republic of Moldova:

When we came, we lived with our friends for three weeks, I would say. They helped us to adjust, explained us transportation, and even simple things, because it's a totally different world than back home. They showed us the office for applying for a permanent resident card, and for a SIN card. They explained where you can go, and where you shouldn't go. And also, they helped us to find a place to rent. (P43)

Some participants were able to find work through their ethnic community. For example, P5 explained how he attained his employment in a software development company:

That gentleman who is an alumni from my university in Moscow moved to Canada in 1999, and he worked as a software developer since then. He knew my situation, and he tried to help me, and some of his friends passed along this job advertisement, and I applied to the job through him. (P5)

Some participants expressed feeling comfortable with people from their country of origin because of the shared culture, experience, and language.

### **Building Networks for Career Development**

As depicted in the previous theme, immigrants often come to Canada with few, if any, social contacts. However, 37 participants (n = 37) endorsed intentionally building networks in order to increase their likelihood of finding employment, particularly within their profession of



choice. In some cases, participants described making friends with people from, or well-adjusted to, Canada, who were able to enhance their employment-seeking behaviours by helping them with their resumes and cover letters, giving them advice about how to apply for work, providing them with interview suggestions, as well as other information about work-related cultural norms. Additionally, some participants reported gaining employment as a result of being referred internally by a friend.

Many participants described networking as the most important activity to engage in, in order to find employment. Some even privileged networking over directly applying for work. A number of participants described joining community groups, such as church, and recreation clubs, in order to build new networks that might link them to future employment opportunities. P38 recalled seeking support from a local church in order to deal with a difficult housing and employment situation:

The problem was I didn't know anyone here, so I couldn't find any information. And one day I went to the church; I'm not religious, but I hear there was a church close to my house at that time, and they have some help there. I went there to ask if somebody is looking for a roommate. But before this, I didn't know about these things. In the church, I asked if somebody could help me, and they gave me the phone number of a Portuguese man, who hired me to clean a bank. And I worked there for 8 months. (P38)

A number of participants described finding school, courses, and retraining opportunities as important not for the education, but primarily because they connected them to other individuals in their profession and plugged them into an insider information network. P64 relayed her approach to finding work in her field:

It was important for me to find a job when I came here, but not immediately. I wanted a network first, before looking for work. But I wanted a job in the media, in journalism, advertising, or television. It was one of those three. Which is why I took the course that I did, because the Concordia course had a good reputation, and I thought it would be a good way to get my foot in the door and meet industry people. Because we were in school, they had given out lists of the industry-related sites that we wouldn't ordinarily know about. I guess all our classmates as well, like if somebody knew someone who was in the field who gave them a website to link to, we would all pass that information around and so that's how we were to know about these industry sites. (P64)

Some participants reported valuing programs with internships because of the networking possibilities, and the ability to use their practicums to make contact with people currently working in their field. P70 reported having this experience in his practicum:

I was able to build some contacts while doing my practicums and they are people that really liked the way I taught and were telling me, ‘What can we do? Can we put a word to the principal?’ And I’m like, “Of course, yes, if they want me to supply, but I need with TDSB.” (P70)

Other participants made an effort to join professional associations and attend professional meetings, conferences, and job fairs in order to market themselves to people in their field. P43 explained:

I think networking was important, just telling people, meeting people and telling them what you do, and that you’re looking for work. I haven’t joined professional associations, but I’ve been going to the meetings of the editors’ associations and writers’ associations. And learn things, because they have seminars; some of them are free, and some of them are very cheap. In the future, you get work out of that too, the more you get to know people. But I’ve found that in the past too; a lot of jobs I’ve gotten are through networking and talking to people I know. (P43)

### **Building Relationships for Socioemotional Support**

31 participants (n = 31) described the importance of developing and maintaining social relationships in order to experience belonging, emotional support, well-being, and encouragement. Unlike the previous theme, these relationships were not viewed as important for their career-enhancing potential, but for their contribution to participants’ overall well-being and adjustment in Canada.

Thus, many participants cited making friends as a priority. Participants reported meeting friends in diverse environments, such as retraining programs, community groups, work, and recreational clubs. Forming affiliative bonds was viewed as an important source of emotional support and encouragement to persist in the face of adjustment difficulties (including challenges to finding fulfilling employment). Developing a sense of belonging through building a social

network was described as a positive experience and source of happiness by a number of participants. P23 described his social life and recalled the efforts he made to cultivate it:

This is Canada; enjoy your life as it goes. After I leave this interview, I'm going to a barbecue, at a friend's houses. Tomorrow I have another friend, I'm going to see him for lunch. So for me, the social life is great, I don't have a problem. At the beginning it was not so good, so I became president of the council at my kids' school. I became active in the community. So, I tried to become as active in the community as I could. (P23)

Some participants reported making friends with multicultural individuals and other immigrants (not necessarily from the same ethnic community) because they could relate to each other's experiences, helping them feel less alone in their post-migration struggles. P26 explained how listening to the experiences of others helped her maintain perspective on her own challenges:

When you meet with a lot of immigrants in Toronto especially, you find that people are very willing to share their experience. Sometimes you tend to take it personal that you're not advancing, but then you meet other people who are experiencing the same thing. Many of the truck drivers that I encountered and that I dealt with were, they had their degrees, or they had a professional life before. (P26)

A number of participants reported that having positive and friendly bosses and coworkers helped them enjoy work and feel supported, even when their job was not professionally satisfying. P24 described the impact of having a positive social culture in her workplace:

Well, I'm very happy, because the boss I have here, my manager, he's really helpful. I guess I'm lucky as well, because he's also an immigrant. He knows how it works when you are here as a new immigrant, so that helped me as well. Also, I feel encouraged when I see the positive side of things; it's a small organization, and everyone is friendly. Almost everyone knows everyone. It's a really friendly environment; we go out once every year to a remote location, and stay there three days, so we know each other. (P24)

In terms of feeling emotionally supported at work, P2 relayed his experience:

My coworkers and my director are very helpful, and always willing to help and assist me in everything that I'm doing, they all support me even in some things that are not related to work. Because they know that I am new, and they know that it's difficult to adjust, they do everything they can to facilitate my adjustment. I consider myself to be very lucky, because I know that many people don't have this opportunity. (P2)

Finally, some participants cited maintaining strong bonds with their family, through

spending quality time with their children and spouse, as contributing to their well-being and giving them a sense of purpose. As P43 stated, “Me and my husband, we helped each other very much. It means very much when you have somebody to talk and complain to.”

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The three broad themes anticipated by SDT, reflecting the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, played important roles in immigrants' narratives about their career and employment experiences, serving to provide insight both into the challenges and difficulties immigrants face as well as creative possibilities for how immigrants can try to find solutions to these challenges. This chapter will provide a summary of these findings, as well as how they addressed the guiding research questions. The theoretical and practical implications of the findings will then be explored, followed by a discussion of the limitations of the present study, as well as possibilities for future research.

#### **Summary of Emergent Themes**

For the need of autonomy, one central theme was the widespread sense of a loss of autonomy, as immigrants were often unable to pursue their interests or goals, but instead had to work at whatever jobs they were able to get, merely to make enough money to survive and provide for their families. A second theme was that immigrants reported using personal values and deeply held goals, such as providing for their family or giving a better life to their children, as a way of feeling a greater sense of autonomy over their actions, thereby helping to sustain their motivations despite the many challenges they face.

In terms of competence, one common theme that emerged was that immigrants reported experiencing the thwarting of this need, due to their skills and experience being devalued in their new country, and due to language barriers that held them back both socially and professionally. A second theme related to competence was the tendency for many immigrants to view any type of work or opportunity as a way to help themselves feel more competent in their new cultural context; for example, they would try to see even a menial job as an opportunity to practice their

English skills, or as a networking opportunity that may help them learn to navigate Canadian society more effectively.

Several themes pertained to the need for relatedness. Immigrants commonly reported the thwarting of this need as a key source of difficulty in their lives, discussing loneliness and the feeling that they lacked social support in their new lives. As with the other two needs, a set of counter themes emerged, involving an emphasis on building a new community networks, career networks and general friendship networks.

In sum, the needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness seemed to play major roles in the adjustment experiences of new immigrants to Canada. Many of their difficulties involved the thwarting of one or more of these basic needs, and many of the coping strategies and responses that helped immigrants become more resilient and better able to adapt to their circumstances, involved finding ways to at least partially fulfill these same needs.

### **Exploration of Research Questions**

The present research was guided by the central research question: How does the fulfillment or undermining of basic psychological needs, as conceptualized by self-determination theory, apply to the career development of professional immigrants? Subsidiary research questions were: 1) In what ways do professional immigrants experience need fulfillment, and need thwarting from the social environment after migration? 2) How do need fulfillment and need thwarting impact professional immigrants' well-being and motivation? 3) What personal, social, and environmental supports promote need satisfaction?

Using these questions to guide the analysis revealed pertinent themes that served to illuminate this SDT-informed inquiry. The primary question was broad, designed to theoretically guide the analysis, while allowing for a flexible approach to the data through which novel themes and relationships could emerge. In turn, the subsidiary questions actually pertained to the specific

ways in which SDT is related to career development. Therefore, through answering the three subsidiary questions, the themes did indeed address the primary question of how the fulfillment or thwarting of basic psychological needs applies to immigrant professionals' career development.

The first subsidiary question asked: In what ways do professional immigrants experience need fulfillment and need thwarting from the social environment after migration? Interestingly, each of the themes within the broader categories of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, can be categorized as an example of either need-thwarting, or need-fulfillment. Specifically, participants described having their need for autonomy undermined by losing control of their career trajectories after migration, and instead, being forced to work below their skill level, often not within their professional field, in order to meet survival needs. However, it was also the case that many participants described holding onto their deeper values and goals, such as personal growth, providing for their family, and advancing in their field of choice, as a way to maintain authorship over their career development and lives, despite challenges.

In a similar fashion, a number of participants experienced having their need for competence thwarted through having their professional knowledge, skills, and credentials devalued, along with feeling a lack of competence in verbal communication. On the other hand, many participants reported fulfilling their need for competence by using their work and life experiences to build and develop new career and language competencies, often through retraining, workshops, courses, and focusing on the learning opportunities present within any form of employment.

Finally, relatedness also reflected this same dichotomy, with participants describing having their needs for relatedness thwarted due to experiencing loneliness and isolation after migration. At the same time, many participants described having their needs for relatedness met

through connecting with their ethnic communities, building career networks, and forming close relationships that served as socioemotional supports.

The second subsidiary question asked: How do need fulfillment and need thwarting impact professional immigrants' well-being and motivation? Need thwarting, as reflected in participant narratives, was often related to sadness, depression, isolation, doubt over the decision to immigrate, a limiting of the scope of vocational goals, apathy, loss of ambition, and lack of self-worth and self-esteem. Thus, undermining the basic psychological needs appeared to be negatively related to well-being and career motivation. Need fulfillment, on the other hand, was often descriptively linked to energy, vitality, sustained motivation in the face of difficulty, continued passion or interest in one's professional field, increased happiness and satisfaction, a sense of personal growth, and social belonging. As such, need satisfaction was related to increased well-being and motivation to pursue vocational goals in participant narratives.

Finally, the third subsidiary question asked: What personal, social, and environmental supports promote need satisfaction? A number of need-supportive contexts emerged from the experiences shared by participants, including community and social relationships, a personal sense of deeper values related to one's career development, public supports for new immigrants (such as employment agencies), retraining, and positive, supportive and motivating workplaces.

These answers taken together shed light on the primary research question of how the fulfillment or undermining of basic psychological needs, as conceptualized by self-determination theory, applies to the career development of professional immigrants. Indeed, different personal, social, and environmental contexts appear to either thwart or satisfy immigrant professionals' psychological needs related to their work-life, thereby impacting their well-being and career motivation.



## **Theoretical Implications**

### **Autonomy**

Within the framework of SDT, autonomy refers to the basic human psychological need to feel a sense of agency and volition when engaging in the pursuits of life. Having this need for autonomy (along with the other two basic needs: competence and relatedness) satisfied by the larger social and cultural environment facilitates thriving, well-being and the autonomous regulation of behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2011). Autonomy plays a central role in SDT and is particularly relevant for flourishing and optimal motivation, as SDT suggests that individuals who experience autonomy are more likely to maximize the satisfaction of their basic needs. Thus, a virtuous cycle is posited between receiving autonomy support from the environment, and autonomous individuals subsequently being more adept at capitalizing on environmental supports for their psychological needs. Conversely, controlling (i.e. autonomy thwarting), environments undermine autonomous functioning and need satisfaction, and contribute to ill-being and discouragement (Ryan & Deci, 2011).

Based on this overview, aspects of the professional immigrant experience that undermine vocational autonomy would be expected to be especially detrimental to immigrants' work-life adjustment. While the current body of literature captures the career-related barriers encountered by immigrants, these barriers are not typically discussed in terms of their impact on immigrants' personal feelings of volition.

The present study's findings confirmed that many participants worked in unfulfilling jobs below their level of expertise, feeling that they had little or no agency over their employment outcomes. This theme captured the subjective experience of lacking autonomy support from one's environment. Diminishing finances often necessitated that participants work in "survival jobs", which themselves were typically described as repetitive and uninspiring, thus further

thwarting participants' autonomy needs. This was related to different sets of feelings, including sadness, passivity, frustration, shame, anxiety, as well as, for some people, an overall reduction in motivation of any kind (Deci & Vansteenkiste, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2011).

This finding suggests that professional immigrants, who often migrate with the hope of attaining greater freedom and opportunities to utilize their skills, experience the thwarting of multiple needs, feeling a deep loss of autonomy with regards to working in their professional field, as well as a lack of control and competence over their larger career development.

The present research also provides insight into particular experiential dimensions of the phenomenon of underemployment. When immigrants occupy labour market positions that are below their skill level (Camarota & Jensenius, 2009; Picot & Sweetman, 2005), they may experience a direct loss of autonomy, in the sense that they lose the feeling of being able to make choices about their career possibilities. Instead, immigrants often feel they have to take whatever job they can get, in order to meet the practical demands of life, rather than exercising their choice and holding out for "the right job" that will engage their skills and reflect their professional ambitions.

This lack of autonomy support in the "survival jobs" at which immigrants often end up working, results in the experience of underemployment emphasizing strongly extrinsically regulated behaviours, much of the time. As a result, SDT supports the interpretation that threats to immigrants' feelings of autonomy lead to reduced well-being, greater difficulties coping, and deficiencies of motivation, which further interfere with their ability to adapt or thrive in their new circumstances, findings that replicate similar results in the literature (Chen et al., 2010; Dean & Wilson, 2009).

A final theme involving autonomy emerged, which was that a key adaptive strategy used by immigrants to sustain their motivations to work hard and continue trying to establish

themselves successfully in Canadian society, was to emphasize highly integrated motivations. For example, the process of retraining could be seen as a personally fulfilling opportunity for personal development; similarly, a relatively unfulfilling job could be approached as an opportunity to make social contacts, or to practice one's language skills in order to improve. Even when facing sheer hardship, it is possible to, at least in part, transform the impact of the experience, such as gaining some solace from knowing that one's own suffering is not in vain if it gains a better life for one's children. Participants reported using these types of reframing strategies to bolster their own sense of autonomy and activate a deeply integrated set of motivations that would help them to successfully cope with or overcome the difficulties of their circumstances (Ryan & Deci, 2008; 2011; Ryan, Lynch, Vansteenkiste, & Deci, 2011).

Interestingly, this set of adaptive responses is virtually the same as the Embracing Orientation described earlier (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006). SDT provides important additional insights into how the highly functional adaptation processes described as an Embracing Orientation, can be promoted, and why they often fail to flourish. Knowing the specific motivational factors that enable people to take an Embracing Orientation to serious life challenges, suggests immediate possibilities for helping immigrants harness more resilient autonomous motivations, as well as ways of structuring society to provide better autonomy support for immigrants seeking to succeed in the workforce.

This is an important theoretical contribution to the literature on immigration, which tends to focus heavily on the negative aspects of immigrants' adjustment, and the specific behaviours and adaptive strategies that immigrants can employ to potentially improve their circumstances. However, little to no attention is paid to the underlying *motivations* that enable immigrants to successfully employ these adaptive strategies, especially when the conditions are not optimal for them to flourish. An SDT analysis, in contrast, specifies the environmental supports that best

motivate and enable people to engage in proactive, resilience-promoting adaptation and coping strategies.

### **Competence**

SDT posits that competence is another fundamental psychological need. Competence encompasses the importance of individuals possessing a sense of mastery in their endeavours, and also feeling that their actions causally influence their environment in order to bring about desired outcomes.

An emergent finding in the present study resulted from many participants describing their professional expertise being questioned and ultimately rejected by people in employment contexts in Canada. Participants described the ways in which potential employers, supervisors, and colleagues displayed skepticism about the skill they had acquired in their foreign training. Many discussed the insufficiency of their international credentials for employment in their professional field, as well as the difficulty of proving their competence to employers or accreditation agencies. This was experienced as deeply discouraging, and a number of participants expressed feeling low self-esteem, sadness, and anger due to having their skills and knowledge deemed worthless in Canada.

This finding provides subjective validation to the research on skill discounting, which outlines how often professional immigrants must deal with their education, training, and skills being devalued relative to Canadian equivalents, despite being deemed eligible for immigration based on their professional experience (Esses et al., 2006).

Language proficiency was another source of competence-related difficulties in the present study. Both aspects of competence (i.e., a sense of mastery, along with the feeling that one's intentional actions will positively impact the environment) were reflected in the theme that emerged from the data. A number of participants reported genuinely struggling with

communicating effectively in English, and not being able to adequately represent the extent of their professional knowledge. Compounding these self-perceived and actual difficulties communicating in their non-native language, participants also reported that speaking with an accent or led others to assume they were less competent, impeding their ability to attain employment, or prove themselves in the workplace. Although both of these language-based challenges are represented in the literature (Neault, 2005; Purkiss et al., 2006), it is insightful and useful to understand how they are both connected to the need for competence.

The competence-related findings of the present study primarily revealed that participants knew that they had the requisite professional expertise and skill, but that their efforts were not effective in bringing about their desired employment outcomes due to the social environment undermining their perceived competence. The former aspect of competence overlaps with self-efficacy, while the latter corresponds to outcome expectations, as defined in social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994).

According to SCCT, which developed from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986), self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about their ability to perform the steps required to successfully complete a given task, while outcome expectations are beliefs about the consequences of one's career-oriented actions (Lent, Brown & Hackett, 1994). Both sets of beliefs are influenced by experience and observation. In this respect, the findings of the present study suggest that professional immigrants do not struggle with believing that they *can* do something, but rather, that their actions are *able* to influence their vocational outcomes. Having their competence needs thwarted by the environment potentially explains why immigrant professionals develop negative outcome expectations. Indeed, the present findings support empirical research which demonstrates that discrimination lowers individuals' outcome expectations, due to expecting external barriers that are not responsive to one's personal efforts

(Hughes, 2011; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). Thus, using competence to conceptualize this experience manages to capture the multiple dimensions self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and the influence of the environment.

Similar to the final finding on autonomy, which described how immigrants are able to use deep, integrated regulation as a source of motivational energy for effectively coping with the challenges of their lives, there is a parallel theme within the competence results. Some immigrants reported that they used the challenges of their circumstances to actually help them rebuild a sense of competence, and thus, they were able to use their thwarted need for competence as a source of motivational energy that promoted effective adaptive coping. For example, some participants described experiencing themselves in positive ways as they rose to the challenge of retraining or gaining further education, or as they used seemingly sub-optimal opportunities (e.g., underemployment), as a way of practicing English and learning to function more competently in Canadian society. Finding ways to turn adversity into competence-supportive opportunities for learning and skill development, also seemed to help participants engage in the types of behaviours that comprised the Embracing Orientation described earlier (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

### **Relatedness**

Relatedness refers to the universal human need to experience belonging and to form social bonds. Within the SDT framework, relatedness is considered to be one of the three basic psychological needs that, when fulfilled, provide the nutrients for optimal functioning and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2011).

The findings of this study suggest that while many immigrants experienced loneliness and a lack of support after arriving in Canada, building relatedness through career networks, social and familial bonds, and ethnic communities was related to adaptive outcomes, greater

adjustment, and increased well-being. Many participants emphasized building career-related networks as important for finding work within their professional fields and gaining guidance about career-seeking behaviours. In a number of cases, career networking did result in employment.

Indeed, in the career literature, networking to build social capital is cited as a useful strategy for career development (Peixoto, 2001; Syed, 2008). Building social capital provides beneficial resources in multiple possible ways. For one, job opportunities are highly related to the networks of contacts that a person possesses, as is well known. But in the context of immigration specifically, more subtle factors are involved; for example, there are always specific nuances about a host culture's hiring processes, social norms, rules of etiquette, conversational styles, and many other factors that can play a role in hiring and career advancement decisions. Given that immigrants usually have limited social networks upon arrival, they often lack these subtle nuances of culture and knowledge of how to more easily function and navigate "the system" (Syed, 2008; Zikic et al., 2010).

Unfortunately, many immigrants underestimate the importance of, or find it difficult to form, social networks, though they experience their absence as a barrier to vocational growth (Bagchi, 2001; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). From an SDT perspective, networking or career purposes is one way relatedness contributes to us flourishing in our individual endeavours (Deci, Ryan, & Guay, 2013; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Naturally, career research emphasizes the positive impact of networking for career purposes. However, building supportive social connections that are not instrumental has an indirect impact on facilitating motivation and improving performance (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). While career networks fulfill a specific purpose, affiliative bonds fulfill our more holistic need for social connection. The present study found that a number of participants described building

friendships at work and in their communities as a source of emotional support, camaraderie, encouragement, and enjoyment. As such, participants who were employed in unfulfilling jobs but reported having their relatedness needs met by their colleagues described feeling happy and motivated to continue working. Similarly, forming relationships, sometimes in one's own ethnic community, with people who had experienced or were going through similar transitions helped participants feel that they were not alone and enabled them to persist in the face of challenges.

Research on immigrant and minority populations has demonstrated that being able to share challenging life circumstances with others is emotionally helpful, and can contribute to healing, growth and feelings of social connection. As just one example, in their study on Sudanese refugees, Khawaja, White, Schweitzer and Greenslade (2008) found that social support buffered the impact of stress and facilitated positive adaptation, even in individuals who had gone through such severe hardships.

Another study on Moroccan and Peruvian immigrant women in Spain demonstrated that social support was one of the two best predictors of their psychological well-being (Garcia, Ramirez, & Jariego, 2002). Indeed, research has shown that the level of community integration serves as a key mediator between the impact of migration and stress (Fontaine, 1986; Maya, Martinez, & Garcia, 1997).

## **Practical Implications**

### **Professional Helping**

One key purpose of this research was to contribute to improving the transition experiences of professional immigrants through informing the fields of vocational psychology and career counselling. The findings of this study, conceptualized through an SDT framework, have interesting implications for intervention approaches that could potentially help immigrants adapt to the challenges caused by the disruption and subsequent need to reestablishment or



reinvent their careers. For example, these SDT findings suggest that counsellors working with immigrants may be able to enhance or support the adoption of an Embracing Orientation, through cultivating autonomous motivations for career-related strivings; this may in turn require addressing certain social-environmental conditions that are thwarting need satisfaction in important ways. Certainly immigrants may have much to gain from seeking counselling (Ishiyama & Westwood, 1992), and the findings of this current study help shed light on specific ways that therapy could be helpful.

Of course, counsellors working with immigrants must learn about their ethnic, religious and historical background, as well as their phase of acculturation (Aponte & Johnson, 2000; Johnson, Bastien, & Hirschel, 2009). Moreover, counsellors must understand the unique challenges that immigrant professionals encounter, such as acculturation challenges in the workplace (Blythe, Baumann, Rheame, & McIntosh, 2009), devaluation of their expertise (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009), and underemployment (Galerneau & Morissette, 2004). Counsellors must also keep in mind their own cultural blind spots and biases, so as not to unknowingly impose their particular worldview onto clients. Finally, it is of primary importance that immigrants who seek counselling feel understood and validated, as that is the foundation for change in counselling (Rogers, 1957).

Based on the findings from this study, it would be important for counsellors working with professional immigrants to balance focusing on the objective barriers to clients' career development with encouraging their vocational agency. As counselling involves promoting change, it is possible to over-focus on what clients can do to alter their situation without sufficiently acknowledging and validating the systemic barriers that are genuinely impeding their growth. The results of this study indicate that these barriers are deeply discouraging to professional immigrants, but also that it is possible to find ways to sustain motivation by helping

to fulfill their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

One particularly important implication of the results of the present study, is that experientially and cognitively connecting amotivated individuals to their internalized values is crucial for facilitating greater autonomous motivation, as opposed to simply focusing on possible employment opportunities. Immigrant professionals may harbor a variety of deeper motivations and intrinsic values, such as wanting a better life for their family, yearning to express their skills, or holding genuine interest in their field of expertise; if these sources of more autonomous regulation could be made more salient, immigrants who are facing employment and other barriers may become more resilient and better able to continue striving to overcome these barriers.

Similarly, the findings of this study suggest that immigrants who practice approaching many different types of experiences as opportunities to build competence in some way (e.g. learning English, understanding Canadian culture), also persist at their career development with greater motivation and enthusiasm.

From a relatedness perspective, the counselling relationship on its own, which is inherently supportive and empathic, would contribute to the fulfillment of relatedness needs. As indicated in the present study, building professional networks can help immigrants improve their career outcomes, while nurturing affiliative bonds can provide them with support, encouragement, and enjoyable social outlets. Thus, counsellors can encourage immigrants to build relatedness in both ways and provide them with any skills or resources required to pursue the fulfillment of this need. Theoretically, SDT merges well with the therapeutic modality of Motivational Interviewing (MI; Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005). MI is a client-centered and empathic therapy that seeks to resolve client ambivalence over engaging in some form of behaviour change by connecting them to their intrinsic motivations (Miller & Rollnick,

2012). SDT posits that individuals exposed to controlling, overly challenging, and need thwarting environments often exhibit defensive behaviours and psychological withdrawal (Markland, Ryan, Tobin, & Rollnick, 2005). MI is an inherently autonomy supportive approach, as it seeks to help clients clarify their own stance on behavioural options, while validating the objective difficulties they are facing. Furthermore, MI's emphasis on exploring the possible outcomes of behavioural options available to their client (grounded in their lived social reality), along with helping them develop clear and realistic goals, and providing positive feedback, is supportive of competence needs. This is an excellent way of applying SDT in a counselling context and would likely be a helpful approach to use when helping professional immigrants come to terms with their career-related challenges

### **Self-helping**

Many immigrants do not seek professional help; this is possibly the result of financial constraints, lack of knowledge about counselling services, or even cultural differences in how individuals seek support. Thus, self-help is an important aspect of immigrant adjustment and well-being. Ideally, prior to immigration, or immediately after, resources would be made available to immigrants, such as employment support, written materials, or mentorship. Applying SDT to these resources would require that they explore how autonomy, competence and relatedness might be undermined in the new social and professional environment, as well as the ways immigrants can optimize their need fulfillment despite potential barriers.

Personal exercises designed to help individuals explore and clarify their motivations and values could increase their sense of autonomy with regard to career development. Explicitly providing a range of behavioural options for fulfilling basic psychological needs could help structure and prioritize immigrant professionals' personal and vocational efforts. Furthermore, any resources made available to immigrants should encourage the formation of social bonds for

the promotion of well-being, adjustment, belonging, and emotional support (Foa, 1998; Heal & Jacobs, 2005; Kobayashi, 2006), as many participants described the positive impacts of developing relationships in a variety of settings. All of these self-help suggestions could positively contribute to immigrants' vocational motivation, adaptive coping, and employment outcomes.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations to consider when applying the results of this study to all professional immigrants. A primary limitation of this study is that the interviews were not designed to explore participants' career narratives from an SDT perspective. As such, all themes pertaining to the basic psychological needs resulted from this writer approaching the data through this framework.

At the very least, without questions directed at exploring the constructs applied in this study, it would be difficult for the emergent themes to achieve the level of detail required for the development of an SDT model of immigration. Thus, the applicability of SDT's basic psychological needs to the life-career experiences of professional immigrants requires further empirical substantiation.

A second limitation pertains to fact that the selection criteria for this study stipulated that interested individuals had to be employed either full or part-time. As such, the participants in this study could be viewed as having attained a measure of relative stability, and even success, not necessarily shared by all immigrant professionals. It is possible that the adaptive themes that emerged in the present study are the result of participants belonging to the group of professional immigrants who found employment. It is even possible that finding employment allowed a number of participants to retrospectively view their career development narrative more positively. Therefore, this study's findings may not be applicable to professional immigrants who

are still in the process of seeking employment.

Finally, the present study did not explicitly develop a causal link between need fulfillment/thwarting and vocational motivation. As a result, while the negative themes clearly related to need-thwarting environments, the positive themes could still be viewed as the result of individual differences, rather than being related to need-supportive environments.

### **Future Directions**

As this study was the first to apply SDT to immigrant career development, the hope was that it would demonstrate the applicability of SDT to this population and context, as well as reveal interesting areas for further investigation.

It would be beneficial for future qualitative studies to structure interview questions with SDT in mind, in order to conduct a more nuanced exploration of SDT-related themes within the context of immigrant career narratives. It would also be useful to perform quantitative or mixed-method studies to supplement qualitative research investigating these themes. Randomized, controlled studies, involving SDT-based interventions would help discern whether there is a causal link between need fulfillment and greater career motivation/satisfaction, and need thwarting and less career motivation/satisfaction. Continuing to explore and clarify the relationship between the basic psychological needs and motivation within this social context would result in increasingly definitive implications on practice, theory, interventions, and research.

Finally, the data used for the current study were interviews of immigrants reflecting on their work-life adjustment in Canada. It would be useful for future research to recruit newer professional immigrants in the job-seeking phase in order to determine whether their experiences would differ from immigrants who had already secured some form of employment.

## **Conclusion**

Taken together, the findings of the present study provide clear evidence that SDT is a useful theoretical framework to apply to immigrants' career trajectories after they move to Canada. Furthermore, factors that promote the development of more autonomous forms of motivation, may help immigrants adopt more functional, pro-active orientations towards their experiences. Promoting autonomous motivation through proper environmental supports, and helping immigrants develop the cognitive, affective and behavioural habits that would enable them to better adapt to the challenges of entering the Canadian workforce, would be the two most practical applications of this research. Clearly, it is possible to better address the psychological needs of immigrants coming to Canada for a better life, and this study in conjunction with SDT, outlines some of the specific ways in which to do so. By setting up environmental conditions to reinforce feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it may be possible to help immigrants more effectively adapt to their new circumstances. In sum, understanding the immigrant experience in terms of fundamental psychological needs, may enable us to make a real difference in the work-life outcomes of future immigrants

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## APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT/POSTER

### RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENT

#### **RE: Worklife Adjustment of Immigrant Professionals in Canada**

We are looking to conduct interviews with new immigrant professionals to examine their employment and worklife experiences after coming to Canada. These interviews are part of a research project lead by Dr. Charles Chen in Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). The interview will be conducted in person, and will take approximately 2 hours to complete. A financial compensation of \$35 will be provided to each participant. You are cordially invited to participate in our study if you are interested in this project, and meet the following criteria:

- You are at least 25 years of age and older.
- You came to Canada as an immigrant within the last 13 years (i.e., January 1, 1994 to June 30, 2006).
- You had a university degree and worked full-time in a professional occupation for at least one-year in your country of origin before coming to Canada.
- You are currently employed either on a full-time or part-time basis, i.e., you are holding paid employment for at least 16 hours per week.

For further information or to set up an interview, please contact:

Charles Chen, Ph.D.

Name(s) of the Research Assistant(s)

OISE/University of Toronto

OISE/University of Toronto

(416)923-6641 ext. 2485

Telephone number

cpchen@oise.utoronto.ca

Email address

## APPENDIX B: TELEPHONE SCRIPT

### TELEPHONE SCRIPT (or LETTER) FOR FIRST CONTACT

#### RE: Worklife Adjustment of Immigrant Professionals in Canada

Thank you very much for calling, and we really appreciate your interest in our research project. First I would like to tell you a bit about the study. Then you can take some time to consider whether you would like to participate in this project or not. If you have questions, please feel free to interrupt me at any time and ask them.

You are cordially invited to attend this interview. The interview is part of a research project being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, an Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and his research assistants. The interview questions are designed to examine the worklife adjustment experiences of new immigrant professionals. It is expected that the results from this study will lead to a better understanding of immigrant professionals' career development experiences and needs, and of the specific barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their vocational life transition in Canada. The interview questions will cover information about your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. We hope that you will benefit from the interview process with an increased self-awareness on issues related to career exploration and planning. We also hope that you would find the exploring nature of the study an interesting process from which you might learn something. However, even if the study does not benefit you directly, we hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers arriving in this country every year. However, even if this study does not benefit you directly, we hope it will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers arriving in this country every year. We really appreciate your interest, and we are very grateful to your participation.

To follow the nature and purpose of the study stated above, research participants in this study will include a total of 90 to 100 recent immigrant professionals. All participants selected will be 25 years of age and older. Each participant is invited to complete an audiotaped interview that will last for about 2 hours. The interview will take place in a meeting room at OISE/UT. As part of the interview, you will be asked to complete and return a 2-page Participant Information Sheet that contains your contact information and basic demographic information relevant to this research project.

The term "new immigrant professionals" in this study refers to a person who meets the following criteria:

- You are at least 25 years of age and older.
- You came to Canada as an immigrant within the last 13 years (i.e., January 1, 1994 to June 30, 2006).

- You had a university degree and worked full-time in a professional occupation for at least one-year in your country of origin before coming to Canada.

- You are currently employed either on a full-time or part-time basis, i.e., you are holding paid employment for at least 16 hours per week.

As one of the participants, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the study, even if you finish a portion of it and then decide that you do not wish to continue. You may choose to refuse to answer any particular question or questions posed to you and still complete the interview. You may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences to your personal life, academic standing, and other career prospects later.

Your employer(s) will NOT be informed either of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

In recognition of the time and effort you have given to participate in this research project, we would like to offer you an honorarium of \$35 if you agree to participate and complete the interview process.

While we will be making an audiotape of this interview, your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous. Your results will be assigned to a code number to protect your identity. Any information that could lead to identify you (e.g., name) will be removed from the data while the interviews are transcribed into written data, i.e., written transcripts of the interview session. You will be assigned a pseudonym in the interview, as well as throughout the entire research process, including in the data analysis, final research report(s), and other related presentations and publications. Any possible identifying information about you will be replaced by a code during the research process. Your contact information, such as your name, phone numbers and email address, will be coded and kept separately from other files. All written and audiotaped data will be kept in secured files, and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased.

The results of this study may be used again in another study. However, they will only be used by Dr. Chen and his assistants for research related to immigrant professionals' vocational and career development issues. These research results may be presented in public settings such as professional and/or academic conferences, and other public forums. Reports and articles based on the research may also be published in academic and/or professional journals. Under such circumstances, your identity will remain strictly confidential, and only your pseudonym and coded information may be utilized.

We will be very glad to provide you with a summary of the current study's results if you wish to receive such a summary report when this research project is completed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask either Dr. Chen, or his research assistant(s) (name of the prospective research assistants).

If you need more time to think about your option, please feel free to do so. You may contact me in a later time if you are interested in arranging an interview schedule with me.

If you are sure that you want to participate in this research, I can set up a time schedule with you now for the research interview.

Whether you will participate in the interview or not, I really appreciate your interest.

Again, thank you very much for your time, and your inquiry about our research project!

## APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

(Printed on the Letterhead of OISE/University of Toronto)

### CONSENT FORM

#### **RE: Worklife Adjustment of Immigrant Professionals in Canada**

You are cordially invited to attend this interview. The interview is part of a research project being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, an Associate Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and his research assistants. The interview questions are designed to examine the worklife adjustment experiences of new immigrant professionals. It is expected that the results from this study will lead to a better understanding of immigrant professionals' career development experiences and needs, and of the specific barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their vocational life transition in Canada. The interview questions will cover information about your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada.

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The term "new immigrant professionals" in this study refers to a person who meets the following criteria:

- You are at least 25 years of age and older.
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- You are currently employed either on a full-time or part-time basis, i.e., you are holding paid employment for at least 16 hours per week.

As one of the participants, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the study, even if you finish a portion of it and then decide that you do not wish to continue. You may choose to refuse to answer any particular question or questions posed to you and still complete the interview. You may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences to your personal life, academic standing, and other career prospects later. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed either of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

In recognition of the time and effort you have given to participate in this research project, we would like to offer you an honorarium of \$35 if you agree to participate and complete the interview process.

While we will be making an audiotape of this interview, your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous. Your results will be assigned to a code number to protect your identity. Any information that could lead to identify you (e.g., name) will be removed from the data while the interviews are transcribed into written data, i.e., written transcripts of the interview session. You will be assigned a pseudonym in the interview, as well as throughout the entire research process, including in the data analysis, final research report(s), and other related presentations and publications. Any possible identifying information about you will be replaced by a code during the research process. Your contact information, such as your name, phone numbers and email address, will be coded and kept separately from other files. All written and audiotaped data will be kept in secured files, and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased.

The results of this study may be used again in another study. However, they will only be used by Dr. Chen and his assistants for research related to immigrant professionals' vocational and career development issues. These research results may be presented in public settings such as professional and/or academic conferences, and other public forums. Reports and articles based on the research may also be published in academic and/or professional journals. Under such circumstances, your identity will remain strictly confidential, and only your pseudonym and coded information may be utilized.

We will be very glad to provide you with a summary of the current study's results after the completion of this research project. If you wish to receive such a summary report, please indicate it clearly in the Participant Information Sheet attached. We would appreciate it that you could complete the Sheet and return it separately to the interviewer.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask either Dr. Chen, or his research assistant(s) (name of the prospective research assistants). Signing the bottom of this form will constitute your consent to this interview, as well as your consent to participate in this research project.

Thank you very much for your time and valuable assistance.

Charles Chen, Ph.D.	Name of the Research Assistant(s)
Counselling Psychology Program	Counselling Psychology Program
Department of Adult Education	Department of Adult Education
and Counselling Psychology	and Counselling Psychology
OISE/University of Toronto	OISE/University of Toronto
Tel.: (416)923-6641 ext. 2485	Telephone number Email:
cpchen@oise.utoronto.ca	Email address

\*\*\*\*\*

I understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research project described above. I have been offered a copy of this consent form for my own reference.

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(Print: Name of Research Participant)

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(Signature of Research Participant)

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(Date)

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### THEME QUESTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEW

#### RE: Worklife Adjustment of Immigrant Professionals in Canada

##### I. Before Coming to Canada

- 1) Could you tell me about your life and work experiences before coming to Canada?
  - Your family (parents, brothers and sisters, spouse/partner, children): What do they do?
  - Your educational background
  - Your work experience and vocational background
  - Your interests and hobbies
- 2) In general, how would you describe your vocational life and career experiences back in your home country? Could you give me some examples?
- 3) Why did you want to come to Canada, and how did you make this decision to come?
  - Reason(s) and rationale
  - Events and experiences that triggered your decision
- 4) What preparation did you make when you decided to move to Canada as an immigrant professional?
  - Anticipated difficulties?
  - Compromise you made to facilitate the immigration process?
- 5) What was your expectation and planning for your employment and vocational life in Canada?
  - Any information you gathered about employment in Canada?
  - Any preparation or action for this planning?
- 6) How important was the role of employment and worklife in your decision of immigration to Canada? Why this was so, and could you provide some reasons?

##### II. After Coming to Canada: Initial General Experience

- 1) What was your main purpose for coming to Canada? And when did you come?
  - Skilled independent worker, family reunion, refugee, etc. ?

- 2) Could you describe your initial living experiences in Canada?
- 3) What did you encounter when you first came to this country?
- 4) How did you feel when you initially came to Canada?
- 5) How did you cope with changes in life?
- 6) What were the difficulties you encountered when you first came to Canada?
- 7) What were the things you enjoyed most when you came to Canada?

### **III. Ongoing Vocational Adjustment and Transition in Canada**

- 1) How important was it for you to find a job when you first came to Canada? Which kind of jobs did you intend to find to get your worklife restarted in Canada?
- 2) What were your basic priorities when you were searching for your new employment in Canada, e.g., money, job security, fit with past experience, personal interest, level of prestige, etc.?
- 3) What did you do to find your initial employment in Canada? Could you tell me in sequential order the main jobs you have held since coming to this country, and your experiences with these jobs?

--Action you took to obtain these jobs.

--Events and/or people that led you to these jobs

- 4) What were the common situations you encountered during your job search in Canada?
- 5) What were some of the most common barriers in your job search in Canada? Could you give me some specific examples?
- 6) Was there a gap between your employment expectation before coming to Canada and the reality of employment you were facing in Canada? If so, what were some of the main issues presented by this gap? How did you feel about these issues, and what did you do to deal with these issues?
- 7) In your job-search in Canada, how useful was your previous professional training and work experience from your home country? What did you do trying to get a job that is more related to your previous vocational and/or professional background experience from your home country?
- 8) What were some of the expected and unexpected events that influenced your job-seeking and vocational development experiences in Canada? And how did you deal with such events?

--Anticipated or unanticipated barriers.

--Opportunities/people that led you to a vocational choice.

9) How important is the impact of such events and opportunities on your vocational life in Canada?

10) How important is the role and function of your personal action in responding to or creating these opportunities for your vocational development in Canada?

11) What were the major compromises you made when approaching to an employment opportunity in Canada? How did you come to a decision when you had to make a compromise in finding and maintaining your new employment in Canada?

12) How did you feel when you had to make a compromise for your vocational choice in Canada?

13) What were some of the main lessons you learned from your job-search experience in Canada?

--Things that were helpful or not helpful to your worklife adjustment.

14) What were the major factors you had to consider when you were trying to find employment in Canada? Why were these factors important?

--Concerns for financial survival.

--Gain Canadian experience.

--Some relevancy to previous educational and professional background experience.

15) What was the role of retraining in your vocational development? Did you try to regain your previous professional qualification you had obtained from your home country? If so, what did you do and what happened to you as a result?

16) Did you try to enter any academic and/or professional training programs for the purpose of better employment prospects in Canada? If so, could you describe in more details about your attempt or experience in these programs?

--Formal degree and professional designation programs.

--Various certificate/diploma programs.

--Trades training.

17) If you had the experience of academic and/or professional retraining in Canada, could you describe your general impression and feeling about this training experience?

--Things you enjoyed the most.

--Things you enjoyed the least.

18) How important and useful was your retraining experience to your employment opportunity in this country? And how do you assess the outcome of this retraining experience?

- Leading to employment that was similar or close to your background experience.
  - Leading to new vocational choice and opportunity.
  - Leading to some employment with little or no satisfaction.
  - Leading to no beneficial outcome for employment.
- 19) What were some of the most important factors that had an impact on your vocational adjustment process in Canada? Could you describe why these factors were important and how they had an impact on your coping experience?
- Related social, economic, and cultural factors.
  - External support from the government, community, and friends.
  - Family relationship.
  - Other personal situations and circumstances.
- 20) Could you tell me about your experiences in your current employment in Canada?
- Circumstances that led you to your present worklife.
  - The nature of your employment.
- 21) What was it like to be a new worker in a new country? How do you feel about your current job? Could you tell me the things you like and/or dislike about your current employment?
- 22) In your current workplace, what are some of the most important factors that facilitate and/or hinder your vocational advancement? How do you cope with the difficulties you counter in your current worklife? Could you provide some examples?
- 23) In general, how would you describe and assess your experience as a new worker in Canada? What impact does this experience have on your perception of self-worthiness as a new Canadian?
- Pros and/or Cons, Gains and/or Losses?
- 24) Do you feel a sense of vocational and career identity from your current employment experience in Canada? Why or why not?
- 25) How satisfied do you feel about your vocational life experience in Canada?
- 26) In your view, how important your vocational life is in your total new life in Canada? In what way your vocational life has had an impact on other aspects of your personal and family life in Canada? Could you give some specific examples?

27) What are some of the main concerns and needs you have about your future worklife in Canada? How do you feel about your future vocational development prospects in Canada, and why do you feel this way?

28) What will you intend to do to improve the quality of your vocational life and to enhance your career development in Canada?

--Anticipate your vocational direction 5 years from now.