
Career Transition of Immigrant Young People: Narratives of Success

La transition de carrière chez les jeunes immigrants : récits de réussites

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ABSTRACT

While a high unemployment rate is documented among immigrant young people, research also suggests that they experience success with career decision-making despite challenging circumstances (Hofferth & Moon, 2016). This study explored the career decision-making narratives of nine young people between the ages of 25 and 35 who had come to Canada when they were between the ages of 13 and 17 and who self-define as doing well in their career decision-making. Using a narrative research design, individual narrative accounts were constructed and analyzed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The six themes that emerged from participant responses were (a) parental and family influences, (b) networking, making connections, and mentorship, (c) personal and workplace challenges, (d) peer influences, (e) the value of education, internships, and volunteering, and (f) the importance of rewarding, fulfilling work and pursuing one's passion. Implications for career counselling practice, research, and career theory development are discussed.

RÉSUMÉ

Malgré le fait que l'on rapporte un taux de chômage élevé chez les jeunes immigrants, la recherche semble indiquer que ceux-ci connaissent du succès dans la prise de décisions relatives à la carrière, en dépit des circonstances difficiles (Hofferth & Moon, 2016). Dans cette étude, on explore les récits de prise de décisions concernant la carrière chez neuf jeunes, âgés de 25 à 35 ans, qui sont arrivés au Canada lorsqu'ils avaient entre 13 et 17 ans et qui rapportent eux-mêmes réussir dans leurs décisions relatives à leur carrière. En utilisant un modèle de recherche narrative, on a élaboré

et analysé des comptes rendus narratifs individuels en ayant recours à l'analyse thématique (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Voici les six thématiques qui se sont dégagées des réponses des participants : (a) les influences des parents et de la famille, (b) le réseautage, l'établissement de contacts, et le mentorat, (c) les défis personnels et en milieu de travail, (d) l'influence des pairs, (e) la valorisation des études, des stages, et du bénévolat, ainsi que (f) l'importance de la gratification, de l'accomplissement du travail, et de la poursuite de sa passion. On discute des implications pour la pratique et la recherche en lien avec la carrière ainsi que du développement de la théorie en ce domaine.

The past 2 decades have transformed the career landscape in Western industrialized economies. Substantial changes—including globalization, increased labour mobility and worker diversity, and the increased role of technology—have influenced career opportunities and career development paths in unprecedented ways (Amundson, 2005; Gunz et al., 2011; Young et al., 2002). While these changes pose challenges for all Canadians (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006), they impact particularly the career development of younger Canadians (Foster, 2012) and of Canadians from underserved or marginalized groups (Block & Galabuzi, 2011).

Concurrently, the composition of the Canadian workforce has also been shifting. Over half of Canada's population growth between 1996 and 2001 was due to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2003). The 2016 census (Statistics Canada, 2017) indicated that immigrants comprised over one fifth of Canada's population, and estimates predict that by 2036 immigrants will account for between 24.5% and 30% of the Canadian population, with nearly half of the country's population being made up of immigrants and second-generation individuals (Statistics Canada, 2018). Furthermore, the rate of immigration underscores another demographic shift in the Canadian population in that 60% of newcomers are under the age of 30 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). While the gap in unemployment rates between immigrant young people and Canadian-born young people is narrowing, immigrant young people, who face additional barriers to securing employment and accessing higher education (National Council of Welfare, 2012), continue to have significantly lower employment rates than their Canadian-born counterparts (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Unemployment and underemployment among immigrant young people in Canada exceed the national average (Statistics Canada, 2015; Wilkinson, 2008).

Despite this challenging context, many immigrant young people do well with respect to their employment and broader career development needs (Hofferth & Moon, 2016), and many make even better use of their educational opportunities than Canadian-born young people (Hofferth & Moon, 2016; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2012). However, there remains a paucity of research on the experiences of immigrant young people in general (Lauer et al., 2012; Schellenberg & Maheux,

2008), and there is no research that has explored the career decision-making of immigrant young people who self-define as doing well.

Relevant Literature

Career Decision-Making

While historical definitions of career centred on paid employment (occupation), modern conceptualizations have expanded to include other activities and roles that individuals engage in and find meaning through over their lifespans (Borgen & Hiebert, 2006). This broader view recognizes career as a dynamic developmental process in which people are continually integrating information to make meaning of their lives (Cranford et al., 2003; Savickas et al., 2009; Tims & Bakker, 2010); it also highlights the psychological principles and processes that contribute to meaning making and to decision-making throughout the life cycle (Riverin-Simard, 2000).

Career Development Theories and Interventions

Modern theories and models of career attempt to consider more complexity than traditional ones. Accounting for such factors as diversity, uncertainty, contextual and cultural influences, social justice, and career construction (Anderson et al., 2012; Arthur & Collins, 2010; Krumboltz, 2009; McMahan, 2005; Pope, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2011; Savickas, 2011), these approaches to career mirror many of the factors influencing the career journeys of young people today.

Recent research points to the importance of relational factors in career outcomes such as decision-making (Blustein, 2011; Richardson, 2012; Saka et al., 2008; Young et al., 2006). While people tend to include others in their career decision-making processes (Amundson et al., 2010; Britten & Borgen, 2010; Phillips et al., 2001), this is particularly evident among those from collective cultures (Leung et al., 2011). Similarly, the extent of belongingness in one's family can be a factor in career decision-making (Britten & Borgen, 2010; Slaten & Baskin, 2014). Although the social cognitive theory (Lent et al., 1994) provides a framework through which to consider and to analyze the role that parents play in the career decisions of their adolescent children (Garcia et al., 2012; Sawitri et al., 2014) and has led to quantitative studies in the field, there is a lack of qualitative research exploring "the lived experiences of career decision-making among young adults who are living at an intersection of multiple cultures" (Mathew, 2019, p. 8).

Some authors propose utilizing a life designing paradigm in career counselling: a framework that emphasizes the importance of exploring all facets of a person's life in order to support their process of career construction better (Blustein, 2011; Riverin-Simard, 2000; Savickas et al., 2009). Research findings suggest that events in individuals' lives are interconnected and that transitions in one sphere of a person's life will influence other areas as well (Borgen et al., 2010), thus emphasizing

the importance of both work-related and non-work-related experiences in career development. Further, the importance of non-work-related experiences holds even greater significance when work opportunities are precarious or tenuous (Cranford et al., 2003; Peavy, 2004).

Although these models of career exploration aim to reflect modern career experiences more accurately, they do not necessarily capture the experiences of immigrant young people, who are at the intersection of a critical developmental period in identity formation and challenges related to their cultural and ethnic identities in a new context. Also, with the conceptualization of career extending beyond paid employment to being portrayed as a life project (Guichard, 2009; Savickas, 2012), the life stories and voices of those who shape their identities, especially career identities, become invaluable.

Immigrant Young People and Career Decision-Making

Jensen's volume (2011) emphasizes that the identities of immigrant youth are impacted by multiple cultures, which in turn influence their career decision-making. In addition to adjusting to cultural differences, language barriers, and other personal transitions, immigrant young people in Canada may struggle to obtain important training or skill sets relevant to navigating the job market in a new context (Anisef & Kilbride, 2003; Britten et al., 2012).

While non-immigrant young people in Canada experience transitional challenges that are consistent with their stage of development (Krahn et al., 2018), immigrant young people experience additional challenges related to racial discrimination, negotiating multiple cultural identities, and managing multi-generational conflicts, all of which influence their career decision-making process (Berry & Hou, 2017; Cohen & Kassan, 2018; Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2018). These challenges have also been identified in the career decision-making of Indigenous young people (Britten & Borgen, 2010). Further, cultural expectations about family and values might influence the degree of autonomy young people from a cultural minority have in their career decision-making (Marshall et al., 2013).

Though there are several studies examining the post-secondary education experiences of immigrants to Canada, they pertain mostly to adults who are seeking to integrate into the Canadian labour market (Adamuti-Trache et al., 2013). Not much is known about immigrant young people and their experiences with post-secondary education, although there is evidence of success in post-secondary education for children of immigrants in Canada. This is attributed to the pro-university ethos that is characteristic of the cultures of many source countries of immigrants to Canada, the selective process of the immigration system that increases the likelihood that the parents of young immigrants are highly educated, the increased access to post-secondary education in Canada in comparison to in their home countries, and the prospect of capitalizing university education toward better economic integration (Finnie & Mueller, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

Immigrant young people are navigating all the challenges of entry into the world of work, compounded by additional complexities of competing personal, social, cultural, and economic influences. Recognizing the complex and unique challenges faced by young immigrants in Canada as they navigate intersecting social contexts (Richardson, 2012) and potential marginalization (Neumann et al., 2000; Yan et al., 2012), this research project sought to understand the experiences of these young people, who nonetheless perceive themselves as doing well. Having a deeper understanding of how these individuals have approached career decision-making and what they found to be helpful and hindering in their career processes will inform interventions that support the career development of immigrant young people more effectively. It is anticipated also that these findings might encourage further research and inform career development theory and policy development relevant to this population.

Method

This study is part of a larger project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) exploring the experiences of Indigenous and immigrant young people who see themselves as doing well with career decision-making (Goodwill et al., 2019). Since the focus of inquiry in this study was on the lived experiences of immigrant participants in terms of their success stories related to career decision-making, we have used the narrative/life review approach, which is a qualitative method. The human sciences have undergone a “narrative turn,” and the concept of narratives has gained popularity over the last three decades (Spector-Mersel, 2010). While scholarship in humanities and literature adopted the narrative method sooner than scholarship in the social sciences did, the concept of narratives has been embraced by psychology, counselling, social work, education, law, and medicine (Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

The narrative approach in the social sciences comes from the tradition of case-centred research (Mishler, 1999). It provides a space for investigating the contextual influences that reciprocate with personal biographies (Riessman, 2008). The narrative method, in the form of case studies, has been applied successfully to understanding immigrant experiences right from the beginning of the twentieth century (Coklin, 1999). The literature also provides recent examples of uses of the narrative method for studying the identities of immigrants (Sabar, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is positioned within both postmodern and poststructuralist paradigms of the human sciences. Our narrative approach in this research is located in postmodernism, in which a relativist ontology prevails. The epistemological underpinnings of narrative research are based in social constructionism, which contends that language is a precondition for devising our conceptual frameworks. Knowledge is therefore not discovered but constructed within living

dialogical moments (Shotter, 1993). Narrative is that structure or form through which we give life meaning (Sarbin, 1986). Narrative researchers also acknowledge that participants' accounts are cultural tales, laden with cultural discourses and cultural teachings. From an axiological perspective, narrative researchers value complexity, diversity in knowledge claims, and the individual account as much as the discourses within which these accounts are constructed. Contexts matter in narrative research. A narrative approach to research helps access "different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning" (Squire et al., 2008, p. 2) that are related to the experiences of participants. While narratives by themselves are sources of information, researchers' interests extend beyond the content of the narrative. The individual creating the narrative is also of interest, and the focus is on how the narratives are structured and the extent to which the narratives are accepted or rejected by others. Historically, the narrative method has emphasized the need for giving voice to the marginalized and often has explored people's relationships with power structures.

The narrative method adopted for this study pertains to establishing meaning through narrative construction (Bruner, 1990; Lyotard, 1984) of what it means to be doing well in career decision-making by immigrant young people. It is assumed that the ordering of one's experience through narrative construction contributes to the process of meaning making. Moreover, people's stories are likely to reflect who they are becoming (Bamberg, 2012; Randall, 1999). In other words, people's identities are tied to their narrative constructions. This method is consistent with the research question pertaining to career decision-making of immigrant young people. When career is conceptualized in terms of cumulative life experiences, the narratives of immigrant young people can explore the core aspects of their life experiences and their stories of identity development with regards to their careers. In conducting this study, we believed that how immigrant young people make career decisions can be best understood by engaging them in the research process, valuing their lived experiences, and relying on their accounts of how they made sense of their unique contexts in selecting and rejecting career choices. The goal was not to capture a definitive reality but to understand what occurred for these young people when they made career decisions and how they described their career journeys concerning both critical events and the related narratives in their life reviews. We believed further that in an attempt to understand how these young immigrants negotiated their career decision-making processes in a shared relational context, "the dynamic interaction between researcher and participant [was] central to capturing and describing the 'lived experience' (*Erlebnis*) of the participant" (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 131).

Recruitment Procedures and Participant Descriptions

Nine immigrant young people volunteered for this study. The recruitment process was initiated after obtaining approval from the behavioural research ethics

board of the University of British Columbia. The recruitment process involved putting up posters in universities and colleges, contacting immigrant-serving agencies, advertising in local newspapers, and using social media platforms. We also recruited participants through snowball sampling involving word-of-mouth publicity from already recruited participants. Based on the inclusion criteria for the study, participants were immigrant young people who were between the ages of 25 and 35, had come to Canada in their teens (between the ages of 13 and 17), could speak English, and saw themselves as doing well in their career decision-making. During the screening interviews, participants were asked whether they believed they were doing well with their career decision-making, which they elaborated on later during the interview process. After obtaining informed consent from the participants who volunteered, the narrative interview was conducted. At the end of the interview, demographic information was also collected. Of the nine participants (six women and three men), all had a bachelor's degree, whereas two also held master's degrees and three were enrolled in master's programs. The annual income of the participants, based on participant self-reports, ranged from \$0 (students) to \$120,000. Three of the participants were full-time students, and the remaining six were employed full time. The nine participants in this study immigrated to Canada from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Fiji, Switzerland, and the U.S.A. They reported working in the fields of health care, advocacy, business consultation, education, investment, mental health, and international missions (religious).

Data Collection

During the narrative/life review interview, participants were engaged in an open-ended interview to address the research question about how immigrant young people are doing well with their career decision-making. This allowed for a systematic and structured process of recalling past events to find meaning and patterns of behaviour and to develop an understanding of the lives of the participants. The basic tenet in narrative life review is that individuals make sense of their lives and their worlds through the stories they tell (Riessman, 2008). The narrative interview lasted for approximately 45 to 60 minutes. All participants were asked to recall significant events in their lives wherein employment-related experiences occurred, focusing especially on how they did well in their decision-making. Participants were encouraged to look at their lives, starting with their early years up to the present. They reported significant moments or events that they believed affected career decision-making. Participants were given the following prompt: "We would like to hear your story about making career decisions that led to your experience of doing well in the world of work."

The interview protocol, included as an appendix, provided a sequence that helped the interviewer guide participants in narrating their stories to ensure

that pertinent aspects of their lives related to doing well with their careers were covered. Over the course of the interview, participants were queried with the help of neutral probes. After going through their early years, participants told their stories about engagement with the world of work, including the types of employment they had had and their decision-making processes associated with each significant milestone on their career journeys. The final part of the interview stressed the level of meaning related to the career journey of the participants. Participants were asked the following questions: “What does your story mean to you? As you recall your personal story of work, what insights or new understandings come to mind?”

Data Analysis

Atlas.ti was used to help manage the data as we conducted Riessman’s (2011) narrative method of life review and Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic content analysis to generate holistic, context-specific processes of career decision-making, understood from the lived experiences of participants. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) method involves six analytic steps: (1) becoming familiar with the data by repeated reviewing of the interviews; (2) generating the initial codes and organizing the codes according to similarities in career decision-making processes; (3) reviewing the coded groupings and clustering/sorting the codes into categories that are meaningful and related; (4) reviewing the categories by refining and integrating similarly defined categories producing main themes; (5) defining and naming the themes, analyzing the data within each theme, and writing a detailed analysis of each theme; and (6) producing a report.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

The trustworthiness of the research was addressed through the use of five credibility checks that were conducted throughout the process of research. These credibility checks are a subset of the nine credibility checks from the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (Butterfield et al., 2005) used for the larger SSHRC project of which this study is a part. The five credibility checks that applied to this study included the following: (1) consistency in interviewing was checked for interview fidelity; (2) the questions, the probes, and the reporting were designed to capture experiences of the participants that represented their true experiences accurately (descriptive validity); (3) two outside experts in the field were consulted for expert opinions; (4) themes were checked for theoretical agreement—that is, themes were assessed within the domains of existing literature and of the researchers’ assumptions; and (5) final themes were cross-checked with participants through a member checking process.

Results and Findings

After completing the thematic analysis of the nine narrative accounts provided by the participants, six main themes emerged regarding immigrant young people's experiences of successful career decision-making. The themes presented are (a) parental and family influences; (b) networking, making connections, and mentorship; (c) personal and workplace challenges; (d) peer influences; (e) value of education, internships, and volunteering; and (f) the importance of rewarding, fulfilling work and of pursuing one's passion. Participant quotations have been identified by participant number in parentheses.

Parental and Family Influences

All of the participants in this study spoke about being influenced by parents and other family members. Parental expectations to secure a profession or to attain a higher degree of education were threads throughout the narrative accounts. Some participants experienced these parental expectations as pressure and others experienced it as a motivating factor in their career success. For example, one participant stated: "My father's expectations were also an important factor for me to do well in school . . . it was a good factor to motivate me" (P1). Another stated that "in our family . . . you're expected to get a university degree," (P3) while yet another shared that "the reason my family decided to immigrate to Canada was for me to become a doctor" (P5). One participant described family influences related to cultural expectation and to being an immigrant:

Being part of an immigrant family, both parents being first-generation immigrants, the expectation was that I'll do good in school. I had friends who took a couple of years off . . . believing that they had their whole life ahead. . . . But as a child in an immigrant family, I didn't have that luxury because my parents were raised with hardships. (P8)

Another stated:

My career decision-making was influenced by the people I was surrounded by. Hong Kong is very banking driven and also all the kids that I went to school with, their parents had professions that kind of set certain expectations. Hence, I was motivated to get into banking. (P6)

There were other types of family demands as well: "Most of my career was pretty much driven by my dad's, by my family's situation" (P6). When this participant's father became ill, she had to return to Hong Kong, where her family lived.

Many spoke about their families' expectations as not necessarily aligning with their choice of career. One participant expressed his disappointment in not being able to select his career of choice:

I was part of the rugby team and I wanted to play rugby like a semi-professional. I was pretty good at it and I was making the school team . . . but obviously you need your parents' blessing to continue, which I did not have. (P8)

He later commented that "I was also thinking about sports psychology . . . but my parents didn't see a career out of that either." He finally went to the university of their choice, claiming that "I don't think I had as much influence in that decision. I just went to satisfy my parents" (P8). Another participant stated: "I wanted to take science and maybe become a researcher, and go into medicine or pharmacy but [that idea] was more from my parents and other people's expectations. They communicated that to me in very subtle ways" (P9). However, this participant finally got to make her own career choice:

My parents could see that I was suffering, so by the end of the first year I told them that this is not for me . . . and they were open about it and they were pretty accepting about it. It kind of, like, liberated me to move into a different direction. (P9)

Parental approval and influence as well as cultural expectations about career and educational choices were important factors in all the participants' narratives about making successful career decisions.

Networking, Making Connections, and Mentorship

Participants described work environments in which making connections with other people was seen as a very valuable component of their career success. "The connections that are made with the people working there were, to me, very, very valuable" (P2). These valuable connections led to job opportunities. Participants also demonstrated skill in their ability to use contacts and to reach out to stakeholders through networking that opened up career opportunities. As one participant described,

I tried all the leadership roles, working as a resident advisor and then a paid position at the student union. It looked good on my resume. . . . It was a good networking opportunity . . . because back then I was pretty much not a Canadian. (P6)

Participants described taking temporary positions that led to permanent ones. As one participant commented, "I got a temporary position in a school district . . .

because they couldn't find anybody else and that's how I got into the district, so in a way, by luck" (P2). Participants also explained that using executive search firms and having supervisors who kept them in mind for future opportunities were important career connections. Career connections were also made by having friends introduce them to their bosses or supervisors and by having past employers remember that they had valued skills.

In terms of valuing mentors, three participants spoke about co-workers, bosses, parents, and a pastor being mentors who were, as one participant phrased it, "guiding me in terms of finding my calling" (P1). One participant asked older people for advice: "What do you see me fitting well into?" (P3). This participant also stated that "the lady who interviewed me just thought I was a good fit for [the job]" (P3). Another commented that "my boss is very welcoming of my work and my ideas," stating further that "they were open to sharing their experiences and bringing me under their wing. They would say, 'Let's go and figure this out together, and find out more'" (P7). Overall, this theme suggested the importance of networking, making career-related connections, and having sound mentorship as key aspects of making successful career decisions.

Peer Influences

Four participants commented on how peer influences assisted them in their successful career decision-making. One participant was influenced by "a lot of my friends in the residence building who were going into business. . . . They said, 'Why are you going into economics? Business is way better than economics.' So, I actually decided to switch from economics to business" (P2). Later, the same participant said that during his internship, a friend suggested that he go work with a particular organization because there would be lots of interaction with other people, which he was missing at his current job, so he did. Another participant applied to a university because one of her friends had applied: "I applied as a joke and didn't mean it at all, but got accepted and then it just kind of happened" (P3). Finally, participants described being influenced by friends' career choices: "All of my friends were going into science and I thought maybe this is what I want to do as well" (P9), and "A lot of my friends were in campus recruitment, so I was curious. I wanted to help people" (P6). For approximately half of the participants in the study, peer influence was a strong motivator for choosing a career path.

Personal and Workplace Challenges

The majority of the participants in this study described contexts where they had to overcome challenges, deal with negative work environments, and learn from their failures in order to achieve career success. Together, these constitute the overall theme of personal and workplace challenges. In the first category, overcoming challenges, five participants described several challenges they had had to overcome to be successful in their career choices. Language limitations were

mentioned as all participants were immigrants: “I’m definitely conscious about my ability to speak English because a health care career is all about communication. . . . I am aware of my limitations” (P1). She continues to explain that she had to overcome this challenge:

When I’m faced with something that I haven’t done before or I am not comfortable doing, which is speaking in front of people, I get anxious and nervous. But it’s something I have to kind of go beyond and achieve. I am using this as an opportunity to help myself grow. (P1)

All of the participants described having to be determined and being able to put in the effort to achieve their career goals. As one participant described, “I entered the job market with more determination than before. I thought to myself, ‘I’m not just going to wait for jobs to come knock on my door—I’m gonna be more proactive’” (P7). Another summed it up this way: “It requires more challenge—I mean, more effort on my part on a day-to-day basis—but I think it’s more fulfilling in that way” (P8). Finally, a participant described physical challenges in the field of sport and how he was able to prove to himself that he could do it:

I’m 5 ft nothing, but I always work with Anglo-Saxon 6 ft 2 rugby boys. . . . But I was able to prove myself . . . the thrill of building something from ground zero, ’cause what I had done in the past gave me the confidence to do it again. (P6)

The next category in this theme is overcoming negative work environments. The main points in this category were having to work in an office all day, sitting in front of a computer all day, being seen as free labour, time required to commute to work, dealing with pollution, not being allowed to engage with fellow employees while at work, work being all about numbers and figures and not about people, co-workers being judgmental and rude, and generally a “bad atmosphere” at work. One participant described her situation this way:

I felt pretty betrayed in some ways because they would keep promising me work and then would never give it to me. People who claim to have pretty high moral standards for their company and then it didn’t show when it counted. Realistically, I couldn’t make this work. (P3)

The final category in this theme is learning from failures. Four participants endorsed this category. One participant described being practical about the challenges at work: “I’m fine with it—I’m used to [dealing with failures]” (P6). As another participant concluded, “I knew what I didn’t want to do and the kinds of people I didn’t want to associate with. . . . I thought it was a painful experience,

but at least I took something away from it” (P7). Yet another participant mentioned that “I realized that this wasn’t really something that I could see myself doing for the rest of my life. I tried it. Until you do it, I think maybe you don’t know” (P8). The participants illustrated their self-knowledge and willingness to learn from their work challenges. Being able to overcome work challenges and to learn from failure appears to be a key factor in successful career decision-making.

Value of Education, Internships, Career Planning, and Volunteering

The participants in this study spoke about the value of an education, the value of their internship experiences, the importance of participating in formal career planning, and the benefits of volunteering while pursuing a career path. A few participants decided to further their education because they did not know what they wanted to pursue as a career, whereas others saw the necessity of earning a higher degree: “I’m not doing anything so I might as well pursue my master’s program while I have time to do it” (P2). As another stated, “In order to continue on in this social work profession, it’s necessary to continue on and get a master’s” (P7). “I wanted to commit myself to learning more about the helping field because I was not able to focus while I worked” (P9). As one participant summed it up, “Education is education, I guess, and for its intrinsic purposes, it still builds up your mind” (P8).

Three participants commented on internship opportunities as a valuable experience toward their career success. “I decided to venture out and do a summer internship back in my home country, in Taiwan, for two months and it was good . . . just getting immersed into my home country” (P7). “My internship was more meaningful because they were more working with people. . . . It was pretty impactful and I thought, *That’s what I want to go into*” (P3). “The internship opportunities were all selected through a process and I thought, *I need to have something on my resume that is marketable*” (P6).

Three other participants described the value of their volunteering experiences that led to successful career decision-making. “I did a lot of work related to nursing before getting into nursing school” (P1). Another participant spoke about volunteering in Mexico that had an impact on her and left her asking questions about her future:

How am I going to use my life now to do something more than just make money? I’ve done a lot of volunteering, working always with underprivileged populations, and that’s had a big impact on what I wanted to do for a career—helping people. (P3)

The last participant described how volunteering work was intimidating and provoked feelings of nervousness, but “I was really surprised that there were

so many people who were dedicated to this kind of career. It clicked inside of me—it felt right” (P9). In addition, participants described how gaining different types of experience was valuable in their pursuit of a career. In summary, the majority of participants in this study described the value of getting higher education, obtaining internships and meaningful experiences through volunteer positions that helped lead them to successful career decision-making.

Importance of Rewarding, Fulfilling Work and of Pursuing One’s Passions

The final theme in this research describes the importance of finding rewarding, fulfilling work and of pursuing one’s passions. Part of the fulfilling work category came from being appreciated at work: “People really appreciate you once you spend time. . . . I got that fulfillment and people were really thankful that you took your time” (P8); “I got to know a lot of people pretty closely and . . . I’ve come to understand that this is very life-giving for me. I enjoyed that and I also find a lot of meaning in it” (P3). Another participant described how finding a rewarding career is not about the money earned:

Although I was making okay money . . . the fulfillment wasn’t there so I thought, *No, I like the field but I don’t like this job*. . . . I took a pay cut to go there, but just being in that new environment was something that was fulfilling to me. . . . As long as I have done my job properly and done my best to educate them, it is fulfilling. (P8)

One participant described the fulfillment of being a teacher: “I enjoy instilling knowledge in there and just the interactions I have with the teenagers. That I find quite rewarding . . . a lot more rewarding than any of the business positions that I’ve had previously” (P2).

The next participant commented on her fulfilling career in social services:

I worked in a social services agency with special needs children and my role was around the administrative aspects of dealing with paperwork and contacting clients on basic requests and that sort of thing. So, it was fulfilling; it was worthwhile, even though it wasn’t a front-line role. (P7)

In addition, three participants spoke about being a Christian and how that helped them make successful career decisions. “The most important factor that contributed to my own career decision-making is my faith, my religious faith” (P1). Later, she stated that “when I first thought about becoming a nurse . . . I knew that God wanted me to do something through this profession and so I went ahead with it.” Another stated: “Being a Christian, I just did not want to be a doctor, but I wanted to be a medical missionary at first” (P5). A third participant described how he found his “calling”: “I was involved in many church [projects]

and a thought came up about how I could enjoy doing work at church for the rest of my life: *This is fun; I really enjoy this.*”

In terms of pursuing their passions, participants also described coursework that helped them decide which field they wished to enter. “I took everything but science and I really fell in love with psychology” (P9). “The classes I enjoyed the most were economics classes, so based on that I decided to go into economics” (P2). Another stated that because she had studied English, she would be able to travel to different parts of the world and teach English. Overall, the participants spoke to the importance of having rewarding, fulfilling work and of pursuing their passions in their career decision-making.

Discussion

The findings of this research both confirm some of the postulates from more recent career theories and provide additional insights that may extend existing theories. The lack of systematic frameworks and models that apply to the career decision-making of immigrant young people makes these results valuable, especially in setting the stage for theory building, making recommendations for practice, and paving the way for future research. The themes identified in this study will form a basis for better understanding the context of career decision-making of immigrant young people and will aid practitioners and policy-makers to support their career development in an informed manner.

Implications for Career Theory

The study focused on capturing the lived experiences of immigrant young people who were doing well with career decision-making. Their stories of personal and vocational journeys with regards to immigrating to Canada as teenagers provided a glimpse of their strengths, the challenges they had faced, their personal and interpersonal qualities, and the multiple ways they had had to adapt. The themes in their narratives, though similar in some way to other immigrant experiences, were unique concerning their minority status and developmental stage, thus calling for extending our theoretical notions related to career decision-making for this population.

What stood out in their narratives is the process of meaning making through integrating life experiences and personal qualities while acknowledging the significance of interpersonal influences in their lives. The more recent shift in career literature recognizes this dimension of meaning making in career development (Cranford et al., 2003; Tims & Bakker, 2010). The themes that are inherent in the stories of the participants confirm how personal meaning and fulfillment are integral to success with career decision-making. Moreover, the themes point to concrete factors that immigrant young people consider as contributing to this meaning. For example, the role of parents and peers is central to their stories.

The participants' narratives spoke strongly to the effects that parenting, family roles, and community involvement had in shaping career decision-making processes. Any paradigm of career decision-making that does not address the active engagement of family members and significant others would fail to understand the lived experiences of immigrant young people making career decisions. While the relational influence of career decision-making is well established in the literature (Blustein, 2011; Richardson, 2012; Saka et al., 2008), what has been missing—but is addressed here—is the intersection of bicultural adaptation and developmental stage of young people in negotiating relational influences in career decision-making. The implication for career theory is the need to link identity development of young people adapting to a new culture while contemplating their vocational goals and plans for their futures in Canada.

A related finding that illuminates one of the strategies that has proven to be successful is to continue to develop and foster new relationships to support career decision-making. For example, the reference to networking and mentorship in the stories of immigrant young people reinforces the confidence participants had in the interpersonal aspect of career decision-making. Hence, not only were relationships significant for the participants in the past, but also the young people in the current study envisioned success for the future, channelling various forms of relationships.

Another implication for career theory reflected in the themes in this study is how non-work or non-vocational aspects of life influence career development. For example, more so than career programming or work-related influences, parenting, friendships, cultural expectations, and personal values are seen to impact the participants' career journeys and future career-related aspirations.

Moreover, these have been identified as having contributed to the participants' success in career decision-making. Thus, the transition-related experiences associated with immigration have positively transferred to competencies and attitudes that are reported to shape people's career development, as has been identified previously (Schultheiss et al., 2011). Many of the participants described their experiences of initial challenges they faced as new immigrants as catalysts for their decision-making processes, and for some participants, their family's support and encouragement were described as motivating factors in aiming toward a certain level of education, which eventually was instrumental in attaining career success.

The reported versatility of the participants in overcoming challenges and adapting to changing situations matches well with what some of the recent career theories refer to in terms of how uncertainty, chaos, and instability are integrated into the theories (Krumboltz, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2011). Also, with more recent models of career decision-making that adopt a postmodern stance (Betz, 2008), the forces of continuous change in the workforce are emphasized. According to these models, individuals making career decisions must adopt an approach that engages both intuitive and rational thinking while capitalizing on their previous

learning experiences (Gelatt, 1989; Krumboltz, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2011). Many of the experiences and themes described by the participants align with the models of career decision-making that underscore the importance of change and unpredictability. The constant flux in occupations, vocational titles, and job markets demands a set of skills that were not considered important in the past. Hence, immigrant young people who have familiarized themselves with modern trends in occupational and employment conditions in Canada can refer to how their parents struggled with adapting to changing scenarios and hence became proactive in managing uncertainty in positive ways. But while these theories can be applied to the narrative themes to a degree, they do not account fully for how the participants in the study made educational and career decisions in spite of identifiable adversities, including language barriers, financial challenges, and some instances of racism. Additionally, the theories do not address fully how or why many of the participants in the study were able to overcome these challenging life circumstances.

Implications for Career Counselling Practice

The narratives of the participants included both their positive experiences and their negative experiences related to career decision-making as immigrant young people in Canada. Their stories, however, reflect their successes more than their failures because of the way the interview questions were framed in line with the aim of the research. Hence, the implication for practice that may be tapped from this study came not only from how participants defined success but also from how they utilized strategies that led them to success. Career counselling practice can draw on three of the prominent areas of strategies identified in this study: 1) integrating parental expectations and family contexts, 2) creating opportunities of success through connections, and 3) clarifying values based on learning experiences and failures.

Firstly, the integration of parental and family expectations in career exploration is particularly significant for first-generation immigrant young people. The shared experience of their parents' challenges with career transition impacted the decision-making of young people in significant ways. The witnessing of some of their parents' career dreams and aspirations shattering as a result of moving to Canada is an inescapable context within which these young people were making career decisions. There is also an implied message that these parents have sacrificed their own careers to provide their children with better vocational opportunities. Hence, career counselling for immigrant young people needs to encompass the unpacking of the feelings and beliefs related to the career stories of their parents as young people see them. Thus, career interventions may be seen as joint projects involving family members in the decision-making process (Domene & Young, 2019).

Secondly, the value of relationships and connections that are inherent in many of the cultures from which immigrants to Canada come is a definite strength when considering career development (Schultheiss et al., 2011). What stood out in the narratives of the participants in this study was the intentional and strategic way by which the participants networked in forming the connections needed to advance their career journeys. This makes sense considering the acculturation process, with regards not only to adapting to a new country but also to learning about the world of work. Young workers' need to reach out is especially significant given that their parents are unable to guide them due to a lack of familiarity with how to navigate the Canadian job market. Interestingly, these connections translated into mentoring relationships, and the participants in the study talked about how these relationships were instrumental in them gaining confidence and gaining the necessary skill sets to make informed career decisions. Hence, the counselling implication here is to incorporate interventions that value and target interpersonal connections, especially ones that foster mentorship opportunities (Amundson, 2018).

Finally, an implication from the results of this study that applies to career counselling involves exploring values related to self, work, success, and experience. It is important to acknowledge that the work-related values that immigrant young people have are a reflection of the shared values of their family and their culture. The extent to which many immigrant young people are hesitant to take a risk with unconventional occupations stems from the value of security that has been reinforced as a result of their immigration to Canada. Similarly, the role of values is evident in the choice of pursuing higher education and lining up experiences to achieve a certain career objective. Sometimes the value-based career decisions of immigrant young people may seem less broad and singularly focused, which often fits less well with Western and more recent career theories. However, it would help career practitioners to appreciate fully the contextual influence of the immigrant young people's values and how they inform their career decision-making.

Limitations

Although this research offers a valuable first-person perspective on the meaning participants made of their successes with career decision-making, it also has some limitations. The focus of narrative research is to increase understanding through rich, nuanced accounts that may illuminate the experiences of others. In spite of care being taken to preserve the voices of participants in telling their stories, the act of summarizing their accounts could have led to some alterations to what they had intended. In addition, the retrospective views of participants' experiences may not be identical to their perspectives at the time that they were making career decisions.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study call for more breadth and depth in scholarship related to career decision-making of immigrant young people. The selection of the participants with regards to their perceived success with career decision-making and to the time range when they moved to Canada in their teens opens up several questions concerning the themes that have emerged in this study. For example, the nature of personal identity of the participants, their developmental stage, and the fact that they had parents who had taken the risk of immigrating to a new country invite more questions regarding the process of migration and successful acculturation for young people. Also, specific personal, interpersonal, and systemic factors that contribute to doing well need to be studied using other research paradigms and methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative. Future research extending from this study, with a larger sample of immigrant young people from diverse countries and occupational fields, could lead to more specific knowledge about policies and practices to support immigrant young people in their career pursuits. Moreover, this study could also be extended to investigate the similarities and differences in career development when comparing members of other minority groups in Canada who have to overcome many barriers.

With more immigrant young people doing better in career decision-making than before (Hofferth & Moon, 2016), we would need research-informed policies to maintain the gains and to refine existing mechanisms that are contributing to their doing well. Also, future research may focus on testing and/or supporting the themes that are identified in the current study to develop tools, strategies, and evaluation standards, thereby increasing the credibility of the outcomes targeting career development of immigrant young people.

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Appendix: Narrative Life Review Interview Protocol

Purpose

[To use Narrative Life Review methodology with immigrant young people in order to obtain detailed descriptions of their career decision-making process and of the evolution of this process over time.]

Interview Protocol

[All participants will be asked to recall career decisions in their lives. To begin the life review interview, the interviewer will use the following sequence of protocols.]

In this first section, we would like you to think about your life as a life review process, beginning in the early years of your life up to the present time. We are looking for descriptions or stories about significant events or moments that occurred that may have had an effect on your career or employment decision-making process over time. We would like to hear your story about making career decisions that led to your experience of doing well in the world of work.

Beginning with your first career decision, please tell me your story about the types of career decisions you have made, and how you went about making them.

Possible Probes

[The following probe is to be used to assist the participant to describe more fully each decision, where the meaning is not readily apparent.]

What does your story mean to you? As you recall your personal story of career decision-making, what insights or new understandings come to mind?

Other Probes

1. How old were you? How did you get the career? What were your responsibilities?
2. What was your experience of this career?
3. Did you experience any difficulties in this work? Can you describe them?
4. Can you describe any career decisions you had to make while in this role?
5. What did you learn about yourself while in this career?
6. What did this career mean to you?
7. Why did you leave this role?

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