PROFESSIONALS IN DISGUISE: IDENTITY WORK OF INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS IN SITUATIONS OF DOWNWARD OCCUPATIONAL TRANSITION

LUCIANA TURCHICK HAKAK

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GRADUATE PROGRAM IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/ORGANIZATION STUDIES SCHULICH SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, YORK UNIVERSITY TORONTO, ONTARIO

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation studies the identity work patterns undertaken by internationally educated professionals in situations of downward occupational transition to a tainted occupation. Previous literature has addressed identity work in situations of upward occupational transition and in enduring dirty work occupations, however, the situations of downward movement or of adoption of a tainted occupation have not yet been addressed. Internationally trained professionals who are working as taxi drivers in the Greater Toronto Area were selected as the ideal extreme case with which to carry out this investigation due to the heightened visibility of the contrast between being a university educated professional and driving a taxi.

A qualitative research methodology was employed in which semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed. Findings indicated that internationally educated professionals face the identity pressures of Unmet Expectations, Prestige-Based Identification and Perception of Occupational Stigma. The aggregate of these pressures caused them to perceive their identity as being threatened, which in turn prompted them to engage in identity work through the protective tactics of Distancing, Ephemeralizing and Image Management and the restructuring tactic of Shifting.

Thus, the situation of downward occupational transition and entrance to dirty work was found to lead to some identity work responses that were different from those found in previous studies on upward transitions or enduring membership in a tainted occupation. This finding contributes to theory by demonstrating the importance of thoroughly understanding the identity pressures and hence, the specific context in place when discussing identity work patterns.
A surprising finding of this study is that individuals did not demonstrate a strong identification with the enactment of their original profession, but they did identify with its prestige. Therefore, this study contributes to current literature by suggesting the need to expand our understanding of occupational identification to include traits that are not necessarily linked to the enactment of an occupation.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on internationally educated professionals in the workforce, by presenting an in-depth account of the intrapsychic mechanisms by which they navigate the challenges encountered in their host countries. Limitations and implications for theory and practice are also discussed.
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Canada has one of the highest numbers of internationally trained professionals in the world (Hawthorne, 2008), and it is often considered to be an open and multicultural society with progressive immigration policies (Zikic, Bonache & Cerdin, 2010). However, upon arriving in Canada, internationally educated professionals often experience significant hurdles in obtaining recognition of their foreign-obtained credentials (Alboim, Finnie & Meng, 2005; Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Hawthorne, 2008), which may lead them to accept jobs that are unrelated to and lower in status and/or in prestige than their original occupation (Fang, Zikic & Novicevic, 2009; Reitz, 2001, 2005). In particular, the example of “doctors driving taxi cabs” is one often cited in the mainstream media as an instance in which the human capital of internationally educated professionals is underutilized as they take on occupations that are far less prestigious than the occupations in which they were trained. This is likely to lead to a great deal of psychological distress (Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013; Zikic et al., 2010). It is also likely to impact immigrants’ sense of identity, or in other words, their sense of self both inside and outside the realm of work.

The goal of this dissertation research is to explore the identity work (Ibarra, 1999; Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006; Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and identity narratives (Ashforth, Harrison & Corley, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) crafted by internationally educated professionals in an attempt to reconstruct their identity when transitioning to jobs which are lower in prestige than those that they held in their home countries. Identity work is understood here as the mechanisms by which individuals
actively form, revise, repair and maintain or strengthen their identity (Ashforth et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Previous studies have addressed the identity work and identification process that individuals engage in when they transition to a new role or profession that is higher in status and prestige than the occupation they held before, such as in the transition from a student to a doctor (Pratt et al., 2006) or in ascending investment banking careers (Ibarra, 1999). However, an issue that has not yet been explored is how identity work takes place in the specific context of downward occupational transitions. In fact, the overall literature on the phenomenon of downward occupational mobility is quite sparse and while a previous study has dealt with the overall psychological well-being of managers in these situations (West, Nicholson & Rees, 1990), the identity work that takes place in this context has not yet been addressed.

A particularly interesting instance of downward occupational transition is when highly educated individuals take on an occupation that is considered “tainted” or “dirty”. Dirty work is defined here as tasks that are physically, socially or morally tainted (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, Kreiner, Clark and Fugate, 2007; Kreiner, Ashforth & Sluss, 2006; Hughes, 1958). While previous literature has described how bearers of diverse types of occupational taint engage in occupational ideologies in order to minimize the negative attributes of their work and accentuate the positive ones (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), the identity work that accompanies one’s adoption of a tainted occupation is a topic that has not yet been explored. Thus, the phenomenon to be investigated in the present study is two-fold: first, it involves a transition to an occupation lower in status than that which was held previously. Second, such a transition may involve the adoption of a tainted or dirty occupation and the insertion into this new occupational status is noteworthy in itself.
This study will explore the process of downward occupational mobility and transition to a dirty work occupation by analyzing a group that systematically experiences this problem, namely internationally educated immigrant professionals who are now in low-prestige occupations in Canada. However, the phenomenon of transitioning to a lower-prestige occupation is not only relevant in the case of immigrants. In addition, the recent global economic recession drove many Canadian workers to jobs which are lower in prestige than the jobs for which they were educated. This population may have also been driven to changes in occupational identity following downward occupational transitions, hence the relevance of this study can be expanded to also include this broader population of underemployed native and locally trained individuals.

In sum, the present work draws on the identity literature to better understand the process by which individuals and in particular internationally educated professionals craft and recreate their identity upon undergoing a downward occupational transition and subsequently entering a dirty work occupation. In this way, it aims to address three current gaps in the literature. First, it will consider the particular ways that identities are crafted and re-crafted in situations of downward transition. These are likely to be distinct from the findings of previous studies regarding the identity work that takes place as individuals begin new and desirable professions or in situations of increasing occupational prestige (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Second, while the dirty work literature has described in detail the tactics and defense mechanisms in place to protect one’s identity when in tainted occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, et al., 2007; Kreiner, et al., 2006 (a)), the specific context of individuals who enter such occupations from non-tainted and prestigious occupations has not yet been addressed. Finally, it will contribute to the literature on internationally educated professionals by offering an account of the
intrapsychic patterns by which these professionals navigate the situation of underemployment in Canada.

**Personal Motivation**

In addition to my desire to make a positive contribution to the field of identity work, this project is also motivated by a personal passion, as I am an immigrant to Canada myself and am surrounded by other immigrants who, while highly educated in their countries of origin, are working in low-prestige occupations in Canada. Thus, in most of my previous work, I explore different aspects of the experience of internationally trained professionals.

The first study I conducted on this topic addressed the labor market entry of Latin American immigrants who had recently acquired their MBA degree in Canada. The main findings from this study are that because of their status as immigrants, these individuals perceive not only barriers such as the lack of networks and discrimination, but also specific opportunities for success in Canada (Hakak, Holzinger & Zikic, 2010).

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to present other projects on the broad topic of immigrant professionals in the Canadian workplace at academic conferences. Specifically, I presented an exploratory study written in collaboration with Dr. Jelena Zikic on the career crafting strategies of immigrant professionals at the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS) conference in 2009 (Zikic & Hakak, 2009). I then went on to present a theory paper at the Academy of Management meeting in 2010 that proposed possible patterns of self-categorization of second generation immigrants within workgroups (Hakak & Tajeddin, 2010).

More recently, I co-authored a paper that appeared in the International Journal of Human Resource Management on the various factors influencing immigrants’ vulnerabilities in the
labour market, the relational nature of these factors and how this drives the success of specific HRM projects and procedures (Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013).

In parallel to this, I have also been particularly fascinated by the overall topic of identity and identification, beyond its relevance to the topic of immigrants in the labor market. This interest in how individuals and groups define and gradually redefine who they are, stems back to my undergraduate degree in clinical psychology, and has become increasingly important to me as I construct multiple role identities for myself over time. The role transitions that took place in my life during the time in which I was immersed in this dissertation work only increased this interest as I recently became a mother, acquired a third citizenship and became fully identified as an academic. One of the research projects that I have become immersed in during this time is specifically connected to these life changes, as I have begun investigating the dual and identification processes of simultaneous entrance to the roles of motherhood and academia (Toubiana & Hakak, 2014). Another research project that is related to my overall interest in the topic of identity and identification is a conceptual paper that has recently been published in the Journal of Applied Behavioral Sciences on Identity Ambiguity and the strategies that individuals undertake to overcome such ambiguity (Hakak, 2014).

This study will continue to build on my current body of work, by exploring the experiences of internationally trained immigrant professionals in a unique setting and by continuing to explore different scenarios and conditions of identity changes and development.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Identity

In order to understand the topics of identification, deidentification, identity work and more specifically, the identity work that occurs in the context of entry to a dirty work occupation, it is necessary to first provide a brief overview of the topic of identity as it has been conceptualized in management studies. In recent years, there has been a heightened focus by organizational scholars on the topic of identity, and on individuals’ identification with their organization (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Chreim, 2002; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Pratt, 1998, 2000; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) or with their professions (Brown & Duguid, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, et al., 2006; Russo, 1998).

These studies have been presented through two parallel but strikingly similar theoretical frameworks. On one hand, there is Social Identity Theory, which stems from the work of Tajfel and Turner (Ashforth, 2001; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). According to these authors, an individual’s identity is composed of personal identity, which includes internal traits such as attributes and dispositions, and social identity, which includes salient categories of people or the position occupied by people in society (Ashforth, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; 1986). Regarding one’s social identity, this theory further espouses that individuals categorize themselves with other members of their group and attempt to clearly differentiate their group from others as a means of enhancing their self esteem (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987).

On the other hand, there is Identity Theory, a sociological theory with origins in the insights of Mead (1934) and Symbolic Interactionism, and whose main proponents are Stryker (1968) and McCall and Simons (1978) (Ashforth, 2001; Hogg, et al., 1995). According to these authors,
one’s sense of self is composed of the multiple and clearly differentiated roles that are constructed and played out through one’s social interactions, such as the role of a parent, employee or manager (Ashforth et al., 2008; Hogg et al., 1995; Stryker & Burke, 2000). For each of these roles, it is believed that individuals construct and enact a specific sense of self which gains meaning as it is compared and contrasted to other roles. For instance, the role of a teacher gains meaning as it is compared and contrasted to that of a student (Hogg et al., 1995).

Common to both Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory is the assumption that identities are socially constructed, changing over time and are multiple in any one individual (Ashforth, 2001, Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003). Also common to both perspectives is the belief that identities are built through the definition of and membership in groups of some kind, whether it is social categories (social identity theory) or roles (identity theory) (Ashforth, 2001). Further, both theories propose that the multiple identities of any one individual differ in terms of salience. Social identity theorists argue that identities are more or less salient depending on the situation they are in, while identity theorists argue that hierarchies of salience between roles are internally driven and only weakly dependent on context (Ashforth, 2001, Hogg, et al., 1995).

Some more recent studies have integrated these two perspectives, arguing that the insights from both identity theory and social identity theory are complementary and extremely useful in understanding individuals’ work related identity (Ashforth, 2001; Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Hogg et al., 1995; Petriglieri, 2011). For instance, in the case of identity salience, it has been argued that a certain identity may have smaller or greater salience, depending both on subjective importance and also on situational relevance (Ashforth, 2001; Ashforth et al., 2008).
Identification, Deidentification and Identity Loss

Members of an organization or occupational group are said to identify with this group when they define themselves at least in part by what they perceive this group represents (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). This group then becomes central in determining how they see themselves within the overall society (Ashforth, 2001). Some of the factors that increase the likelihood that an individual will identify with a social category are when there is a great degree of distinctiveness between it and other categories, when the category is considered prestigious, and when there is a great degree of awareness as to out-groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Furthermore, identification with a role or an organization can allow individuals to satisfy needs such as safety (Pratt, 1998), affiliation (Bartel & Dutton, 2001; Pratt, 1998), uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Terry, 2000), self-esteem enhancement (Ashforth, 2001; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998) and meaning (Pratt, 1998).

The mechanism of identification with an occupation or organization is said to occur through a series of sense breaking, sense giving and sense making processes, which in organizational contexts may be top-down (sense-breaking and sense-giving) or bottom-up (sense-making) (Ashforth et al., 2008). Furthermore, the specific case of identification with a given role or profession is said to occur in three phases: First, individuals observe occupants of roles, define role models or prototypes and observe the similarities and differences between these role models and themselves. Then they develop “provisional selves” whereby they both imitate certain traits of the role model and express traits from their own personal identities. Finally, they reflect on these provisional selves and receive external feedback, both which allows them to modify and adjust these provisional selves until they become identified with the role (Ibarra, 1999).
Deidentification denotes an opposite pattern, whereby individuals come to distinguish their identity from that of the organization or occupation (Ashforth, 2001). It occurs in situations of personal, role or context change in which individuals lessen their perceived affinity with a role or context and in some cases, exit this role (Ashforth, 2001). Because of the importance of identification in ensuring high self-esteem (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and in meeting several individual psychological needs (Pratt, 1998), it is clear that transitions involving deidentification can be difficult to handle, leading to a sense of loss of meaning, uncertainty, disequilibrium and pain (Fiol, 2002). In such situations it has been argued that the stronger the initial identification and the more time this identification is in place, the more difficult deidentification will be (Ashforth, 2001; Tosti-Kharas, 2012).

**Identity Loss.** Deidentification is often accompanied by the experience of identity liminality. This concept was introduced by Turner (1967), as an anthropological exploration of rites of passage, such as the transition from boy to man, in which focus is placed on the “betwixed and between” stage wherein the old identity is no longer in place and the new identity not yet reached. Identity liminality is said to originate from various triggering situations, which could be either intra-psychic or external to the individual and it can be seen as a positive, liberating and exciting experience, often accompanied by a clear prospect of a future target of identification (Ashforth, 2001; Beech, 2011).

A similar construct to identity liminality is identity ambiguity (Corley & Gioia, 2004; Hakak, 2014). Both identity liminality and ambiguity describe the moment within an identity transition in which one senses an absence of a strong identity. However, when experiencing identity liminality, individuals supposedly have clarity as to when and how identification is likely to re-occur and may regard the “between” stage as a necessary and worthwhile step in
achieving an ulterior goal (Beech, 2011). In contrast, individuals experiencing identity ambiguity have very little information about whether, when and how they will eventually regain work related identification and have the perception that they have very little control over this process (Hakak, 2014). In both cases, it has been argued that individuals strive to regain their sense of work related identification (Hakak, 2014; Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). The specific strategies that they are said to undertake in order to regain this strong identification include: identity maintenance, identity reconstruction, ambidextrous identification and identity neutrality (Hakak, 2014). Those who cannot carry out these strategies may experience ongoing identity instability, a condition in which they are consumed by the lost target of identification and feel unable to re-build their social identity (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014).

Literature on stress and coping mechanisms may also shed light on the dynamics of loss of identification. Researchers in this field have proposed that people appraise certain environmental stressors as harmful to their identity in the present or threatening to their identity in the future, and this leads them to invest in specific coping mechanisms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) or identity protection and restructuring responses (Petriglieri, 2011). Identity threat has been defined as “experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity” (Petriglieri, 2011, pp. 644). Therefore it is distinct from identity harm or loss because it refers to the perceived potential of future harm to one’s identity. Hence, examples of identity threat include the fear that revealing one’s sexual orientation may lead to negative consequences in the workplace (Creed & Scully, 2000). As for identity harm or loss, this would occur for example if a professional typist learns he is no longer able to carry out the work with which he is identified because his core work instrument (a typewriter) is now obsolete (Reissner, 2010).
Finally, studies on identity loss have also drawn from grief theory to explain how people cope with the loss of an important target of identification (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). According to this perspective, individuals who lose an important target of identification cope with this loss by moving dynamically between loss orientation and restoration orientation. Loss orientation refers to efforts towards dealing with the loss itself, and includes loss-related emotions, which are stronger and more clearly negative the greater the distance between post-loss and ideal identities. Restoration orientation, on the other hand, consists of reflections and coping mechanisms with the goal of rebuilding one’s identity (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014).

**Identity Work**

Identification as described above portrays the ways in which individuals experience a sense of oneness to their contexts and in doing so; create their work related identity. Most studies focused on these processes tend to consider both contexts and individuals themselves as being more or less stable and therefore tend to focus more on the state rather than on the process of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In other words, these studies explain what an “identified” individual looks like, but place far less emphasis on how they reach and/or maintain this state.

Other, more recent studies take on a different view and propose that given that targets of identification such as organizations or occupational roles as well as individuals themselves are not stable, but rather, are constantly evolving, the identification relationship between individual and context would need to be continuously re-negotiated (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006(b); Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). These studies have focused on the concept of identity work, defined as the mechanisms by which individuals actively form, revise, repair and maintain or strengthen their identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Identity work can occur in
the form of the display of office decor (Elsbach, 2003), experimenting with provisional selves (Ibarra, 1999) or it may take place in the form of complex cognitive negotiations in which the individual strives for a balanced and positive identity (Kreiner et al., 2006 (b); Pratt et al., 2006).

Illustrations of identity work as a cognitive negotiation process can be found in several studies such as Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep’s (2006) analysis of the narratives employed by Episcopal priests to achieve a balance between their individual identities and the strong and demanding identity of priesthood. Pratt, Rockmann and Kauffman (2006) as well as Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) also provide accounts on the cognitive expression of identity work, but focus on how individuals resolve conflicts between their identities as professionals and the expectations placed on them as they carry out their daily duties at work. Pratt and colleagues (2006) utilize the setting of medical students becoming residents to illustrate this point, while Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) provide a rich account of how a single manager struggles to reconcile her identity with the expectations placed on her by others in her work context.

In all of these scenarios what seems to be taking place is an active craft of a narrative of the self (Ibarra & Barbalescu, 2010), which ultimately enables individuals to reach their identity goal and achieve a sense of balance and increased self-esteem. This narrative is furthermore constantly revised and modified if at any point it fails to generate feelings of authenticity or becomes perceived as invalid by outside observers (Ibarra & Barbalescu, 2010). Furthermore, the nature of this narrative is said to be determined by the magnitude of the discrepancies between one’s initial role identity and the developing role identity and by the intensity of one’s identification prior to any change or crisis (Pratt et al., 2006).

There is some dispute over whether identity work must be prompted by a major crisis or contextual transition or whether it is ongoing. For instance, Ibarra & Barbalescu (2010) argue
that the act of stepping back and revising one’s identity narrative occurs in situations of macro role transitions and is more prevalent the more such a transition is radical, visible to outsiders, high-stake and socially undesirable. Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann (2006) espouse a similar view, describing in detail how job newcomers engage in cognitive and rhetorical strategies to enable them to resolve work-identity integrity violations. Similarly, Petriglieri (2011) argues that when an identity is appraised as being under threat, such as in the experience of an identity conflict that is perceived to be unsustainable (Kreiner et al., 2006 (b)), or in the experience of an injury that threatens one’s ability to further one’s career (Maitlis, 2009), individuals become driven to restructure or protect their identity.

Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheeep (2006) on the other hand, understand identity work and identity negotiations as a constant and ongoing process that takes place throughout one’s life and as one interacts with others. Fine (1996) also addressed the topic of identity work as a constant process, occurring daily as work is carried out. In his ethnographic study, this author identified four different rhetorics that cooks employ strategically in different situations and with different audiences to construct their occupational identities. Thus, cooks adopt the identity of professionals, artists, business people and laborers, depending on the situation at hand. Finally, Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003), argue that the precondition to identity work is not necessarily a transition or crisis, but rather, a certain degree of self-doubt and openness in the individual, which happens often (but not only) in situations of macro transitions.

**A Special Case of Identification: Occupational Identification**

Management scholars have demonstrated an increasing interest in the topic of occupational or professional identity and identification. This trend is at least in part a response to previous calls to research claiming that professional identification has been understudied and
overshadowed by studies on organizational identification (Ashforth, et al., 2008; Johnson, Morgeson, Ilgen, Meyer & Lloyd, 2006; Pratt, et al., 2006). Nonetheless, it is now believed that individuals maintain a stronger identification to their profession than to their organization, as the profession tends to be a more salient, proximal and concrete target of identification (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth, Joshi, Anand & O’Leary-Kelly, 2013; Johnson et al., 2006). Still, to date, there is no uniform definition of professional identity and identification.

The first problem is that there is some divergence between authors that have used the term “professional identity” (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006), and those who prefer the term “occupational identity” (Ashcraft, 2013; Ashforth et al., 2013; Hassan, 2012). While some studies are clear about why they refer either exclusively to “professionals” or, on the other hand, to members of all occupations, others have used the terms interchangeably. Second, there is some confusion as to the differences between occupational/professional identity and identification. Here, once again, some authors have used this term interchangeably, while others make a clear distinction and it is often difficult for the reader to clearly understand what is meant in each case. Third, authors’ fundamental understanding of the actual construct of occupational/professional identity also varies, as some seem to assume it is composed of distinguishable parts that people identify with to various extents, while others see it as a unique and consistent target of identification that one either identifies with or does not.

**Professional vs. Occupational Identification.** The majority of studies to date have preferred to use the terms professional identity and professional identification (e.g. Chreim, Williams & Hinnings, 2007; Cohen-Scali, 2003; Doolin, 2002; Elsbach, 2009; Hekman, Bigley, Steensma, & Hereford, 2009; Ibarra, 1999; Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom & Svensson, 2007; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006; Pratt et al., 2006; Russo, 1998, Vough, 2012). These studies very rarely discuss
the actual term and what is meant by “professional”. According to Van Maanen and Barley (1984) professions are those occupations in which individuals have a high level of expertise, there are specific regulations set in place by its members, and individuals believe in the social importance of the profession. Furthermore, professions are said to be formed through successful claims to exclusivity, in which ownership of a work problem is explicitly and overtly determined and maintained (Abbot, 1988; Ashcraft, 2013).

In line with this, some studies on the topic of professional identity actually apply only to this specific set of highly specialized jobs. Thus, in their study of role transitions among nurses, Currie, Finn and Martin (2010), refer to an identity that is based on a certain expertise and on strong institutional boundaries, which would not apply to all occupations. Korica and Molloy (2010), refer to the introduction of work-specific technologies as an essential component of the overall professional identity of doctors, which is not necessarily the case for occupations involving less specific training. In these cases, identity is understood as being less about the content of a job or how it is enacted, and more about the knowledge and technologies that compose it in its abstract form.

However, most studies that employ the term “professional identification” would also apply to members of occupations that are not considered to be “professions”. For instance, Ibarra (1999) defines professional identity as “the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role.” (pp. 764-765), a definition that could also apply to occupations in general. Similarly, Cohen-Scali (2003) defines professional identity as “…an accumulation of general know-how and skills associated with the experimentation of a professional role” (pp. 240) and Chreim, Williams and Hinings (2007) as: “... an individual's self-definition as a
member of a profession and associated with the enactment of a professional role” (pp. 1515). These definitions do not necessarily imply in highly specialized educational achievements, but instead, focus on the practice of an occupation and the skills and knowledge acquired through this practice, a situation that could easily be applied to non-professional occupations.

Other authors have preferred to use the term “occupational identity” arguing that this label is more inclusive and descriptive, since identification with the work one does and with the prototypical characteristics of people who do such work is common to any occupation, whether or not such work is specialized and requires a specific academic degree (Ashcraft, 2013; Hassan, 2012). For instance, Ashforth et al (2013) use the term occupational identity in their study of call centre customer service representatives and they define it as the way in which “…members of an occupation are defined as a collectivity, including their recurring tasks, the discourses used to make sense of their work, as well as their values, goals, beliefs, stereotypic traits, and knowledge, skills, and abilities.” (pp. 2427). Although this definition is similar to that used in some studies on professional identity (Ibarra, 1999; Chreim et al., 2007; Cohen-Scali, 2003), here it is explicitly applied to the broader set of professional or non-professional occupations, including the CSR population of their study.

**Occupational Identity or Identification?** Still another term that has caused some confusion is the somewhat indiscriminate use of the terms “occupational/professional identity”, and “occupational/professional identification”. According to Ashcraft (2013), professional or occupational identity should explain what the occupation truly *is*. This would be coherent with the definition of organizational identity, which describes a shared perception by organizational members about the fundamental nature of the organization (Dutton, et al., 1994). Similarly, the
identity of an occupation can be defined by the nature of the work itself and by the specific population that is commonly expected to carry it out (Ashcraft, 2013).

Nevertheless, researchers often claim to study professional identity, when what is actually being investigated is professional identification, that is, the individual’s affiliation with the collective profession. For instance, Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann (2006) speak of the construction of professional identity by medical residents, when it may be argued that they are in fact referring to the development of their affiliation to or identification with the medical profession and not with the development of professional identity itself (Ashcraft, 2013). In this study, medical residents gradually become identified with certain medical specialties. They do so through identity work tactics of patching, splinting and enriching, which occur through the enactment of the new specialty, cognitive comparisons with prototypical members of each specialty and self assessments of their changing identity. However, throughout this process, it is not the identity of the medical profession that is changing but instead, the identity of the individual doctor through the development of professional identification (Ashcraft, 2013).

Other studies however, do discuss the identity of the actual profession. For instance, Chreim et al. (2007) addressed the topic of changes in the role identity of physicians in a specific health care organization, motivated simultaneously by institutional and organizational changes. These physicians’ actual roles gradually shifted regardless of the extent to which individual physicians felt identified with this role. Korica & Molloy (2012) also provide an example of professional identity change in a study of physicians, but focused on changes to the physician role identity that take place as a result of evolving technologies for diagnosis and treatments.

**Occupational Identity – whole or parts?** The nature of an occupation’s identity is also a concept that lacks a unanimous definition in the field. Specifically, while some authors believe
that each identity is a relatively cohesive whole that can be accessed through practice in a given occupation, others describe it as a fragmented and complex construct towards which individuals may not only identify or disidentify, but also feel ambivalent (Ashforth et al., 2013). This mirrors debates that take place surrounding the topic of organizational identity, as some authors see organizational identity as being a single construct that individuals may or may not be identified with (Chreim, 2002; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Dutton et al., 1994), while in other studies it is assumed to be mostly fragmented, composed of multiple features that may be targets of identification to different individuals and in varying degrees (Ashforth et al., 2008; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

As an example of a study that considers occupational identity to be a relatively cohesive unit is the paper by Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep (2006) that investigates the identity tactics that lead to different degrees of integration or differentiation between the personal and occupational identities of Episcopalian priests. Here, even though it may conflict with non-work-related aspects of their identities, the occupational identity of priesthood is considered to be recognizable and non-fragmented. In addition, studies that compare individuals’ degree of identification with different work related targets such as the organization, occupation or work group (Ashforth et al., 2008; Gunz & Gunz, 2007; Heckman et al., 2009; Johnson et al., 2006; Vough, 2012), also seem to understand occupational identity as a somewhat concrete and un-fragmented entity with which one may identify to varying degrees. The challenge described in these studies is to integrate one’s identity considering multiple targets of identification, not to integrate occupational identification itself.

On the other hand, different studies have described occupational identities as being composed of multiple, and often conflicting, parts. Ashforth, et al. (2013) argue that occupations
embody multiple facets or dimensions and that individuals are likely to respond differently to each of these facets. Hence, in a similar way as organizational identification may be ambivalent, whereby one both strongly identifies and strongly disidentifies with aspects of an organizational identity (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004), these authors argue that occupational identification may also be ambivalent. In these scenarios, individuals would identify strongly with one aspect of an occupation, but disidentify with others (Ashforth et al., 2013). Another example of this view of occupational identification as a composition of “parts” is a study by Kram, Wasserman and Yip (2012), that investigates PhDs who work as scholar-practitioners. Based on this work, they describe professions as being composed of multiple social identities. In this case, the roles of scholar and of practitioner would be completely distinct from each other, invoking different metaphors and different archetypes in occupational members.

A study conducted by Svenningsson and Alvesson (2003) assumes a similarly fragmented and complex view of occupational identity, as they describe a managerial role in which the often divergent discourses of administrator, ambassador/communicator and culture generator all co-exist. Similar divergent images are also at the centre of a study by Fine (1996) who describes the occupation of chefs as being composed of four different rhetorical images that individuals draw on interchangeably depending on their circumstance. Specifically, these images are of a professional, an artist, a businessman or a manual laborer. In this way, the “chef” occupation can be seen as being composed of multiple and competing aspects with which individuals may identify. Finally, Cascon-Pereira and Hallier (2012) investigated the identity work conducted by doctors who became hospital managers, and found that the management or physician aspects of their jobs were seen as being two different and at times irreconcilable aspects of their occupational identity. However, in all of these instances, the different parts of an
occupation with which individuals are said to identify to varying extents refer specifically to the behaviors carried out at work, and not to other aspects, such as an occupation’s image or prestige.

Given the importance and supposed strength of occupational identification (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Johnson et al., 2006), in the present dissertation study, it was expected that respondents would demonstrate a strong sense of identification to the profession in which they were trained, and in which they had work experience. It was also expected that because of this strong initial identification, they would be motivated to find a job in this initial occupation following their move to Canada.

Dirty Work

The term “dirty work” was first coined by Everett Hughes in 1951 as those tasks and occupations likely to be seen by society as disgusting or degrading (Hughes, 1951). He later went on to specify that work can be considered “dirty” if it is physically, socially or morally tainted (Hughes, 1958). Physical taint refers to workers that are in direct association with garbage, death or dangerous work conditions. Social taint refers to jobs in which there is direct contact with a stigmatized individual, such as in the case of a prison guard, or to jobs in which the worker has a servile relationship to others such as in the case of a maid or a taxi driver. Finally, moral taint is said to be present in jobs that are commonly perceived as being dubious in virtue, such as exotic dancers (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

In recent years, identity researchers have been especially interested in the topic of dirty work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, et al., 2007; Dick, 2005; Kreiner, et al., 2006(a); Lucas, 2011). The reason for this interest is that while identity research suggests that people develop strong social identities as a means of enhancing their self-esteem (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999;
Tajfel & Turner, 1986), members of these occupations would appear to have an especially hard time developing strong work identities since they are surrounded by pervasive negative stigma (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Stigma is understood here as a process by which something is discredited and reduced from a whole person or occupation with many attributes to a tainted one (Goffman, 1963). This perceived taint is said to lead to reduced psychological well-being and may hinder individuals’ ability to cope with occupational stressors (Baran et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, research indicates that members of dirty work occupations have an exceptionally high involvement with their work, as they tend to invest a greater effort reflecting on their jobs (Baran et al., 2012). This heightened job involvement has also been expressed as strong identification with the occupation. Further, the creation and maintenance of strong social and occupational identities is said to enable them to maintain their high self esteem (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). This is said to be done at the collective level, within workgroups or occupations, as individuals rely on one another to craft and sustain positive occupational ideologies and to engage in social weighting (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Major & O’Brian, 2005). Positive ideologies are those that transform the meaning of work and this is said to be done in three ways: reframing, in which the negative value of the stigma is denied; recalibrating, in which the importance of certain aspects one’s work is exaggerated or reduced in relation to others; or refocusing, in which the attention is shifted from stigmatized to non-stigmatized aspects of work (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). As for social weighting, this consists of crafting advantageous comparisons between one’s group and other groups, by claiming that others are actually worse than themselves (“condemning the condemners”), or by elevating the importance of outsiders who view their work positively (“supporting the supporters”) (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).
Other studies have found that some of the tactics that people in dirty work occupations engage in to create and sustain a strong and positive occupational identity can also be employed individually, beyond the workgroup. Thus, a study by Ashforth, et al., (2007) revealed several tactics specifically used by managers to normalize dirty work, or in other words, to make the problematic aspects of dirty work seem ordinary and therefore less of a problem. Specifically, the tactics outlined in this study include the occupational ideologies of reframing, recalibrating and refocusing proposed by Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) as well as social comparison tactics. In addition to this, these authors also describe how managers in dirty work occupations utilized social buffers, confronted clients and the public, and used other defense tactics such as distancing themselves from the role, in which one sends a message to others that “I may occupy the role but I am not the role” or by avoiding, in which the stigmatized aspects of one’s work are made to seem normal or are hidden from outsiders (Ashforth et al., 2007).

Still other studies have focused on describing how occupants of specific tainted jobs go about preserving a positive identity. Hence, Lucas (2011) conducted in depth interviews with members of a blue-collar mining community and found that these blue collar workers rhetorically construct a positive and dignified self-identity as was evident through the expressed themes that all jobs are valuable; that dignity is based on the quality of performance and not the status of the job; and that dignity is based on how people treat others, regardless of their occupational status (Lucas, 2011). Dick’s (2005) account of how police officers deal with the moral taint caused by their use of coercive authority is another example of a study focused on how members of a specific occupation deal with social stigma. This study revealed that officers reframe the meaning of their coercive actions by placing the blame on society and the law rather than on themselves. Yet another study focused on gynecology nurses and revealed that while this
population was very aware of the “dirty” nature of their job, they were also proud of it and claimed it to be all the more important and special because of its unpleasant aspects (Bolton, 2005).

Thus, the dirty work literature has focused on how individuals in tainted occupations have secured positive identities and hence, positive self-esteem despite the stigma placed on them by outsiders. However, management scholars have not yet explored whether and how newcomers to dirty work occupations, who were previously in high-status occupations, negotiate such a positive identity.

For the purpose of this study, the determination as to whether or not an occupation such as taxi driving is tainted depends primarily on the perception of occupational taint by the job incumbents. As previous research has pointed out, if an individual perceives him or herself as stigmatized, the process of psychologically attempting to manage that stigma will occur regardless of whether this perception is shared by the non-stigmatized public or not (Meisenbach, 2010). Since this cognitive process of management, or more specifically in this case, identity work, is at the forefront of the present study, it seems appropriate to privilege the incumbents’ perception of whether their occupation is in fact dirty.

**Downward Occupational Transitions**

Very few studies in the fields of management and careers have specifically addressed the phenomenon of downward occupational transitions, that is, a transition within one’s career to an occupation that is lower in status or prestige than the occupation held previously. Hall and Isabella (1985) researched intra-organizational downward moves, or in other words, demotions, and argued that these moves could be perceived as a positive developmental opportunity provided that the employee was given some reason to believe that such a path would eventually
lead to future growth. These authors define downward occupational transitions as a move in which the person in question perceives a reduced level of responsibility and authority (Hall & Isabella, 1985). More recently, Sargent (2003) conducted another study on the subjective consequences of downward occupational transitions, but utilized a broader definition than Hall and Isabella (1985), and defined downward moves not only as those involving reductions in responsibility and authority but also compensation and status. This author concluded that when such transitions alter individuals’ status or influence within the organization, employees tend to experience identity threat and lower subjective career success (Sargent, 2003).

However, the studies described above concern intra-organizational transitions and not moves that occur as a result of unemployment. This is a meaningful distinction as the experience of unemployment likely shapes individuals’ options in accepting a new job lower in perceived prestige and often in an entirely different occupational field. Likewise, it is reasonable to believe that the experience of downward transition following unemployment is likely to influence one’s identity in different ways than the experience of a demotion. Few studies have explicitly addressed this specific inter-organizational or inter-professional mode of downward occupational transition. Among these studies is one conducted by West, Nicholson and Rees (1990), which investigated the psychological impact of downward mobility for managers and found that those who underwent downward transitions had less psychological well-being not only than those who experienced lateral or upward moves but also than those who experienced continuous unemployment. These authors argue that this would be because those who lose work status due to a downward transition, also lose the belief in opportunities for future growth, which would not necessarily be the case for individuals in continuous unemployment (West et al., 1990).
In addition, other authors have addressed downward occupational transitions for specific population subsets. Thus, Fournier and Bujold (2005) studied individuals in non-traditional jobs and the career trajectories that led them to such occupations. Many of these individuals were in non-traditional jobs which were inferior to their qualifications as a result of previous unexpected events in their professional or personal lives such as sudden job loss, an illness or a failed relationship. Once in their new, non-traditional job they experience stress, negative future career expectations, and are generally unsatisfied with their situation. Wilson (2009) studied racial differences in the propensity to undergo involuntary downward occupational transitions and found that such moves are more common for blacks and (although to a slightly lesser extent), Latinos. Furthermore, this author demonstrated that when such transitions occur for minority group members, the reasons are much less likely to be traceable to traditional sources of stratification such as human capital, family background or labor market forces.

Notwithstanding the above review, the topic of downward occupational transitions and in particular those occurring outside the scope of a single organization, continues to be an understudied topic. Furthermore, previous studies have not yet addressed the specific topic of how one’s identity shifts, is readjusted and reconstructed as a result of such transitions.

**Internationally Educated Professionals and Underutilization of Immigrant Skills**

Canada is host to a very large population of immigrants, and many of these arrive through the skilled workers program, in which prospective newcomers are selected through a points system based on their supposed labor market adaptability. These criteria include language ability, education level, work experience in country of origin, age, among others (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). At least in part due to this, the percentage of immigrants to Canada with university degrees has been increasing rapidly. In 2008, 45% newcomers to Canada had university degrees,
more than double the proportion of newcomers in 1994 (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). However, among immigrants with university degrees who have been in Canada for eight years, from 2000 to 2008, two thirds were working in occupations that were unskilled or that required at most a community college education or apprenticeship, compared to 40% of native Canadians (Gilmore 2009). Further, according to the 2006 census, among the population of university graduate immigrants, only 24% were working in an occupation that matched their exact field of study, compared to 62% of their Canadian-born counterparts (Zietsma 2010).

The under-valuation of skills of immigrant professionals is far from being specific to Canada. Rather, this is a phenomenon that occurs frequently and in many of the countries that are generally considered to be immigrant host countries. For instance, Almeida, Fernando and Sheridan (2012) demonstrate that the skills of immigrant professionals in Australia are often not recognized, and they suffer discrimination when looking for work. Al Ariss (2010), showed that a similar dynamic occurs in France, where individuals of North-African or Middle-Eastern origin are discriminated against both when looking for jobs and when they are hired, within organizations. Also, in the Netherlands, there is a large discrepancy in employment between migrants and those who are native born, with 76.9% of native Dutch people who wished to be in the workforce being employed, compared to 63.6% of migrants (Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013)

Previous literature has indicated that immigrant professionals are unable to find jobs that are commensurate to the skills they obtained in their home countries for various reasons. First, barriers to credential recognition, carried out either by employers or by professional associations acting as gate-keepers, is considered to be a key issue leading to the inability of immigrant professionals to work in their original fields (Almeida et al., 2012; Bauder, 2003; Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013). The actual work experience of immigrant professionals, regardless of their specific
credentials, is also often devalued by employers (Reitz, 2001; Salaff, Greve & Ping, 2002; Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013; Hawthorne, 2008; Zikic et al., 2010) and in Canada, research shows that recruitment agencies often avoid referring migrant applicants to their clients, as they anticipate that their applications will be rejected (Fang et al., 2009). Finally, the undervaluation of immigrant professionals has also been known to occur due to discrimination towards their culture, ethnicity, names and religion (Almeida et al., 2012; Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013; Kustec, Thompson & Xue, 2007).

The devaluation of immigrant skills may also occur through less explicit forms of discrimination (Esses, Dietz & Bhardwaj, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010). Examples include instances in which employers demand local qualifications or experience (Ralston, 1998; Bauder, 2003), or in which individuals with foreign accents systematically fare worse in job interviews than individuals with local accents (Creese and Kambere 2003; Purkiss, Perrewe´, Gillespie, Mayes and Ferris 2006). Yet another reason given by employers not to hire an immigrant professional is that s/he does not have the “right looks” for the job (Warhurst, van den Broek, Hall and Nickson 2009), an argument that is likely provided to mask racial or ethnic discrimination.

Finally, the under-valuation of immigrant skills is often described as “brain waste”, or in other words, a waste of the knowledge and skills that immigrants bring with them to Canada and that would have otherwise been useful to the Canadian economy (Reitz, 2001). Brain waste is said to hinder individuals and host countries alike. For instance, the Canadian economy is said to lose over $11 billion annually because immigrants’ skills are underutilized and up to $12.6 billion because they are underpaid (Reitz, Curtis and Elrick 2014). Hence, the underutilization of the skills of highly educated immigrants has consequences not only for the well being of immigrants themselves, but for society as a whole.
Conclusion

This literature review addressed the main issues relevant to the topic of downward occupational transitions and dirty work entrance for the population of internationally educated professionals. The following table (table 1) consists of definitions of the main constructs used throughout this study and based on this review of the literature.

Table 1 – Construct Definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition as understood in current study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Individuals define themselves by what they believe their group represents (Kreiner &amp; Ashforth, 2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Identity</td>
<td>&quot;... goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles and time horizons that are typically associated with a role.&quot; (Ashforth, 2001, pp. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Pressure</td>
<td>Internal or external factors that indicate harm to one's identity and the need for identity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Work</td>
<td>The mechanisms by which individuals actively form, revise, repair and maintain or strengthen their identity (Sveningsson &amp; Alvesson, 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Threat</td>
<td>“Experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity&quot; (Petriglieri, 2011, pp. 644).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty Work</td>
<td>Tasks and occupations likely to be seen by society as disgusting or degrading (Hughes, 1951).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stigma</td>
<td>A process by which something is discredited and reduced from a whole person or occupation with many attributes to a tainted one (Goffman, 1963).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Prestige</td>
<td>Composite of status, power, quality of work, education, and income (Ashforth &amp; Kreiner, 1999; Treiman, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationally Educated Professionals</td>
<td>Individuals educated abroad as professionals who subsequently immigrate</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 3: METHOD

The goal of the present study was to build and extend current theory on identity work in the understudied context of downward occupational transitions and entrance to a stigmatized occupation. In order to meet this goal and capture the richness of identity narratives, a qualitative research methodology was employed, in which the researcher remained open to emergent data while simultaneously focusing on how the theoretical insights will contribute to and extend existent theory (Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Sample

In order to clearly showcase the situation of a downward transition into a stigmatized occupation, an extreme case was sought (Sigglekow, 2007). In this case, this was the population of underemployed and internationally trained immigrant professionals. These immigrants often experience significant hurdles in obtaining recognition of their foreign-obtained credentials (Alboim, et al., 2005; Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013; Zikic, et al., 2010), which leads them to accept jobs that are unrelated to and lower in status and/or prestige than their original occupation (Fang, et al., 2009; Reitz, 2001). Thus, this population serves as a clear and systematic example of the dynamic of downward occupational transition.

Furthermore, within this population, the example of “doctors driving taxi cabs” is one often cited in the mainstream media as an instance in which the human capital of internationally educated professionals is underutilized. When such a situation is mentioned, one immediately recognizes the contrast between a doctor and a taxi driver and the inappropriateness of an individual with training in a highly specialized field such as medicine to be working as a taxi
driver. Over 80% of taxi drivers in the Greater Toronto Area are immigrants, and of these, 53% have at least some post-secondary education and 6.2% have a masters, PhD or MD degree (Xu, 2012). Furthermore, this number has increased sharply over the years, with the percentage of immigrant taxi drivers with post-secondary education increasing from 49.6% of those who arrived before 1996 to 61.9% of those who arrived between 1996 and 2006. In addition, previous literature has described taxi driving as an occupation that is typically low in prestige and socially tainted due to the servile relationship implied in it (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, et al., 2007). Due to the heightened visibility of this contrast both to taxi drivers themselves as well as to outside observers, internationally trained immigrants who are working as cab drivers are an “extreme case” (Sigglekow, 2007) and therefore, were selected as the ideal population with which to conduct this study.

Sampling was purposive and based on the fact that all drivers interviewed had undergone a downward occupational transition, having completed at least post-secondary degrees in their countries of origin with at least some experience working in the profession for which they were trained before migrating. Hence, all interviewees had transitioned from a profession that demanded specific training and expertise to taxi driving.

The number of interviews was determined by the point of theoretical saturation, understood as the phase during data collection in which it becomes clear that no incremental learning can be gained from the exploration of additional interviews (Eisenhardt, 1989). The total number of interviews was 28. While this total number of interviewees is smaller than the sample size of some recent qualitative studies in this field (e.g.: Ashforth et al., 2007; Kram et al., 2012; Kreiner et al., 2006 (b)), the strength and similarity of the accounts and identity work tactics employed by these respondents strongly indicated that theoretical saturation was reached.
Interviews were divided into groups, or “phases” corresponding to the progress of the research. The first 5 interviews were considered “pilot” interviews and were coded and analysed in February, 2012. The next group (phase 1) consisted of nine additional interviews conducted at a single location and conducted between March, 2012 and March, 2013. The final group consisted of 14 interviews conducted in various locations between May 2013 and December, 2013. As I moved from one phase to another, I reconsidered my sample and made strategic decisions regarding the overall direction of my research. I will now proceed to explain each of these phases and the key transition points between them in greater detail.

**Pilot Interviews.** Conducting the five initial pilot interviews was important in order to ascertain that the proposed sample criteria would allow me to meet my research objectives and also in order to further guide me to the literature that would help me to understand the issues at hand. These interviews were recruited from a taxi management company employing nearly 100 taxi drivers, most of which are from Pakistan. This over-representation of drivers from Pakistan is likely to be because the managers themselves are Pakistani and drivers of the same ethnic origin contacted each other through word of mouth. The company is located in the east end of Toronto, ON and it is composed of a small office adjacent to a mechanics repair shop. The fleet managed by the company is owned by several different people from outside the business, who outsource the management of their cars (or “plates”) to this company. Thus, the fleet of cars is not owned by the company, which instead has the purpose of leasing taxis to drivers. Taxis are leased to each driver for either the 12-hour day or night shift for one week at a time and at the time of this study, the cost of a leasing a taxi for either shift was approximately CAD$600.00 per week in Toronto. These leasee-leasor relationships were relatively stable as drivers tended to lease the same car from the same company for months or years at a time. Telephone dispatch
services are also not located within the company, but rather are outsourced to a large and well-known dispatch service within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Thus, a large portion of the money that customers pay taxi-drivers goes to pay for the lease of the vehicle, and the management company uses this revenue to secure a profit for itself and for the plate owners, as well as to pay for the services of the dispatch company and for the cost of maintaining and repairing the fleet of vehicles.

I was introduced to potential interviewees by the assistant manager of the office. Therefore, despite the fact that there was no employment relationship per-se between manager and driver (the relationship was one of leasee and lesor), and that it was made clear that interviews were purely voluntary, interviewees in this phase of data collection may have felt more inclined to accept this invitation than they would have if the interview had been conducted outside of the office.

Conducting five initial pilot interviews prior to my dissertation proposal defense allowed me to improve my interview guide as well as my approach in collecting data. First, I realized that because of the very long work hours of taxi drivers, it may be unrealistic to assume the interviews would be 60 to 90 minutes in duration as I had initially intended. Several potential interviewees said that they only had 30 or 45 minutes to talk and if I had said no to these willing participants, I would have missed the chance to collect valuable and interesting data. Therefore I subsequently changed my expected interview times to 30 to 90 minutes.

After conducting pilot interviews, I also learned that it is valuable to begin my interview by telling participants that I too am an immigrant. As I am a white woman with only a fairly subtle accent in English it may be easy for the interviewees to see me as the “other”, and therefore avoid being as open as they would be if they saw me as similar to them. By identifying
as a fellow immigrant, I hoped to avoid this obstacle. Furthermore, I learned that at the very beginning, it was important to clarify that the interview will more or less follow a chronological order, beginning from their experiences in their home country, then going on to their experience of immigrating and only then discussing their current work. If I had not done so, respondents would likely have refrained from talking about their lives before coming to Canada, which is an important piece to the puzzle of how they understand their work trajectory and their occupational identity over time.

I also made minor changes to the interview guide itself following these first interviews. Some of these were questions that I found participants did not fully understand, such as whether there is a certain impression of themselves that they would like others to have. However, I was able to access this information through other questions in the interview guide such as: “When others ask you about your job, how do you usually respond? Do you give different answers to different people?” In addition, I made certain adjustments based on surprising findings during the pilot interviews. For instance, in the pilot interviews, I asked them if they intended to look for a job in their original profession. However, noticing that most interviewees in the pilot study intended to look for a higher prestige occupation that was not in their original profession, I began asking a less specific version of this question, now inquiring whether they intended to look for a different occupation. Yet another adjustment was that as I noticed the importance to them of family roles and noting also that most were sole earners in their households, I began asking more about their family roles, and the decision process (if it were the case), that their wives would not work outside of the home.

A complete copy of the interview guides used for the pilot interviews and subsequent interviews can be found in appendix A. Despite the described adjustments, I am confident that
the accounts of identity work in situations of downward transition were sufficiently similar and comprehensive between the pilot and subsequent interviews so that all could be considered in the analysis of the data.

**First Phase (post pilot).** After conducting and analyzing pilot interviews, I continued to interview taxi drivers at this same management office. Of the 14 interviewees conducted in this stage, including both the 5 pilot interviews and 9 subsequent interviews, 13 were originally from Pakistan. Because of this, I became concerned that the ensuing findings would be representative of taxi drivers of a particular cultural background, rather than of the larger population of internationally educated immigrant professionals who work as taxi drivers, as I had originally intended. Thus, in the summer of 2013, I began a second phase of data collection, outside of the original taxi management office, in which I attempted to access taxi drivers from different nationalities in order to expand and diversify my sample population.

**Second Phase.** In this second phase of data collection, the sampling criteria was altered to specify country of origin. A total of 14 taxi drivers were interviewed in this phase, of which only three were from Pakistan. Participants were contacted through cold-calls to other taxi management offices throughout the Greater Toronto area, by going to taxi lines and trying to speak to taxi drivers who happened to be waiting for work, and by snowballing. Interviews in this phase were conducted inside the participants’ taxis, in coffee shops or in the management offices with which these drivers were affiliated.

In this phase, it was more difficult to source respondents than it had been when I was affiliated with a single taxi management office. However, broadening my sample beyond the taxi drivers of a specific office enabled me to achieve my goal of diversifying the sample. It also
enabled me to observe a greater variety of work contexts for taxi drivers, which in turn increased my overall understanding of this occupation.

Most of the respondents in this second phase of interviews leased their taxis in a manner similar to the drivers interviewed in phase 1 – they leased taxis for 12 hour shifts (day or night) during one week. At the end of their 12 hour shift (in the early morning or late afternoon), they were expected to return the car to the management office. The fact that they paid for a 12 hour shift, 7 days a week was described by them as an incentive to work as much as possible within that time period with very few breaks.

Six of these interviewees had different shifts because they worked at the airport. Their shifts were 24 hour shifts 2 to 4 times a week and similarly to the drivers from outside the airport, they also leased their car and plate. Although at first it seemed as though this shift arrangement allowed these participants to have more time to engage in parallel work activities, this was not necessarily the case. Of the six interviewees at the airport, only two were invested in work or study activities in the time in which they were not driving a taxi. One of these owned a convenience store and another was studying for certification in his field. However, all participants were clear about the intensity of these 24 hour shifts, causing rests between shifts to be an absolute necessity, and in most cases, not allowing them to systematically engage in other work activities during these breaks.

**Overall Demographic Profile.** The pilot sample, phase one and phase two of interviews resulted in a total sample of 28 interviewees, of whom 75% were from either India or Pakistan. The demographic profile of my entire sample of interviewees loosely mirrors that of population of taxi drivers in Toronto, as India and Pakistan are over-represented countries of origin of immigrant taxi drivers in this city (Xu, 2012). As for the demographic characteristics of
participants, their pre-migration professional experience was as accountants (2); lawyers (1); managers in industry/commerce (5); engineers (7); military pilots (1); computer scientists (2); researchers/academics (4), architects (1); bankers (3); teachers (1) and doctors (1). Drivers were all male, the average age was 44 years, 25 out of 28 were married and 3 were divorced. All but one had children. At the time of the interview, they had arrived in Canada on average 11.7 years ago with a median of 9.5 years and they had worked as taxi drivers for an average of 8.2 years (median 4.5 years) although their tenure as taxi drivers also ranged broadly, from less than one year to 28 years. Their countries of origin were Afghanistan (n=1), Ethiopia (1), India (n=5), Iran (n=3), Jordan (n=1), Nigeria (n=1) and Pakistan (n=16) and their reported income was between CAD$ 20,000.00 and CAD$40,000.00 per year.

**Data Collection - Interviews**

The main data source of this study was semi-structured interviews, a format which allows unforeseen topics to emerge (Ibarra, 1999). Interviews conducted in the pilot and phase one of data collection took place in the office of the company manager, whereas interviews conducted in phase two took place mainly in the drivers’ taxis, with the exception of three which took place in coffee shops and two in the offices of other taxi management companies, upon the drivers’ requests. The duration of interviews ranged from 24 to 82 minutes, and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The relatively low duration of interviews compared to that of most qualitative studies in the field is due to the fact that taxi drivers were often only willing to talk while they were in the taxi line, or just after a long and often exhausting 12 hour shift. Nevertheless, the information gained in these interviews was rich and meaningful and led to several important insights into the research question at hand.
An exploratory interview guide was employed with the goal of exploring the participants’ broad identity narratives, understood here as the ongoing story created by individuals in order to link who they are as professionals or organizational members with who they were and who they might become (Ashforth, et al, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). The structure of the interview guide consists of “grand tour” or broad question areas (McCracken, 1998) followed by sub-questions or topics that serve as reminders to me as the interviewer to address as the interviewee’s narrative unfolds.

It is important to note that the content explored during the interviews was not restricted to that in the interview guide. Rather, the goal of this guide was to ensure that all necessary general topics are covered, but further exploration of the data and prompts were also employed (McCracken, 1988). These further explorations were essential in ensuring the true richness and depth of the resulting data (McCracken, 1988). These interviews had several important objectives, the primary of which was to assess the identity work tactics that they employed when speaking about their professional life before, during and after their downward occupational transition. In order to achieve this goal, I first sought to better understand respondents’ lives before migrating, including their connections to their original professions, the jobs they held prior to migrating and the conditions that prompted their migration. Second, I looked for information on the process by which they looked for jobs in Canada, how they became taxi drivers, and what thoughts and emotions accompanied this transition. I also looked for information on their self perception before and after this transition and on the impressions that they wanted others to have of them. Finally, I asked participants about the various roles that they played, whether in their family realm, with the community of taxi drivers, with the community they left in their countries of origin and with the community of migrants in Toronto.
Data Analysis

Data analysis began after conducting the initial five “pilot” interviews and continued concurrently to data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process of coding and analysis took place by moving iteratively and constantly between literature and data, with the goal of ensuring that the research is both tightly grounded in the data and also not isolated from relevant literature (Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes were determined and organized with the assistance of the software Atlas.ti.

The first phase of the analysis consisted of an open-coding process whereby I read each of the transcripts and identified categories or first-order codes. An example is the code “disappointment in oneself, sense of failure”. This gave me a fine-grained understanding of the elements that emerged in the interviews. I then re-read all of the transcripts and codes to gain a more “macro” overview of the data and specifically, a greater understanding of what were the common threads of meaning across interviews that contribute to answering the research question at hand (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This second-phase of the analysis revealed patterns, which I then related to the literature and to existent constructs in order to further aggregate codes into second order “themes”, therefore moving from a strategy of primarily “open coding” applied in the first phase, to one of “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This phase therefore revealed themes that were far more abstract and closely linked to theory than the first-order codes, and in this way, the analysis moved progressively to a higher level of understanding of the data.

At this point it was clear that participants in this study had a series of frustrations and dissatisfactions with their current situation and that many of these were related to their identity, as their current objective situation contrasts so starkly from their past. It was also clear that they engaged in certain specific identity work tactics in order to regain their sense of self. However,
the extent to which the differences among drivers - such as their tenure driving a taxi, the number of years since they had moved to Canada, their country of origin or their profession before migrating - determined whether they would be more inclined to engage in one or another identity work tactic was unclear.

In analyzing this data I found no clear patterns linking demographic characteristics on the one hand and identity work tactics on the other. For instance, the tactic whereby respondents indicated that they plan to change their profession occurred in cases in which respondents had been driving a taxi for two years but also for nine years. Tactics in which respondents reported hiding their occupation from their families was also not related to the number of years they had been in this occupation or in Canada. Their country of origin or ethnicity also did not change these findings, nor did their original profession. Thus, despite the number of respondents in each demographic category being too small to provide any definite conclusion, there were no obvious differences between categories.

I also considered whether this data set could reveal findings about their identity beyond identity work, such as a typology of certain social or personal identities that stemmed from specific patterns of identity work, demographic characteristics of respondents, and/or specific critical incidents that had occurred throughout their lives. In order to better investigate this, I returned to the interviews and coded them once again, but this time looking specifically for critical incidents throughout their lives and careers, such as their original decision to study in a specific field, their decision to immigrate to Canada, the first job they had in Canada and their decision to drive a taxi. I also re-coded each interview depending on their past, present or future focus and on the apparent overall congruence of their current identity (whether it was compartmentalized, realigned or in a state of flux). However, I found no specific relationship
between the identity work tactics employed and critical incidents occurring throughout their lives or their current identity. In fact, as I will expand on in the “Findings” section below, all of the identified identity work tactics were employed by the majority of respondents, regardless of other traits, which indicates the overall importance of these tactics for the population of internationally educated professionals in situations of downward occupational transition.

Finally, I went back to the literature, and compared and contrasted each of the themes with concepts which have been explored in previous research. This enabled me to gain a better understanding of the ways in which the codes and themes found in the data relate to each other in such a way that they enable a coherent story to emerge, which in turns, contributes to theory. I therefore aggregated each of these themes into higher-order dimensions, which consist of a broader explanation, through the data, of the phenomenon at hand. A complete illustration of this analysis process can be found in Figure 1 below.
Figure 1: Progression of data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unmet Expectations →</th>
<th>Prestige-based Identification →</th>
<th>Identity Pressures →</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not know of challenges in host country&lt;br&gt;Disappointment in job market&lt;br&gt;Disappointment with official information available before migration&lt;br&gt;Overconfidence in employability</td>
<td>Values status at work&lt;br&gt;Family proud of previous professional status&lt;br&gt;Willingness to work in any/many high-status occupation&lt;br&gt;Values financial returns rather than content of work</td>
<td>Identity Threat →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi drivers are looked-down upon in host and/or home country&lt;br&gt;“Bottom of the chain”</td>
<td>Disappointment in themselves, perception of failure&lt;br&gt;Self-esteem negatively affected&lt;br&gt;Frustration with situation</td>
<td>Ephemeralizing →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider returning to home country; laments that children won’t want to return&lt;br&gt;Taxi driving is said to be temporary; vague change plans</td>
<td>Disidentification with taxi driving occupation; “true self is hidden”&lt;br&gt;Disidentification with other taxi drivers; avoids relationship with other drivers</td>
<td>Distancing →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shame; doesn’t reveal occupation to family and friends; family proud of previous profession and accomplishments&lt;br&gt;Doesn’t tell people in Canada that has degree; makes a point of telling people in Canada that has degree</td>
<td>Provider identity: Sacrifice for children; taxi as a means to be an effective bread winner&lt;br&gt;Vicarious success: Fulfilment through children</td>
<td>Image Management →</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Identity Shift →</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: FINDINGS

The analysis of these 28 interviews indicates that individuals undergoing involuntary downward occupational transitions face various forms of identity pressures, defined here as the internal or external forces that lead individuals to try to protect, modify and re-craft their identity through identity work. Previous studies indicate that identity work is often prompted by situations of macro transitions and abrupt contextual changes (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner, et al., 2006 (b); Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In the present study, an analysis of the data revealed that important identity pressures were in place, regarding both the situation at hand and individuals’ priorities and preferences.

In the following paragraphs I will present these findings in two stages: First I will present and discuss the identity pressures faced by this population. I will then present the specific identity work tactics carried out by this group with the goal of protecting and re-building their identities. A graphic representation of the main identity pressures and subsequent identity work tactics employed by this population can be found in figure 2 below.
Figure 2 – Model of identity work in situations of downward occupational transition

Identity Pressures in Downward Occupational Transitions

Members of this population were found to be faced with three key identity pressures: Perception of Occupational Stigma, Prestige-Based Identification and Unmet Expectations. Regarding occupational stigma, participants claim that taxi driving is a highly stigmatized job and that they have been aware of this stigma since before they became drivers themselves. Most believe that this stigma is widespread and exists both in their home countries and in Canada,
albeit in varying degrees. Previous literature has described taxi driving as an occupation that is typically low in prestige and socially tainted due to the servile relationship implied in it (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth, et al., 2007). Furthermore, their belief that taxi driving is socially stigmatized shapes their reactions to this stigma, regardless of whether or not this perception is shared by the non-stigmatized public (Meisenbach, 2010). Thus, the fact that they perceived themselves to be entering a stigmatized occupation led them to re-consider and re-define their identities.

Prestige-based identification was evident in instances in which participants demonstrate having been more strongly identified with the prestige conferred by the profession in which they were trained than with the profession itself. The loss of this prestige is therefore likely to have impacted their identities and to have driven them to consider strategies to change and re-craft their identities. Finally, most of the respondents claim to have had high expectations of the jobs that they would be able to get upon immigrating to Canada, and feel disappointed when they realize that these expectations cannot be met. This sense of disappointment is also more likely to drive respondents to identity work than if they had undergone an expected downward occupational transition that they understood and had time to come to terms with before it actually happened.

The combination of these identity pressures led to an appraisal of identity threat, which consisted of a general sense that they are not being true to themselves and of disappointment in the immigration system, the local labor market and themselves. This realization of identity threat, in turn, prompted several specific identity work tactics. These identity pressures will be explained in more detail in the following paragraphs and a summary and explanation of each of these pressures can be found in table 2 below.
### Table 2 - Identity Pressures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pressure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Exemplary Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Stigma</td>
<td>Taxi driving is perceived to be a stigmatized and undesirable occupation</td>
<td>&quot;They look down. It’s not a respectable business. It’s not really respectable. Even most of the people are well educated... But it’s not respectable.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prestige-Based Identification</td>
<td>Work-related identification prior to migration is based on the prestige conferred by their occupation, rather than on the enactment of the occupation</td>
<td>(In response to why he chose medical school) &quot;Oh, that’s a very highly regarded education there, you’re regarded as a very highly distinguished person&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmet Expectations</td>
<td>Did not expect to face challenges in obtaining a high-prestige occupation in Canada</td>
<td>&quot;My expectations were very high. I thought I have degree from Pakistan, I have some transcripts from Cyprus, I got a post-graduate diploma in software engineering, so I thought right away I’ll get a job in accounting, or at least in administration work.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unmet Expectations

For a variety of reasons, the majority of these drivers (24 out of 28) were surprised with their inability to find a job in their field of choice upon immigrating to Canada. They believed that they would be able to pursue their career of choice in their new country and the discovery that this was not the case further increased their dissatisfaction. The original sources of these incorrect and exaggerated expectations varies and ranges from blatant misinformation by
Canadian immigration officers abroad; to the lack of contacts in Canada that could inform them of the barriers in entering the Canadian job market in their field of choice; to the belief that although others had difficulties, their situation was “special”, so that these difficulties would not apply to them. For instance, the following passage illustrates the situation of a respondent who was disappointed with the situation found in Canada given the image that Canada portrays of itself abroad:

“And Canada is not a bad country as far as Canada advertised itself outside of Canada. So in Canada, it’s a different story. Back in other countries they advertise themselves like that’s the heaven, which is not right. So, there is a different story.” (Driver #24 – trained as a chemist (PhD))

The next excerpt demonstrates that even when respondents could count on information from friends and family who had immigrated to Canada previously, and who told them about the potential problems for labor market integration in Canada, they often believed that their case was somehow unique, and that despite the difficulties faced by others, they would be successful.

“It was in my mind that you know, I will get some kind of managerial job and it will be easy for me. (...) But when I came here I saw that you know, it’s a very difficult thing to find a job here. (...) I had friends and they told me that it’s very difficult to find a job but still I was very confident you know, that I will find a job. But when I came here I really found it very difficult to find a job here” (Driver #13 – trained as an electrical engineer)

Furthermore, while some were disappointed to find out that their foreign credentials would not be automatically valid in Canada, others, particularly those whose labor market re-entrance did not depend on a specific credential, were especially perplexed and frustrated with
employers’ frequent demand that they have “local experience”. This requirement was not something that most of them had expected before migrating.

“When I came in 1999, I applied for an architectural firm but everybody told me: Do you have any local experience? So I was very upset that time (...) How can I get the experience just tell me? If you don’t give me the job I cannot get the experience. I need to do something but nobody gives me any opportunity.” (Driver #10 – trained as an architect)

This demand for local experience often comes as a surprise to immigrants to Canada, as has already been determined by other studies on internationally trained professionals (Bauder, 2003; Zikic, et al., 2010). Among the participants in this study, half (14 out of 28) specifically mentioned the demand of Canadian experience as a surprise and as one of the biggest obstacles they encountered in entering the Canadian job market in a position that meets their professional expectations. Since the immigration process that most of these participants underwent specifically assesses their professional degrees and experiences when determining whether they should be allowed to immigrate, they are given the false impression that these are the only necessary requirements to practice their original profession in Canada. For instance, in the above example, the respondent was an architect who received his immigration visa because of his degree and experience as an architect, and therefore assumed that Canadian employers will welcome his work in this field. However, upon arriving, he found that most actual employers will only hire those who already have Canadian experience.

Participants’ initial expectations of the jobs they would have after immigrating to Canada is likely to have been shaped by their identity. It is reasonable to assume that individuals would create expectations for the future based on who they believe they are and on how they gage their
surroundings. Breaking these expectations is therefore likely to pressure people to change the way they see themselves, or in other words, to prompt identity work, so that a new and coherent set of plans and expectations can be contemplated.

**Perception of Occupational Stigma**

The perception of stigma directed towards taxi drivers was a strong identity pressure for members of this population. The roots of the perception of stigma in this case are two-fold. First, participants recognize it in the ways in which they are treated by customers and other people that they meet while working. Specifically, 13 out of the 28 respondents spontaneously commented on how their occupation is looked down upon in Canada and on how customers often treat them in a derogatory manner. The following passages are examples of this sentiment:

“As a profession, they kind of look down upon people who are taxi drivers. Even in the school, they tell the students: “you take your shower, you dress properly”, as if... you know, they don’t say that to all the professions. It’s kind of I think as looking down at people who are taxi drivers.” (Driver #11 - degree in business.)

“Here the taxi driver... you are the bottom of the food chain. You are at the bottom of the ladder” (Driver #28 – trained as a chemist)

In addition, they may also perceive this occupation as stigmatized because until very recently, they were part of a higher-status class that regarded other occupations such as taxi driving as “lower-class” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, Major & O’Brien, 2005). In any case, whether prompted by the experience or perceptions of derogatory treatments towards taxi drivers in Canada, or by an enduring image that they brought with them from their previous country and status, 27 out of 28 participants regard the occupation of taxi driving as carrying a negative stigma.
Prestige-Based Identification

The majority (20 out of 28) of respondents show signs of strong identification with the prestige in their original profession, more so that with the profession itself or with a broader concept of status, such as the social class that they belonged to in their countries of origin. Rather, they identified with the prestige that they felt they had as doctors, engineers, accountants etc. They felt as though this designation led to them be perceived with more respect and reverence, and it was precisely this respect that they missed in their jobs as taxi drivers.

Previous literature has described professional or occupational identity as the extent to which individuals’ sense of self is based on the work they do and the prototypical traits associated with those who do that work (Mael & Ashforth 1992). Professionals are said to be defined by what they do rather than where they work (Pratt et al., 2006) and one’s professional identity is said to form over time and through experience (Schein, 1978). Professional or occupational identities are therefore usually understood to be deeply connected to the enactment of a certain occupation (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). In contrast, the participants in this study mostly show signs of having a weak identification with the activities and responsibilities that are specific to the profession in which they were trained. Only 10 out of 28 mention actually enjoying activities that were specific to their original occupation, or feeling as though that occupation helps to define them. One of the respondents that did demonstrate signs of identification with his overall profession and the activities that it was composed of said:

“Actually my work was to electrify new villages, right? Where there was no electricity so, I was electrifying the villages and it was a great enjoyment for me to, you know, to give electricity to the people they didn’t know about how electricity and you know, so I really enjoyed my life." (Driver #13 – trained as an electrical engineer)
This participant speaks of the actual content of his job as a source of satisfaction and meaning. In contrast, most of the interviewees do not demonstrate any particular feelings of pride or meaning derived from their original profession, nor do they aim to return to an occupation within or related to their original field. Instead, when recounting their original occupation, most respondents focused on the prestige that in their view occupants of that profession usually have, and spoke of how being a member of that professional category allowed them to feel important and respected. The following excerpt illustrates this sentiment:

“You are an important person if you are a professor. You can sign for someone, you can be... you are a respected person. But if you are driving a can I guess not that much.”

(Driver #16 – trained as an academic (PhD))

Contrast Stigma vs. Prestige-Based Identification

Their strong pre-migration identification with the prestige of their occupation served as an important point of pressure driving them to engage in identity work. Losing the ability to work in the prestigious profession in which they were trained was felt not only as a career “fall”, but also as a loss of an important part of their identity. In addition, given that they were strongly identified with the prestige of their previous occupation, the contrast between their previous job and their new job, which they see as stigmatized, is striking to them. In fact, it is likely that they remember their previous job as even more prestigious than they would have, if they were not comparing it to a job they considered to be especially low in prestige. Equally, their perception of taxi driving as stigmatized may be exacerbated by the fact that the prestige associated with their previous occupation was a key component of their work-related identity. Thus, the realization that they were no longer considered someone worthy of respect and reverence caused
them to perceive their identities as threatened and led them to re-think who they are given this new situation.

**Identity Threat**

The high valuation of the prestige in their former occupation and the stigma they see in their new occupation reinforce and potentialize each other. This, combined with the unexpected nature of this downward transition produces a state of internal crisis that is the source of much frustration and disappointment. An illustration of how these identity pressures were combined to produce identity threat can be found in figure 3 below. In short, prestige was an important part of these individuals’ identities, but they unexpectedly find themselves in a job that according to them is stigmatized, and therefore notably void of such prestige. This led them to become deeply unsatisfied, and prompted a great degree of soul-searching as to who they truly are.

**Figure 3 – Identity Threat**
The following excerpts show examples of individuals who are extremely frustrated by the gap between their identity, crafted through the experience of being in high prestige professions, and their current – stigmatized – occupation.

“It’s pretty hard for an engineer or a doctor or an MBA or something to tell him or for him to come up with this kind of decision he is going to start driving taxi. It’s very hard. Even for me it was very difficult. Even up to today, I don’t want to take my taxi home. No, your brain, can never accept something like that. You were not designed to do a taxi. (...) Inside you’re hidden.” (Driver #24 – trained as a chemist (PhD)

“It’s horrible because when I started this one, I was psychologically in a very bad condition because I was feeling bad for myself. What I’m doing, what I was doing in the past, what was my career, what was my position and now what I’m doing? It was like - you are on the fourth floor and you just jump on first, so it’s like that.” (Driver #1 – trained as an accountant)

All of the respondents perceived this conflict in one form or another and all reported frustration with the Canadian immigration system, Canadian employers, the taxi driving occupation and/or themselves. They were frustrated first because they were not in a position that offered the prestige that they had in their original profession, second because they perceived their new occupation as stigmatized, and third because the disappointment of seeing their positive expectations be unfulfilled. It seems clear that if any of the three parts of this equation – prestige-based identification, occupational stigma and surprise – were not in place, the resulting frustration would have been less pronounced. This resulting frustration directly influenced the participants’ perceived need to engage in identity work.
Identity Work

The taxi drivers interviewed in this study engaged in identity work by crafting elaborate narratives of who they are in their new context. Because this occupational change involved a loss in prestige, these narratives served the important purpose of protecting their self-esteem and self-image. There were two main modes of identity narrative. The first, Identity Protection, consists of an attempted to protect their overall identities, in order to cope with the problem of diminishing prestige in their occupations. In the second, Identity Reconstruction, specific identity narratives were employed with the goal of offering solutions to this problem and re-building their identity. Thus, their narrative encompassed themes of protecting their identities from the drop in prestige and subsequently, of changing their identity so that they could cope with a reality in which this prestige has been lost.

Identity Protection included the identity work categories of Distancing, Image Management and Ephemeralizing. Distancing was found to be further divided between Distancing from the Occupation and Distancing from Other Drivers. Image Management was composed of the specific tactics of Home Image Protection and Immigrant Image Crafting. Finally, Ephemeralizing was composed of the tactics: Leaving the Occupation and Leaving the Country. As for Identity Reconstruction, this also encompassed two tactics: Provider Identity and Vicarious Success. A summary of these identity work tactics can be found in table 3 below.
### Table 3 - Identity Work Tactics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Work Tactic</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Exemplary quote</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protection Tactics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Distancing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distancing from Occupation</td>
<td>Setting themselves apart from the occupation, claiming that the occupation is not who they are</td>
<td>“No, I’m not a cab driver, it’s not my profession”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distancing from other drivers</td>
<td>Separating themselves from other taxi drivers in order to escape the stigma directed towards drivers</td>
<td>“Here, I don’t have one friend. I don’t talk to anybody, never ever. Here, I have seen that there are people who are educated but then what happened was because they intermingled with people at a really low level, they became like them. They started talking like them. They started acting like them.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Image Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Image Protection</td>
<td>Hiding occupation from family and friends in their home country, in order to protect the high-status image that others had of them</td>
<td>“My immediate family they know, but my parents and my cousins they don’t know, because when you spent 30 years in your education, how you’re going to say I am going to do this labor job?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Image Crafting</td>
<td>Crafting a specific image about themselves in Canada in order to promote a positive image of oneself</td>
<td>“It depends on who is in front of me. If he is an educated person, I tell him that back home I am an engineer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephemeralizing</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving Canada</td>
<td>Express a (vague) desire to return to home country</td>
<td>“Well I love my country and... it’s not a bad idea to go back, you know some time to live”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving the Occupation</td>
<td>Express a (vague) desire to change occupations</td>
<td>“She (daughter) is going this year in the university so maybe in a couple of years, maybe we will move from here but I don’t want to drive taxi in rest of my life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restructuring Tactics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shifting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provider Identity</td>
<td>Shifting in salience from a work related identity to family role identity and specifically, identity as an effective provider</td>
<td>“Like usually people work 40 hours. We do double or more than double, you know? And we are happy that we can, we manage to make that much money that we can pay our rent, our bills and the food for our kids.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicarious Success</td>
<td>Satisfaction in children’s professional success if their success is not attainable</td>
<td>“… it’s kind of devotion and sacrifice that immigrants many, many times think, we are doing for the best of our kids and maybe we are not expecting to get so much because it’s for them”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While not all respondents were engaged in all identity work tactics, each of the four broad identity work categories (Distancing, Image Management, Identification Shift and Exit Plans) were employed by most of the respondents. Furthermore, the vast majority of those who used identity reconstruction tactics also used some form of identity protection tactics. This indicated that both the act of protecting one’s identity and rebuilding it in some fashion was important for these drivers. The only exceptions to this were three participants who had been driving a taxi for over 20 years and did not seem to use an identity protection tactic. The only identity work tactic that these three drivers displayed was Identification Shift. In these cases, it is possible that when they had begun their tenure as taxi drivers, they also expressed the desire to distance themselves from the occupation or manage their image. However, they may have become so accustomed to their situation over time that they passed the stage of looking to protect their previous identity, and are already somewhat comfortable in their new, shifted identities. While all three of these drivers see taxi driving as stigmatized and speak of the frustration they felt when they first realized they would not be able to work in the field in which they were trained, they are not currently experiencing such emotional distress and do not mention intentions to change their occupation. The remaining identity work, in these cases, would have the sole purpose of maintaining their new, changed identity. In the following paragraphs, I will proceed to describe these identity work tactics in detail, as well as provide illustrative examples of their occurrences in the data.

**Identity Protection**

Participants were found to employ several identity work tactics aimed at enabling them to protect their identities. The identity protection tactics employed were Distancing, Image Management and Ephemeralizing.
Distancing

Distancing refers to the argument according to which participants do not belong in this occupation and are essentially different from other taxi drivers. They see taxi driving as being very low in prestige and socially tainted, therefore, setting themselves apart from this occupation allows them to remove themselves from the taint and shame associated with it. Overall, 22 out of 28 respondents used distancing as a central identity work tactic. Distancing is a tactic already mentioned in previous studies as being common in tainted jobs (Ashforth et al., 2007; Snow & Anderson, 1987) and offers the opportunity to think: “This is undesirable and low-class, but it is not me”.

Within the identity work category of distancing, two main identity work tactics were found to be prevalent. These are: 1- Distancing from the Occupation; and 2 – Distancing from Other Taxi Drivers. The difference between these two tactics lies in the target in which the respondent believes that most of the stigma is located. Drivers who stated that they didn’t consider themselves to be “taxi drivers” and didn’t identify as such, believe that in distancing themselves from the occupation, they also distance themselves from the taint directed at this occupation. In contrast, drivers who specifically attempted to distance themselves from other taxi drivers, saw the group of taxi drivers as being the main target of stigma, so that distancing themselves from this collective would allow them to escape these attributions.

Distancing from the Occupation. By distancing from the occupation, and saying: “This is not me”, drivers protect their self-image from being tarnished by a tainted category. Previous studies have shown that individuals employ specific identity work tactics in order to distance themselves from a role that is considered tainted or that has negative attributes (Ashforth et al., 2007; Snow & Anderson, 1987). By setting themselves apart from the occupation, they are also
saying that they do not belong to it and can retain a self-image that is higher in prestige and more desirable to them. 21 out of 28 participants showed signs of distancing from the occupation. This was clear in statements such as:

"Up to today mentally I am not here as a driver. But physically no choice because every day you have to have income, you have pay rent, you have to feed them, that stuff."

(Driver #18 – trained as an accountant)

“I’m not a cab driver, it’s not my profession” (Driver #2 – degree in Business)

In both these passages, the drivers were making a point in saying that driving a taxi was their job but it was not who they were, or in other words, it was not really a part of their identity. In doing so, they separate themselves from the stigma related to this occupation and in this way, protect their identity.

**Distancing from other drivers.** Distancing from other drivers was evident in statements in which participants made it clear that not only do they not belong to the taxi driving occupation, but they also do not belong to the group of taxi drivers, which according to them have incorporated the stigma of the occupation. The following passages illustrate this:

“(…) nobody knows me in the industry. I don’t have one friend. I don’t talk to nobody, never ever. After some time I have seen that there are people who are educated but then what happened was because they intermingled with people at a really low level, they became like them. They started talking like them. They started acting like them. If you mix a lion with a jackal the lion becomes like a jackal so you have to stay away from jackals.” (Driver #14 – trained as a pilot)

“My circle is not with the taxi drivers. I know like he is sitting beside me and other guys are sitting beside me when I am driving I talk to them, but when I go home I have like a
different circle I sit with the IT professionals or the accountants...” (Driver #15 – trained as an accountant)

In these excerpts, participants are very clear about the differences between the group of taxi drivers and the group that they see as their own, which is composed of more educated and perhaps higher status people. This is illustrated in the contrast between jackals and lions or between other taxi drivers and IT professionals or accountants. They clearly preferred to associate themselves with the more prestigious group, in the hope that this prestige would be transferred to them. The identity work tactic of distancing from stigmatized peers was similarly identified by Snow & Anderson (1987) in their study of the identity work of homeless people. In both that case and the present study, individuals would try to distance themselves from others who they believed were stigmatized in order to escape this stigma themselves.

**Image Management**

In addition to distancing, another way in which the taxi drivers interviewed in this study used identity work as an attempt to protect their identities was through Image Management. For many of these respondents, the taint that they perceived in their occupation caused them to feel shame. This led them to try to manipulate their image so that others would not apply the stigma attached to taxi drivers in general to them. Previous studies have addressed instances in which individuals try to manipulate their image with the goal of enhancing or protecting their sense of self. (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ibarra, 1999; Snow & Andersson, 1987). This narrative was present in 17 of the 28 interviews and was carried out in two particular ways – Home Image Protection and Immigrant Identity Crafting.

**Home Image Protection.** This particular identity work tactic occurred as respondents made an effort to ensure that family and friends from their home countries, who knew them
when they were employed in the profession for which they were trained, do not find out that they are now driving a taxi. These respondents claim that by making sure that close family and friends see them as the doctors, engineers or accountants that they were in their countries of origin, they are able to “save face”, and their original identity can remain untarnished. On the other hand, the potential discovery by family members in their home country that they are working as taxi drivers in Canada is described as being a great source of shame. The following passages illustrate this:

“My friends, my family back home, nobody knows I drive a cab. I cannot tell them, if I tell them that would be the last day of my life, maybe the worst thing for me, because they saw me in different positions.” (Driver #1 – trained as an accountant)

“Honestly because it’s not something you’re proud of. They would say with your level of education you are driving a taxicab? Or something like that. If I receive a call from home and the radio is on I have to turn it down, so they wouldn’t be able to hear the background.” (Driver #11 – degree in Business)

In these passages, participants express their fear that others would find out that they are taxi drivers in their new country and explain the strategies used to guarantee that their new occupation remains hidden. This was a common theme among participants, with 15 out of 28 respondents stating that they carefully hide their occupation from family and friends in their home countries. In this way, at least in their interactions with these family members, their image is untarnished and there is no dissonance between their image and their identity, which allows them to retain a sense of self integrity. This, however, is only possible because these family members do not have daily and face-to-face contact with them. Interactions with people in their
home country then become a “bubble” of sorts, within which their identities are carefully protected.

**Immigrant Image Crafting.** Other respondents tried to manage their image by carefully selecting the messages they would convey about themselves to people in Canada. This was done either by making a point of telling new acquaintances that they were in fact, trained as professionals, with the goal of increasing the value of their image, or, on the other hand, making a point of not telling new acquaintances that they had university training, with the goal of making the “fall” or loss of prestige less evident. Following is an example of an interviewee who tries to manipulate his image so that others do not know that he has a professional education and went through a downward transition:

“Everybody asks you when they talk to you, they realize that you are an educated guy. Then they start asking then why you started this business and why not... and you just start telling them a story. Then suddenly I felt that no, I should not tell my story to anybody. Now if someone asks me what is your education I tell them I’m a high school (graduate) and that’s it.” (Driver #13 – trained as an electrical engineer)

According to this respondent, it was preferable to be seen as someone who did not have a professional background than someone who had it and lost this status. For these individuals, similar to those who emphasize not telling their families in their home country that they are now driving a taxi, the career descent is in itself shameful and they prefer to transmit an image that does not include this fall.

Other drivers made a point of telling people who they considered to be educated that they too were highly educated. The following passage is an example of this:
“I don’t hide that, I have been driving taxi. But it depends on who is in front of me. If he is an educated person, I tell him that back home I am an engineer. If the person is like, driving a taxi and not educated, I don’t tell them” (Driver # 19 – Trained as an electrical engineer)

In this case, the participant seems to be trying to transmit the message to the educated people that he encounters in Canada that he is essentially the same as them, that he is actually an engineer who happens to be enacting the role of a taxi driver at the moment. By equating himself to professionals, he hopes to avoid being seen in a negative light by them. In both of these cases, participants are communicating the importance of somehow managing or manipulating the image that others have of them in order to “save face” and retain a self image that is more positive than the image that they expect others to have of them.

**Ephemeralizing**

23 of the 28 interviewees made a point of referring to their current occupation as temporary, or “ephemeral”, and claimed that in the future they would either return to their home country or find a different job. Their narrative is of someone who is transient, who is temporarily an immigrant driving a taxi but who is actually and essentially someone else. In this way, they protect the valued aspects of their identity by saying that what they are doing does not threaten who they really are. Most of these plans to occupations or to return to their home country seemed quite vague, and were not expressed in a way that indicated with any certainty whether they would actually be achieved. Rather, the priority seems to be fact that these plans – any plans - exist, and that they focus on a target, however unclear it might be, beyond their current situation. Two identity work tactics were found to have the purpose of “ephemeralizing” their situation: 1 – Leaving the Country and 2 – Leaving the Occupation
**Leaving Canada.** Those who reported a desire to leave Canada were deeply unsatisfied with the overall situation they found after migrating and were especially disturbed about how, in their view, the experience of being an immigrant had cost their careers and their sense of career related prestige. In these cases, participants spoke of desires to return to their home country in the hope that this would enable them to go back in time and proceed in the career path that was cut short by their migration. In this way, their view of their home country is romanticized, which is enforced by their negative view of their current situation. The more negative their current experience, the more the previous experience is construed as positive in contrast, even though this positive perception likely does not capture the entirety of their experience in their home country. It is important to note that all respondents who express a desire to return their home country had migrated to Canada voluntarily, supposedly in search of something better than they had in their countries of origin.

In some cases they also showed awareness of the pitfalls of a plan that involved a return to their home country. Some know that their career success depends on networks and knowledge of specific opportunities that they left behind and that no longer exist. Others recognize that even though they would like to return, their children were too well acculturated to Canadian life and would not be willing to move. For example, in response to the question of whether they had ever considered a return to their home country, participants said the following:

“*Yes. So many times but since I have a daughter and she got the education, she doesn’t want to go back, that’s why I got stuck here.*” (Driver #15 – trained as an accountant)

“*Their kids are their maybe two, three, four, five by the time they come and they are captives. Three, four, five years down the road when they look at the reality they find out*
This feeling of being “stuck”, of being in Canada against one’s true will was seen often among interviewees who expressed a desire to return to their home country. They couldn’t return because in the time that they had stayed in Canada, they children began seeing Canada and not their country of origin as “home”, and would not be willing to leave it.

**Leaving the Occupation.** Many respondents also spoke of their desire to leave taxi driving and change occupations while remaining in Canada. Specifically, 22 out of 28 respondents spoke of taxi driving as a temporary job, and of their strong desire to do something different in the future. Some had specific plans as to how this would take place. For instance, some spoke of study programs that they would like to enroll in, so that they could return to their profession of choice, to a similar field, or even to a completely different occupation, as long as it is perceived as more prestigious than taxi driving. Others spoke of changing occupations not through furthering their education but by saving money for entrepreneurial projects. In any case, these plans were overall quite vague, with very few respondents having specific timelines or showing awareness of the required steps to achieve these goals. In fact, of the 22 respondents who said they had the intent to change their occupation, only 8 had concrete plans, with timelines and specific steps in place. The other 14 expressed the desire to do something different, but had trouble verbalizing what, when or how this would take place. An example of this intent can be found in the following excerpt:

“I would like to start my own business. I am about to do that. Maybe subway store or my wife is a hair stylist and she wants to start her own... We will be in the business soon, maybe next two or three years.” (Driver #27 – trained as an engineer)
In this statement, while the respondent has a couple of career options, neither of them seem concrete, nor does the timeline for when they would be pursued. Indeed, while this may be impossible to determine with certainty within the scope of this study, the fact that they were so vague indicates that many may never come into fruition. It is for this reason that this may be considered more of an identity tactic than an actual statement of plans. By clarifying in their discourse that taxi driving is temporary for them, they craft their identity as that of someone in transformation and focus on who they have been in the past and on who they plan to be in the future, but not on what they are doing in the present. Thus, they take their focus away from the present and ensure that they see themselves and that others see them as someone who is temporarily driving a taxi and not truly as a Taxi Driver.

A surprising aspect of this attempt to change occupations is that few drivers spoke of plans to return to their original occupation. Specifically, of the 22 respondents who mentioned they would like to change their occupation, only eight said that they would only seriously look for a job within their original field. For the majority, the most important criteria in deciding whether or not to invest in a new occupational change and/or what type of new job they would look for was the increase in prestige that this new transition would enable. The following passage illustrates this sentiment:

“Very soon I am going to quit from this business. I am going to any business - some kind of dealership, any kind of business.... Or salesperson...” (Taxi #10 – Trained as an architect)

This respondent, like many others in this study, did not have the goal of going back to the architecture field, but instead, thought of becoming an entrepreneur or a salesperson because these are perceived by him as being more prestigious occupations. This reinforces the idea that
for many of these individuals their primary target of identification prior to immigrating was not their previous occupation itself, but its prestige. Thus, pursuing a high-prestige occupation was a way to avoid the loss of an important and positive part of their identities.

**Identity Restructuring**

**Shifting**

While identity protection tactics have the goal of protecting individuals’ self esteem and valued parts of their identity, identity reconstruction tactics have the goal of re-focusing one’s identity to a different aspect of their lives. This tactic was present in 16 out of the 28 interviews and it is how respondents answered the “what now?” question of how they would craft their identities into something new and positive after they had tackled the difficulties of their current situation. These tactics included: 1- The construction of a “Provider Identity” and 2 – “Vicarious Identification”, both which refer to a shift, in which respondents focus on their role in the family realm rather than on their work life.

**Provider Identity.** Some respondents try to re-craft their identities by shifting their main target of identification from their work role to other roles, more specifically, the roles of a husband, father and provider. This identity work tactic was employed by 15 out of the 28 interviewees. Most of the respondents (25 out of 28) were married at the time of the interview and 27 had children. Furthermore, among the 25 respondents that were married, 18 were the sole bread-winners of the household, as their spouses did not work outside of the home. One of the most frequently mentioned advantages of taxi driving was that it had a good earning potential, enabling them to be effective providers. In contrast, because they perceive their career as having transitioned in a negative direction, they do not feel as successful in their professional role. Previous studies indicate that people are far more likely to identify with roles that will enable a
boost to their self esteem (Ashforth et al., 2008; Pratt, 1998). Perhaps it is for this reason that in their identity narrative, respondents tended to prioritize the roles in which they believe that they were successful rather than those in which they consider themselves to be unsuccessful: in order to preserve a strong and positive sense of self. An example of this can be seen in the following passages:

“The taxi business has supported me a lot. My kitchen is very good you know my kitchen is running, my kids are happy, everything will work.” (Driver #13 – trained as an electrical engineer)

“I make good money, I help my parents. See, everyone is educated now. Now this is their luck to get a job or not. They have completed, I like help them financially in Sweden, my brothers, and my dad said oh I need some money... I did it. So I am fine. Now I am making - saving something for me because now my kids are getting big, right? (Driver #4 – trained as a computer scientist)

These excerpts demonstrate respondents’ sense of pride in their ability to provide for their children and, in the case of the second passage, help his extended family as well. It is suggested that this pride and sense of fulfillment can become an important part of these individuals’ identity and can enhance their self esteem in the same way as the prestige attached to their profession did in the past.

**Vicarious Success.** In some cases this shift occurred in such a way that respondents no longer sought professional success for themselves but instead, for their children. This tactic was present in eight of the 28 interviews and those who employed it stated that they are not bothered by their inability to fulfill their professional goals in Canada, as long as their children will be able to fulfill their goals. Previous studies have also concluded that immigrants often invest
heavily in their children’s education and professionalization, as they realize that some of the requirements to being successful in their new country that were unattainable to them, such as language fluency, local education and local networks, are available to their children (Kim, 2004; Simons & Plaza, 1998). Furthermore, because they made the decision to migrate, they see themselves primarily as the ones that enabled the success of their children in their new country. Hence, they are proud because they enabled their children’s success and in this way, by being “vicariously successful”, they are able to maintain a strong identity and high self-esteem.

An illustration of this is the following interview excerpt:

“I want her to be a doctor or something like that, very high position. If I am not going to become a lawyer or something else, but I want my children, my daughter especially, to be a doctor or something. I can do anything for my daughter.” (Driver #6 – trained as a lawyer)

For this respondent, not being able to practice the profession for which he was trained and not being able to obtain another high-prestige job becomes more bearable if his daughter is able to reach such a position. He feels fulfilled through her professional fulfillment and through the realization that he is the one that provided the means to her success, through his decision to migrate to Canada and through his ability to provide financially for his family’s livelihood.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of these interviews, it became clear that internationally educated professionals who undergo a downward occupational transition face several identity pressures, which lead to various identity work tactics, which in turn enable them to protect and rebuild their identity. In the next sections I will present a more detailed discussion of these findings,
considering how they can be better understood in light of previous literature, how they contribute to specific theoretical fields, and their implications for theory and practice.
Chapter 5: DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the identity work of individuals in situations of downward occupational transition and specifically, transitions to a tainted occupation. To this end, interview data was gathered with internationally educated immigrant professionals who are working as taxi drivers in Toronto. An analysis of these interviews revealed that members of this population perceive the occupation of taxi driving as stigmatized and are deeply affected by this occupational transition. Furthermore, their situation contains certain pressures and consequently an appraisal of identity threat, which leads them to engage in specific identity work tactics in order to protect their self esteem and re-craft their identity.

Previous literature has described how in upward transitions, individuals apply identity work to strive to be comfortable in their new work related identities (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). This study revealed an opposite movement: individuals applying identity work to protect their original identities, showing no desire to become identified with their new occupation. Their only option to effectively change their identities came in the form of shifting their priorities away from work-based identity altogether and instead, focusing on their role within the family realm. The findings in this study were also distinct from those in the Dirty Work literature which as of yet, has not differentiated between individuals who have transitioned to a tainted occupation from those who have always been in such positions. Hence, while the Dirty Work literature describes tactics whereby individuals use positive occupational ideologies and social weighting to enhance their occupational identity or image within tainted occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007), the participants in this study engage mostly in tactics that indicate a less acceptant attitude toward their new occupation and its identity demands.
This study also revealed that the combination of specific identity pressures determines the direction of identity work, indicating that the context in which an identity transition occurs, and the way in which this context is understood by individuals, is critical in understanding its outcomes. Focus on context seems to have been undervalued in the identity literature thus far, as most previous studies have focused much more on the patterns through which individuals revise, maintain or rebuild their identity and less so on the identity pressures that lead specific identity work patterns to take place. This study therefore contributes to the identity and dirty work literature by placing perceived context at the forefront of discussion and by suggesting that it is the combination of a set of identity pressures, rather than individual pressures in isolation, that drives identity work in certain directions. This research also contributes to theory by furthering our current understanding of identity threat, its antecedents and the ways in which it can be resolved. In addition, these findings enable an expansion of our current understanding of occupational identification to include factors beyond the enactment of a particular job.

Finally, reaching a more thorough understanding of identity work in situations of downward identity transition and entrance to dirty work occupations is important not only because this context has not been studied before, but also because it is a context in which there is a great deal of human suffering. Deepening our understanding of this phenomenon therefore allows us to raise awareness and in this way potentially influence practical improvements whether it is through policy changes or within organizations.

In the following paragraphs I will proceed to elaborate on the identity pressures and identity work tactics carried out by internationally educated professionals who have undergone a downward occupational transition and are now working as taxi drivers. In order to illustrate
some of the unique aspects of this situation, I will compare and contrast these findings with previous studies on identity work, role transitions and dirty work.

**Identity Pressures**

**Unmet Expectations.** This data revealed that participants were surprised and disappointed with the employment situation found upon migrating. Many arrived in Canada with the promise of seamlessly continuing their careers in the same field that they belonged to in their countries of origin. With only two exceptions, the great majority of participants in this study had immigrated to Canada through the Skilled Workers program, according to which one’s eligibility to immigrate is determined based on a system that awards a certain number of points based on knowledge of English, prior work experience, and level of education, among other criteria (Houle & Yssaad, 2010). Hence, this system supposedly measures one’s adaptability to life and work in Canada and sends the message to potential migrants that since Canada accepts them based on these criteria, achieving a sufficient number of points is an indicator that they will achieve professional success in Canada.

However, these expectations are often not achieved, due, among other factors, to discrimination on the part of employers, lack of sufficient government-sponsored bridging and mentoring programs, gate-keeping activities on the part of professional associations, lack of understanding on the part of immigrants of the importance of networks in Canada and lack of actual instrumental contacts (Hakak et al., 2010; Hakak & Al Ariss, 2013). These factors are often not communicated to prospective migrants, therefore it is understandable that they would come as a surprise. In fact, one of the respondents in this study mentioned specifically that he first thought of applying to immigrate to Canada after seeing a pamphlet at the office of his professional association in his home country advertising the Canada Skilled Workers Program.
Clearly, the message he received through this endorsement by his professional association was that he would be able to continue working in Canada in his original field.

Moreover, while one might argue that the decision to migrate and subsequently to become a taxi driver was voluntary for these individuals, and that therefore they must have anticipated a reasonable number of “surprises”, I argue that even if migration itself was voluntary, the downward transition was involuntary. Moreover, an individuals’ perception that their role transition was involuntary negatively impacts their sense of control and enhances the desirability of their former role (Ashforth, 2001). In this case, their belief in the involuntariness of their transition leads them to feel a lack of control and to become still more attached to their previous role identity.

Furthermore, it is likely that this element of surprise is also prominent in downward occupational transitions that do not involve migration. If voluntariness is seen on a continuum, as has been suggested in previous literature (Ashforth, 2001), then individuals who are led to a downward occupational transition in their own countries without having made the conscious decision to dramatically change their status quo, undergo a far more strikingly involuntary transition than that of immigrants. For these individuals, losing their job due to plant closures, obsolescence of key technologies or other radical contextual changes often comes as a complete surprise. Previous literature has described this abrupt and unexpected loss of an important target of identification as a subtractive change, which often leads to the experiences of identity liminality or identity ambiguity (Ashforth, 2001; Beech, 2011; Hakak, 2014). This situation, in which there is a lack of understanding as to who one is and the direction one is headed, is believed to be highly distressing.
In addition, regardless of migration status, it is possible for individuals to resort to the discourse according to which although others suffer setbacks, they thought that they would be immune. In the current study this is reflected in the denial-ridden claim that while they knew that there were obstacles to be faced when migrating, their particular skills and resources would allow them to be protected and make a smooth transition to the local labor market. In the case of non-migrants, this would be the case of individuals who mistakenly hold on to the belief that despite economic downturns, their jobs remain safe. The present study reveals that the disconnect between one’s optimistic beliefs and a more stark reality is an identity pressure, that prompts individuals to question their self-image and affiliations.

**Perception of Occupational Stigma.** Perception of Occupational Stigma was another strong identity pressure. Taxi driving has specifically been described as a socially tainted and low prestige occupation (Kreiner et al., 2006 (a)), and members of such tainted occupations are said to be acutely aware of the fact that they are socially stigmatized and are recipients of negative cultural stereotypes (Major & O’Brien, 2005). Furthermore, it has been argued that it is the perception of social stigma, more so than stigma itself, that leads individuals to attempt to psychologically respond to this stigma (Meisenbach, 2010).

In this study, it is likely that this perception of taint and stigma is especially salient as participants had transitioned from a non-tainted occupation and therefore clearly saw the contrast between their previous and current jobs (Major & O’Brian, 2005). This recent transition prompts them to attach themselves to specific and non-stigmatized self-images from the past and in this way convince themselves and others that they do not truly belong in this new job. This attachment to their former, non-stigmatized role identities while in a new, stigmatized occupation prompts the need to apply specific identity work tactics to reconstruct their identity.
Thus, protective identity work tactics such as ephemeralizing, distancing and image management become possible and are especially relevant for individuals in this context. This may not be the case for individuals who have always been in tainted occupations and who therefore have never had the opportunity to truly envision themselves in a different light. For those individuals, differently from those in the present study, attaching oneself to a position in which there is no taint may be more of a fantasy than a known reality. They may imagine what it would be like to have an occupation that is not tainted, but may not have any experience in such a position. On the other hand, those who undergo a downward occupational transition, such as the participants in this study, have been in high-prestige and non-stigmatized occupations before, so an attachment to this past status is not only possible, but is also concrete.

**Prestige-based Identification.** Finally, another strong identity pressure found in this study was “Prestige Based Identification”. Considering that all participants of this study were trained as professionals, I initially expected them to be highly identified with their professions. Professions are considered to be a strong target of identification, often being even stronger than identification towards one’s organization (Ashforth & Johnson, 2001; Ashforth, et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2006). However, findings indicate that they were not strongly identified with the professions themselves, but rather, with the prestige of their original professions.

Previous studies have described professional identification as being directly related to the work a professional does and to the traits of prototypical members of that profession (Ibarra, 1999; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Pratt et al., 2006). Thus, professionals would observe the work carried out by doctors, accountants or engineers, construct an identity that they see as matching this set of activities and the image of prototypical members, and then receive feedback from other occupational members regarding the appropriateness of this identity. They would then
maintain or modify this constructed identity depending on such feedback (Ibarra, 1999). However, the participants in this study mostly show signs of having a weak identification with the activities and responsibilities that are specific to the profession in which they were trained and do not consistently mention plans to return to those occupations.

Other research has considered the possibility that professionals may identify with aspects of an enacted occupation, rather than with the occupation as a whole (Ashforth et al. 2013; Fine, 1996; Kram et al., 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Thus, individuals are said to identify to a different extent to certain groups of behaviors that are specific to and expected in their jobs. For instance, within a managerial job individuals may be expected to enact roles that are similar to that of an administrator, ambassador/communicator and/or culture generator (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and they may identify with some of these roles but not with the others. Still, this compartmentalization of identification as described in previous studies is related to conflicting aspects of the enactment of occupations, rather than the idea, image or reputation of these occupations.

Considering that people identify with a social group in order to satisfy needs for self esteem enhancement, safety, affiliation and meaning (Pratt, 1998), this finding suggests that perhaps it is possible to satisfy these needs through certain aspects of a profession and not necessarily through its enactment. In this study, participants felt as if their original profession contributed to the explanation of who they are, not because of what they did in those jobs, but because it was a prestigious job, and therefore one that allowed them to meet important psychological needs. Hence, this study suggests an opportunity for future studies to expand the definition of professional identity to include elements that are intrinsic to the profession but are not necessarily tied to its enactment.
This increased importance of the topic of prestige can be attributed to two factors: First, because their accounts of the past are likely to be influenced by their present, (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), it is possible that prestige was actually not as important to them in the past as they claim. However, it is certainly important now, as the contrast between the degree of prestige in their new and old occupations is undeniable. Nevertheless, given that the focus of this study is the identity work that they undertake following a downward occupational transition, the objective truth of whether they truly identified, in the past, with the prestige of their occupation, is less important than whether it is part of their current narratives and subsequently, identity work efforts. It is this current perception, and not their actual past identification, that drives their identity work in the present (Meisenbach, 2010).

The second likely reason for the increased valuation of the prestige of their original occupation, is the sharp contrast that they perceive between their former profession and their current stigmatized job. Thus, the fact that taxi driving is perceived to be stigmatized led them to elevate the salience of the overall topic of prestige and stigma in their self-narratives and it is the combination and contrast between perceived stigma and prestige-based identification, more so than either of these identity pressures on their own, that drives the appraisal of identity threat. This point will be addressed in more detail in the following section.

**Prestige and Stigma: Combination of salient yet contrasting occupational traits.**

Similarly to previous studies on the topic of identity work (e.g. Kreiner et al., 2006 (b)), this study revealed several distinguishable identity pressures. However, it is unlikely that these pressures are actually experienced by individuals as completely separate and independent forces. Rather, one would expect that individuals perceive these identity pressures as indistinguishable components of the overall situation that drives identity threat. Therefore, because they are
perceived as a complex whole, it is also likely that these perceived pressures interact in how they influence ideas or behaviors regarding one’s identity. In this case, while occupational stigma is the antecedent to certain identity work tactics already explored by the dirty work literature (Ashforth et al., 2007; Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), the combination of this stigma with prestige-based identification leads to unique identity work tactics.

This indicates an opportunity for future studies to continue to explore the relationships between different identity pressures when addressing identity work patterns. In this case, the high valuation of the prestige of their previous occupation, combined with their strong perception of stigma in their current occupation is a clear contrast, which in turn drives identity threat and subsequently, specific identity work tactics.

**Identity Threat**

Previous studies have indicated that macro role transitions and perceived inconsistencies between role demands and identity leads to identity work (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999; Kreiner, et al., 2006 (b); Pratt et al., 2006). This study indicates that in situations of downward transition, in which these pressures and inconsistencies are clearly perceived as negative, there is an additional component at play, that is caused by this confluence of identity pressures and that drives identity work. Specifically, participants in this study spoke of deep feelings of frustration, inadequacy and disappointment in themselves that are a product of prestige-based identification, occupational stigma and unmet expectations and it is this internal crisis that prompted their efforts to revise their identity. Thus, it is suggested that it is not the inconsistencies themselves but the appraisal of identity threat which occurs in response to these inconsistencies that leads to identity work.
Identity threat can be understood as a specific type of stress, resulting from the cognitive and emotional appraisal that certain environmental stressors may damage one’s identity, and associated with a great deal of psychological pain (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Petriglieri, 2011). Individuals in situations of identity threat are compelled to try to protect their identities and shield it from harm or to change their identities (Petriglieri, 2011). These two dynamics were found in this study as respondents attempted to protect their identities as prestigious professionals and restructure their identities by focusing on non-threatened aspects of the self.

This study contributes to present theory on identity threat by clarifying some of the specific and interactive factors that may precede it when an important target of identification is lost. Further, these findings also contribute to theory by demonstrating that when faced with identity threat, individuals use identity work not necessarily by choosing between a protective or a restructuring response (Petriglieri, 2011), but possibly by engaging simultaneously in both modes of identity work tactic. Thus, participants of this study attempted to protect important aspects of their identity while, at the same time, shift their focus to non-threatened aspects of their selves. This is in alignment with the general view whereby social identities are multiple and are not restricted to the context of work (Ashforth, 2001). Thus, protection and restructuring efforts are not necessarily exclusionary, if one considers that individuals may react to threat by protecting some aspects of their identity and restructuring others.

This leads to yet another novel finding of this study, which is that the resolution of threat is not necessarily directly related to the same realm of the lost target of identification. For instance, it is currently believed that individuals craft different strategies to resolve the crisis stemming from a perceived absence of work related identification depending on whether they are drawn to
the new, post-change work situation (Hakak, 2014). Petriglieri (2011) explains how identity exit from a specific, work related identity, is an option that has an extremely high psychological cost and occurs only when the threat is very high and the alternative identity is clear. However, the specific dynamic whereby one attempts to restructure one’s identity by altering the hierarchy of salience of one’s social identities has not yet been demonstrated empirically. In this case, individuals’ attempts to restructure their identity consists of focusing on other aspects of their new reality, such as their roles as a father and a provider, instead of with aspects that are related to work. Thus, identity restructuring and protection may occur with respect to any of individuals’ multiple social identities, and not only that which is directly related to the threatened identity.

Identity Work

The identity work tactics at play in this study were divided between protective and restructuring tactics. Such labels were determined through a primarily grounded exploration and analysis of the data but were found to confirm those predicted in the literature (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014; Petriglieri, 2011). Protection tactics refer to retaining or reclaiming an identity that is thought to be lost or threatened. As for restructuring tactics, these refer to the identity work that is focused on the future, and on regaining a sense of identification. This distinction has also been compared to the grieving process, in which having lost an important target of identification, individuals would move dynamically between loss orientation and restoration orientation (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014), or in other words, between a focus on protecting the past and on building a new identity for the future.

Some of the main protective identity work tactics that have been proposed in previous studies include: derogation, or condemning the condemner, in which the validity of the source of threat is diminished (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Fiol, Pratt & O’Connor 2009); concealment,
which the threatened identity is hidden in order to avoid the impending threat (Creed & Scully, 2000) and finally, positive occupational ideologies (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999) or positive-distinctiveness, in which one attempts to demonstrate to others the positive value of one’s identity (Creed & Scully, 2000) (Petriglieri, 2011). Restructuring tactics have also been described in previous studies and are said to consist of reducing the importance of a threatened role identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Crocker & Major, 1989); changing the meaning associated with the threatened or harmed role identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006); or exiting a threatened role identity (Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988) (Petriglieri, 2011).

**Identity Protection**

In the context analyzed in this study, protective tactics consisted more specifically of Ephemeralizing, Distancing and Image Management. These tactics are all employed in an attempt to protect individuals’ identity and to cope with the perceived contradictions between their identity and the demands of their new reality. While their initial identity, from which they derived much of their sense of positive self-esteem, affiliation and meaning, was strongly based on the prestige of their original profession, they perceive their current occupation as being low in prestige and stigmatized. Faced with this very clear contrast, the protective identity work that they engage in has the goal of maintaining, through their identity, the benefits of their previous situation.

**Ephemeralizing.** In this context, “ephemeralizing”, or making their occupation into something that is transient, is essentially a re-affirmation that taxi driving is not their true identity. By clarifying that taxi driving is “only” temporary, they allow themselves to focus instead on who they have been in the past and on who they plan to be in the future, but not on what they are doing in the present.
In some cases, this identity work tactic appeared in the form of a desire or intent to change their occupation, while in other cases, because this sample consisted of internationally trained professionals, participants ephemeralized their current situation by speaking of plans or wishes to return to their countries of origin. Hence, when speaking of a wish to return to their home country, their desire seemed to be to return to their situation prior to immigrating, therefore erasing the experience of migration. This is clearly an illusion – the concrete experience of immigrating is in the past and cannot be undone, and it seems reasonable to speculate that they realize this to some extent, even if below the level of consciousness. Therefore when speaking of the desire to return, their plans were overly vague and included external reasons as to why they could never become concrete. An example of this would be that their children were too well adapted to life in Canada to allow for a return. Their narrative surrounding the desire to change occupations was also very vague, and only rarely included timelines or realistic strategies as to how this change would actually occur. The purpose of speaking about a change in occupation therefore seemed to be about identity work, rather than an account of an actual strategy.

Thus, both in the case of a narrative of return to home country and changing occupations, they are shifting their attention temporally – either focusing on the context they left behind, whether this past was the high-prestige occupation they held before or their country of origin, or focusing on plans for a better future. This identity work tactic may have been especially discernible in the present study because the population studied were immigrants, who had recently undergone a major life transition and therefore may be more likely to see themselves as being in an ongoing transient state. However, it is also likely that non-immigrants who undergo an involuntary downward occupational transition would feel unsettled in their new role and would therefore develop a narrative according to which it is purely temporary.
These usually vague alternative realities are much more effective in meeting their needs for affiliation, meaning, self-esteem enhancement and safety than their present occupation, and therefore they are the identities that they choose to rely on. These are, however, distinct from the act of exiting the identity as has been described in situations of an identity restructuring response to identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011), or a response to a macro context change (Ashforth, 2001; Fiol, 2002; Hakak, 2014). On the contrary, the vagueness in the expressions of the identity tactic of ephemeralizing indicate more of an effort to communicate that the respondent is not a taxi driver than an actual intent to exit the identity.

**Distancing.** Distancing is also a tactic employed in order re-affirm that they are “more than” or “better than” the taxi driving occupation and/or other taxi drivers. The identity work tactic of distancing from stigmatized peers was similarly identified by Snow & Anderson (1987) in their study of the identity work of homeless people. Ashforth et al. (2007) also described how managers of dirty work jobs distance themselves from their roles both cognitively and behaviorally as a defense tactic. In these cases as well as in the present study, individuals try to distance themselves from a role that is perceived as stigmatized in order to escape this stigma.

They also employ identity work in an attempt to set themselves apart from other taxi drivers. While one might argue that the taxi driving occupation is by nature somewhat isolating, it is noteworthy that participants in this study spoke of making active efforts not to interact with other drivers. However, by doing so, they may unknowingly be sacrificing opportunities to enhance their self esteem and protect their identity against the stigma related to their occupation.

According to previous studies on the topic of dirty work, a strong group culture is highly beneficial as it allows members of tainted occupations to counter threats to self-esteem that may originate from membership in these occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Specifically,
individuals in “dirty” occupations would craft advantageous comparisons between their group and others, by claiming that others are actually worse than themselves (“condemning the condemners”), or by elevating the importance of outsiders who view their work positively (“supporting the supporters”) (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). In this way, maintaining a strong group culture enables the formation of an “us versus them” mentality, and creates the possibility of support and new shared narratives that may be stronger than individual narratives in countering stigma. Still another purpose of a strong group culture is enabling the creation of social buffers, which consists of a network of equals that can insulate and protect members of dirty work occupations from being stigmatized by the broader society (Ashforth et al., 2007).

This suggests a paradox in the identity work tactics employed by this population: while they avoid relationships with other taxi drivers in an attempt to protect their identity from the stigma attributed to this occupation and occupational members, in doing so they are also stopping themselves from reaping the positive outcomes of a strong group culture, such as the construction of favorable inter-group comparisons or social buffers. As is illustrated in figure 4, this relationship is cyclical – the more drivers that engage in distancing, the weaker the culture becomes, which implies in them not being able to count on the social support that could potentially mitigate their sense of frustration and disappointment in themselves. Thus, by avoiding the formation of a strong group culture, individuals may essentially be increasing the strength of their felt identity threat. This identity threat then leads them to engage in more identity work, potentially including the protective tactic of distancing. Thus, while distancing is employed as an attempt to resolve individuals’ internal crisis, it may indirectly lead to an exacerbation of this same crisis.
**Image Management.** Image Management is a tactic that focuses on ensuring that respondents’ identity was recognized by others, despite the contradictions between it and the demands of their current occupation. Thus, they tried to ensure that both their acquaintances in their home country as well as new relationships forged in Canada perceive them in a way that is coherent to how they perceive themselves. Specifically, many hide their occupations from family and friends in their home country, sometimes for several years, and claim to be deeply ashamed of working as a taxi driver. This tactic, also known as concealment (Creed & Scully, 2000; Petriglieri, 2011) or “passing” (Snow & Anderson, 1997), is only possible because these family members do not have frequent contact with them. In other dirty work studies, this pattern was not as evident (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007), likely because the possibility of hiding their occupation from a specific portion of family members and friends is more difficult for non-immigrants who often have frequent contact with most of their acquaintances.
According to previous literature, negative perceptions by others, such as attributions of taint, lead to reduced psychological well-being and decreased job satisfaction (Ashforth et al., 2007; Baran et al., 2012). In addition, stigmatization, such as in this case the stigma that is perceived to be directed toward taxi driving, is considered to be harmful to one’s identity (Crocker & Major, 1989; Major & O’Brian, 2005). Hence, the patterns by which participants made concerted efforts to hide their tainted occupation from family members who knew them as professionals is an identity protection tactic, as it can be viewed as an attempt to keep this previous role identity alive and un tarnished, at least in the minds of their friends and family. In sum, by hiding their occupation from friends and family, they are able to escape harmful perceptions as well as their negative consequences.

In other instances, drivers demonstrated a similar sense of shame of revealing to Canadians that they underwent a downward transition, or a specific pride in telling others that they have an advanced degree. Previous studies have addressed instances in which individuals try to manipulate their image with the goal of enhancing or protecting their sense of self (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Creed & Scully, 2000; Fine, 1996; Petriglieri, 2011; Snow & Anderson, 1987). Specifically, the pattern whereby drivers avoid telling Canadian passengers that they have university degrees is aligned with previous work which indicates that the negative social impact of a downward employment transition can be even more harmful than the impact of unemployment (West, et al., 1990). The “fall” that is evident in downward transitions can be seen as a marked sign of failure, whereas unemployment may be more easily masked or portrayed as voluntary (Ashforth, 2001).

**Identity Protection Tactics – Concluding Remarks.** Identity loss is thought to involve sentiments of grief, and it is believed that in some cases, individuals may become “stuck” in the
emotions and thoughts related to their lost identity (Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). A similar dynamic occurs here, as individuals apply identity protection tactics to attach themselves to their former, non-stigmatized identities. However, maintaining strong identification to a role that can no longer be enacted may bring about more distress than if they were able to exit this role (Tosti-Kharas, 2012). Hence, utilizing protective identity work tactics and maintaining an orientation towards their lost, non-stigmatized identity may actually be impeding them from achieving a more adaptive situation in the mid to long run.

Previous literature on Dirty Work suggests that individuals attempt to protect their identities against harm or threat from stigma through several identity work tactics, many of which were not present in this data, for reasons that are specific to the situation of these participants. First, it has been argued that members of dirty occupations engage in identity work tactics of reframing, in which the negative value of the stigma is denied and recalibrating, in which non-stigmatized aspects of one’s work are exaggerated or the stigmatized aspects reduced (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). These tactics were not identifiable in the present study, which, I argue, can be attributed at least in part to the fact that these individuals were “newcomers” to a tainted occupation. Because the stigma towards taxi drivers is something that they shared from before they became drivers themselves, it is especially difficult for them to deny this stigma through reframing, or even to downplay stigmatized aspects of their work through recalibrating. Their previous membership in a non-tainted occupation causes the stigma associated to taxi driving to be more salient than it would be had they not undergone this transition (Major & O’Brien, 2005), and it is therefore more difficult for them to push it aside, or to somehow change the meaning of this role identity.
It has also been argued that members of tainted occupations engage in positive social comparisons such as condemning the condemners and supporting the supporters (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Petriglieri, 2011). It has already been suggested in the section on Distancing (above) that participants in this study do not engage in these tactics, in part because the group culture formed is too weak to maintain a “us vs. them” mentality, necessary for this social weighting to occur. However, yet another contributing factor to this may be that in this case, the source of identity threat is too widespread, so that it is impossible for them to target any one, cohesive group as the source of stigmatization. Identity threat is perceived as stemming from the government and immigration officials, Canadian customers, family members that remained in their home country, the Canadian labor market in general, etc. Thus, condemning those who caused led them to perceive their identity as threatened is very difficult as it would imply in condemning society as a whole, with very few exceptions.

**Identity Restructuring - Shifting**

The tactic of identity restructuring refers to an abandonment of participants’ professional identity in favor of one that is believed to be a more certain source of prestige and high self-esteem, in this case, that of a family provider. Multiple role identities are believed to be more or less salient depending both on hierarchies of subjective importance, which measures the importance of a role to the individual, and hierarchies of situational relevance, which measures the degree to which an identity is appropriate in a given context (Ashforth, 2001; Hogg et al., 1995). Furthermore, it has been argued that when faced with a unfavorable self-image, individuals may shift their focus to a more favorable role identity (Ashforth, 2001; Mussweiler, Gabriel & Bodenhausen, 2000).
Due to the frustrations derived from the combination of prestige-based identification, perception of occupational stigma and unmet expectations, their work life is no longer a self-esteem enhancing target of identification. On the other hand, they can honestly claim “success” and therefore a more positive sense of self in their roles as a provider and father. Thus, because their job as a taxi driver was seen by them as stigmatized, and overall damaging to their self-esteem, they shifted their focus to the more favorable family-based identity. This finding is aligned with several previous studies in the field, in which it is argued that reducing the importance of a threatened role identity in favor of a non threatened role identity is a common response to identity threat or harm (Crocker & Major, 1989; Petriglieri, 2011). This phenomenon is also akin to the concept of refocusing (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999), whereby individuals in stigmatized occupations change their focus to non-stigmatized aspects of their work, or in this case, the financial gains that are made possible from their work as taxi drivers.

In some cases, respondents indicated that they would feel vicariously successful if their children obtain professional success. In these instances, it seems as though they still consider their professions and occupational prestige to be important targets of identification, as they believe that professional success is an important goal for their children to achieve. Thus, while in the case of an identity shift from professional identity to other roles they are shifting their focus from the work to the family realm, in the tactic of vicarious success they seem to maintain the importance placed on work life and professional success. The shift in this case pertains to the person who is expected to enact this professional success, which is no longer them but instead, their children. In both cases, whether this shift consisted of a change of targets of identification or of the person that is meant to embody the practice of a desirable occupation, participants were
trying to restructure their identity by building a context that would allow their sense of self to thrive.

**Identity Restructuring Tactics – Concluding Remarks.** Previous authors have found that when an identity is threatened or harmed, individuals may engage in restructuring tactics to recreate their identity (Kreiner et al., 2006 (b); Petriglieri, 2011). In this study, individuals engaged in tactics that increased the salience of some roles in their lives – more specifically that of a father and provider. By doing this, they readjusted the hierarchy of salience of their identities, privileging the role which is most likely to enhance their self esteem (Ashforth, 2001).

However, other restructuring tactics were far less applicable in this population than in other instances of macro identity transition. For instance, it has been suggested that in an instance of upward identity transition, in which one’s initial identity is strong and the magnitude of the contrast between one’s identity and the identity of the new role is large, one would engage in identity patching, whereby aspects of the new role would be added onto one’s existent role to create a new, supposedly more complete “super role”, and in this way restructure one’s identity (Pratt et al., 2006). In this case, while there was a strong sense of initial identification with aspects of their profession and a large distance between this initial identity and that of the taxi driving occupation, the new role was undesirable and therefore restructuring occurred outside of the realm of work.

**Conclusion**

It is suggested that in situations of downward transition and entrance into dirty work occupations, individuals engage in specific identity work tactics in order to make sense of their identity and protect or re-create their sense of self. In addition, the process by which this occurs and the identity work tactics applied are distinct from those that have been shown to occur in
instances of identity work in upward transitions or when individuals have always been in tainted occupations (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Ibarra, 1999; Petriglieri, 2011; Pratt et al., 2006).

Regarding instances of upward identity transition, previous literature indicates that when acquiring a new role identity individuals will engage in certain identity work tactics depending on several factors. Pratt et al., (2006) propose that this process will depend on the magnitude of the difference between the new role and one’s previous role identity, on the degree to which individuals have the discretion necessary to change their jobs to better match their identity, and on the strength of their original role identification. The resulting identity work tactics include patching, in which the new role identity is added on to the original role identity, enriching, in which the original role identity is maintained with the addition of aspects of the new role, and splinting, in which the old role is used merely as a support for the development of the new role identity, which in turn becomes the central role identity (Pratt et al, 2006).

Another important study on identity work in upward transitions was conducted by Ibarra (1999), in which identification is said to occur as individuals observe role models or prototypical role members, develop provisional selves in imitation of these members and seek feedback as to whether these provisional selves match the role models (Ibarra, 1999). Similarly, Ashforth et al (2008) propose a process model of identification whereby individuals enact new identities, receive and interpret responses from others regarding these enactments and in this way, incorporate elements of the role into their overall identity.

However, in a situation of downward occupational transition, such as in the present study, this dynamic is radically different. Members of this group have no desire or motivation – whether intrinsic or extrinsic - to identify with their new role. In addition to them perceiving the
role as stigmatized, and to their high valuation of occupational prestige, the structure of the industry also does not seem to require or encourage identification. Taxis are almost exclusively leased and there is no employment relationship with a manager or organization, which could have served as other potential targets of identification (Ashforth et al., 2008). Therefore, in this situation of downward occupational transition, the focus was on lost targets of identification and on other, non-work roles, rather than on the new work role.

Other studies have specifically address the ways by which individuals navigated situations in which one’s identity is harmed or threatened. For instance, Petriglieri (2011), proposes a specific model of response to identity threat, arguing that certain tactics will be employed depending on factors such as one’s social support, the strength of the threat, ease of interaction with the source of the threat, perceived ability to change others’ perception of their identity, importance of the threatened identity, clear alternative identity, and length of time that one has had the threatened identity. The specific combination of these factors would then lead the individual to protect their threatened identity through derogation, concealment or positive-distinctiveness tactics or restructure their identity through exit, meaning change or importance change and, as an end result, the threat would be maintained or eliminated.

A specific type of identity threat or loss is said to occur with members of dirty work occupations as they struggle to maintain a positive sense of self despite the stigma of their occupation (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al; 2007; Kreiner et al., 2006 (a)). Thus, members of dirty work occupations are said to engage in the positive occupational ideologies of reframing, recalibrating and refocusing (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007), in the social weighting tactics of condemning the condemners, supporting the supporters and selective social comparisons (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007), in creating social buffers,
confronting clients’ and public perceptions of taint, and engaging in specific defensive tactics, among which are avoiding, use of gallows humor, accepting and distancing from the role or from clients (Ashforth et al., 2007).

As was evident throughout this discussion, the nature of this transition and the identity pressures that members of this population experience impeded them from engaging in most of these tactics. Positive occupational ideologies or confronting is not possible because the stigma of this occupation is deeply rooted in their perception as they once saw this occupation from an “outsider” perspective, as members of a different social group. Thus, they cannot strongly argue against the stigma of the occupation if they deeply believe in it and share the perspective of society in general. Social weighting and buffering is also difficult because it requires the formation of a strong group culture which members of this population purposefully avoid as they try to make their occupation ephemeral and to distance themselves from other taxi drivers. Finally, some defense mechanisms are applied, but not all of those found in the study by Ashforth et al (2007). The defense tactic that perhaps is most similar between that study and this one is distancing, in which the stigma of the occupation is avoided as the individual claims “this is not me”.

The key difference between these studies is the direction of the transition (downwards and not upwards) and the stability of the tainted membership (newcomers and not ongoing membership). In other words, the key difference between this and previous studies is the specific context of the macro role transition, and consequently the specific nature of the identity pressures in place, indicating that context, as it is perceived by individuals, has a fundamental role in predicting identity work. Although identity crisis and stress is said to be prompted by specific
environmental cues (Lazarus & Folkman 1984), perceived context seems to have been undervalued in the identity work literature.

Hence, while previous studies in this field describe in detail identity work tactics when acquiring new role identities (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006); coping with conflicts between one’s various role identities (Fine, 1996; Kreiner et al., 2006 (b); Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) or dealing with threat or harm to one’s role identity (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Ashforth et al., 2007; Petriglieri, 2011), these studies seem to focus little on the particularities of identity threat in each case and the specific pressures that prompted it. Extending previous arguments according to which the magnitude of identity transitions and the strength of initial identification are critical in defining which identity work tactics are most likely to be applied (Pratt et al., 2006), in this study, it is argued that the particular combination of identity pressures and consequently the specific context in place, as it is perceived by individuals, determine the nature of identity work tactics. Here, the context was that of a downward occupational transition, however, this indicates that other contexts of change may merit the same level of specific attention.
Chapter 6: CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

This study contributes to the identity work and dirty work literatures by exploring the novel context of downward occupational transition accompanied by entrance to a dirty work occupation. Hence, it demonstrates issues and dynamics that are absent from studies of upward transition or of long-term members of dirty work occupations. For instance, in the situation analysed in the current study, protecting one’s original identity is deemed essential in order to shield oneself from stigma, and reconstruction is carried out beyond the realm of work. In addition, because they were newcomers to a dirty work occupation, participants were unable to separate their perspective from that of members of high-prestige, non-stigmatized professions, therefore leading to a heightened perception of stigma and unwillingness to invest in the formation of a strong group of peers.

Overall, the identity work tactics identified in this study were the result of a specific combination of identity work pressures, each of which potentialized the effect of the other, and in this way caused the realization of identity threat. This indicates the importance of the specific combination of identity pressures in place in situations of role transition in creating the “perfect storm” scenario which drives identity work. This study therefore contributes to current literature by demonstrating the importance of context, as it is perceived by individuals, in situations of role identity transitions. In particular, it is argued that the aggregate of identity pressures and not each pressure alone must be considered when understanding the complex situation that leads to unique patterns of identity work.

In addition, this study contributes to our understanding of the concept of identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011), including the factors that may precede it and some of the ways in which it
may be resolved. It particular, it is argued that when faced with identity threat, individuals may contemplate changes to their whole identities, not only to the aspect that is perceived as threatened. Thus, they may simultaneously protect some parts of their identity and restructure others, including those from outside the realm of work, in an effort to maintain a strong and positive sense of self.

This study also contributes to theory by suggesting an expansion of our understanding of occupational identification. While it was initially expected that these respondents would be strongly identified with their original profession and invested in returning to it as previous studies have indicated might be the case (Zikic et al, 2010), members of this population showed signs of identifying with the high-prestige image and reputation of their original profession, rather than with the profession itself. This indicates the need to broaden our current conceptualization of occupational identification to include traits of the occupation that are not necessarily linked to its enactment.

Finally, while there have been several recent studies by management scholars on the challenges faced by internationally trained professionals in entering the workforce, there is still a paucity of research on the intrapsychic dynamics of these individuals (see Hakak et al., 2010 and Zikic et al, 2009 for exceptions). This study therefore contributes our understanding of the immigrant perspective and experience.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is that the sample is restricted to a specific group of individuals, all of whom are male and in the same occupation. Although there are known benefits to adopting an extreme case in qualitative studies, as the investigation of a specific scenario enables insights to a broader array of contexts (Sigglekow, 2007), it is reasonable to believe that
different patterns may have emerged if comparisons had been possible between male and female respondents or between respondents in different tainted occupations. For instance, a female population may (or may not) have placed different degrees of importance on their role of financial provider for the family and members of different tainted occupations may have stronger group cultures. Future studies would do well to investigate these potential differences and their implications for our overall understanding of the experience of downward occupational transitions to a tainted occupation.

Similar considerations apply for non-immigrants who have undergone a downward occupational transition. This population varies from the current sample with regard to their cultural background, as well as with respect to the voluntariness of their transition. Voluntariness is considered to be a continuous variable (Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988), so that while the downward transition undergone by participants in this study was involuntary, it is also reasonable to believe that upon immigrating they retained some level of openness to the unknown (Richardson & McKenna, 2003). This indicates that this transition is still less involuntary than that of non-immigrants who undergo a downward transition due to plant closures, mergers and acquisitions or overall economic downturns. Thus, the comparison with non-immigrants in situations of downward occupational transitions may provide complimentary and important insights. Future studies would do well to compare these different samples in order to gain a more detailed perspective of the phenomenon of identity work following situations of downward occupational transition.

Further, within this sample of internationally educated taxi-drivers, a more thorough investigation of their family context may have yielded interesting and valuable insights, given the large number of respondents who have been found to shift their main target of identification
to their roles in the family realm. Thus, investigating also the perspective of their wives and children in light of this transition would help to gain a more thorough understanding of this scenario. This investigation was not carried out in the present study due to difficulties accessing respondents’ families, however it is a worthy endeavor for future studies.

The fact that the investigator was seen as fundamentally “different” from the respondents also may have affected the data. As a white female with only a slight foreign accent (compared to most native English speakers in Canada), participants may have seen me as an outsider, therefore restricting the information provided in an effort to “save face”. Hence, the protective identity work tactic of “image management” that they apply in their interactions with Canadians in general, is likely to also have been applied in their interactions with me, in my role as interviewer. For instance, this bias may have been present in the times in which interviewees spoke of their restructuring identity work tactics, and in their goals to be seen as a good provider for their families. This point may have been emphasized with the goal of conveying the message that they are strong and competent, and it is not clear whether they would have been so adamant on this point if the interviewer were someone seen as more similar to themselves, and who therefore they believed they had less need to impress. Nevertheless, the fact that they also shared many vulnerabilities and negative emotions, and did so throughout the majority of the interviews, indicates that while image management may have occurred during the interviews, it did not completely skew their stories, nor did it allow them to hide the identity threat that they faced. The findings of this study already indicate a great deal of emotional unrest related to this downward occupational transition, and it is reasonable to believe that the absence of image management efforts would only have exacerbated these same outcomes.
Finally, given that the transitions studied in this project unfold over time, it would be valuable to interview each respondent at different points of time, thus enabling a full perspective of the process whereby they evolve between psychological states and between identity work tactics. Because this was not a longitudinal study, retrospective sensemaking may have occurred, whereby respondents answer questions about their past while being influenced by their situation in the present (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Thus, comments on the importance that they placed on prestige while working in their original profession, may have been influenced by the importance that prestige has in their lives in the present, as the contrast between the prestige in their previous and current occupations is clear to them and highly salient. This bias could have been avoided if interviews had been conducted prior to migration and then again at different points after migration. Future studies may do well to pursue this opportunity.

Nevertheless, the fact that this is how they see and recount their life stories now should not be disregarded, even if it is different from the way in which they saw themselves in the past. The focus of this study is the process of identity work in which they engage, in the present, to make sense of their past, present and future identity. Their view of the past is an inherently important aspect of this story and it is based on this point of view and not on the actual perception that they may have had in the past, that they construct these narratives in the present. Hence, while retrospective sensemaking may have been in place, this does not diminish the value that came from these respondents’ current narratives, and therefore does not compromise the meaningfulness of these findings.

**Implications for Research**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be argued that there is a need for an increased focus on context in future identity work studies, including a deeper understanding of how
context is perceived and understood by the population in question. For instance, in the current study, beyond the broad and more visible context of internationally educated professionals who are working as taxi drivers, there is also a perceived context, consisting of their understanding of the specific combination of identity pressures with which they are faced. It is due to this perceived context that identity work took place in a certain direction. Thus, in agreement with previous calls to focus on context within organizational studies (Johns, 2006), I argue that this increased focus is of particular value to the topic of identity work.

In addition, the finding whereby different identity pressures interact in producing identity threat and ultimately, identity work, also has valuable implications for identity work theory. This finding indicates that identity pressures do not occur in a vacuum, but instead, are perceived simultaneously and as part of the whole experience of the individual. However, previous studies have not focused on this interaction between identity pressures. This has implications for the way in which we understand identity and identity threat, as is demonstrates the complexity of the conditions in which such threat occurs. Future research may expand on this, by showing other instances in which identity pressures interact and reinforce each other, ultimately driving specific modes of identity work.

**Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study indicate that specific changes can be made at various levels in order to ameliorate the situation of immigrant professionals who undergo downward occupational transitions. In particular, these changes may take place through actions by the government of Canada though its local and overseas immigration policies, and by Canadian employers and potential employers. First, the fact that problems in the Canadian labor market came as a surprise to these immigrant professionals indicates a need for Canadian immigration
officers abroad to communicate more effectively with prospective immigrants, in order to set more realistic expectations for them before they decide to migrate. Some other countries already do this successfully. For instance, Australia has a much lower incidence of underemployment of medical professionals than Canada, partially because they allow prospective immigrants who are doctors the opportunity to undergo their re-certification exams prior to migrating. Many who do not pass these exams then make the conscious choice not to migrate if it will imply in not being able to work in their field (Hawthorne, 2008). Hence, a more clear communication model prior to migration would allow prospective migrants to become aware of the inherent risks, and therefore make an informed choice.

After they arrive, policy changes providing immigrants with more access to re-certification opportunities in Canada, so that they are not obligated to work in low-prestige occupations simply to make ends meet should also be considered. Although these re-certification and bridging programs already exist, they are not available in sufficient quantity and therefore are not yet at reach for all internationally trained professionals. In particular, many of these programs require financial resources and full time dedication away from work that many immigrant professionals do not possess. Further, bridging programs geared at helping immigrants from particular professional backgrounds to succeed in the Canadian workplace are still rare, with most programs being focused on generic themes such as resume building, cultural competencies or development of basic computer skills (Hakak et al., 2013). While these topics are clearly important for all immigrants to succeed in the labor market, this focus on a “one size fits all” approach, with themes that should help all immigrants, does not provide sufficient resources for highly specialized, highly trained professionals such as those interviewed in this study.
Immigrant professionals are also less likely to undergo this involuntary downward occupational transition if their degrees were more consistently recognized by local employers. Previous research has shown that potential employers often discriminate against immigrant job candidates and fail to recognize their degrees (Fang et al., 2013; Hakak et al., 2013; Zikic et al., 2010). In order to ameliorate this, organizations should be persuaded to implement more affirmative action and diversity awareness training programs, in order to encourage hiring managers to seriously consider applicants with foreign degrees and experience.

Finally, the fact that by avoiding the formation of strong bonds with others who are in the same occupation, the participants in this study actually face more pronounced situations of identity threat indicates that there is an opportunity to effect positive change by encouraging the formation of strong groups within these occupations. Hence, this study indicates that there are specific and practical arguments against resisting the formation of strong groups in low-prestige occupations such as taxi driving. Encouraging this strong group formation could be done at the level of taxi management companies or through professional associations, or, in the case of other occupations where there is an employment link with a specific organization, through Human Resource initiatives geared at helping internationally trained professionals to form strong and supportive relationships with their peers.


Bolton, S. C. 2005. Women's work, dirty work: The gynaecology nurse as "other". *Gender, work and organization*, 12(169-186)


*Academy of Management Journal*, 52(3), 506-526


APPENDIX A

Initial interview Guide (prior to pilot interviews)

Identity of Immigrant Professionals

GT Q.1 (Grand Tour Question One): Work/Life before moving to Canada

Tell me a bit about your life before coming to Canada

- What is your educational background?
- How did you decide to study ……?
- Tell me about your work experience before you came to Canada
  - How long have you been working in that profession?
  - Did you worked for many different organizations/employers or done different kinds of jobs?
- In your opinion, how did people in your country view people that worked in … (the profession in which you were trained)?
- How did your friends and family view you?
- How important was your profession to you when you were in your home country?
  - What made you happy about your work/what did you like the most?
  - What did you like the least about your work?
- What prompted your decision to immigrate to Canada?
- What did you expect your professional/personal life to be like in Canada before you immigrated?
  - What were these expectations based on?
To what extent were they accurate?

What information did you have about the opportunities to work in your original profession in Canada?

GT Q2: Work/Life experiences in Canada

Now I would like to ask you a bit about your life in Canada…

- How did your professional life change when you immigrated to Canada?
- What kind(s) of employment have you had since you arrived?
  - How did you make the decision(s) to work in this (these) job(s)?
- Do you intend to work in your initial profession in the future (if you are not currently doing so)?
- How important is the occupation that you have now to you? Why?
- If you could choose, what would be your ideal job here in Canada?

GT Q3: Self & Other Perceptions

Has the way you see yourself changed since you came to Canada? How has it changed?

- In your opinion, how do people in Canada view people who work in the profession for which you were originally trained?
- In your opinion, how do others in Canada view people who have the job you have now (only ask if occupation has changed)?
- How do you think your friends and family see you now (in terms of your occupation)?
- When others ask you: “what do you do?”, how do you usually respond?
  - Do you give different answers to different people?
• Is there a certain impression of you that you would like others to have?
  ○ If so, tell me about it.

**GT Q4 Satisfaction with overall life in Canada …Conclusions:**

In general, how satisfied are you with your life in Canada?

• Overall, considering not only professional but also personal aspects of your life, how do you feel about your decision to immigrate to Canada?

• If it were only for professional reasons, would you consider going back to your country of origin?

• How has life in Canada affected other members of your family?
  ○ (If married) How has your spouse adapted to life in Canada? Is he/she working?
    Is he/she happy about her life (and/or career) here?
  ○ (if has children) How have your children adapted to life in Canada?

• Do you have friends in Canada?
  ○ Are these friends from the same country as you?
  ○ How did you meet them?

• If you could change anything about your life in Canada, what would it be?
Identity of Immigrant Professionals

GT Q.1 (Grand Tour Question One): Work/Life before moving to Canada

Tell me a bit about your life before coming to Canada

- What is your educational background?
- How did you decide to study …..?
- What did your friends/family think when you decided to study...?
- Tell me about your work experience before you came to Canada...
- Did you like your previous job? What did you like the most about it?
- What prompted your decision to immigrate to Canada?
- What did you expect your professional/personal life to be like in Canada before you immigrated?
  - What were these expectations based on?
  - To what extent were they accurate?
  - What information did you have about the opportunities to work in your original profession in Canada?

GT Q2: Work/Life experiences in Canada

Now I would like to ask you a bit about your life in Canada…

- What kind(s) of employment have you had since you arrived?
• How did you find out about the taxi business? And about this particular management company?
  o How did you make the decision(s) to work as a taxi driver?
  o What was the process like (getting a licence, etc?)
  o At the time, were you happy about taking this step? How did you feel about this?
• Do you intend to leave your current profession and look for a different occupation in the future (if you are not currently doing so)?
  o If so, how will you go about doing this?
• Are you happy about your decision to become a taxi driver? Why?
  o What do you like about it/ what do you dislike about it?
• If you could choose, what would be your ideal job here in Canada?

GT Q3: Self & Other Perceptions

Has the way you see yourself changed since you came to Canada? How has it changed?
• In your opinion, how do people in Canada view people who work in the profession for which you were originally trained?
• In your opinion, how do people in Canada view taxi drivers?
• Is it different from the way people in your home country see taxi drivers? How so?
• When others ask you about your job how do you usually respond?
  o Do you tell them you are a taxi driver?
  o Do you tell them about your original profession?
  o Do you give different answers to different people?
• How do you think your friends and family see you now (in terms of your occupation)?
• What are the most important aspects/roles in your life (if necessary, probe with examples)?
  o Has this changed since you arrived in Canada? How so?

**GT Q4 Satisfaction with overall life in Canada …Conclusions:**

In general, how satisfied are you with your life in Canada?

• Overall, considering not only professional but also personal aspects of your life, how do you feel about your decision to immigrate to Canada?

• Would you ever consider going back to your country of origin? Why/why not?

• How has life in Canada affected other members of your family?
  o (If married) How has your spouse adapted to life in Canada? Is he/she working?

  Is he/she happy about her life (and/or career) here?
  ▪ (If not working) Was the decision that you would work and she would stay at home something that you came up with together? Or was it your decision? Or hers? Is this common in your country of origin? Or for people from your religious background? Tell me more about this...?

  o (if has children) How have your children adapted to life in Canada?

• Do you have friends in Canada?
  o Are these friends from the same country as you?
  o How did you meet them?

• If you could change anything about your life in Canada, what would it be?