THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

CONSTRUCTING PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS:

THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL

RECOGNITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM AND POLICY PRIORITY

IN CANADA

By

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# ABSTRACT

Utilizing a social constructionist approach to social problems, and drawing from the public policy's insights into agenda-setting dynamics, this thesis examines the social construction of foreign credential recognition as a social problem in Canada, and the factors that led to the elevation of this issue onto the federal government's policy agenda in 2001 – some twenty years after it was initially claimed to be a troublesome condition. More specifically, this study explores how the claims-making activities of various stakeholders involved in the foreign credential recognition debate came to define the issue as a social problem, and how those activities transformed this social problem into a policy solution worthy of widespread public and political attention. While the historical analysis of federal policy documents provide background and context to the development of foreign credential recognition as a social problem, interviews with eighteen stakeholders from the policy community contribute to an in-depth understanding of the claims-making dynamics involved in the foreign credential recognition debate.

Findings from this thesis reveal that while foreign credential recognition was largely constructed around humanitarian concerns in the 1980's, claims-makers redefined the issue as a promising economic policy tool with the potential to benefit the country as a whole from the 1990's onward. This definitional shift, largely constructed by strategic and innovative organizational sponsors on behalf of immigrant victims, garnered foreign credential recognition increased public and political attention based on its appeal to neoliberal goals in the context of a globalizing knowledge economy. Foreign credential recognition was elevated onto the federal government's policy agenda in 2001 as a consequence of the convergence of widespread concerns over Canada's economic competitiveness and prosperity in the global economy, the claims-making activities of experienced and committed organizational sponsors, public awareness of and support for the issue, and political receptivity to economically promising policy solutions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the social and economic integration of highly skilled immigrants in Canada has gained increased attention. Much of this interest has circulated around the manner in which immigrants' international educational and occupational credentials are evaluated in Canada. Governments, politicians, immigrants, immigrant-serving organizations, professional regulatory and licensing bodies, credential recognition agencies, universities, academics and the media have all made claims with regards to foreign credential recognition in the recent past. This, however, was not always the case. Utilizing a contextual constructionist approach, this research seeks to explore how foreign credential recognition came to be socially constructed as a social problem in Canada, and understand the factors that led to the issue's inclusion on the federal government's policy agenda in 2001 – some twenty years after it was initially claimed to be a troublesome condition.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

The two broad questions which guide this study are (1) how has foreign credential recognition been socially constructed as a social problem and, (2) what led to the inclusion of foreign credential recognition on the federal government's policy agenda in 2001? These questions have been approached from a contextual

constructionist perspective on the social construction of social problems, as well as political science's insights into the world of governmental agenda-setting dynamics. More specifically, this study examines how the claims-making activities of various stakeholders involved in the foreign credential recognition debate came to define the issue as a social problem, and how those activities transformed this social problem into a policy solution worthy of widespread public and political attention. While the literature to date describes the experiences and effects of the devaluation of immigrants' foreign credentials, it lacks a systemic analysis of the historical development of this issue as a socially constructed problem. This research seeks to bridge this gap while also contributing to theoretical understandings of the processes by which certain social problems come to be defined as pressing policy priorities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL DEVALUATION

Since 1995, an influx of immigrants with university education have arrived in Canada and now constitute the country's largest proportion of annual immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2003); however, many of these immigrants and their supporters claim that barriers to the recognition of foreign educational and occupational credentials have prevented highly educated newcomers from obtaining fitting employment in Canada. For the most part, recent research on the downward social and occupational mobility of highly skilled immigrants has pointed to the devaluation of foreign credentials as a major contributing factor to

such problems. Much of this research focuses on either immigrant's personal

explanations of the occupational disadvantages they encounter, or the economic

incorporation of highly skilled immigrants based on earnings analyses.

**Constructing Foreign Credential Recognition as a Barrier to Employment**

Part of the sociological literature on foreign credential recognition

identifies it as a social problem based on the barriers that highly skilled

immigrants with international educational and occupational credentials experience

in the workplace. Indeed, McDade's (1988) study of barriers to employment for

immigrants is one of the earliest and most comprehensive investigations of

foreign credential recognition and its policy implications in Canada. The study,

which highlights barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials in Canada, is a

unique piece of literature in that it includes a review of the related

recommendations of federal bodies. Although this review covers only those

federal recommendations from 1981 to 1987, it is perhaps the only study which

explores the responses of the Canadian federal government to the issue of foreign

credential recognition. The study highlights the federal government's

involvement in the issue of foreign credentials on four policy fronts:

multiculturalism, human rights, immigration and international relations. The

author concludes that the failure to recognize immigrants' credentials undermines

federal immigration policy, which commits to promoting national prosperity

through the contributions of a highly educated immigrant labour force. The

author stresses the need for participation by both federal and provincial levels of

government in resolving problems associated with foreign credential recognition.

Ten years later, in a study of highly skilled immigrants' experiences with

and perceptions of foreign credential recognition in Canada, Basran and Zong

(1998) surveyed 404 foreign-trained Indo- and Chinese-Canadian professionals in

Vancouver about their experiences in attempting to access the professional

workforce. The findings suggest that a large number of foreign-trained visible

minority professional immigrants have experienced downward social mobility

after immigrating to Canada, and that the significant human capital possessed by

immigrants is being underutilized. The study found that although over 88 percent

of respondents reported having worked as professionals (doctors, engineers,

school/university teachers and others) in their country of origin prior to

immigrating to Canada, only 19 percent had worked or were working as

professionals in Canada. Over 60 percent of respondents felt they were

overqualified for the work they had acquired in Canada. More than 50 percent of

respondents felt that their foreign education was not fairly recognized by

provincial government agencies, professional organizations, and educational

institutions, and 48 percent of respondents did not believe that "the foreign

education of foreign-trained professionals is compared to Canadian standards

fairly." An overwhelming percentage of respondents felt their foreign education

and work experience was devalued due to discrimination based on skin color (65

percent), national or ethnic origin (69 percent), and speaking English as a second

language (79 percent). Based on these findings, the authors suggested that visible minority immigrants do not have the same life chances as other Canadians, and that the devaluation of foreign credentials along with racial discrimination pose major barriers to opportunity for new Canadians.

Statistics Canada's (2003) first wave of results from the *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada* reveals findings similar to those of Basran and Zong. The first wave of Statistics Canada's study, based on in-depth interviews with 12,000 recent immigrants, found that 50 percent of new Canadians identify non-recognition of foreign credentials and a lack of Canadian job experience as crucial barriers to gaining employment and upward mobility (Statistics Canada, 2003: 5). Other obstacles to employment were identified as language problems, a lack of available jobs and a lack of workplace networks. The study also suggested that 60 percent of employed immigrants worked in a different occupational group after their arrival. Immigrants' country of birth was said to impact whether they found a job within the same field as they had been previously employed in before coming to Canada. For example, 68 percent of immigrants from Australia and New Zealand, and 63 percent of immigrants from the United States were employed in the same occupational groups; however, only 33 percent of those born in Asia and the Middle East, and 36 percent of immigrants from Central and South America were able to find jobs in the same occupational groups they had worked in before immigrating to Canada. These findings suggest that educational credentials from different countries are valued differently in the

Canadian workplace, and warn that educational credentials from the developing world are devalued to a greater extent as compared to those from English-speaking, commonwealth countries.

Mata (1999) highlights poor information about professional licensing and registration procedures as one of the first and foremost barriers that professional immigrants face upon arrival to Canada. He describes the foreign accreditation process as a "personal journey involving complex interactions with several institutions," including post-secondary education institutions, provincial governments, professional self-regulating bodies, immigrant-serving organizations, and employers (Mata, 1999: 2). Mata accuses the licensing procedures of professional regulatory bodies of being guilty of "statistical discrimination" – the use of subjective assessment techniques in the "estimation" of professional merits of non-Canadian applicants, which he suggests are often enveloped by traditional prejudices. The author goes on to discuss problems associated with the "vicious circle" of credential devaluation: the non-recognition of immigrants' foreign professional credentials and work experience disqualifies their entry into professional jobs, leaving them no chance to acquire Canadian work experience, yet the emphasis on Canadian work experience as a requirement for professional accreditation and employment makes it difficult for new Canadians to become qualified for professional jobs – a barrier that essentially "traps" many immigrants at different stages of the accreditation cycle. Mata identifies the social consequences of downward social mobility due to the

devaluation of foreign credentials as weaker immigrant integration, race relations

tensions and community frustration, all of which have direct impacts on societal

cohesion. He calls for a concerted national policy addressing foreign credentials,

involving multi-stakeholder coordination, standardization of educational

credentials, reformation of institutional accreditation processes and revamped

employment equity approaches or human rights legislation.

Drawing from a longitudinal survey study of 1,200 new immigrants in

Israel conducted between 1992 and 1995, Lerner and Menahem (2003) examine

the process of occupational incorporation of highly skilled immigrants. The study

focuses on the impact of governmental recredentialization programs on the

occupational integration and subsequent mobility of educated immigrants from

the former Soviet Union. The findings support the authors' hypothesis that

participation in governmental occupational retraining and 'upskilling' programs

are beneficial to immigrants both in terms of their earnings and occupational

status. The authors suggest that their results highlight the symbolic and political

significance of obtaining legitimized recognition of credentials from both the

government and the professional gatekeepers involved in immigrant retraining

programs.

With the exception of McDade's 1988 study, most of the research which

points out various barriers associated with the recognition of foreign credentials

has surfaced in the recent past, and is indeed quite limited in light of the extensive

research on immigrant earnings which also points to troubles with foreign

credential recognition as a basis for the downward social and economic mobility of highly skilled newcomers.

## Constructing Immigrants' Declining Earnings as a Consequence of Foreign Credential Devaluation

In addition to studies based on immigrants' perceptions of and positions within the Canadian workplace, empirical earnings analyses of native- and foreign-born Canadians have socially constructed the devaluation of foreign credentials as a contributor to pay inequalities, which lead to the downward social and occupational mobility of highly skilled immigrants. These studies suggest that economic returns to human capital, often conceptualized as both educational credentials and labour market experience, are lower for immigrants – especially those of visible minority status – than for the native-born. While many studies claim that immigrants tend to experience a short-lived but significant earnings disadvantage upon arrival as compared to native-born Canadians, yet narrow this gap over time, recent research maintains that for visible minority immigrants who have arrived since the 1980s, this initial earnings gap has widened and the catch-up rate has slowed down – a finding partially explained by the devaluation of immigrants foreign credentials (Reitz, forthcoming; Alboim, Finnie and Meng, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2003).

Using 1981 census data, Trovato and Grindstaff (1986) studied the economic position of thirty-year-old women in Canada, comparing immigrants to the Canadian-born population. The study suggested that immigrant women who

moved to Canada as adults had the highest percentage of university completion; however, they were more likely to earn low incomes and hold jobs in the lower end of the occupational structure. The authors cited improper recognition of foreign credentials as an explanation of these findings.

In a similar study of occupational status amongst Canadian-born and foreign-born workers based on the 1973 Canadian Mobility Survey, Boyd (1985) concludes that Canadian-born workers receive greater returns on their education compared to foreign-born workers due to difficulties in transferring foreign educational credentials across national boundaries. In a similar vein, Schaafsma and Sweetman (2001) examine the relationship between age at immigration and earnings using 1986, 1991, 1996 Canadian census microdata files. They suggest that those immigrants who arrived at an early age, and therefore likely obtained their educational credentials in Canada, have similar returns to education as their Canadian-born counterparts, whereas those who arrived later in life, who likely possess foreign educational credentials, have increasingly lower returns to education.

More recent literature has also suggested that immigrants educated abroad receive lower returns to education in the form of occupational status and earnings than native-born Canadians. Using 1991 Canadian census data, both Pendakur and Pendakur (1998) and Wanner (1998) examine the role that country of origin plays in the relationship between foreign educational credentials and earnings. While Pendakur and Pendakur find significant earnings gaps between foreign-

trained whites and nonwhites, with men possessing U.S. and U.K. degrees earning

more on average than those immigrants with Canadian degrees, they did not find a

relationship between the level of development of the source country and returns to

education for foreign-trained immigrants.  Conversely, Wanner (1998) found

level of development of country of origin to have a strong effect on earnings

returns to post-secondary education, with foreign-trained immigrants from less

developed countries suffering the greatest earnings differentials of all.  Similar

research in the U.S. correlates with Wanner's findings.  Using 1970, 1980, 1990

U.S. census data, paired with the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth,

Bratsberg and Ragan (2002) compare the economic returns of those immigrants

with U.S. educational credentials and those without U.S. educational credentials,

with attention to country of origin.  They find that foreign credentials from highly

developed, English-speaking countries reap greater rewards in the U.S. labour

market than foreign credentials from less developed, non-English-speaking

countries.

In a study of the market worth of immigrants' educational credentials

using 1996 Census Microdata, Li (2001) employs an intersectional approach in

analyzing the earnings differentials between highly educated foreign-born

immigrants and native-born Canadians, as visible minority status, gender, place of

education, and variations in other individual and work-related characteristics were

all taken into consideration.  The study found that even after controlling for the

above-mentioned characteristics, native-born, white, Canadian degree-holders

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consistently earned the most, while foreign-born, visible minorities who had

earned degrees outside of Canada consistently earned the least, with women in the

latter group suffering the greatest earnings differentials of all. Li argues that for

visible minority men and women, about half of the income disparity between

native-born Canadian degree-holders and immigrant foreign degree-holders can

be attributed to foreign credentials. Reitz (2001) suggests that if immigrants

received full compensation for their years of education and work experience with

no discounting based on origins, their annual earnings would increase by $15

billion and would be about 20 percent higher than they were in 1996.

Alboim, Finnie and Meng's (2005) analysis of immigrants' earnings,

based on the 1989 Canadian Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities

(LSUDA), claimed to account for the entire income gap between highly educated

native- and foreign-born Canadians by adding measures of the source of their

schooling and work experience. Their findings point to the importance of host-

country educational credentials regardless of immigrant status, since those

immigrants who obtained a Canadian degree *in addition* to their foreign education

received equivalent returns to their education as native-born Canadians with

comparable credentials. In a similar vein, Zeng and Xie (2004) use 1990 U.S.

Census Public Use Microsample data in exploring the effect of race, nativity and

place of education on earnings differences between whites and Asian-Americans

in the United States. In comparing the earnings of native-born whites, native-born

Asian-Americans, U.S.-educated Asian immigrants and foreign-educated Asian

immigrants, the findings suggest that foreign-educated Asian immigrants are the only disadvantaged group in the study, highlighting the importance of *place of education* in determining earnings, over race and country of origin.

Indeed, many of the above-mentioned studies emphasize the importance of *where* a credential is obtained as a crucial factor in determining its market worth. By highlighting the downward trends in immigrants' employment and earnings, these studies call into question the extent to which immigrant's foreign educational and occupational skills are accepted and effectively utilized in the Canadian workplace (Reitz, 2005).

**Constructing Explanations of Foreign Credential Devaluation**

Explanations for the discounting of immigrants' human capital investments generally fall under two different categories in the literature: individual or structural. Individual explanations for earnings differentials include the inability of foreign-trained individuals to meet occupational entry requirements, a lack of Canadian work experience, the inadequate command of English and/or French, a short residency of fewer than 10 years in Canada, and limited social capital, such as professional networks (Alboim, Finnie and Meng, 2005; Basran and Zong, 1998; Li, 2003; Mata, 1999). Many of these individual barriers are used to explain immigrants' inability to meet occupational entry requirements in the literature, thereby constructing immigrants themselves as being responsible for their failure to access jobs commensurate with their educational and experiential credentials.

Structural explanations for the devaluation of foreign credentials highlight the structural conditions which hinder immigrants' access to employment, such as the problem of gaining full recognition of foreign educational credentials and work experience inherent to accreditation policies, regulations and procedures of governmental, occupational, educational and licensing institutions. Indeed, numerous studies have suggested that foreign-trained immigrants have difficulties translating their educational credentials into occupational advantages due to systematic exclusion from the professions and other occupations, which has been attributed to larger problems of discrimination and racism in the labour market (Basran and Zong, 1998; Li, 2001; Pendakur and Pendakur, 1998; Reitz, 2005; Trovato and Grindstaff, 1986; Wanner, 1998). Some studies claim that "statistical discrimination" of professional credentials occurs when employers, professional regulatory bodies and educational institutions utilize subjective assessment criteria in the absence of systematic and accessible information on international credentials (Mata, 1999; McDade, 1988). Recent research has identified a host of other systemic barriers related to the decreased returns to foreign-trained immigrants, including increasing educational levels of Canadian-born individuals and credential inflation and competition, changing occupational structures and workplace innovations which may negatively impact immigrants, decreasing values of foreign experience in comparison to occupation-specific, Canadian work experience, increasing emphasis on "soft skills" in the knowledge economy, and the role of credentials as cultural capital markers (Reitz, forthcoming).

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While much research has examined the devaluation of foreign credentials

in hopes of constructing explanations for this phenomenon, the identification of

one specific explanatory factor underlying the discounting of international

qualifications has been impossible in light of the numerous individual and

structural variables at play (Alboim, Finnie and Meng, 2005; Reitz, forthcoming).

Indeed, many scholars favour a holistic understanding of the extent to which

foreign occupational and experiential skills are accepted and utilized in the

Canadian workplace, which requires the examination of both individual and

systemic factors given that individual barriers are difficult to entangle from social

conditions and structural arrangements. As Li (2001: 27) notes, "…it is often not

clear whether it is immigrants' racial origin, gender or post-secondary degree that

is being undervalued, due to the difficulty in separating the credentials that

immigrants hold from the holders themselves."

The ensuing discussion will focus on the social construction of foreign

credential recognition as a both a social problem and a policy prerogative. In

many respects, this study departs from McDade's (1988) research, which

surveyed the activities of the federal government in relation to foreign credential

recognition up until 1987, by continuing the historical examination of the federal

government's construction of foreign credential recognition up until the time of

writing in 2007. In addition, this research will contribute to understandings of

foreign credential recognition as a socially constructed social problem by

exploring the various claims-making activities of stakeholders involved in this

social problems game. Furthermore, this project will examine the evolution of

foreign credential recognition from a social problem to a pressing policy priority.

Before moving onto this substantive context, an overview of the theoretical

frameworks and methodological approaches behind this study will be presented in

efforts to frame the forthcoming analysis. Indeed, this study is a reflection of the

social constructionist belief that *"a social problem doesn't exist until it is defined*

*as such"* (Loseke, 1999: 13).

# CHAPTER TWO

# THEORY

The constructionist approach to social problems provides a useful theoretical framework for the analysis of the development of foreign credential recognition as a social problem. The social problems perspective equips researchers with a lens through which to view the human processes of creating meaning and definitions, the manner in which claims and statements about those meanings and definitions are made, and the various players and stakeholders involved in the construction of social problems. While the constructionist approach to social problems helps to explain how certain conditions come to be viewed as problematic, the public policy literature furthers this analysis by explaining how certain social problems become topics of government attention and action. Together, the social constructionist perspective on social problems and the models of agenda-setting dynamics within the public policy literature provide a sound theoretical basis for the analysis of the evolution of foreign credential recognition from a private trouble, to a public worry, to a prominent policy priority in Canada.

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Social constructionist perspectives on social problems are an application of the general social construction theoretical perspective, which have

philosophical and methodological roots in phenomenology and ethnomethodology (Loseke, 1999). Together, phenomenology's interpretive approach to understanding social life as the creation and interpretation of meanings, and ethnomethodology's study of the taken-for-granted procedures for making sense of daily life help to inform the social constructionist perspective that humans *create* meaning, and that such meaning is *social* (Loseke, 1999, emphasis added). The ethnomethodological tradition helps to focus attention on the social practices through which social problems come to be recognized and understood – the everyday, commonsense activities, procedures and resources that people use to create meaning and understanding (Holstein & Miller, 2003). In discussing the social construction of social problems, Loseke (1999: 18) describes social constructionism as a way of exploring "...*what* we think about the world, *how* we come to think in that way, *why* we think that way, and *what happens* because we think the way we do." Given this emphasis on the analysis of the creation of meanings, it follows that the social constructionist perspective on social problems argues that "*a social problem doesn't exist until it is defined as such*" (Loseke, 1999: 13, emphasis in original).

While most of the recent work on social problems has utilized a social constructionist perspective, earlier sociological research on social problems were guided by functionalist, conflict theory or other perspectives, which defined social problems as objective conditions, or as "real conditions in the social environment that cause harm" (Loseke, 1999: 174). This view of social problems essentially

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contradicted the constructionist view that social problems are human beliefs or

subjective creations, which led to much confusion over the definition of "social

problems" as a sociological concept and how the study of such phenomena should

occur (Schneider, 1985). As Loseke (1999: 175) points out, "approaches to

social problems as objective conditions are concerned with how the world *is*;

constructionist approaches focus on what humans *believe* the world is."

In efforts to clarify the social constructionist approach to social problems,

Blumer (1971: 298) called for a fundamental change in conceptualization to

reflect a definition of social problems as "products of a process of collective

definition" rather than taken-for-granted "objective conditions and social

arrangements." Later, Spector and Kitsuse's (1977/1987: 75, emphasis in

original) seminal work, *Constructing Social Problems*, further explored this

notion by defining social problems as *"the activities of individuals or groups*

*making assertions of grievances and claims with respect to some putative*

*conditions."* As the authors explain,

> ...the word putative... is used to emphasize that any given claim or
> complaint is about a condition *alleged* to exist, rather than about a
> condition whose existence we, as sociologists, are willing to verify
> or certify.[1]

According to Spector and Kistuse (1987: 76 emphasis in original), social

problems theory should attempt to *"account for the emergence, nature and*

*maintenance of claims-making and responding activities"*. By defining social

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[1] Spector & Kitsuse, 1987: 76

problems as claims-making activities, the authors argue that constructionist

analysis is scientific and value-free precisely because claims-makers themselves,

rather than researchers or sociologists, make claims about which conditions they

feel are problematic (Loseke, 1999). Indeed, by focussing on claims-making

activities, constructionists draw attention to something all social problems have in

common by asking such questions as: What sorts of claims get made? When do

claims get made, and what sorts of people make them? What sorts of responses

do claims receive? (Best, 1989). As Best (1989: xix) points out, "questions such

as these guide constructionist research; they provide a framework for a theory of

social problems."

## Theoretical Debates within Social Constructionism

A central debate within the social constructionist approach to social

problems concerns the status of "objective conditions" (Loseke, 1999). While

Spector and Kitsuse (1987) are clear that references to social problems as

conditions must be abandoned in favour of conceptions of them as *activities*,

questions remain as to whether or not constructionists actually do this, and

whether or not references to objective conditions within constructionist analyses

should be allowed. Picking up on this inconsistency, Woolgar and Pawluch

(1985: 214) offered a direct critique of the social constructionist approach to

social problems by accusing social constructionists of what they termed

"ontological gerrymandering", which involves describing the variable nature of

claims-making processes related to a putative condition, while holding that

putative condition constant, thereby "making certain phenomena problematic

while leaving others unproblematic." Woolgar and Pawluch felt that

constructionist researchers were analytically manipulating a boundary:

constructionists were so focused on deconstructing various claims-making

activities about a putative condition that they neglected to deconstruct the putative

condition itself, thereby treating the putative condition as an objective 'truth' or

'assumption' (Pawluch, Sociology 700 lecture, May 25, 2006). Indeed, by

making assumptions about the constancy of the putative condition at hand, social

constructionists were violating Spector and Kitsuse's mandate to ignore social

conditions (Loseke, 1999).

Following Woolgar and Pawluch's publication, a heated debate about

whether or not constructionists were guilty of ontological gerrymandering ensued

in the literature, which led to questions regarding the extent to which such a

logical inconsistency within the theory even mattered in sociological research.

Joel Best (1989) directly addressed the question of what social constructionists

should do about the place of objective conditions within examinations of social

problems by proposing a distinction between "strict" and "contextual"

constructionism. According to Best (1989: 245), strict constructionists "examine

the perspectives of claims-makers, policymakers, and other members of society"

and "avoid making assumptions about objective reality." Strict constructionists

believe that actual social conditions are irrelevant in light of what claims-makers

say about those conditions. In contrast, contextual constructionists, who also focus on the claims-making process, "acknowledge making some assumptions about social conditions," since "such assumptions locate claims-making within its social context" (Best, 1989: 246-247). While these assumptions are precisely what Woolgar and Pawluch warn against, Best (1989: 247) asserts that "in addition to using social conditions to explain the emergence of claims, an analyst may refer to social conditions in explaining why some claims receive attention or shape social policy." James Holstein and Gale Miller (2003: 6) further explain contextual constructionism's consideration of social contexts:

> Contextual constructionists argue that the goal of research and theory should be to offer information about, and insights into, the organization and workings of social problems construction, and that reference must be made to social conditions in order to properly describe social problems claims-making. To this end, contextual constructionists acknowledge the usefulness of careful and delimited ontological gerrymandering in explaining how social problems claims emerge within particular sociohistorical contexts (Holstein & Miller, 2003: 6).

Indeed, the contextual constructionist approach to social problems is particularly useful for the analysis of issues that are influenced by certain social conditions at specific points in time. Since the contextual approach considers claims-making as social constructions which occur in and are influenced by certain social contexts, the perspective allows social problems researchers to raise such questions as, "Why did a problem appear when it did?" and "What was going on in the social environment that led to claims-making about this problem at this particular historical time?" (Best, 1989; Loseke, 1999: 206, 208). Given

that the purpose of this research is to study the development of foreign credential

recognition as a social problem over time, and explore the factors that led to the

inclusion of foreign credential recognition in the federal government's 2001

Speech from the Throne, a contextual constructionist perspective is appropriate

for the analysis of the evolution of foreign credential recognition as a social

problem.   As will be illustrated later, the definitional shifts that the issue of

foreign credential recognition experienced at different points in time were a

reflection of popular socio-historical themes, therefore some assumptions about

social conditions are necessary for a complete analysis of the evolution of this

policy problem.

**Constructing Social Problems**

In attempting to understand social problems as claims-making activities,

Loseke (1999) describes the process by which social problems come to be thought

of as such as the "social problems game":

> The goal of the social problems game is to convince enough people
> to do something about a social problem; it is to use social problem
> categories to make sense of the buzzing confusion of our lived
> realities.  Like games in general, the social problems game has
> *activities* and *players* who compete; there are *competitions* and
> *strategies* for winning (Loseke, 1999: 19).

The players in the game include the *claims-makers* who say and do things to

convince audiences that a social problem is at hand, as well as the *audiences* to

which such activities are directed.  Since these activities take the form of claims,

*claims-making* can be said to be the work of social problems (Loseke, 1999,

emphasis added).   Spector and Kitsuse (1987: 79) define claims-making activities

in behavioral terms, consisting of "demanding services, filling out forms, lodging

complaints, filing lawsuits, calling press conferences, writing letters of protest,

passing resolutions, publishing exposes, placing ads in newspapers, supporting or

opposing some governmental practice or policy, setting up picket lines or

boycotts." By engaging in claims-making activities, claims-makers typify

problems and construct notions regarding the causes of conditions that they, or

those they represent, find burdensome. Claims-makers direct their claims at

certain audiences, who selectively encourage or discourage various kinds of

claims through their action or inaction (Best, 1989).  As the various players in the

social problems game interact with one another, they construct meanings and

definitions of the social problem at hand.  Thus, social problems are social

constructions – the products of interactions between claims-makers during claims-

making processes (Best, 1989).  The "winners" of the social problems game are

those who are successful in convincing others that a certain type of social problem

exists and that something must be done.  The prize for winning the social

problems game: the power to define understandings of the putative condition at

hand, and therefore to lead social change (Loseke, 1999).

### *Claims-makers*

As Best (1989: 75) points out, "…claims cannot exist without claims-

makers…claims-makers both create claims and promote them…"  Given that any

person at any time is capable of making statements which try to persuade, the

gamut of claims-makers is enormous. Recognizing this complexity, Loseke

(1999) describes the "social problems industry" in efforts to categorize the

various claims-makers involved in the social problems game. Included in this

"industry" are claims-makers working in and around all levels of government,

such as bureaucrats, politicians, and political lobbyists. While claims are

typically directed *at* government institutions, participants in the social problems

game do not always play the roles stereotypically assigned to them. As Spector

and Kitsuse (1987: 155) point out, "governmental and other official agencies not

only respond to expressions of popular concern, they may also define and foster

them." Indeed, government players may become active claims-makers who work

to define social problems if they feel they have something to gain by taking over

or controlling the issue (Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). "Political campaigning" is a

claims-making activity in itself, since politicians construct and identify social

problems, and simultaneously propose solutions to those problems around

election times (Loseke, 1999). Government officials often make claims to both

defend their agendas and policies, as well as expand their influence over certain

issues (Best, 1989).

Perhaps most obvious of claims-makers are the actual victims of social

problems. Indeed, victims of troublesome conditions are active claims-makers,

who often include references to their personal experience of the social problem in

question. Victims' claims-making efforts are often supported by organizations

and associations dedicated to helping victims of social problems, which Loseke (1999) describes as the "troubled-persons industry". However, as Best (1989) points out, victims and grass-roots movements with limited resources are often disadvantaged players in the social problems game since successful claims-making campaigns often involve many complex activities, such as high levels of organization, fund-raising, public relations, grant-writing, and lobbying.

Organizational sponsors are another type of claims-maker who, due to their abilities to influence others based on their reputations, financial resources and organizational skills, are often called upon to initiate or resuscitate claims-making efforts (Best, 1989; Loseke, 1999). As Best (1989) suggests, while these specialists may be less committed to the cause than activists, their claims-making experience and skills are often quite advanced. Indeed, as will be described later, the support and activities of organizational sponsors are a crucial component of successful claims-making campaigns about policy problems.

Researchers, teachers, academics, and all others whose job it is to educate others about social problems are also players in the social problems game, since they supply evidence for certain claims through books, articles, or presentations on social problems topics. These claims-makers often possess lofty academic or professional credentials, and are therefore well-situated in what Loseke (1999) refers to as the "hierarchy of credibility" in the social problems game. Since public audiences and policy-makers believe in and value science and research, claims made by those with high levels of education and expertise are often taken

more seriously than claims made by those who are perceived to have less

expertise and, therefore, power. Thus, all claims-makers in the social problems

game play a vital role in determining whether their claims will gain attention and

legitimacy as pressing social problems or not. Indeed, a social problem can "fail

to capture the imagination of the general public simply because of *who* is making

the claims" (Loseke, 1999: 36).

### Claims and Claims-making Strategies

The contextual constructionist approach to social problems argues that

claims-makers do more than simply draw attention to particular social conditions,

but that claims-makers shape our sense of just what the problem is (Best, 1989:

xix). As Loseke (1999: 59) explains, "successful social problems claims stem

from successful claims-making strategies – those that important audiences

evaluate as believable, those that lead to social change." Claims about

troublesome conditions implicitly or explicitly attempt to classify certain types of

conditions as certain types of problems. Best (1989) describes the process by

which claims-makers characterize a problem's nature as "typification," whereby

claims-makers adopt a certain orientation or perspective that frames their

arguments in light of certain social contexts. Any one condition can be framed in

a multiple of ways; there are "moral" problems, "medical" problems, "political"

problems, and "economic" problems, to name only a few. Indeed, certain

typifications emphasize certain aspects of the troublesome condition over others,

which equip audiences with larger category systems for thinking about the "problem" at hand (Loseke, 1999).

There are many different strategies which claims-makers utilize in attempting to typify troublesome conditions in certain ways. As Loseke (1999: 73) points out, typifications are critical in the social problems game since they construct the *causes* of troublesome conditions, which, in turn, ultimately promote particular kinds of solutions. Loseke categorizes the ways in which causes are constructed into three broad types: social causes, individual causes, and causes outside individual and social control. Social causes of social problems highlight the role of social structures, such as the economy, schools, family, and social welfare system, as well as social forces, such as prejudice, racism and ageism, as the roots of social problems. In contrast, individual causes construct people as the problem by claiming that the condition stems from certain individual's personalities, beliefs, abilities or actions. This is often a popular claims-making approach, since problems caused by individual people can be solved by individual change, which is a quicker and more manageable solution than systemic change (Loseke, 1999). Yet as Loseke (1999) indicates, while constructing social problems in terms of individual causes and solutions are often successful since they are simple and easy to understand, they often ignore the complexity of lived realities. As later chapters will illustrate, both individual and social causes have been used to typify foreign credential recognition as a social problem at different points in time.

Constructing the causes of social problems inevitably involves reference to morality, since discussions of cause essentially highlight *why* a particular condition is troublesome. Two separate and distinct approaches to constructing morality are discussed in the literature. Firstly, humanitarian moralities involve the construction of social problems based on the elimination of pain and suffering through appeal to emotions and the desire to make the world a better place (Loseke, 1999). Newly constructed social problems are often framed in humanitarian concerns using what Best (1987) refers to as the "rhetoric of rectitude", where claims are made about the existence of a troublesome condition from a value-based or moral perspective. As the author points out, this strategy tends to be adopted by relatively inexperienced claims-makers during the early stages of social problems construction, and is often recognized by those who are already sympathetic to the condition at hand.

A second approach to constructing understandings of why a social problem warrants public concern involves making claims that appeal to logic or rationality. Loseke (1999) refers to "organizational moralities" such as capitalism, individualism, family and fair play, each representing a set of beliefs about the organization of the social world. The author points out that the morality of capitalism, which involves reference to economics, competition and the right to profit, often enters claims-making in the form of solutions to social problems. Claims-makers often construct claims around themes that appeal to logic when attempting to address new audiences, as claims are revised and reconstructed

based on the receptivity of the new target audience. Such claims-making activity

can involve what Best describes as the "rhetoric of rationality". This rhetorical

strategy is deemed to be more sophisticated than the rhetoric of rectitude, and is

normally employed by experienced claims-makers at later points in a claims-

making campaign, in efforts to revive claims when new frames of reference

become available. Claims which feature a rhetoric of rationality often promise

the audience some type of benefit upon ratifying the claims. As Loseke (1999)

points out, the larger the group of potential beneficiaries, the more likely the

claim is to be successful. Since claims based in the rhetoric of rationality can

make demands for action in fresh and new ways, audiences are often easily

persuaded by such claims. Thus, when changes to policy are the favoured

outcome of a claims-making campaign, the rhetoric of rationality is an effective

strategy for evoking such change.

Another strategy for typifying social problems involves constructing what

Loseke (1999: 62) terms "cultural worries", or "the general worries shared by

many people at one particular time". This claims-making strategy involves

playing on the influences and events of a particular socio-historical context in

efforts to construct successful claims. Often, when claims-makers construct their

claims around issues that the general population is already concerned about, they

are able to tap into existing urgency and potential for social change, since the

troublesome condition becomes symbolic of larger and well-established social

problems (Loseke, 1999). Constructing a specific social problem as an instance

of a larger moral trouble at certain points in time is indeed a very effective claims-making strategy.

As claims-makers work to construct definitions of social problems through diverse claims-making strategies, they often incorporate various "facts" about the putative condition into their claims, in the form of evidence or definitions, which function to both illustrate the seriousness of the issue and to justify their recommended solutions (Best, 1987). Best's (1987) analysis of the rhetoric used in constructing the missing children problem drew upon philosopher Stephen Toulmin's argument analysis scheme, which described the evidence and assertions made about a problem as the "grounds" of an argument. In extending this model into the realm of social problems claims-making, Best (1987) identified three types of grounds which are commonly used in claims-making campaigns: examples, definitions, and numeric estimates. Firstly, many claims-making activities give examples of horrific and personal experiences of the social problem at hand in order to grab readers' attention and personalize the troublesome condition. While such "atrocity tales" are usually quite extreme in nature, they often come to be normalized through repeated media representations and public discussions of the social problem. Introductory examples are often followed by definitions of the troublesome condition, which both guide the way that the social problem is interpreted and suggest appropriate avenues for response. Secondly, definitions can take the form of *domain statements*, which identify new or newly recognized social problems and charts out their boundaries,

or *orientation statements*, which typify or re-orient conditions as particular types

of problems. Claims-makers may actually resuscitate familiar social problems by

utilizing new orientations to typify the troublesome condition in new and different

ways. Lastly, once a social problem is introduced through examples and

definitions, numeric estimates of the problem are often constructed in attempting

to emphasize the problem's size. Such estimates may highlight the number of

people affected by the problem, the growth of the problem and its potential to

spread, and the range or reach of the social problem. Claims which construct

social problems as being indiscriminate in who they may affect are considered a

particularly powerful claims-making strategy. As Best (1987: 108) points out,

> ...claims that a social problem's range extends throughout society
> serve an important rhetorical function. By arguing that anyone
> might be affected by a problem, a claims-maker can make
> everyone in the audience feel that they have a vested interest in the
> problem's solution... these claims present the social problem as
> something that cannot be ignored...

Indeed, in order for a troublesome condition to earn the title of a social problem,

claims-makers must convince their audiences that the putative condition at hand is

widespread, and therefore, close to home (Loseke, 1999). The more people who

feel they may be adversely affected by the consequences of a social problem, the

more likely they are to become concerned about the condition at hand.

Constructing a social problem as a wide-ranging, common condition is an

effective strategy for creating a social problem that cannot be ignored by

politicians and government bureaucrats (Loseke, 1999). As will be discussed

later, both numeric estimates and (re)orientation statements played an important role in the construction of foreign credential recognition as a pressing policy problem.

While claims-makers have a countless array of strategies to promote their claims at their disposal, successful claims-making anticipates what themes and typifications will likely be most effective with particular kinds of audiences (Loseke, 1999). Most certainly, claims-making strategies are ultimately a reflection of larger social and cultural contexts; therefore, close analysis of claims-making activities is particularly useful in understanding why certain claims emerge at particular moments in time.

## CONSTRUCTING POLICY PROBLEMS

While the social problems literature provides insight into how social problems become constructed and defined as such through claims-making activities, the public policy literature furthers the analysis of how social problems become "policy problems," or issues that are recognized as important by government officials. In the context of the current research, the development of both social problems and policy problems are crucial pieces in understanding the evolution of foreign credential recognition. In fact, the public policy literature can be seen as a natural extension of the social problems literature, given that social problems theory describes the formation of social problems and public policy theories of agenda-setting explain how certain social problems become

prominent issues on government agendas. The processes and dynamics involved

in government agenda-setting are particularly important to the current project in

explaining how and why foreign credential recognition became a pressing policy

priority in Canada in 2001, after a lengthy history as a social problem. Indeed, the

public policy literature helps to answer the question of why some social problems

capture the attention of governmental officials while others do not.

The public policy literature contains theoretical undertones very similar to

those within contextual constructionism, which are especially evident in the

attention paid to understanding the timing of policy problems – a crucial aspect of

the current research. John Kingdon, in his seminal work, *Agendas, Alternatives*

*and Public Policies,* examines how and why issues become prominent on

government agendas, and how and why government agendas change from one

time to another. Based on an in-depth study of the development of public policy

over time in the United States, Kingdon's (2003: 3) model of governmental

agenda-setting, which defines the 'agenda' as "the list of subjects or problems to

which governmental officials, and people outside of government closely

associated with those officials, are paying some serious attention at any given

time", considers the influence of social problems, their champions, and politics,

on pre-decision public policy processes.

Kingdon (2003: 87) argues that three sets of processes must interact

during the agenda-setting process for an issue to become elevated on the policy

agenda: problems, policies and politics. The *problem stream* involves the

definition and recognition of troublesome conditions that require government

action. The *policy stream* represents a community of policy specialists, both

inside and outside of government, who examine policy problems and propose

solutions to them. The *political stream* consists of things like public opinion,

election results, swings of national mood, and interest group pressure campaigns.

Kingdon (2003: 168) suggests that the three streams operate somewhat

independently until the appearance or "opening" of a "policy window" – a

specific and short-lived opportunity for pushing policy proposals or conceptions

of problems onto the policy agenda which arises when "a new problem captures

the attention of governmental officials and those close to them." When these

short-lived opportunities appear, players in the claims-making game, most likely

the organizational sponsors or "policy entrepreneurs", as Kingdon refers to them,

push their definitions of problems, their policy proposals, and their political forces

into the opportunity, thereby linking or "coupling" the disparate problem, policy

and political streams together. As Kingdon (2003: 173) describes:

> ...solutions come to be coupled with problems, proposals linked
> with political exigencies, and alternatives introduced when the
> agenda changes. Their advocates hook them onto the problem of
> the moment, or push them at a time that seems propitious in the
> political stream.

Thus, an issue is elevated onto the official agenda when a policy window opens

and policy entrepreneurs successfully couple problems to solutions, along with

favourable political forces. As Kingdon (2003: 165) explains, since policy

windows may open for short periods of time, policy entrepreneurs must join the

three streams quickly and efficiently:

> ...advocates lie in wait in and around government with their
> solutions at hand, waiting for problems to float by to which they
> can attach their solutions, waiting for a development in the
> political stream they can use to their advantage.

If policy entrepreneurs fail to join the three streams before the policy window

closes, the issue risks fading from view. Thus, in order to ensure that successful

coupling occurs, policy entrepreneurs often re-package their policy solutions in

light of new problems at hand. As Kingdon points out, policy proposals can be

recast, combined with something new, or attached to a problem different from the

one they started with. The author describes the development of policy processes

in evolutionary terms, where "evolution proceeds not so much by mutation, or the

sudden appearance of a wholly new structure, as by recombination, or the new

packaging of already familiar elements" into a new structure or proposal

(Kingdon, 2003: 124). Indeed, Kingdon suggests that survival in the 'policy

primeval soup' of policy alternatives is contingent upon the ability of policy

entrepreneurs to continually adapt their policy ideas to new and emerging policy

environments. This evolution is described as crucial to the elevation of a policy

issue onto the government's agenda, since old policy tools come to be defined as

solutions to pressing problems which politicians have vested interests in solving

(Kingdon, 2003: 172).

Kingdon's model of agenda-setting differs from traditional models of policy making within the public policy literature in that he rejects the notion that policy develops in logical and consistent stages or steps, in favour of a more fluid process. Kingdon envisages the policy process as consisting of independent streams that simultaneously flow through the system, only becoming coupled together when the activities of certain players socially construct favourable windows of opportunity and short-lived climates of receptivity. In this sense, Kingdon's model of agenda-setting can be considered a natural extension of social constructionist theories of social problems, given its focus on the activities of policy entrepreneurs as they construct problems, policies and solutions for specific target audiences, with strict attention to political contexts. Together, social constructionist perspectives on social problems and Kingdon's agenda-setting model provide a strong foundation for the analysis of the evolution of foreign credential recognition as a social problem and its transformation into a pressing policy priority in Canada.

# CHAPTER THREE

# METHOD

In analysing the evolution of foreign credential recognition as a social

problem, this study utilized two qualitative methodologies: historical analysis and

interview techniques. While the historical analysis of federal policy documents

served to provide the background and context of the development of foreign

credential recognition as a social problem, it in no way captured the full extent of

the claims-making process related to foreign credential recognition since it was

limited to documented claims-making at the federal level. Moreover, the

document analysis revealed further research questions in regards to the

construction of foreign credential recognition as both a social and policy problem

which required direct input from claims-makers themselves. To this end, a series

of interviews were conducted to further develop themes found within the

historical analysis, and contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the claims-

making dynamics from the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in the

current debates about foreign credential recognition.

## Historiography

This research first began with the collection and analysis of various

publicly-available federal government documents that addressed, either directly or

indirectly, the issue of foreign credential recognition. The creation of a descriptive written account of the various claims-making activities over time at the federal level was deemed to be a logical place to begin tracing the socio-historical construction of foreign credential recognition as a social problem. The document analysis involved the close examination of both past and present federal government reports, publications, commissions, news releases, Throne Speeches, and proceedings from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration that addressed foreign credential recognition as a policy issue. Federal responses to the reports of Committee's and Commissions, where available, were also analysed.

The historical analysis examined, compared and contrasted the claims, claims-makers and claims-making strategies involved in the foreign credential recognition social problems game between 1981 and 2007. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, the analysis highlighted the various constructions of foreign credential recognition at different points in time, and helped to identify a crucial definitional shift that occurred around the typification of foreign credential recognition in the mid-1990's. Much of the information garnered from the documents also provided insight into the various political and social contexts that the claims about foreign credential recognition occurred in.

**Interviews with Key Informants**

The latter portion of this study is based on data from 16 in-depth interviews with 18 key informants from various stakeholder groups regarding

their definitions and claims-making strategies in regards to foreign credential

recognition and their views on how and why the issue became elevated onto the

federal policy agenda 2001. Participants were selected based on their specialized

or expert knowledge about foreign credential recognition, their participation in

government initiatives or committees which examined the issue, or their role as a

stakeholder involved in claims-making activities around foreign credential

recognition. Based on the historical document analysis and current literature on

the widespread debates about foreign credential recognition, this study identified

key stakeholders as the federal government, professional regulatory bodies,

immigrant-serving agencies and organizations, research institutes and academics.[2]

Given that many of the participants were high-profile stakeholders in the

foreign credential recognition arena who often held senior or executive positions

within their various organizations, accessing such individuals proved to be

difficult in some cases, as will be further discussed below. While 27 individuals

were contacted in regards to participating in this study, the final sample was

comprised of 18 key informants. Despite efforts to ensure representative

participation by each of the stakeholder groups involved in foreign credential

recognition conversations, individuals from immigrant-serving associations

expressed a much greater interest in participating in the study than did

representatives from provincial or federal governments, or professional regulatory

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[2] While employers, universities and immigrants themselves are also important
stakeholders involved in the foreign credential recognition debate, these players were deemed to
be outside the scope (and size limitations) of this study's examination of the 'policy community'.

bodies. The final sample of key informants was comprised of executive directors of local, provincial and national immigrant-serving associations and organizations, a CEO and registrar from professional regulatory bodies, the directors of a credential recognition agency and a credential referral agency, a past Member of Parliament, a former provincial Deputy Minister, a former provincial government employee, senior policy analysts in the federal government, senior researchers at a research institute, and two academics.

Of the 16 interviews that were conducted between February and July 2006, 5 took place over the phone due to scheduling conflicts or geographical distance, often at the request of the participant. By offering to conduct the interview over the phone, two informants who were initially reluctant to participate in the study due to time constraints later agreed to partake in a phone interview. While this option was not ideal in terms of building rapport with the participants and garnering important cues evident in face-to-face conversations, phone interviews proved to be the only option available in a few cases. The remaining 11 interviews were conducted face-to-face in Calgary, Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa, and occurred at the respondent's place of work. In two different instances, two key informants chose to participate in the same interview together rather than in separate meetings. Each interview lasted anywhere between 45 minutes to over 2 hours, and were tape recorded in full. While I took sparse notes and brief jottings of key points in the first few interviews as suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995), this strategy was forfeited in later

interviews as it interrupted my strict and constant attention to respondents, which

many seemed to expect. As will be further discussed below, the extreme pace of

some of the interviews also demanded quick and pointed questioning on my

behalf.

While the basic content of the interviews remained largely constant for the

majority of the interviews to enable comparisons across interviews, each

interview guide was slightly altered in efforts to obtain in-depth details of each

participant's specific role and knowledge of the issue. The interview guide was

more fully developed throughout the interview process, as various patterns,

dynamics and strategies related to claims-making activities around foreign

credential recognition emerged from the interview data. The interview guide was

loosely structured around a set of thematic questions which stemmed from the

preliminary historical document analysis. Interviews centered around

participant's constructions of the problem, including their definitions of causes,

their role, message, claims-making strategy, preferred solutions and views of

other active claims-makers, in addition to questions regarding their views on why

and how foreign credential recognition emerged as a prominent policy priority for

the federal government in 2001. To garner such information, the following set of

guiding questions were utilized as prompts during the interviews:

- How did you first become interested/involved?
- What is your position on this issue?
- How do you/your organization try to get that message across?
- Are there particular groups you're trying to reach?
- Do you think the message is getting across?

- Where do you see the stumbling blocks?
- What would you like to see happening?
- In terms of a time line, how do you see this unfolding?
- Why did this issue start to receive increased attention from the government in 2001?
- Have certain groups been particularly effective in pushing this issue onto the policy agenda?

These questions were carefully formulated in the context of the theoretical framework of social constructionism, and therefore reflect efforts to understand the claims, claims-makers and claims-making processes as constructed by participants themselves, with as minimal reference to objective conditions by the researcher as possible. Given that the goal of this research is to describe how *claims-makers* socially construct the issue of foreign credential recognition, great lengths were taken to frame the interview questions in neutral terms. Depending on the participant's level of feedback to the various questions, probes were used during interviews to gain more complete and in-depth responses where necessary.

**Interview Analysis**

Each of the 16 interviews that were conducted were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software program QSR NUD*IST. After a preliminary read of all of the interviews, a coding scheme was developed based on the themes which emerged from the data. In total, 21 different codes were applied to segments of the interviews, resulting in over 200 pages of coded output. As some of the data were not exclusive to one specific code, certain segments were grouped under various applicable categories. Successive analyses of the grouped interview data revealed common themes and

patterns between the responses of different participants. Some of the key themes which emerged from the interview analysis with respect to foreign credential recognition include stakeholders' definitions of the problem, claims-making strategies, constructions of other stakeholders, drivers of increased political attention and assessments of remaining policy roadblocks. Chapters 5 and 6 provide an in-depth analysis of how participants socially constructed foreign credential recognition as a social problem and why they felt the issue garnered increased political attention in 2001.

## Reflections from the Field

Throughout the interview process I encountered numerous methodological dilemmas and challenges. Both accessing participants and managing my identity during interviews were admittedly more complex than first expected, the implications of which affected my sampling method and interview techniques.

### *Accessing Elites*

As previously mentioned, the high occupational status of the individuals I wished to interview during the course of my research resulted in problems of access. In fact, my access problem not only concerned obtaining an interview in the first place, but also involved attempting to gain information from respondents that went above and beyond what I could have garnered from skimming their organization's website or latest publication. Indeed, a handful of respondents

who declined to participate in the study referred me to existing publicly-available

documents or statements on the issue, informing me that their organization's role

and views on the topic could be located there.

My first point of contact with potential key informants was through an

email in which I introduced myself as a graduate student interested in the

development of foreign credential recognition over time in Canada, and either

requested a meeting with them to discuss the issue or stated the name of a

previous respondent who had suggested I speak with them. A personalized Letter

of Information[3] was attached to the email and I promised to follow up with a

phone call to schedule a meeting in the coming days. While individuals' email

addresses and phone numbers were largely available via their organization's

website, I soon found out that these did not necessarily lead directly to that

person. In a few instances, assistants or secretaries, the "gatekeepers of the

executive world", replied to my email or answered the phone (Hoffman, 1980).

In some cases, the participant themselves replied to my email, while in others

their assistant contacted me to indicate their availability. Indeed, in a few

instances throughout the interview process my first point of direct contact with

respondents was the face-to-face or phone interview. I found that building

rapport with respondents in these cases was much harder than in others where I

had previously communicated directly with the individual prior to the interview,

either by phone or email. Given this, I made pointed efforts to make introductory

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[3] See the Appendix

small talk with such respondents in hopes of bridging that initial communication gap that I felt existed. In other instances where I did not receive a reply to my email and followed up by phone, many assistants were reluctant to transfer me to the named individual and preferred to take a message on their behalf. Since this strategy failed to result in any returned calls in the initial phases of the interview process, I began considering alternative ways of "winning over" these gatekeepers. I was finally successful at getting transferred to the individual (or normally their voicemail) by informing the intermediary liaison that I had been corresponding with the potential informant during the past week, that they were expecting a phone call from me, and that I would very much appreciate being transferred to their voicemail. Indeed, much time was devoted to strategizing various methods of contact during the initial phases of this research.

While the original goal of this research was to interview a representative sample of individuals from various stakeholder groups, that intention was relaxed after numerous attempts to access various individuals by email or phone failed to yield results. Instead, I began to utilize my initial participants as referrals to other stakeholders involved in the issue. Simply asking participants if they knew anyone else who could provide me with further information at the end of the interview normally resulted in anywhere between one and four references. In fact, in most cases, respondents were more than willing to pass on names of other colleagues or acquaintances involved in the issue; however, I soon realized that such referrals did not necessarily translate into the successful attainment of an

interview. Of the nine individuals who declined to participate in the study, either

directly or by non-responsiveness, four were based on referrals from other

participants. Nevertheless, asking participants to point me towards others to

whom I should speak yielded an interesting result, in that common names kept

arising from one respondent to the next, suggesting that the circle of stakeholders

involved in the issue was fairly small and intimate. While the snowball method of

sampling rendered the study non-representative, and proves to be the study's

biggest limitation, tapping into the social networks of high-ranking leaders

involved in foreign credential recognition enabled me to access elite claims-

makers that I would have otherwise been unable to do.


*Negotiating presence*

As Hoffman (1980: 45) indicates, "the problem of access…is not resolved

upon entry into a social setting or upon securing an interview. Researchers then

have to acquire and maintain access to the activities, beliefs, and experiences of

their informants." Indeed, I must admit that I was in no way prepared for the vast

and demanding task that both managing my identity during the interviews, as well

as the interview dynamics themselves, proved to be. I was also surprised to learn

that while the majority of interviews occurred in a very relaxed manner and took

the form of open-ended conversations, others were extremely fast-paced and

encouraged quick and pointed questioning, to the point that I felt the need to be

almost aggressive with participants to keep pace with their responses and short

attention spans. Indeed, each type of interview demanded that I play a different

kind of role as a researcher, and the lessons learned with regards to strategies for

managing my identity during 'intense' interviews are worth mentioning.

As noted above, intense interviews often resulted with respondents who

were initially hard to contact, where meetings had been scheduled by

administrative assistants, and whose body language and tone deemed their time

(and patience) to be a non-renewable resource:

> Amber: Do you feel that certain groups have been more influential
> than others in pushing this issue onto the government's policy
> agenda?
> Respondent: How much longer do you think you'll need?
> Amber: Well, I only have a few more questions. Probably about 5
> minutes, but we can wrap this up if you need to go…
> Respondent: Well I have to run no later than 4:15
> Amber: Sure. Not a problem. We won't run longer than that…

In some cases, informants' attitudes or responses took the form of 'let's cut to the

chase and get this over with.' For example, the following interview segment

describes the happenings of the first few minutes of an interview that was

originally set up to be attended by two participants at the same time:

> Amber: Will [the second respondent] be joining us today?
> Respondent: I don't think so. From our point of view it's a lot of
> time. We work in the same organization and I am the Executive
> Director.
> Amber: I see. Absolutely…
>
> (a few minutes later the respondent's phone rings)
>
> Respondent: I'm sorry. I don't know why they're calling me when
> my door is closed.
> Amber: Oh, that's not a problem at all.
>
> (respondent answers phone)

> Respondent: Yes?! Oh. Well, alright I guess. Although I don't think it's necessary. In my opinion this whole thing is a waste of... well, fine. Send her in.

> (respondent hangs up the phone; the second respondent enters room and joins the conversation)

Trying to keep my composure and confidence about me after hearing the above statement proved to be an extremely difficult task, since I was not only shocked but put under immediate and absolute pressure to perform well in the interview, for sake of not wanting to disappoint the respondent or 'waste their time'. In cases such as these, I learned to utilize a handful of strategies in order to manage the interview, as well as my own identity.[4] Firstly, short and to-the-point questions worked better than open-ended guides during intense interviews, and quick probing and follow-up questions required my utmost attention. In these cases, there was no opportunity to take notes or jottings during the interview given its pace, and the fact that I felt that even the slightest break in eye-contact was interpreted as a sign of distraction or disinterest. Respondents appeared to react positively to my expressions of interest, such as nods and prolonged and constant eye-contact, which also allowed me to stay keenly aware of participants' nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, enabling me to guide the interview accordingly.

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[4] These tactics became apparent to me as I became more experienced with interviewing high-level executives and officials, and spent time reflecting on which strategies worked or failed to work after every interview. The manner in which I came to conduct interviews became an instinctive process, based on my initial interpretations and judgments of the respondent and the resulting interview atmosphere.

Another strategy that I employed to manage intense interviews was the inclusion of references to either the key informant's or their organizations work pertaining to the issue of foreign credential recognition by making implicit or explicit references to it during the interview. This information was garnered from background research that was conducted in preparation for each interview, which included becoming familiar with the participant's writings and statements related to foreign credential recognition, as well as their organization and individual rolls and responsibilities. Indeed, preparing for the interviews required a significant amount of this very crucial work – a methodological aspect which distinguishes interviewing elites and public figures from more traditional qualitative interviews (Spector, 1980). In addressing the importance of gathering background information prior to interviewing public figures, Spector (1980: 100) notes, "well-known people tend to expect this work… they may grow impatient with questions that could be easily answered by a look at public documents or their writings, or they may not take an uninformed researcher seriously." Most certainly, respondents seemed to be pleased with the fact that I had done my 'homework', and in some cases attempted to test the extent of my knowledge:

> Respondent: Do you know about the work that I've done in this area?
> Amber: Yes, your reports [title one] and [title two] directly address some of my research questions.
> Respondent: Yes, there were those and a few others as well. Can you remind me of the publication date of [title one]?
> Amber: I believe that report was published in 2002.
> Respondent: Yes, but we had done all sorts of consultations prior to that.

Incorporating other insider information also served to guide the interview to more

pertinent areas of discussion, and helped to avoid repetition of well-known facts.

While including such background information during the interview served to

legitimate both myself as a researcher and the research project itself, in other

cases it worked against me. For instance, after I made mention of one

respondent's work, she immediately began utilizing an increased number of

acronyms that were not familiar to me and started to refer to various people on a

first-name basis. While I asked for clarification in the first few instances, I

eventually gave up since I felt I was interrupting the flow of the interview and

also exposing my naivety. Indeed, intense interviews proved to be both

exhilarating and exhausting.

Another methodological issue that I encountered during the course of the

interviews involved the negotiation of trust with key informants. I was much

more successful in building rapport with respondents who appeared more relaxed

and on less of a time constraint than others. I gauged respondent's level of trust

by the depth of information they offered me. For example, in some interviews

that were more casual and opened-ended, informants made off-the record

comments, which I interpreted as gestures of trust. However, prior to the offering

of such information, respondent's often looked for my reassurance of their

anonymity with comments such as: "well, not that you'll quote me on this or

anything, but…", and "well, just between you and me", or, "perhaps I could

expand on that point after the interview". These findings are commensurate with

Spector's (1980) observation that elites often assume and expect to be quoted given their status as public figures, and are therefore extremely aware of both their statements in general as well as the accuracy of statements attributed to them. During the course of this research, I found that my immediate and repeated promises of confidentiality and anonymity appeared to be appreciated by informants, and often seemed to encourage further intimate thoughts and details, and was therefore adopted as a methodological strategy.

While the negotiation of trust was successful in some of the interviews, it was less successful in others. Many participants voiced their distrust of me and my research through statements such as: "well, I'm not going to tell you anything that I wouldn't say publicly...". Indeed, many of the respondents who made such comments often did so early on in the interview, almost as a way of making their intentions clear to me in a round-about way. Other participants expressed notions of suspicion in response to my questions of anonymity. Informants were given the choice to remain anonymous or not near the end of the interview. Interestingly, while the majority of respondents opted to forego anonymity, many of them did so in very cautious and guarded ways:

> Amber: Thank you so much for your time. Today has been really informative for my research. Thank you for seeing me this morning.
> Respondent: I look forward to seeing it and what you plan to quote me on, because I've learned to be careful.
> Amber: Yes, I will transcribe this interview in full and can email it to you. Later I can indicate the specific sections that I am interested in using from our conversation prior to using them in my report.
> Respondent: Great, good luck Amber.

And,

> Amber: Would you like to remain anonymous?
> Respondent: You can use my name in your report, but I want to see
> anything that you plan to quote me on so I can verify its accuracy.
> Amber: Okay. I can send you a transcription of our conversation
> in the next few days.
> Respondent: Good.

Also:

> Amber: Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me.
> Respondent: Well, I would love to see what you write, I really
> would.
> Amber: Sure, that is not a problem at all. It will be a few months
> before I start writing, but I can keep you posted as to my progress
> if you'd like.
> Respondent: Yes, I would like to see it not only for accuracy
> purposes, I would like to see what you attribute to me, I would like
> to see that, but more to the point, I would love to see your whole
> thesis and how you're going to put this all together. It will be quite
> interesting.
> Amber: I will definitely get that to you. Would you like to remain
> anonymous in my report?
> Respondent: Well why don't I see what you're attributing to me?
> Generally, I haven't said anything here that I haven't said publicly,
> I don't think. So, I don't have to be anonymous, but I would like
> to see what you are attributing to me before I make my final
> decision.

While I completely understood and in fact expected that many of my informants

would request anonymity or wish to see what they may be quoted on prior to the

excerpt's publication, I felt that this dynamic cast an awkward shadow over the

relationship that had been so diligently negotiated throughout the short-lived

course of the interview, and therefore opted to remove the choice of anonymity

from the study in favour of full and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity.

Without a doubt, the elite and professional status of many of the key

informants in this study affected the way in which the research was conducted. In

addition to accessing participants in the first place, a host of other unforeseen

methodological considerations were encountered throughout the course of the

research. From extensive background preparation, to specific interviewing

strategies and techniques, to the acute negotiation of presence in the field,

including the maintenance of confidence and composure in the face of awkward

and even insulting instances, interviewing high-profile individuals indeed

involves a different mix of skills than those traditionally used by field researchers

(Spector, 1980: 107).

The first three chapters of this thesis have laid the groundwork for the

results that follow. While the introductory chapter examined the literature on

foreign credential recognition, it also highlighted a gap in the knowledge about

the history of this issue and how it evolved over time. It was argued that utilizing

the social constructionist framework on social problems to investigate the

development of foreign credential recognition as a social problem would lead to

new insights about the ways in which claims-makers themselves have socially

constructed the issue over time. In working towards this goal, the remaining

chapters will examine the documented history of the development of foreign

credential recognition as a social problem at the federal level (Chapter 4), current

social constructions of the issue by various claims-makers (Chapter 5), and the

factors that influenced the transformation of this social problem to a prominent

policy priority in 2001 (Chapter 6).

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM, 1981-2007

In what is perhaps the first major study of the barriers to foreign credential recognition in Canada, McDade (1988) concluded her analysis with an examination of the federal policy activities that had addressed foreign credential recognition up until 1987. This chapter intends to update this research with respect to the federal activities that have occurred regarding foreign credential recognition since the 1980's. More specifically, this chapter will examine the factors that led to the emergence of foreign credential recognition as a formal policy priority in Canada in 2001, with its inclusion in the federal government's Speech from the Throne, in spite of its longstanding history as a policy dilemma. Indeed, a historical analysis of the social construction of foreign credential recognition as a social problem may lead to a better understanding of the factors that influenced the emergence of this issue as a federal policy priority. Utilizing a contextual constructionist approach, this chapter will explore how foreign credential recognition came to be socially constructed as a social problem by analysing the claims-making processes that occurred at the federal level in regards to this issue between 1981 and 2007.

## THE 1980's: EQUITY AND MULTICULTURALISM

Foreign credential recognition was first discussed at the national level in 1981 at the National Conference on Immigrant Women in Canada (McDade, 1988). The conference was sponsored by the federal government's Multiculturalism Directorate and led by the Minister of State for Multiculturalism and the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Canada, 1981a). It was attended by over 150 delegates from every province and level of government, 110 of which were community-based agencies represented by immigrant women (Canada, 1981a). The purpose of the conference, as identified by the Minister of State for Multiculturalism, was to address "the plight of immigrant women in Canada" to "[ensure] more fair and equitable treatment of immigrant women" (Canada, 1981a: 5). Since the issue of employment status of immigrant women was raised by the community-based agencies as one that lacked sufficient research, they recommended that the federal government "undertake a major research study to document the range of skills, education and training brought to Canada by immigrant and refugee women" (Canada, 1981b: 15). The conference participants suggested that such a study include an analysis of the "professional accreditation of immigrant and refugee women and barriers to acquiring Canadian accreditation in the same profession" (Canada, 1981b: 15). The federal government, however, failed to act on the conference's recommendations (McDade, 1988).

The issue of foreign credentials was raised again at the federal level three

years later. On June 27, 1983 a Parliamentary Task Force on Participation of

Visible Minorities in Canadian Society was established by the House of

Commons after a series of situation reports in the previous year identified "race

relations" as an area of concern in cities across the country (Interview). Thus, the

Task Force set out to seek positive ideas, models and recommendations to

"promote racial understanding, tolerance and harmony in Canadian society"

Canada, House of Commons, 1984: vi). The basic principles guiding the

Committee's investigation were identified as zero-tolerance for racism, the

protection of visible minorities against acts of discrimination and the achievement

of equal opportunity for visible minorities in Canada (Canada, 1984: 6).

Comprised of seven Members of Parliament, the Task Force received 300 briefs

from Ottawa and travelled across the country to hear from 130 groups of

witnesses, the majority of which were immigrant-serving organizations

(Interview).

In March 1984, the Special Committee on Visible Minorities in Canadian

Society published their influential report, *Equality Now!*, which identified finding

work that corresponded with one's qualifications as the "most important issue

brought before the committee" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984: 32). An

interview with a past Member of Parliament who was a member of the 1984 Task

Force attributed the strong appearance of foreign credential recognition in the

*Equality Now!* report to the fact that they heard and were presented with

numerous testimonials and submissions that highlighted the non-recognition of

international credentials as extremely problematic. "We heard about a lot of these

roadblocks in testimonials and briefs that were sent to us... Even as a Member of

Parliament, part of my case work was working with people to assist them to get

their credentials accepted" (Interview). Indeed, the *Equality Now!* report

presented case examples of the problems which related to the recognition of

foreign credentials. For instance, the report described how a Jamaican immigrant

with a Bachelor's degree from Harvard university and a PhD from Stanford

University who had applied for accreditation testified that he was informed by the

Ontario Ministry of Education and Ministry of Colleges and Universities that his

educational credentials "may be considered comparable to the completion of at

least Grade Thirteen in the current Ontario school system" (Canada, House of

Commons, 1984: 40). The Committee felt this instance "underscore[d] the

concern expressed in submissions...that the evaluation of foreign credentials is

such that minority immigrants are prevented from becoming licensed or from

receiving recognition for their credentials" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984:

40). *Equality Now!* also discussed the conditions said to be systemic barriers in

the process of foreign credential recognition - biased licensing practices,

nepotism, the requirement of excessive educational entry requirements,

prohibitive costs and subjective interpretation of eligibility requirements. In this

regard, the Committee concluded that "the current state of affairs in Canada [are]

haphazard, arbitrary and inequitable" with respect to foreign credential

recognition processes, and called on the federal government to ensure that

"evaluation methodology is equitable" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984: 41).

Moreover, the Committee recommended that both federal and provincial

governments "investigate the methods and organizations for evaluating non-

Canadian degrees and credentials, and the licensing and other practices of

professions, trades and apprenticeships" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984: 41).

The federal government responded to *Equality Now!* in June 1984, during

the midst of an election campaign (Interview). They pledged to further their

commitment to "eradicat[e] racial discrimination and promot[e] equality of access

and opportunity within [our] organization" noting that "the eradication of racism,

the development of a society noted for its commitment to equality and justice for

all and the full institution of multiculturalism is in the best interests for all

Canadians" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984: v-vi). With respect to the

Committee's recommendation regarding the evaluation of foreign credentials as

described above, the federal government claimed that the Minister of

Employment and Immigration would "discuss with his provincial counterparts,

the feasibility of joint action in this area" (Canada, House of Commons, 1984: 6).

However, the election welcomed Brian Mulroney's new conservative government

to Ottawa in September 1984, and two years later, a progress report by the federal

government on the results of *Equality Now!* revealed that the government had

made little progress in terms of foreign credential recognition due to issues

regarding shared jurisdictional responsibilities for professional credentials

(McDade, 1988). The government identified issues pertaining to educational

equivalency and professional and technical standards as areas of provincial

jurisdiction, and agreed to cooperate with provincial licensing bodies to establish

Canadian equivalencies for foreign educational credentials (McDade, 1988).

The government's response to *Equality Now!* can be assessed in the

context of Judge Rosalie Abella's *Report of the Commission on Equality in

Employment,* also released in 1984. The report examined efficient and effective

means for promoting equal employment opportunities, based on several months of

consultations with over 1,000 groups and organizations, including groups of

women, Aboriginals, visible minorities, disabled persons, government employees,

and representatives from business and labour (Abella, 1984: vi). The report,

which is largely known for introducing the term "employment equity" into the

policy discourse, boldly asserted that certain identifiable groups were not being

fairly represented in the Canadian public sector work force, despite demonstrated

educational and skill capacity (Bakan & Kobayashi, 2005). As part of this, the

Abella Report identified foreign credential recognition as a source of labour

market discrimination for professional immigrants, and cited the absence of a

mechanism to evaluate professional qualifications, the prohibitive cost of many

licensing and examination requirements, and the requirement of recently arrived

immigrants to have Canadian work experience as discriminatory barriers for

highly-trained newcomers (Abella, 1984). The report described the devaluation

of foreign credentials as a "waste of human and intellectual resources…that have

less to do with their professional qualifications or qualifiability and more to do

with the insularity of some professional organizations" (Abella, 1984: 50). In

order to reduce such barriers, it was recommended that a "system of qualification

and credential assessment be available so that recent as well as prospective

immigrants can be advised accurately about exactly what is necessary in order to

qualify them to practice their professions" (Abella, 1984: 49).

Three years later, in 1987, the Standing Committee on Multiculturalism

also examined the federal government's responsibility towards foreign credential

recognition. In their final report, *Multiculturalism: Building the Canadian*

*Mosaic*, the Committee identified the need for federal involvement in resolving all

problems pertaining to foreign credentials by recommending that "the federal

government take a lead advocacy role in examining licensing and accreditation

practices and in working with professional associations to enable immigrants to

establish themselves professionally in Canada" (Canada, House of Commons,

1987: 38). Highlighting the fact that similar recommendations had been made in

the past by both *Equality Now!* and the Abella Commission, the Standing

Committee on Multiculturalism held the federal government to account over its

responsibilities for foreign credential recognition by recommending that they

review and report on the implementations of each of the recommendations in both

reports.

The following year, in 1988, the Task Force on Mental Health Issues

Affecting Immigrants and Refugees released its report, *After the Door has been*

*Opened.* The twelve-member Task Force had been jointly established by then Health and Welfare Canada and Secretary of State, Multiculturalism to examine the mental health issues facing immigrants and refugees in Canada. Based on two years of research and public submissions, *After the Door has been Opened* identified failure to find suitable employment as one of the most powerful predictors of emotional distress among immigrants, and recommended that the government negotiate a strategy alongside their provincial counterparts to facilitate the successful entry of foreign-trained immigrants into the trades and professions (CTFMH, 1988). The Task Force concluded that the current treatment of highly skilled newcomers was "…wasteful of human talent and may jeopardize mental health" (CTFMH, 1988: 49).

All of the above-mentioned proceedings are unique in the history of claims-making around foreign credential recognition in that they served to directly voice the claims of immigrants themselves, the victims of the social problem, as well as their organizational sponsors, the immigrant-serving organizations and associations, to the federal government. Given that foreign credential recognition was raised in the majority of public consultations and their resultant reports around themes of equality, inclusion and multiculturalism in the 1980's, immigrants and their supporters were undoubtedly successful at constructing foreign credential recognition as a social problem at that time. In spite of this achievement, the federal government would not become responsive to this social problem until later in the 1990's.

## THE 1990's: PREPARING FOR THE "21ˢᵗ CENTURY"

Foreign credential recognition received very little attention in the late 1980's and early 1990's. That changed in 1994, when Citizenship and Immigration Canada held public consultations across the country regarding the future directions of Canada's immigration policy. Over 10,000 people participated in 58 national study circles, seven public meetings, ten working groups of experts and 300 written submissions.[5] The issue of equitable access to employment in terms of foreign credential recognition was raised at every public meeting, in working group meetings, and in several written submissions (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994: 20). In their final report, *Into the 21ˢᵗ Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship*, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994: 20) explained that:

> Immigrants can only contribute to the economy if they are equipped to enter the work force. Many have skills and education which, if recognized in Canada, enable them to join the labour market shortly after their entry.

Within this context, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (1994: 21) committed to establishing a "national clearinghouse on accreditation for the recognition of foreign credentials with provinces and professional associations" with the assistance of the Department of Human Resources Development, in order to establish greater national consistency on the accreditation process. The report also revealed that a federal-provincial working group on access to trades and

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[5] The report does not include a list of participants, but does contain numerous quotes from various immigrant-serving agencies and government departments.

professions, led by the provinces, had been established at the immigration deputy

ministers' meetings in July and September 1994, in efforts to establish federal-

provincial cooperation on accreditation. This report is especially noteworthy in

that it represents the first set of claims made by the federal government about

foreign credential recognition. Indeed, the report represents the government's

first formal response to, and therefore recognition of, foreign credential

recognition as a social problem.

Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship led to

renewed interest in foreign credential recognition at the federal level. One year

later, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration was mandated to

respond to a 1994 publication from the C.D. Howe Institute entitled *Diminishing*

*Returns: The Economics of Canada's Recent Immigration Policy*, which

highlighted the declining earnings of recent immigrants in comparison to their

earlier counterparts as an alarming trend (Canada, House of Commons, 1995a).

The Committee heard from a variety of experts on the economic impact of

immigration between March and June 1995. The Standing Committee's final

report, *The Economic Impact of Recent Immigration*, argued that immigration was

"economically benefiting both those who arrived at our borders and the resident

population" (Canada, House of Commons, 1995a: 1). The report concluded that

the waning economic impact of immigration in recent years arose partly from

"Canada's difficulty in evaluating and recognizing foreign educational

credentials", and noted that the "failure to recognize foreign occupational and

educational credentials of newcomers resulted in losses for both immigrants and

the country as a whole" (Canada, House of Commons, 1995a: 25). While the

Standing Committee highlighted provincial responsibilities for professional

credentials and noted that the federal government's role in terms of foreign

credentials was "confined largely to providing information", the final report

recommended that the federal government work with various stakeholders in

order to develop a "nation-wide system for assessing and recognizing the

educational and occupational qualifications of foreign-born individuals" (Canada,

House of Commons, 1995a: 25). While the Standing Committee on Citizenship

and Immigration formally requested that the federal government deliver a

response to their final report, there is no evidence to indicate that such a reply was

ever issued. In fact, records of the Routine Proceedings on Immigration in the

House of Commons in 1995 reveal the Standing Committee on Citizenship and

Immigration's frustration over the government's lack of attention to their work.

This was evident in a speech made by Osvaldo Nunez, MP, Bloc Quebecois,

Bourassa, the vice-chair of the Standing Committee at the time, during the

Routine Proceedings on November 1, 1995:

> ...In short, I am asking the minister to pay more attention to the
> reports issued by the Standing Committee on Citizenship and
> Immigration. It has issued several reports which were tabled in this
> House, but we never had any feedback from the minister. Although
> many witnesses have come before the committee and much effort
> was spent on this, the minister has not bothered to respond to these
> reports...[6]

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[6] Canada, House of Commons, 1995b

While the federal government may not have responded to the Standing

Committee on Citizenship and Immigration's 1995 report, they did establish an

independent Legislative Review Advisory Group (LRAG) in November 1996 in

order to update legislation pertaining to immigration and the protection of

refugees. The LRAG was comprised of three individuals: Susan Davis, a

consultant to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration and a past Executive

Director of Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada, Dr. Roslyn Kunin, an

Executive Director of a economic consulting firm, and Robert Trempe, a retired

Assistant Deputy Minister of the Quebec Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

(Canada, House of Commons, 1997a). The LRAG conducted national

consultations with "people involved in all aspects of immigration, inside and

outside all orders of government" and considered over 500 written submissions

over their one-year mandate, which required them to advise the Minister of

Citizenship and Immigration on the best future direction for Canadian

immigration beyond the year 2000 in light of emerging trends and research

(Canada, House of Commons, 1997b: 1).

The LRAG's influential report, *Not Just Numbers: A Canadian*

*Framework for Future Immigration*, proposed a new legislative framework for

immigration and made more than 170 recommendations concerning immigration

and refugee policy and law (Canada, House of Commons, 1997b). A

comprehensive section of the report devoted to "Access to Trades and

Professions" described foreign credential recognition as a systemic barrier to

labour force integration for highly-skilled newcomers. The report claimed that

such barriers "transform what should be transitional underemployment into

chronic underemployment" and result in "wasted potential and losses for both

immigrants themselves and the country as a whole" (Canada, House of Commons,

1997b: 36). The report largely targeted professional regulatory bodies as lacking

accountability and using their "role as protectors of the health and safety of

consumers as a guise to protect the interests of their members through

exclusionary entrance requirements" due to the threat that professional

immigrants pose to the "earning power of members" of professional associations

(Canada, House of Commons, 1997b: 36). The LRAG also highlighted the fact

that despite Citizenship and Immigration Canada's 1994 commitment to

"establish a national clearing house on accreditation,"[7] provincial and federal

coordination on foreign credential recognition remained largely unorganized. *Not

Just Numbers* called upon Citizenship and Immigration Canada to "monitor

policies and actions of professional bodies with respect to access" and

recommended that the Federal-Provincial Council on Immigration and Protection

"establish access to trades and professions and foreign credential recognition as

priorities and work with other relevant groups to resolve issues of restrictive

access" (Canada, House of Commons, 1997a: 37). The report also suggested that

credential assessment agencies develop national standards for Canadian

equivalencies for foreign professional qualifications.

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[7] Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994: 21

One year later, the federal government responded to *Not Just Numbers*

with the release of *Building on a Strong Foundation for the 21st Century* in 1998.

The report outlined Citizenship and Immigration Canada's new framework for

immigration and refugee policy and legislation in order to "help meet the

opportunities and challenges of the coming decades" (Citizenship and

Immigration Canada, 1998: i).  In addition to considering the findings and

recommendations presented in *Not Just Numbers*, the Department conducted their

own consultations with 115 organizations and individuals, and considered over

2200 written submissions from organizations and the public (Citizenship and

Immigration Canada, 1998: 6).  The government's report recognized that highly

educated immigrants who are partly admitted to Canada "because of the

occupation they intend to pursue" are often "disappointed" and "mislead" due to

the "lack of recognition of foreign credentials" (Citizenship and Immigration

Canada, 1998: 29).  The report also highlighted the lack of pre-immigration

information regarding accreditation procedures as a "structural barrier" for highly

skilled immigrants and committed to working with provinces and professional

associations to improve access to trades and professions by supporting

"provincially mandated credential evaluation services with transparent and

portable credential assessments" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998: 31).

These noteworthy claims represents the federal government's first direct

admissions that foreign credential recognition was a widespread social problem

for many new immigrants, and therefore transformed their role from that of target

audience to also one of claims-maker. After a lengthy history of hearing claims

by immigrants, their supporters and various federal commissions and committees

about the problems associated with foreign credential recognition, the federal

government became a claims-maker and active participant in constructing foreign

credential recognition as a social problem.

## INTO THE 21st CENTURY: GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The year 2001 marked the transformation of foreign credential recognition

from a social problem to an official policy priority, with its debut inclusion in the

federal government's Speech from the Throne. While the relevance of the Speech

from the Throne has received very little attention from Canadian public policy

analysts due to its irregularity and variance in length and structure, the Throne

Speech can be considered an accurate indicator of the government's agenda and

policy priorities at specific points in time (Soroka, 2002). The inclusion of

foreign credential recognition in the Throne Speech elevated the issue onto the

federal government's formal policy agenda for the first time in history, where it

would remain through consecutive Throne Speeches to come. The 2001 Speech

from the Throne outlined the need to better attract skilled workers from abroad,

and committed the federal government to cooperating with the "provinces and

territories to secure better recognition of the foreign credentials of new Canadians

and their more rapid integration into society" (Canada, 2001: 4). Then Prime

Minister Jean Chrétien reinforced this commitment in his reply to the Throne

Speech the following day, by urging provincial governments to revise their

policies with respect to the recognition of foreign credentials (Canada, 2001b).

The inclusion of foreign credential recognition in the 2001 Speech from the

Throne served to legitimize the issue as a government priority, which spearheaded

increased federal attention to the issue.

Numerous federal proceedings and publications addressed foreign

credential recognition throughout 2002 and 2003. In February 2002, the federal

government unveiled 'Canada's Innovation Strategy' with the release of

*Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians*. The report examined

strategies for increasing knowledge and learning to enable Canadians to better

"contribute to and benefit from the new economy" (Canada, 2002a: i). In a

section devoted to "Helping immigrants achieve their full potential", the federal

government illustrated that highly skilled and educated immigrants earn less than

Canadian-born workers with equivalent education levels, and that the earnings

gap between highly skilled immigrants and the native-born population closes

more rapidly in other countries, such as Australia (Canada, 2002a: 52). The

report claimed that "ensuring that immigrants are able to fully utilize their skills,

soon after arrival, is in the shared best interest of new immigrants to Canada and

the economy as a whole" (Canada, 2002a: 52). *Knowledge Matters* suggested that

the "rapid integration" of immigrants into "society and the labour market" could

be achieved by improving settlement programs, which would help to "maximize

the labour force benefits of immigration to the economy and society over the long

term" (Canada, 2002a: 52, 54). Foreign credential recognition was identified as a

settlement priority since "effective processes for assessing and recognizing

qualifications can improve access to employment" (Canada, 2002a: 53). In

efforts to address the barriers to labour force integration for highly skilled

immigrants, the government proposed cooperating with stakeholders to "develop

fair, transparent and consistent processes to assess and recognize foreign

qualifications before and after arrival for those in regulated professions and

trades, and those with education and experience in non-regulated professions and

trades" (Canada, 2002a: 54). The extensive attention that foreign credential

recognition received in *Knowledge Matters* is noteworthy, as it represented the

most systematic set of statements made by the federal government on the issue at

that point in time.

In March 2002, one month after the release of *Knowledge Matters*, the

Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration tabled their latest report,

*Building a Nation.* This report is unique in that it was initiated by the Committee

itself, as a way to independently evaluate the Department of Citizenship and

Immigration's proposed regulations to the new *Immigration and Refugee*

*Protection Act.* By undertaking such a study, the Committee provided a forum for

public comment that would have otherwise not occurred (Canada, House of

Commons, 2002a). The Committee received over 50 written briefs and heard

from 45 individuals and groups involved in immigration and refugee service

delivery, law, education and business, as well as from Citizenship and

Immigration officials. Foreign credential recognition was raised as a concern by

many of the witnesses, who noted that the issue was not addressed by the

proposed regulations. *Building a Nation* claimed that "skilled workers arrive in

Canada expecting to be able to apply for jobs as engineers, electricians or

physiotherapists, only to discover that licensing requirements preclude them from

seeking work in their profession or jurisdiction" (Canada, House of Commons,

2002a: Part 1, Section C). While the report recognized that professional

accreditation is a provincial jurisdiction, it urged the Department of Citizenship

and Immigration to act as a "facilitator in assisting licensing bodies to determine

foreign equivalencies" in order to encourage "the entry of skilled worker

immigrants into the labour market" (Canada, House of Commons, 2002a: Part 1,

Section C). The Committee also recommended that all applications for permanent

residence in Canada indicate the possibility of licensing requirements and advise

applicants to discuss accreditation procedures with the appropriate regulatory

body "to determine their likelihood of obtaining such accreditation or

certification" before applying to immigrate (Canada, House of Commons, 2002a:

Part 1, Section C).

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration responded to *Building a*

*Nation* three months later, in June 2002. The government supported the

Committee's recommendation that permanent residence applications contain

information about accreditation procedures, and claimed that they were working

to provide better information on foreign credential recognition online and in

application kits (Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002a). With

regards to federal leadership on accreditation, the government claimed that they

were "pleased the Committee raised this important issue" and referred to their

past commitments in both the 2001 Speech from the Throne and *Knowledge*

*Matters* to working with provinces, territories and key stakeholders in developing

fair and consistent foreign credential recognition processes before and after an

immigrant's arrival (Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002a). The

government also highlighted their intention to hold discussions about foreign

credential recognition with regulatory bodies and at federal-provincial-territorial

venues such as the Forum of Labour Market Ministers.

June 2002 also marked the release of the Standing Committee on

Citizenship and Immigration's second report of the year, *Competing for*

*Immigrants*, which assessed Canada's ability to compete with other countries to

"obtain and retain desirable immigrants" in light of Canada's aging population,

low fertility rate and shortages of skilled workers (Canada, House of Commons,

2002b). The Committee conducted briefings in Ottawa and met with staff

members at eight missions in the Far East, South Asia and Europe during April

2002. *Competing for Immigrants* documented that the Committee discussed

foreign credential recognition with overseas staff and found that missions

"routinely inform prospective immigrants of this potential barrier to participation

in the Canadian workforce" (Canada, House of Commons, 2002b: 21).

Committee members also met with Australian immigration officers, and described

Australia's foreign accreditation system, which requires that accreditation be

obtained before application for permanent residency, as a model to help address

problems with foreign credential recognition in Canada. *Competing for*

*Immigrants* made four formal recommendations to the government in regards to

foreign credential recognition, which largely duplicated their past

recommendations regarding improved online accreditation information and

stakeholder cooperation, and increased federal-provincial-territorial attention.

One unique recommendation called upon the federal government to provide

incentives to immigrants to obtain a Canadian assessment of their credentials

before they applied to immigrate.  In this regard, the Committee suggested that

Citizenship and Immigration waive the interview requirement or give priority

processing to prospective immigrants who obtain favourable assessments of their

credentials by a Canadian regulatory body.

The Minister of Citizenship and Immigration responded to *Competing for*

*Immigrants* in November 2002 by repeating many of their earlier responses

regarding foreign credential recognition.  While the government claimed that they

supported the Committee's recommendation to provide incentives for pre-

immigration credential assessments, they did not commit to any specific

incentives; however, they did support the placement of information regarding

accreditation and Canadian assessment agencies on Citizenship and Immigration's

website (Canada, Citizenship and Immigration, 2002b).

Foreign credential recognition was raised again at the federal level three

months later, in September 2002, with its second consecutive appearance in the

federal government's Speech from the Throne.  The Throne Speech characterized

immigrants as "one of Canada's greatest assets – and a unique advantage in a

globalized world", and claimed that Canada's ageing population and slowing

labour force growth placed an "even greater premium on this immigration

advantage" (Canada, 2002b).  The government then proposed to "work with its

partners to break down the barriers to the recognition of foreign credentials and

fast-track skilled workers entering Canada with jobs already waiting for them"

(Canada, 2002b).  One year later, the federal government offered funds to address

foreign credential recognition for the first time in hopes of addressing the

"barriers preventing [many newcomers] from reaching their full potential in the

Canadian labour market" (Department of Finance, 2003: 131). The 2003 federal

budget allocated some $13 million dollars over two years to support partnerships

between governments, regulatory bodies and employers to facilitate foreign

credential recognition procedures.

By 2003, the issue of foreign credential recognition was being discussed

not only by politicians, but more broadly in Canada.  The media had become

active in the foreign credential recognition claims-making process by reporting

heavily on what came to be known as the 'PhD taxi-driver syndrome'.[8]  In June

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[8] The role of the media is an important aspect of the foreign credential recognition
claims-making process and is worthy of future study; however, their numerous activities go
beyond the scope of this study.

2003, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration tabled a report,

*Settlement and Integration: A Sense of Belonging, "Feeling at Home"*, which

examined Canada's immigrant settlement and integration programs and

highlighted areas of concern. The Committee conducted cross-country hearings

in February 2003 and heard from 70 witnesses who were directly involved in the

provision of immigrant settlement services in all of the provincial capitals, as well

as Montreal and Vancouver (Canada, House of Commons, 2003). The

Committee's final report contained detailed claims from many witnesses

regarding barriers to foreign credential recognition, which was identified as the

"primary concern" of "those witnesses specifically involved in employment

counselling" (Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 11). Witnesses testified that

"as a result of accreditation barriers, education is not an advantage and does not

seem to pay off for recent immigrants" and referred to the skilled worker selection

process, "with its emphasis on advanced education", as "misguided" and

"immoral" (Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 11-12). Some witnesses

characterized the accreditation requirements of various licensing and regulatory

bodies as "arbitrary and irrelevant", and indicated that "systemic racism may be at

play" (Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 12). The report also presented

research from the Conference Board of Canada, which indicated that "over

500,000 Canadians would earn an additional $4.1 to $5.9 billion annually if their

experience and credentials were recognized in the workplace" and identified

"unrecognized foreign credentials" as the most significant reason for

unrecognized learning in Canada (Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 12). In

what may be their most commanding statement regarding foreign credential

recognition up to that point in time, the Standing Committee on Citizenship and

Immigration claimed that:

> The current underutilization of human resources is at odds with the
> country's immigration goals, and in particular, the goals of our
> skilled worker and provincial nominee programs. Equally
> important, the impact on the individuals affected – the PhD who
> ends up driving a taxi, for example – is profound. This can become
> a significant mental health issue for newcomers.[9]

The Committee's recommendations, which utilized noticeably forceful

language compared to their past recommendations on this issue, called on

Citizenship and Immigration Canada to "immediately establish an office to

facilitate professional and trade assessments and accreditation for immigrants",

requested that the federal government "provide greater support and assistance to

foreign-trained workers through loan and internship programs, as well as other

means", and urged the federal-provincial-territorial working group on foreign

credential recognition to "move as quickly as possible in this endeavour"

(Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 12).

The federal government issued a response to the Committee's

recommendations in October 2003, which highlighted their commitment to

remedying the barriers to foreign credential recognition by making reference to its

inclusion in the 2002 Throne Speech and the allocation of $13 million dollars

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[9] Canada, House of Commons. (2003: 12)

over two years to address foreign credential recognition in the 2003 federal

budget (Canada, 2003). The government claimed that the improved recognition

of foreign credentials would "reduce the likelihood of underemployment and will

positively impact Canada's economy" (Canada, 2003: Recommendation 16). The

government's responses to the Committee's potent recommendations relied

heavily on their past responses to the Committee's 2002 recommendations

regarding foreign credential recognition. The government did, however, reveal

that they were developing an internet portal "to assist immigrants to prepare for

Canada's labour market" before and after their arrival (Canada, 2003:

Recommendation 18).

The federal government addressed foreign credential recognition again in

2004, in both of the Throne Speeches that occurred that year. The February

Speech from the Throne highlighted the need to improve efforts to recognize

foreign credentials by informing immigrants about the accreditation process

before they arrive in Canada (Canada, 2004a). The second Throne Speech of

2004, delivered in October, marked a change in the government's claims-making

strategy in that it admitted that "efforts to improve the recognition of foreign

credentials and prior work experience [had] yielded too little progress" (Canada,

2004b: 3). In light of the "growing contribution that will be required from new

Canadians as our population ages" the government committed to "redouble its

efforts", in cooperation with the provinces and professional bodies, to integrate

highly skilled immigrants into the workforce (Canada, 2004b: 3). Then Prime

Minister Paul Martin replied to the Throne Speech by confirming that his

government would "make it easier for new immigrants to quickly find their way

into the work force" in efforts to "ensure Canada and Canadians remain

competitive in the global economy" (Canada, 2004c: 2). The 2004 budget

allocated an extra $5 million per year to foreign credential recognition, in addition

to the $13 million per annum committed in the previous budget.

The following year, the federal government's 2005 budget devoted much

attention to "ensuring maximum participation" of "newcomers in Canada",

describing immigration as:

> ...an important source of labour force growth. Demographic
> research indicates that within the next ten years immigration will
> account for all net labour force growth in Canada. Attracting and
> retaining skilled immigrants and ensuring they are able to reach
> their full potential sustains economic growth, promotes innovation
> and keeps city and community economies strong.[10]

The 2005 budget provided $75 million over five years to accelerate the

assessment and integration of internationally educated health care professionals,

and earmarked $68 million over six years to facilitate the assessment and

recognition of foreign credentials for all internationally trained workers.

Additionally, the government devoted $298 million over five years for settlement

and integration programming, in efforts to address settlement pressures across the

country and improve labour market outcomes for immigrants in Canada

(Department of Finance, 2005). Indeed, these commitments represented a marked

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[10] Department of Finance, 2005

change from the government's 1984 proposal to "assess the feasibility of joint action" on foreign credential recognition in response to the *Equality Now!* recommendations.

Delivering on Throne Speech and budget commitments, the federal government launched the Internationally Trained Workers Initiative on April 25, 2005. The initiative, lead by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, involves over 14 federal departments who will work together to address the barriers that internationally trained workers face in Canada (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2005). In addition to addressing the integration of internationally trained health professionals, creating an on-line internet information portal, and enhancing language training initiatives, the Internationally Trained Workers Initiative allocated "$68 million in funding over six years to facilitate the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications for both regulated and non-regulated occupations" (Canada, 2005). In announcing the initiative, Lucienne Robilliard, then President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, and Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, stated that "We look forward to working with partners to ensure that everyone can use their skills and abilities, no matter where they received their training, so that they—and Canada—can benefit to the fullest" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005). Health Canada (2005), one of the participating departments in the initiative, issued a news release describing the strategy in terms of its departmental objectives:

> Canada faces current and looming shortages of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals. At the same time, there are numbers of internationally trained health care professionals who have been unable to practice in Canada. Successfully addressing such challenges is becoming increasingly important, because adequate health human resources are essential to achieving high quality of care and lowering wait times. To this end, the Government of Canada has been working with 14 federal departments, provincial and territorial governments and health regulatory bodies to reduce the barriers that have prevented internationally trained health care workers from making full use of their talents and expertise to the benefit of all Canadians.

As both of the above claims illustrate, the government largely typified the Internationally Trained Workers Initiative in terms of its potential to benefit not only immigrants themselves, but the larger Canadian public as well.

February 2006 marked the beginning of a new government in Ottawa, as the Liberal's were defeated by the Conservatives in the federal election that occurred that winter. Two months later, in April 2006, the Conservative government's first Speech from the Throne committed to promoting "a more competitive, more productive Canadian economy" by improving "opportunit[ies] for all Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples and new immigrants" (Canada, 2006: 11). In May 2006, the new government released their first budget which proposed a number of measures to "build a more competitive, productive Canada", including increased support for immigrant settlement and foreign credential recognition. (Department of Finance, 2006a). As part of the government's strategy to "combine people, skills, new ideas and advanced technologies to create a competitive edge" in the "modern global economy", $307 million was committed to immigrant settlement and a commitment was made to

establish a Canadian agency for the assessment and recognition of foreign

credentials:

> In this budget, the Government is moving forward on its
> commitment to create an agency to ensure foreign-trained
> immigrants meet Canadian standards, while getting those who are
> trained and ready to work in their fields of expertise into the
> workforce more quickly.[11]

In November 2006, the federal government released *Advantage Canada:*

*Building a Strong Economy for Canadians,* a report outlining its long-term

economic plan. A section devoted to improving opportunities for Canadians

noted that "globalization and the growth of the knowledge-based economy are

sharply increasing the importance of the skills, education and adaptability of our

workforce for global competitiveness" and identified the need to "increas[e] the

participation of Canadians and immigrants in the workforce to meet current and

future labour shortages" (Department of Finance, 2006b: 48). The report claimed

that Canada's "immigration policies should be more closely aligned with our

labour market needs," and highlighted the need to improve and expedite foreign

credential recognition processes in light of the challenges that many newcomers

face in adapting their knowledge to the Canadian setting. The report expressed

concern that immigrants' "employment rates have fallen below those of other

Canadians, and their relative earnings, particularly for the university-educated, are

lower" (Department of Finance, 2006b: 49).

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[11] Department of Finance, 2006a: 11

The federal government's latest budget, released in March 2007, was largely fashioned around Advantage Canada's commitments, and allocated $13 million over two years towards the creation of a national Foreign Credential Recognition Referral Office – an investment in support of building Canada's "knowledge advantage," defined as having the "best-educated, most-skilled and most flexible labour force in the world" (Department of Finance, 2007: 22).

As the numerous examples above illustrate, the federal government became an extremely active claims-maker with regards to foreign credential recognition from 2001 onwards. Compared to their role in the 1980's and 1990's, the federal government can be said to have transformed their role from one of reluctant audience to that of active and concerned claims-maker in the 2000's. Interestingly, all mention of foreign credential recognition at the federal level from 2001 onwards occurred in formal federal policy statements, such as the Speech from the Throne and the annual budget. Indeed, the substantial monetary support allocated by the federal government to addressing problems associated with foreign credential recognition furthered their commitments to and constructions of foreign credential recognition as not only an important social problem, but a pressing policy priority in Canada.

## THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

All of the above-mentioned activities involve a series of claims about foreign credential recognition, a variety of claims-makers, and a particular claims-

making process that served to construct the issue in different ways at different

points in time. Three central claims-makers were involved in socially

constructing foreign credential recognition as a social problem during the 1980's.

As evident with the National Conference on Immigrant Women in 1981,

concerned immigrants, who were victims of the negative effects of credential non-

recognition, and their organizational sponsors, the immigrant-serving agencies

who had intimate knowledge of the barriers that existed for highly skilled

newcomers, were the first to make claims about the problems associated with

foreign credential recognition in a national context. These claims were directed at

the federal government, both the multiculturalism and employment and

immigration departments, who largely adopted the role of audience during this

time. The governmental players who were active claims-makers in regards to

foreign credential recognition in the 1980's were either mandated to conduct

national consultations by the federal government, such as the Special Committee

on Visible Minorities in Canadian Society and the Abella Commission, or were

members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in the

House of Commons. Indeed, the Parliamentary Standing Committees and

Commissions acted as intermediary claims-makers between concerned

immigrants and immigrant-serving organizations and the federal government,

since they were comprised of Members of Parliament or appointed by the

government directly, yet served to voice the opinions of concerned Canadians via

public consultations and out-of-house research. The final reports of

Parliamentary Committees and Commissions therefore can be said to represent

the claims of concerned Canadians, yet are often sensitive to the political

atmosphere on Parliament Hill given their 'insider' status as politicians and

consultants.

Foreign credential recognition was largely constructed around

humanitarian concerns regarding equality of opportunity and fairness by

immigrants and their organizational sponsors during the 1980's. As illustrated

above, *Equality Now!* identified foreign credential recognition procedures as

"haphazard, arbitrary and inequitable", and the Abella Commission made claims

regarding the exclusionary attitudes amongst professional organizations towards

their foreign-trained counterparts. These claims constructed foreign credential

recognition from a social justice, value-based perspective, and demonstrate what

Best (1987) refers to as the rhetoric of rectitude, which is often utilized in efforts

to appeal to morality and humanitarian ideals during the early stages of the

claims-making campaign. Indeed, this typification strategy corresponded to

political and social contexts during the early 1980's, which were characterized by

a heightened attention towards equality and the removal of racially discriminatory

barriers due to the marked increase in the flow of visible minority immigrants that

were entering Canada at that time, and accompanying concerns over the rise of

racism (Leman, 1999). As Peter Li (2000: 17) notes, "The growth of the visible

minority in Canada in the 1980s had created a new demographic and political

reality, and along with it, growing concerns about the plight of racial minorities in

Canadian society, as they experienced unequal life chances in Canada." Since

the causes of credential non-recognition were constructed by claims-makers as

stemming from systemic discrimination, and solutions were constructed around

the need for "fair and equitable treatment" and commitment to the "development

of a society noted for its commitment to equality and justice for all," foreign

credential recognition was socially constructed as a racialized issue in the 1980's

(Canada, 1981a: 5; Canada, 1984: vi). In spite of official commitments to

combating racism and discrimination during this time, such as the unveiling of the

*Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 and the *Multiculturalism Act* in 1988, the

federal government failed to respond to the recommendations set out at the

Immigrant Women's Conference and in *Equality Now!,* the Abella Commission,

and the report of the Standing Committee on Multiculturalism, all of which called

upon the government to take a leadership role in the coordination of professional

accreditation procedures. Indeed, the federal government's lack of response to

this issue served to minimize the importance of foreign credential recognition at

the federal level during the 1980's.

Foreign credential recognition was revived as a policy dilemma in the

early 1990's, yet was constructed in a very different manner as compared to the

1980's. While foreign credential recognition was raised as a social justice

concern during Citizenship and Immigration Canada's public consultations in

1994, the government's response to these claims were framed in a much different

way. The government's report, *Into the 21st Century: A Strategy for Immigration*

*and Citizenship,* focussed on the negative *economic ramifications* of foreign

credential devaluation. The report contained numerous references to the changing

role of immigration in the new 'global economy', and stressed that:

> Canadians are confronting sweeping economic and social change
> as Canada moves from a resource-based to an information-based
> economy. The immigration and citizenship program will be
> managed to provide enhanced and direct support to creating the
> skills base and the environment necessary to use change as an
> opportunity for growth and advancement.[12]

This claim represents the first step towards a dramatic definitional shift that would

soon follow: foreign credential recognition was no longer typified via

humanitarian rhetoric of inequality or racism, but was rather constructed as a

strategic tool for economic success and national prosperity. The federal

government's claims reframed foreign credential recognition from a social justice

problem to an economic solution using what Best (1987) terms the 'rhetoric of

rationality' – an effective claims-making strategy often utilized by experienced

claims-makers when attempting to reorient social problems to logical arguments

and new social contexts. As Loseke (1999) points out, appealing to moralities

such as capitalism and globalization are often successful in constructing solutions.

This new economic typification also changed the claims-makers involved

in the construction of foreign credential recognition as a social problem. The

federal government officially became a claims-maker upon issuing the report *Into*

*the 21ˢᵗ Century: A Strategy for Immigration and Citizenship* in 1994 by pledging

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[12] Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994: x

that Citizenship and Immigration Canada would partner with Human Resources

Development Canada to establish a "national clearing house on accreditation".

Indeed, this inclusion of Human Resources Development Canada also served to

construct foreign credential recognition as an economic issue, since the

department addresses all issues related to the country's labour market. The

Department of Multiculturalism, who was actively involved in the foreign

credential recognition debate in the 1980's, ceased to participate in related

government proceedings during the 1990's.

In addition to constructing foreign credential recognition as an economic

issue throughout the 1990's, the federal government also structured their claims

around the risks and benefits associated with the issue. Not only did the 1995

report *The Economic Impact of Immigration* typify foreign credential recognition

in terms of its potential economic contributions, the report also pointed out that

"failure to recognize foreign occupational and educational credentials of

newcomers resulted in losses for both immigrants and the country as a whole"

(Canada, House of Commons, 1995a: 25). This claims-making strategy is also

evident in the Legislative Advisory Review Group's (LRAG) 1997 report *Not*

*Just Numbers,* which described the barriers to labour force integration for highly

skilled newcomers in terms of "wasted potential" and "losses" (Canada, House of

Commons, 1997b). These claims served to construct foreign credential

recognition as an issue that the entire country had a vested interest in due to its

wide-ranging consequences: failure to remedy the problem could result in

economic losses for native-born Canadians, but successfully addressing the

problem promised economic growth. Indeed, by reframing the foreign credential

recognition debate from a racialized issue to one that concerned national

prosperity, the federal government widened the audience interested in foreign

credential recognition to include the entire electorate – a recipe for successful

claims-making. As Loseke (1999) points out, the larger the group of potential

beneficiaries, the more likely the claim is to be successful.

The federal government's response to *Not Just Numbers* in 1998 marked a

crucial point in the evolution of foreign credential recognition as a social problem

in that the government claimed, for the first time, that economic immigrants to

Canada are often "disappointed" and "mislead" due to the "lack of recognition of

foreign credentials" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1998: 29). It is

noteworthy that this admission by the federal government came only after the

issue's typification as an economic imperative. The government's response can

be viewed in the context of the neoliberal restructuring that occurred in the

1990's, which were largely characterized by anti-inflation and anti-deficit policies

and cutbacks to government spending in light of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade

Agreement in 1989 and the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994

(Watkins, 2004).

Neoliberalism as a macroeconomic ideology is aimed at increasing

productivity and reversing declining profit margins characteristic of the late

1960's into the 1980's largely through the promotion of a cheaper, more flexible,

and more productive workforce (Gordon, 2005). This ideological shift became

entrenched during the late 1980's and 1990's, emphasizing free market forces, a

reduced role of the state, economic efficiency, and global economic

competitiveness (Gordon, 2005; Larner, 2000; McKeen and Porter, 2003).

Canada's current immigration policies have been described as representing an

"economic model of immigration" characterized by neoliberal objectives, in that

Canada's extremely selective points system selects for highly skilled and

technical workers, fast-tracks them into the country, and expects them to make

large contributions to the Canadian economy (Satzewich & Wong, 2003). This

has resulted in what has been referred to as "designer immigration," where the

state is able to specify the desired human capital that immigrants should possess

(Simmons, 1999 quoted in Satzewich & Wong, 2003). While the majority of new

immigrants in Canada possess such high levels of human capital, which are

equated with elevated earnings, productivity and contribution to Canada's

knowledge-based economy, the devaluation of foreign credentials became

constructed as a barrier to the efficient use of such valuable human resources,

which threatened to contradict both the goals of Canada's immigration policy and

the federal government's larger neoliberal agenda.

Indeed, the construction of foreign credential recognition as a social

justice issue was largely replaced by a neoliberal problem definition during the

1990's. This change in typification may have been crucial in the development of

foreign credential recognition as a policy priority since it garnered the issue

increased attention by the federal government. Indeed, the federal government's

construction of foreign credential recognition as an economic issue in light of

burgeoning concerns over globalization and sustainable economic

competitiveness in the 1990's served to legitimize the issue as worthy of further

attention in a way that the social justice concerns of the 1980's did not. As both

Best (1989) and Loseke (1999) point out, constructing claims in terms of

humanitarian or value-based moralities are often less successful than those that

appeal to logic or rationality, such as capitalism, since the latter often offer larger

groups of people some type of benefit. Indeed, claims which concern national

prosperity are likely to be more successful than claims which highlight social

justice concerns of smaller groups such as immigrants. The politics of

typification must also be considered here, since politicians are likely more

comfortable making campaign promises around improved economic performance

than pledging to address widespread discrimination embedded in the country's

institutions as well as the electorate themselves. Certainly, foreign credential

recognition received real and significant political attention only after claims

which highlighted the racialization of the problem were reoriented by

constructions of the issue as a promising economic policy tool that had the

potential to benefit the country as a whole.

The devaluation of foreign credentials remained typified as an economic

concern by the federal government into the 21$^{st}$ century. This was highlighted in

the federal government's 'Innovation Strategy' *Knowledge Matters*, released in

2002, which claimed that foreign credential recognition was essential if "Canada

is to benefit from [immigrants'] full potential" and called for "effective processes

for assessing and recognizing qualifications" in order to "improve access to

employment" (Canada, 2002: 49, 53). This typification was reinforced in the

2002 Speech from the Throne, when the federal government referred to the

"immigrant advantage" as "one of Canada's greatest assets" in the "globalized

world" (Canada, 2002b). The Standing Committee on Citizenship and

Immigration also became active in constructing foreign credential recognition as

an economic issue by claiming that the devaluation of foreign credentials cost

Canada "$4.1 to $5.9 billion annually" (Canada, House of Commons, 2003: 12).

Indeed, this claim typified foreign credential recognition in a way that resonated

with the federal government, and the utter size of the estimated economic loss

constructed the issue as a problem that the government could not afford to ignore.

In spite of the inclusion of foreign credential recognition in the 2001 and

2002 Throne Speeches, the federal government continued to claim that the issue

was largely a provincial responsibility, and committed only to "cooperating with

other stakeholders". By constructing foreign credential recognition as a

provincial issue, the federal government placed the onus of the problem onto the

provinces, which neutralized their own responsibility for the issue. A similar

strategy emerged in 2002, when both the federal government and the Standing

Committee on Citizenship and Immigration implicated professional licensing and

regulatory bodies as being responsible for the devaluation of foreign credentials

(Canada, House of Commons, 2002a; Canada, Citizenship and Immigration

Canada, 2002a).

Regulatory bodies and immigrants were further implicated by calls from

both the federal government and the Standing Committee on Citizenship and

Immigration for pre-immigration accreditation procedures. This strategy was

championed by both of the Standing Committee's reports in 2002, which

described Australia's approach to foreign credential recognition, which requires

immigrants to obtain Australian accreditation of their credentials before they can

apply to immigrate, as a "model" that Canada should "strive" for (Canada, House

of Commons, 2002b). The federal government responded by agreeing to provide

better information about accreditation to immigrants before they arrive in Canada.

These claims constructed foreign credential recognition as a responsibility of

individual immigrant's themselves, which thereby distanced the federal

government from the issue.

In spite of this, the federal government allocated federal dollars to

addressing the barriers associated with foreign credential recognition for the first

time in 2003. While this signalled their commitment to the issue, their claims

continued to highlight the provincial and regulatory responsibilities for foreign

credentials, and made reference to the complex web of stakeholders involved in

the issue (Canada, 2003). The unveiling of the Internationally Trained Workers

Initiative by the federal government in 2005 constructed foreign credential

recognition as an important social problem that the federal government was

committed to addressing, in that the issue received a substantial $68 million

dollars over six years. In discussing their responsibilities for the Internationally

Trained Workers Initiative, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

(2005) claimed that "one of the keys to our prosperity and competitiveness will be

the degree to which internationally trained workers are able to contribute to

Canada's economic and social development". Indeed, the federal government

constructed foreign credential recognition as an issue that the entire country had a

vested interest in by claiming that widespread economic benefits would stem from

the successful participation of highly skilled newcomers in the Canadian labour

market.

Foreign credential recognition continues to be constructed around such

neoliberal rhetoric today. Since the economic rationales behind foreign credential

recognition fit nicely into the new Conservative government's policy priorities,

the issue survived as a policy priority in spite of the change of government in

2006. The 2006 Speech from the Throne and the 2006 and 2007 federal budgets

all made reference to foreign credential recognition as a way of creating a

"knowledge advantage" that Canada requires in order to remain competitive in the

global knowledge economy. The knowledge advantage was described as a way of

fuelling Canada's productivity, which was claimed to be a crucial aspect in

responding to future challenges:

> From around 2010, the trend share of Canada's population in the
> workforce will begin to decline as increasing numbers of baby
> boomers retire. And demographic change will not only affect our

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economic potential, but it will also exert pressures on public
pension and health care expenditures.[13]

By relating the economic integration of immigrants to the larger, more established social problem of Canada's aging population and the impacts of looming demographic shifts, the federal government constructed foreign credential recognition as part of larger cultural worries, thereby tapping into existing public concerns and attention.

## DISCUSSION

The use of contextual constructionism to describe the claims-making processes around foreign credential recognition at the federal level revealed an interesting phenomenon: a change in the popular political discourse altered the typification of foreign credential recognition, which ultimately led to its construction as a pressing policy priority. During the lengthy claims-making campaign described above, the definitions, typifications and policy recommendations regarding foreign credential recognition changed with the political context of the day. Indeed, foreign credential recognition was transformed from a racialized issue that the federal government was hesitant to acknowledge and address, to one that concerned economic competitiveness and national prosperity in the new global economy which has received significant federal funding and attention. While the former typification was largely purported by immigrants and their organizational sponsors in the early stages of

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[13] Department of Finance, 2006: 90

the foreign credential recognition claims-making campaign in the early 1980's, this analysis has revealed that the latter typification began to be promoted by governmental committees and commissions, and then by the federal government themselves in the mid-1990's. At this point in time, the government constructed foreign credential recognition as a social problem on the grounds that it was an obstacle to burgeoning neoliberal goals through typifications largely rooted in the globalization rhetoric, which highlighted the need for skilled workers to sustain economic competitiveness in the 'global' 'knowledge' economy that the $21^{st}$ century would bring. Certainly, the policy conclusions of the 1990's were more substantial than in the 1980's, as the federal government recognized foreign credential recognition as a structural barrier for new immigrants and committed to working with provinces and professional regulatory agencies in addressing this 'provincial responsibility'.

Foreign credential recognition became a federal policy priority in 2001 when it was included on the government's official policy agenda – the Speech from the Throne. Since then, the federal government has become an active claims-maker in constructing foreign credential recognition as an important economic policy lever for the country's future economic success. Strong neoliberal typifications continue to highlight the economic 'waste' and 'losses' associated with the devaluation of foreign credentials, and the substantial funding that has been devoted to the issue over the past few years by the federal

government further constructs foreign credential recognition as a major policy concern.

It has been said that the social construction of a particular issue affects the types and direction of intervention schemes (Baumann, 1989). While foreign credential recognition can be viewed from both social justice and neoliberal perspectives, only neoliberal discourses served to construct foreign credential recognition as a social problem worthy of government funding and attention. While this analysis was limited to the claims-making reflected in federal government documents, further questions remain as to how other claims-makers besides the federal government socially construct foreign credential recognition. Who are the other claims-makers, what claims do they make, and to who? What strategies do they employ? While this chapter has charted out the historical evolution of foreign credential recognition in Canada, questions still remain as to why and how the issue became included in the Speech from the Throne in 2001. These questions will be further explored in the following chapters in efforts to fully capture the dynamics of the claims-making processes that led to the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority in Canada.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

This chapter works towards an understanding of current constructions of foreign credential recognition by stakeholder groups, including immigrant-serving organizations, credential assessment and referral agencies, federal and provincial governments, professional regulators, research institutes and academics. The way in which these claims-makers socially construct foreign credential recognition as a social problem will be examined through an analysis of both their claims-making activities, as well as the strategies which they utilize in this social problems game. More specifically, this chapter will explore how various players construct definitions, causes, challenges, consequences and solutions related to foreign credential recognition through their claims and claims-making activities. As will be illustrated, immigrant-serving organizations who sponsor and execute claims-making activities on behalf of immigrant victims are expert players in this social problems game who strategically manipulate their claims around their target audience.

## CONSTRUCTING DEFINITIONS OF THE PROBLEM

Prior to discussing their own definitions of foreign credential recognition and the factors which cause it to be a social problem, many participants first

expressed their opinions of what they felt to be popular definitions of the social

problem. Several informants expressed displeasure with the ways in which

various stakeholders, including the media, had defined the problem, and claimed

that many commonly held beliefs about foreign credential recognition stemmed

from overly simplistic definitions of the problem, which they felt minimized the

complexity of the issue:

> ...the problem is that the definition of, the whole notion of foreign
> credential recognition was unfortunate from the beginning, because
> its not really just a matter of their credentials, and now people are
> focussing on the credentials as the real problem and demonstrated
> competencies rather than focussing on the whole communication
> and cultural issues an so on. So just looking at academic
> credentials, which I think is the easiest piece of the puzzle, was the
> one that I don't think will have the impact that is necessary.
> (Academic)

And,

> Having a federal interdepartmental approach to this issue is good,
> because not only is it interdepartmental, but it should be holistic.
> It's not limited to one issue, its not limited to FCR. It's looking at
> the broader picture. So, how does language play a role in your
> integration at home and in society and in the workplace? How
> does understanding essential skills, how do you explain culture to
> people? How do you explain that hanging around the water cooler,
> as long as you don't do it twenty-four hours a day, can be really
> beneficial in creating the links and networks that you need to fully
> participate in your workplace, community and home? We need to
> look at the bigger picture of how do we integrate new Canadians
> into society. (Federal government employee)

Also:

> ...foreign credentials are a component in a broader immigration
> issue... [Last year at a large governmental conference on
> immigration] credentialing was one of the issues on the table, but
> other issues were housing, transportation, language, settlement

> services, labour market information, career counselling. There is a
> whole host of things that goes on between the selection of people
> to come to Canada and how that's done, to settlement in the
> country and integration services to get people properly integrated
> in society and the economy. So there are a lot of issues there.
> There's no doubt that foreign credential recognition is a major
> issue, but it has to be understood as being a piece in this bigger
> picture. (Research institute)

In keeping with Loseke's (1999) suggestion that constructing social problems in

simple and easy to understand terms often ignores the complexity of lived

realities, many informants were unsatisfied with the use of the term 'foreign

credential recognition' since they felt it constructed both a narrow definition of

the problem and an overly simplistic solution to an issue that was described as

only one part of larger dilemmas related to the successful incorporation of

immigrants in Canada and immigration policies in general. Some respondents

blamed the federal government for the sole and intensive focus on foreign

credentials over other immigration issues, including a federal government

employee:

> I think part of the problem is that it wasn't set up well at the
> beginning because no one really knew what it was. It was one of
> those, there is a problem, it has to do with immigrants, let's solve
> it, we'll recognize their credentials, and there's nothing more to it
> than that. Not realizing that if you go down that path what that
> really means. (Federal government employee)

The executive director of an immigrant-serving association voiced similar

concerns:

> ...the problem we have with policy makers and politicians who get
> involved is that they just pick up on something and because there is
> hype and so a lot of money goes towards it and it justifies it. But

> then, us as community advocates say hold it here, this is important,
> but so are resources that allow families to go to ESL classes. But
> now because professional immigrants are sexy, all of the resources
> are going towards them... So, I think we are going from one
> extreme of not doing anything, to now where everybody talks
> about it. Every politician talks about it, even when they don't know
> what it means. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> I've been advocating this issue for years, but now I am actually
> having problems because all the attention is being paid to this
> particular issue, and I'm trying to balance it with other issues... It
> is a really important issue and we have to address it, but it's not the
> only issue. (Immigrant-serving organization)

As the above claims illustrate, many respondents were concerned with what they

felt to be current and widely-held definitions of foreign credential recognition as a

problem, and were therefore adamant about constructing different definitions of

the issue which highlighted the complexities involved in this social problem.

Several different and competing claims were presented about the causes of

foreign credential recognition as a social problem, which served to construct

participants definitions of the problem. Many of the key informants in this study

who worked directly with foreign-trained immigrants identified professional

regulators and licensing bodies as the root of the problem by claiming that

problems associated with foreign credential recognition stemmed from their

actions and policies, specifically those relating to the alleged requirement that

new immigrants must obtain professional Canadian work experience prior to

being granted full professional licensure:

The basic principles are that the profession self regulates for the protection of the public, which means that they decide who comes into the profession. Most of them will say you need Canadian experience, which is a major problem. If you don't have Canadian experience you can't get a job and so on and so forth. It's the catch twenty-two. (Credential referral agency)

And,

Basically we were able to conclude that [foreign-trained professionals] were more highly educated than the average [professional] here, and they are not only underemployed and unemployed, but even when they are paid they are grossly underpaid. We've shown how the system of community support doesn't work for them and how the real nature of the problem is in the Canadian work experience requirement for licensing. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Also:

I think Canadian work experience is a big problem, but not when you look at what Canadian experience is, but the way Canadian experience is used as a means to discriminate against people. (Past provincial government employee)

While Canadian work experience was identified as a source of problems associated with integrating highly-skilled immigrants into the professional labour market, claims-makers also constructed regulatory bodies and licensing authorities as villains in the social problems game by claiming that such practises represented regulators purposefully insular policies and discriminatory attitudes towards new immigrants. Other respondents also claimed that regulators consciously create artificial barriers to professional employment for immigrants:

The licensing groups are self-serving groups very often. They do not necessarily represent Canada's economic need, they represent their own self economic needs. As a result, they don't have interests in adding people [to the profession]. Because they have

absolute power in their areas, they are the gatekeepers. As
gatekeepers they are going to allow as many people as they want
in… This is one of the big problems. I think that our licensing
system is not matching Canadians economic need, its outdated and
lead by people who are in conflict of interest who defend their own
turf. In fact, a number of cases show that licensing groups claim
that [foreign-trained professionals] lower professional standards
just doesn't cut it. That's absolute bullshit that they do to justify
their gatekeeping practises. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> …it's not about your skill or knowledge level, it's about whether
> they [professional regulators] think you fit into a system in a
> certain way. And what they are usually saying, and this is a major
> problem for immigrants, is that there's a quality issue and a health
> and safety issue and competency issue, and we've got to make sure
> everyone is just so. And no doubt that is important to do, but the
> universities and regulatory bodies have constructed the most
> complicated way of doing this. They have very little insight to the
> fact that they have a problem. (Research institute)

The vast majority of respondents defined problems associated with foreign

credential recognition as an issue stemming from regulators insular policies and

practises. These claims constructed regulators as exclusionary villains who

knowingly create barriers for foreign-trained professionals. By suggesting that

regulators discriminate against immigrant 'others' in efforts to keep them out of

the professions, respondents constructed foreign-trained immigrants as racialized

victims of this social problem.

Regulators in this study appeared to be keenly aware of such accusations,

and while they never discussed being accused of discrimination directly, many of

their claims and responses were often extremely and immediately defensive of

their role as regulators, especially when asked about the causes of problems

associated with foreign credential recognition:

> The job of the licensing authority is to ensure that everybody who
> practises medicine in your jurisdiction is competent. So what is
> happening at the moment is that licensing bodies across Canada are
> seen from a variety of other groups as being "the problem". It's
> not so much that licensing authorities are the problem, it's that
> doing their job makes them appear to be a problem... We try hard
> in our human resource programming and assessments and
> credentialing to serve two masters, one of them being our
> fundamental obligation to protect the public by ensuring
> competency, but the other is to help make sure that there are
> enough hands on board. It's very difficult to keep ones head in
> trying to manage both of those tasks. (Regulator)

And,

> It comes back to the basic fundamentals of competency. If you flip
> back to the public and say, sure I'll register that person, but are you
> concerned if they're competent? Would you take your mother to a
> [service] provider that no one knew if they were competent? The
> answer is no. So we would be legally liable for that.
> (Regulator)

As the above excerpts illustrate, regulators' claims largely reinforced their role as

protectors of the public good by constructing foreign credential recognition as an

issue involving legally required assurances of competence for the sake of public

safety. Regulators highlighted the difficulties associated with evaluating the

credentials of foreign-trained professionals through claims such as, "[foreign-

trained professionals] have had different education and different practical training,

so it's hard to know where they fit in to our process", and "...you really have no

idea what they can do. Apart from language and cultural problems, you just don't

know where they stand because you know nothing about their [professional]

education." While regulators claimed that they lacked knowledge of international

professional education systems and standards, they constructed such knowledge

as beyond their role and responsibility as regulators.

As the above quotes illustrate, regulators also constructed foreign

credential recognition as a social problem as stemming from immigrants'

individual attributes or abilities, such as their language and communication skills.

One regulator described why foreign credential recognition was a problem in the

following way:

> Language for a variety of reasons is a problem. Part of a huge
> disconnect that my research and others research has demonstrated
> that if it's ESL, generally speaking, those individuals
> underestimate their language requirements in the workplace. They
> believe that they don't need assistance or help – that they are fine
> and clear. And then they get an "ah-ha" phenomenon where they
> realize that their abilities aren't enough. So there's this huge
> disconnect between perceived ability and application... So, that
> does make a difference in terms of pick up on the employment
> side. But also soft skills and communication. You need those
> whether you're a lawyer, a health care provider, a teacher. Soft
> skills are a big deal... (Regulator)

In addition to highlighting their responsibilities towards ensuring competency of

professionals in order to protect the safety of the public at large, regulators also

placed responsibility for problems associated with foreign credential recognition

onto immigrants by claiming that their unknown credentials and abilities were

problematic to both regulators and employers. As Loseke (1999) points out,

constructing individuals as the causes of problems serves to construct solutions

that focus on individual change, which are often quicker and more manageable

than institutional change. These claims are therefore markedly different from

others presented earlier in the chapter, which constructed immigrants as victims

and regulators as villains. Indeed, regulators claims not only attempted to defend

and clarify their role in the social problems game, but also constructed blame onto

someone other than themselves – a strategy used by every key informant involved

in this study.

While many claims presented in the interviews placed the onus for

problems associated with foreign credential recognition squarely onto

professional regulatory bodies, one respondent cautioned against labelling one

stakeholder as responsible for an issue which involves a variety of different

players:

> I get very frustrated by most levels of government and most
> politicians simply saying that this is the regulators fault. That is a
> very simplistic answer. It very easily puts the blame on someone
> else. (Immigrant-serving organization)

As previously mentioned, many respondents claims-making activities highlighted

the complexity of this social problem in order to challenge what they felt to be

simplistic constructions of the problem.

Other key informants implicated a number of stakeholders in the creation

of foreign credential recognition as a social problem, including employers and the

federal government:

> I'm constantly amazed by the behaviour of individuals and
> institutions. I mean, take a look at the biggest institution in our
> country, the federal government. As much as it tells other people
> what to do, its own house is not in order. And the excuses, you
> know, that you have to speak French, that they have to be
> Canadian citizens, there's a union so we can't do it, you know. So

there's the small-minded on one hand. And then there's employers... There's an attitudinal view on the part of employers and there's two parts: one is that they see international experience and persons as risk, not asset. But to change that around, they see it as a tremendous asset when a Canadian MBA has experience in Shanghai, but when the Shanghai MBA comes here it's suddenly different. So international experience is differentiated in some regards. (Immigrant-serving organization)

The construction of employers as risk averse stakeholders was echoed by another respondent who described foreign credential recognition in the following way:

I think it's a matter of risk more than anything else. I think employers are notoriously risk averse. There is no question that somewhere in this equation there is some element of discrimination. To quantify it is very difficult. And I would think that it varies from community to community. In some of the larger metropolitan areas that have experienced diversity very differently than some of our smaller communities... I would argue it's truly a matter of risk and that there isn't that much discrimination, actually. But it's hard to quantify. And it's the hardest issue to deal with. (Academic)

While this respondent constructed employers hesitation to hire foreign-trained immigrants as a matter of risk, other respondents constructed employers hiring practises as blatantly discriminatory and racist:

There's this discrimination component that we can't really measure, but we know it exists. Because it's this thing of, well, I don't know what the University of Beijing means. But then the person says okay, well I went and got my credentials assessed, and here's what it means. Well then, its okay, well you've got an accent. And the next thing is that well, you're language is not up to snuff. Well really, the person can converse quite well. But well, I don't know if my clients will understand your thick accent. Even though you grammatically structure your sentences correctly, you have this accent. So, employers have this list and its like if you pass hurdle one, they make up hurdle two, and if you pass hurdle two, they'll make up hurdle three. (Federal government employee)

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And,

> I think that the major problem is the…well, you don't want to say
> it but I think the problem is discrimination. That's where I think
> we're stemming from. So I think it needs to be dealt with at the
> employer level and at the licensing body level, with a lot of
> education towards removing discrimination and racism. It's very
> much a connected issue I think, in that when you look at who is the
> most disadvantaged…I think Peter Li has done a lot of research on,
> not only is it immigrant professionals, but visible minority
> immigrant professionals are in the worst situation, so there's
> obviously some kind of connection between racism and
> discrimination and this. There are systemic barriers in the process.
> (Academic)

While the federal government was criticized for not taking a leadership role in

terms of hiring foreign-trained immigrants, private-sector employers were seen as

a major contributor to problems related to foreign credential recognition based on

their hiring practises, which some respondents conceived of as discriminatory.

Indeed, these claims construct foreign credential recognition as a racialized issue

through references to conscious efforts on the part of employers and licensing

bodies to keep immigrant 'others' out of their organizations and professions.

As the claims presented thus far illustrate, a variety of competing claims

were made in regards to the nature and cause of foreign credential recognition as a

social problem. Different claims-makers constructed the social problem as

stemming from different causes, which inevitably constructed certain players as

villains and others as victims in the social problems game. The claims presented

in this section also highlight a tension between individual and social constructions

of foreign credential recognition as a social problem. While regulators largely

identified the roots of the social problem as the individual attributes of immigrants

themselves, the organizational sponsors in this study, comprised of immigrant-

serving organizations, credential recognition and referral agencies and academics

who often took leadership roles in making claims about this social problem,

located the cause of the troublesome conditions in the actions, policies and

processes embedded in social institutions and structures. One respondent spoke

directly of this definitional tension:

> Part of the problem I think is that we're still looking at this
> primarily as an issue of problems that immigrants have, as opposed
> to problems that the institutions are not dealing with – systemic
> issues. We're not looking at the values and benefits that
> immigrants bring to us, we're looking at deficits that they bring
> that have to be corrected. We're not really focusing enough on the
> institutional and systemic change that I think is absolutely required
> to adapt to the immigrants, as opposed to putting all the weight on
> the immigrants to adapt to our institutions. So, that is the broader
> framework within which everything else fits. (Academic)

Indeed, many respondents who favoured systemic definitions expressed

displeasure with claims-makers who constructed the issue as an individual-level

problem. As one participant claimed, "no matter how perfect you make your

immigrant, if the employer doesn't want to hire him, he won't even look at the

guy". Indeed, a claims competition emerged between claims-makers who define

foreign credential recognition from the micro perspective of the individual and

those who define the problem in broader systemic terms.

## CLAIMS AND CLAIMS-MAKING STRATEGIES

The manner in which claims-makers defined the causes of foreign

credential recognition as a social problem impacted their subsequent claims, the

target audience of their claims, and their claims-making strategies. While the

various claims-making activities of stakeholders in this social problems game

constructed challenges, consequences and solutions associated with foreign

credential recognition in different ways, common claims and claims-making

strategies also emerged.

**Claims Competitions**

The claims-making competitions between regulators and organizational

sponsors came to the fore once again as respondents described their claims-

making activities. Immigrant-serving organizations, who largely viewed licensing

bodies as villains in the foreign credential recognition debate, continued this

construction by centering their claims-making efforts around problems with

regulators policies for evaluating foreign-trained professionals:

> We tell [regulators] what's happening on the ground and show
> them research. That is what they need to change their practises. If
> there was one message I'd send to regulatory bodies it would be
> that there needs to be an independent review of each regulatory
> body's entire process. Right now it's in-house, it's not
> accountable... They need to be evaluated as to whether or not
> their processes are transparent and accountable and equitable.
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

Conversely, regulators, who remained diligently defensive of their policies and

practises in relation to foreign-trained professionals, continued to make claims

about their responsibilities towards ensuring professional competency:

> I think the regulatory community takes a beating as being a
> primary barrier and problem, when in fact my experience is that
> we're doing our darndest to really make some change happen. It's
> not perfect, but if you really believe in the values that we want

competent people practising then competencies have to be
accurately developed. (Regulator)

Regulators were also adamant about constructing their policies and practises

regarding foreign-trained professionals as equitable:

> We look at everybody the same.  We don't treat anybody
> differently.  The only thing we treat differently is that I don't have
> to do a credential review of a Canadian grad, because I know what
> that system is.  If I didn't know what that system is, or if a
> Canadian school came up that didn't want to be accredited, then
> they'd be in the same process too...  But the general message is, I
> don't have a system for the internationally educated and then a
> system for Canadians.  I have a credential evaluation system for
> when I need it, which is mostly for the internationally educated,
> but it wouldn't much matter, and then I have an examination
> system that is identical for absolutely everybody.  (Regulator)

The above claims illustrate the claims competition between immigrant-serving

organizations and professional regulatory bodies regarding foreign credential

recognition as a social problem.  While immigrant-serving organizations accused

regulators of being exclusionary gatekeepers, regulators defended themselves as

fair and equitable overseers of professional standards.  Indeed, regulators'

claims appeared to be direct responses to their construction as discriminatory

stakeholders in the foreign credential recognition debate by other claims-makers,

even though the claims of others were not raised during the interview.  Regulators

naturally defensive claims attempted to neutralize and compete with accusatory

claims against them, and represent their acute awareness of the claims-making

game and its dynamics.

**Organizational Sponsors as Expert Claims-makers**

In addition to targeting regulatory bodies, several organizational sponsors focused their claims-making activities around the role and responsibilities of employers as stakeholders in the foreign credential recognition debate. Many respondents described their meticulous strategies for targeting their claims-making activities towards this stakeholder group:

> We try to do media outreach and try to get articles written in trade publications and the mainstream media to really get the idea that not only are there very well-trained and skilled immigrants in the community, but that it was quite straightforward to determine how skilled they were and what credentials they had, and that employers are missing out on a huge pool of missing talent. So we push that message in a lot of different ways: through the [immigrant-serving] associations, the media, and in one-on-one conversations. (Credential assessment agency)

And,

> Re-framing the media debate is a big focus for us... It's not about helping the poor immigrant. It's about opening up your institutions and looking outside of your little boxes. Employers and regulatory bodies need to understand that this is good for their productivity... If regulatory bodies aren't doing their part in terms of licensing these people, employers are not going to be able to hire them. They don't think about the impacts of this on their productivity. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Also:

> Our message very practical: there *are* solutions. Our message is that this is not an insolvable issue... The message has evolved and developed and become more pointed, certainly in the last couple of years, because we've wanted to engage employers more effectively. So we've developed a stronger business case and built some messaging around that. But that doesn't take us off the core message that there are solutions and ways of working together to make things work better. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Organizational sponsors were extremely strategic in their claim-making activities

and worked to carefully target their messages in ways that would resonate with

their intended audience. As the latter two quotes illustrate, claims-makers

messages to other players involved in the claims-making game often typified

foreign credential recognition in terms of its economic potential by highlighting

immigrants' abilities to "contribute" to "productivity". As the previous chapter

illustrated, definitions of foreign credential recognition have shifted from largely

social justice typifications to neoliberal definitions of the problem over time,

which served to construct the issue as a solution to burgeoning concerns over

Canada's economic growth and competitiveness. Indeed, organizational sponsors

were keenly aware of this definitional shift:

> Certainly in the 80's it was a social justice issue. Access was
> important. We obviously were only able to take it so far. But
> now, when you look at the global economy and how Canada fits or
> does not fit into that, and how Canada is now struggling to make
> itself more competitive within that global economy and the fact
> that our population is not replacing itself, our reliance is therefore
> on immigrants to come in and take the jobs to pay the taxes to
> maintain our standards of living, and that is what is really driving
> this interest and participation from a number of different sectors.
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> What we're finding in the last year is that a lot of provincial
> departments have reorganized and put their FCR or skilled
> immigrant component under their economic development or labour
> divisions and took it out of their immigration portfolios. It used to
> be seen as a social issue and now it's seen as a way to address
> labour market issues. It's a very interesting dynamic... So, that
> has been quite a dramatic change in the last year. They see it as a
> way to address labour market issues and not so much the

humanitarian diversity issues any more. (Federal government employee)

Several claims-makers from immigrant-serving organizations were not only aware

of this change in typification, but also made conscious efforts to incorporate these

new definitions into their own claims about foreign credential recognition:

> The government was starting to buy into this economic discourse, so stakeholders decided they better start using the same economic terminology in order to get action on this. So, I think that community agencies were starting as well to say that yes, we need immigrants to fill skills shortages, and I think recognizing that it was a social justice issue, but if we can use this language to get government to listen, then action will be taken on it. (Past provincial government employee)

By incorporating new economic typifications of foreign credential recognition

into their claims, organizational sponsors became active participants in re-framing

definitions of foreign credential recognition as a social problem. As the following

excerpts illustrate, organizational sponsors were extremely deliberate and

strategic about the ways in which they framed their message depending on who

their target audience was:

> …it is an issue of social justice, and also an issue of economic imperative and an issue of globalization. It's many different issues. It's like a prism – it has many different facets to it. I think that different sectors and different players can pick up on different facets and run with that. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> Well in terms of messaging, you have to target your message to your audience. So depending on who you meet, we talk to them about different things. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Also:

> You can frame this to employers under corporate social
> responsibility, it's a good philanthropic gesture and good corporate
> stewardship, all of that. That's fine. But as soon as the economy
> drops, all items in corporate social responsibility fall off. We need
> to mainstream this, so framing it as a business case makes sense. I
> think the human rights arguments often get taken up with some of
> the legal cases that have arisen around this, but that's because that
> framework work and can be effective there. And I think
> sometimes when you're trying to build up some public support you
> can use some of the social justice language because that gets at
> people's values and the fact that we live in a just society. But I
> think it depends on the audience and the moment that you choose
> to use certain frameworks of language. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

While many organizational sponsors typified their claims about foreign credential

recognition around social justice issues in the 1980's, organizational sponsors in

this study consciously re-oriented their claims-making activities around economic

typifications, which widened their target audience to include employers in

addition to government stakeholders:

> The main economic argument is what is happening to our
> productivity? If we cannot compete with the world globally, then
> you are non-competitive. And which government in the world can
> protect itself against non-productivity? It is a government mandate
> to make sure that employers rise to the challenge of making profit
> and productivity. And that's what the government should be
> addressing much more than FCR problems. And we should be part
> of the discourse on the productivity. And maybe that's what it
> would take to promote things along. Think about it. We were
> brought in here to take this country to increase its knowledge base
> and move its productivity. And what has happened is that they've
> closed the door on these guys and they can't do anything. There's
> no way they are contributing to productivity. And as they are not,
> people out there are getting much more productive than we are.
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

Although the utilization of new economic typifications about foreign credential

recognition was mentioned as a claims-making strategy by nearly all of the

organizational sponsors in this study, some respondents were clearly

uncomfortable couching their messages and activities in economic discourses:

> From a strategic point of view, if you want to make change and get
> someone's attention, you have to present your arguments in a way
> that will be heard and speak to people in ways so that they will
> listen. It's too bad that it takes an economic argument to deal with
> social justice issues, but if issues get resolved, that's the most
> important thing... Money talks louder than equity. So sometimes
> we have to make the argument in different ways to different
> audiences. (Credential recognition agency)

And,

> I think that part of the reality is that if we make it publicly
> acceptable, we always relate it to the economy. But, the economy
> is part of the game. That's a part of the reality. If we don't get
> immigrants, we will have negative population growth...due to our
> aging population... If we don't get immigrants, regardless of the
> jobs, in maybe 200 years we are not going to have people living in
> Canada anymore! It's going to be empty! And in this respect, it is
> in fact an issue of citizenship too... But we don't want to talk
> about that piece because we think that the only way we can shove
> it down people's throats is to talk about the economic
> [ramifications]. (Immigrant-serving organization)

In spite of this reluctance, organizational sponsors proceeded to utilize economic

typifications in their claims-making activities in order capture the attention of

important audiences. Indeed, convincing audiences that foreign credential

recognition was a widespread social problem was the first and foremost goal of

organizational sponsors, who were willing to use any and all strategies to market

their claims to influential audiences.

**Relationships as Strategy**

While organizational sponsors were extremely strategic in their claims-making activities related to foreign credential recognition, other claims-makers in this study did not necessarily have such articulated or conscious approaches to the issue. This is likely due to the fact that foreign credential recognition was not their sole or primary focus, as it was for many organizational sponsors. As one regulator described:

> I think we [regulators] struggle with this quite a bit because we're not trying to make this a separate career for each of us – because it could be. By far the majority of us are small regulators, not large… We're very busy organizations running flat out. So, running around trying to do all this kind of stuff [related to foreign credential recognition] is not high on my list. Not because I'm not interested, but because I just don't have the resources. And that's been a difficult thing to try and get people to understand. It isn't about lack of interest, it's about how. (Regulator)

While other claims-makers did not exert the same amount of vigour into their claims-making activities as compared to organizational sponsors, many respondents spoke of their efforts to build positive relationships with other stakeholders involved in this issue. Indeed, numerous participants highlighted their activities towards the creation of an atmosphere of collaboration amongst stakeholders for the sake of working towards common understandings and solutions to foreign credential recognition. One respondent described a provincial strategy for addressing foreign credential recognition:

> We talked very strategically about how to get regulators as our partners within our unit… We decided to build partnerships with licensing bodies around very neutral issues. They are not going to

want to work with us if we go up to them and say 'you're doing it
all wrong, and you have barriers in your process', and things like
that. So, we said, what is the most neutral barrier that we can deal
with?… information. Information always came out as one of the
major barriers that immigrant professionals experience, so we said
lets build relationships with regulatory bodies around getting
information out to immigrant professionals about [licensure
processes]. So that was strategic in hopes of moving the
relationship with [regulators] on. (Past provincial government
employee)

Another respondent spoke of his experience in attempting to build a working

relationship with the federal government around the issue of foreign credential

recognition:

...it's about developing partnerships, and that takes time. We see
the world differently, the government and myself, since we are
coming from two different mandates. So, how we can narrow
those gaps to recognize this is a common goal we have? Once you
develop a partnership and trust, I think it works. The extent to
which you can influence [others] depends on how well we develop
that relationship and partnership. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Many respondents claimed that building relationships in order to share knowledge

in collaborative ways was crucial in trying to address problems associated with

foreign credential recognition. As one respondent noted, building relationships

and new forms of understanding led to new levels of awareness and engagement:

We have an intergovernmental committee… and they've been
undertaking an exercise for the last two or three years where
they've all come to the table to do a mapping exercise of who's
doing what, where are the gaps, where is the overlap, are their
opportunities for collaboration – whether its at the very low level
of information sharing, up to a higher level of engagement like
collaborative funding or planning. We haven't reached that yet, I
think that's more of a long term goal, but the very fact that this
information sharing is happening that didn't happen before is
evidence of this shift in people doing that and getting into the habit
of thinking in that way. (Immigrant-serving organization)

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A respondent from a credential recognition agency also highlighted their efforts to

educate stakeholders and raise awareness about foreign credential recognition:

> So in order to ensure that what we were doing was valuable to the
> individuals who were using our service, we had to spend a
> considerable amount of time working with employers and
> regulatory bodies and academic institutions to help them
> understand what it is that we do, what goes into it, why it is
> accurate and reliable, and how they can use the reports in the
> institutions to save themselves time and money.  Right from the
> beginning we really expended as many resources on that part in
> terms of connecting with the community, whether it be employers,
> regulators, educators, information sessions for newcomers at
> community agencies… We go to a lot of conferences as well.
> (Credential recognition agency)

Respondents from the federal government were also very interested in building

relationships with employers, and were contemplating strategies for accessing this

vast stakeholder:

> We are trying to improve our employer engagement strategies.
> What are they looking for, what help do they need, how do we
> target them?  So, there are a whole lot of things to deal with in
> terms of employers.  But that's one of the toughest groups to
> actually identify and target and talk to.  The other ones are very
> easy because there's an umbrella organization or because they're
> out there and vocal, but the employers are a huge group that we
> just don't know how to get to.  Some know its important, but on a
> survey asking if they have hired immigrants, 95 percent say no.
> So, it's a hard group to get a handle on. (Federal government
> employee)

Building relationships with other stakeholders involved in foreign credential

recognition was a common strategy mentioned by the majority of the respondents

in this study.  Most certainly, networking and collaboration with other

stakeholders was deemed to be an essential claims-making activity, since it

provided opportunities to directly communicate claims, in the form of knowledge

and information for the sake of education, to an attentive assembly of players

involved in the social problems game.  While respondents felt that such claims-

making activities resulted in promising relationships in terms of moving the social

problem forward, the multitude of stakeholders involved in foreign credential

recognition was also described as one of the major barriers to progress on this

social problem.

**Constructing Challenges and Barriers**

Respondents were eager to discuss their claims about the barriers and

pinch points involved in the foreign credential recognition debate.  Participants

made claims about numerous roadblocks which they felt complicated the issue,

and also discussed various consequences as a result of the highlighted difficulties.

Several informants claimed that a lack of coordination and cooperation amongst

the multitude of stakeholders presented a complicated dilemma:

> The fragmentation amongst the stakeholders presents a particular
> challenge and the fact that there is no coordinated focus on it or
> lead initiator for resolving this issue.  I feel that it is still going to
> remain problematic because there is no way that these colleges and
> physicians who have major stakeholder roles are going to move
> from their position of status quo unless there is some major
> pressure put to bear on them, including from the government, and
> at this stage, I'm not sure that the government or individual leaders
> who could influence their policies are really genuinely aware of the
> extent of the issue.  (Past Member of Parliament)

As this excerpt illustrates, respondents constructed the disassociation of

stakeholders as the result of a lack of leadership by government and community

leaders, which was deemed to be an essential requirement for remedying this social problem. As will be discussed later in the chapter, political leadership was touted to be a promising solution to problems associated with foreign credential recognition by numerous respondents.

Other respondents described federalism as a major barrier involved in foreign credential recognition by claiming that Canada's federalist organization hinders the geographical movement of labour, since education and professional standards fall under provincial jurisdiction, while immigration is largely a federal responsibility[14]:

> The problem is that Canada, and I think we forget this sometimes, that people are accepted as immigrants to Canada but the recognition of their qualifications for academic or professional licensing purposes happens in each province. We don't have professional or academic mobility across the country. So if you want to be a doctor, you have to decide what province you want to practice in and I don't know how people make that decision before they come here and find out what the working conditions or the workplaces or the job opportunities are. We have to build the mobility agenda before we can really ensure the mobility of the internationally trained… I think we have to build bridges across the provinces for Canada to overcome this issue. (Credential recognition agency)

And,

> The challenge is, who is responsible? Why in a country you can have a drivers license in Ontario and when you go to B.C. you have to change your driving license? It's the same issue over license to practice professionally…The labour market is now mobile, so the license needs to be mobile… The system, I believe, is outdated. (Immigrant-serving organization).

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[14] With the exception of the province of Quebec.

Federal employees claimed that Canada's federalist organization limited

the role the federal government can play in terms of remedying problems

associated with foreign credential recognition, given the jurisdictional

complexities involved:

> Our country is built – it's a federation. The very basis of how
> we're structured leaves very little room for national coordination
> once people are inside. So, to do that requires negotiation because
> there is no jurisdiction. Even in the unregulated fields, which is
> not provincial or federal jurisdiction, its basically employers
> deciding whether or not you have the competencies to hire you.
> Even at the employer levels, they are more aligned to provincial,
> local, chambers of commerce, organizations, than they would be to
> a national organization. So that presents a particular challenge. So
> even if the federal government says we really want to coordinate
> labour market integration once immigrants are here, the only way
> we can do that is to negotiate and get people in agreement that that
> needs to happen. (Federal government employee)

Other respondents also recognized the jurisdictional intricacies involved in this

issue and suggested that successful solutions to the problem would involve a

multitude of stakeholders:

> There is no silver bullet. Just as in health care... You know I often
> compare this jurisdictional quagmire to health care... Everybody
> has jurisdiction and nobody has jurisdiction. There it is. So when
> immigrants ask, how come I was promised this, and you,
> Government of Canada, fix it – well, it doesn't work that way. It's
> complicated. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Others in the study described attitudes and behaviours of both individuals

and institutions as a major barrier in the foreign credential recognition debate. As

previously mentioned, many participants claimed that problems associated with

foreign credential recognition stemmed from systemic racism and discrimination.

This theme emerged once again when respondents discussed various pinch points

involved in this social problem. One respondent claimed that foreign credential

recognition was not necessarily in tune with 'traditional' Canadian cultural

expectations:

> To me, Canada being an immigrant country, there is an attitude
> that once you're here, you're on your own. That is a prevailing
> social attitude. Because we're all immigrants. We've all come
> here and settled our families and our people through means that
> had little or no government intervention. So, there's a prevailing
> social attitude that you can't dismiss. (Federal government
> employee)

While this respondent constructed immigrant integration efforts as a

contemporary privilege, other participants constructed the assistance of

newcomers as not only a federal responsibility, but a national expectation, and

deemed the government's lack of assistance for highly-skilled immigrants as a

covert expression of systemic discrimination:

> …our institutions are rooted in the nineteenth century. Our
> institutions need to globalize. They understand the global
> movement of goods and services and labour and migration, but
> they do not understand the movement of human capital. In
> international arenas when you have bureaucrats, politicians,
> academics meeting with each other, they view each other as equals.
> But then when they move here, they suddenly become inferior, and
> that is a problem… this assumption of deficiency comes into
> being. (Immigrant-serving organization)

This concern about an "assumption of deficiency" was expressed by many

respondents in this study in various different ways. Several participants were

extremely displeased with policies and programs which they felt fuelled and

promoted definitions of immigrants as deficient 'others', such as bridge-to-work

and internship initiatives. As one respondent claimed:

> Immigrants who have thirty years of multinational experience
> don't want to be interns – they've been through their intern phase!
> To give someone an internship is to carry on the discourse that
> they somehow need to be schooled and trained and that they are
> not able to transfer over their knowledge base. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

A similar sentiment was also expressed by a regulator:

> I think that North America has to get over itself. I think we're
> exceptionally arrogant. We're arrogant about our education, and
> that's not to say that our education isn't great and I'm not
> suggesting we ditch it, I'm just saying we're elitist. (Regulator)

Over and above concerns about stakeholder fragmentation, claims-makers

constructed the federal government's lack of leadership and institutional

resistance to change as evidence of systemic discrimination. Indeed, the

assumption of deficiency and inferiority of newcomers was deemed to be a major

roadblock in the foreign credential recognition debate.

## Constructing Consequences

In addition to discussing the barriers and obstacles involved in the foreign

credential recognition debate, respondents also constructed consequences of this

social problem through claims regarding the costs and impacts of credential

devaluation. Numerous immigrant-serving organizations claimed that highly-

skilled immigrants were beginning to return to their home countries or other

countries due to their frustration with their inability to access the professional

labour market in Canada:

> ...a StatsCan report that came out last week showed that an
> increasing number of immigrants go back to their countries or

other countries. It said that immigrants will have more options, but
Canada will not have more options. And now we are seeing that
some of the people who are having difficulties accessing their
professions here get recruited to work in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and
interestingly enough even in the American hospitals, and they get a
really good paying job, so they leave. There is competition for
internationally trained professionals and Canada is currently
loosing that competition because people come here and can't
access the job market, but other places provide them with
opportunities to get a job and start working immediately.
(Immigrant-serving organization)

As the above quote illustrates, many organizational sponsors typified the potential

emigration of highly skilled immigrants[15] in terms of losses to the Canadian

economy. By highlighting the increasing competition for human capital around

the world, organizational sponsors constructed the devaluation of foreign

credentials as an economically intolerable practise for any economically

competitive country. Another respondent from a research institute typified return

migration in terms of its economic costs:

We have a problem in this country that a fair number of
immigrants who come here eventually leave. And where do they
go? The US, right? So, if they leave the country, assuming that
they have the capacity to add value to our economy, every time
one leaves we loose some of our GDP. Well no individual entity
like a regulatory body is responsible for that. But the government
of Canada needs to be considering the aggregate impact of that on
our national wellbeing. So this is another reason why we need a
bigger view to be taken. (Research institute)

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[15] Research has suggested that barriers to fitting employment may entice immigrants with
marketable skills to return to their country of origin or to go to other countries. Using the
Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) to examine the emigration of immigrant taxfilers who
arrived in Canada between 1990 and 1998, Dryburgh and Hamel (2004) found that the majority of
the small percentage of immigrants who did emigrate by the year 2000 (4.3% of all landed
immigrant taxfilers) were highly skilled and educated individuals who perceived a lack of stable
employment opportunities and possessed the resources to facilitate moving again.

Indeed, such claims constructed Canada's failure to remedy problems associated

with foreign credential recognition as a self-inflicted wound that would hamper

the country's economic competitiveness and productivity, and once again

represented economic typifications of this social problem.  Respondents

constructed responsibility for remedying problems associatied with foreign

credential recognition to the federal government, whom they felt could not afford

to ignore the fiscal consequences of this social problem.

Many respondents claimed that foreign credential recognition was a

reflection of Canada's taken-for-granted and overconfident view of itself as one

of the world's premier immigrant destinations:

> Word is out now that perhaps people will have difficulty getting
> accredited. Canada has been a country that has been very blessed
> in its resources and lifestyle, and because of that I don't think that
> – well, we've always had the luxury of people knocking at the
> door, which is really nice.  But as more choices become available,
> and the world becomes a far more mobile place, people might live
> here for a few years and then go back to [their country of origin].
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> The competition for migrants is so strong that immigrants are
> starting to move out of Canada.  And word of mouth is really
> strong, and that might actually lead to a reduction in immigration
> numbers.  Which I think would actually be a good thing.  Our
> immigration policy at this point is unsustainable because our
> economy can't absorb those kinds of numbers.  So, if you're going
> to bring in and poach the best from other countries, what are we
> really doing?  We're not doing a good thing by relegating them to
> menial sort of labour.  They are better off being in their developing
> countries and practising and raising the nutrition levels of their
> own countries rather than coming here and then being part of
> menial jobs. (Immigrant-serving organization)

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Given that several respondents, largely organizational sponsors, viewed the devaluation of foreign credentials as an unjust and unacceptable social problem, many supported the exodus of highly-skilled immigrants from Canada. Most certainly, claims regarding the willing departure of foreign-trained professionals from Canada constructed highly-skilled immigrants not as docile victims, but as tenacious and valuable leaders of the global knowledge economy.

In addition to constructing return migration as a consequence of the devaluation of foreign credentials, some respondents also highlighted the negative impacts of credential devaluation on immigrants themselves. One respondent from an immigrant-serving organization claimed that many highly-skilled immigrants experience downward social mobility due to credential devaluation: "…what we're doing is deskilling and de-legitimizing [foreign-trained professionals] by forcing them into the service sector." Many respondents expressed concern over the downward social mobility of highly-skilled immigrants who were denied access to professional labour markets due to credential devaluation. One respondent accused employers of knowingly taking advantage of foreign-trained professionals:

> I think one of the things we have seen with some of the businesses,
> and again, some areas like nursing or lawyers or doctors it will be
> almost impossible, but when you are in the manufacturing,
> businesses and engineering, bending the rules is much easier
> because nobody says I need to have ten engineers. If I need the
> engineer just because of their signature, their privilege to sign
> things, I hire one engineer and I hire ten technicians who are
> internationally trained engineers. I pay them less and they will do
> the same job and I don't need them to be licensed in Canada to

> practise as engineers... Basically, people are finding ways to
> bypass the licensing process. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Respondents were extremely vocal about the consequences of the devaluation of

foreign credentials which were constructed both in terms of economic costs to

immigrants themselves as well as to the country as a whole. By highlighting the

detrimental economic impacts of return migration and underemployment, claims-

makers constructed foreign credential recognition as a pressing social problem

that all Canadians had a vested interest in solving. Furthermore, economic

typifications constructed the devaluation of foreign credentials as damaging to the

world economy in terms of the lost potential that immigrants' countries of origin

experience upon the emigration of their skilled citizens.

## Constructing Solutions

In light of these barriers and consequences, all participants in this study

were extremely forthright in discussing their claims about and strategies for

remedying problems associated with foreign credential recognition. While a vast

array of solutions were offered by various respondents, many claims addressed a

handful of preferred approaches. The majority of respondents raised the need for

government leadership at the federal level in efforts to organize and coordinate

activities related to the recognition of foreign credentials. Some participants felt

that the multitude of stakeholders involved in this issue presented unique and

particular challenges that could only be addressed through political leadership.

As one respondent described,

> ...[change] really needs to be driven at the political level in order
> to cause these very well-meaning agencies like a university or a
> regulatory body, they are generally well-meaning I think, but they
> need an external force to cause them to change... At this point, the
> federal government seems to be considering how to do that.
> (Research institute)

While respondents claimed that progress on this issue was contingent on

leadership, they also stressed the importance of cooperation amongst the various

players involved in this social problems game in the creation of both acceptable

and successful solutions:

> I think definitely that you need a combination of stakeholders,
> from businesses to unions to universities to NGOs to licensing
> groups. And saying the licensing groups, I don't want to just bash
> them, but definitely they have a role to play, but they choose to
> play that role as gatekeepers. I don't believe that we don't need
> them, I think we need them, but with a new mandate that serves the
> interests of everybody, not just their self-interests. (Immigrant-
> serving organization)

Another respondent agreed that "only multi-stakeholder and multi-level

collaboration will solve this problem." While a variety of players mentioned the

importance of stakeholder coordination, organizational sponsors claimed that such

cooperation was especially crucial at local levels:

> I think that part of the problem with our immigration policy is that
> it's a national policy and not necessarily locally driven or locally
> responsive. So I think that these local initiatives are really
> important within a national framework. There has to be a national
> framework, but there really needs to be a lot of flexibility at the
> local level. What I do think would be really important is for
> people to be able to share promising practises, their research, their
> experiences so you don't reinvent the wheel twelve thousand
> times. So I think the sharing is really important. But I'm not sure
> if we need a mega, national approach. (Academic)

And,

> If we are able to organize employers at local levels and champion them to be their own change agency, then that's a good thing. (Immigrant-serving organization)

While stakeholder cooperation was deemed to be crucial, respondents overwhelmingly claimed that targeted efforts to engage and educate employers were essential to making progress on this issue. Indeed, many respondents' claims-making activities were focused on educating employers about the benefits that highly-skilled immigrants could offer and encouraging employers to broaden their hiring practises:

> Meaningful involvement of the business community needs to happen at all levels. But mainly I think that employers, for their own benefit, have to pay more attention to how they recruit and retain immigrants in the workplace by building an understanding of who they are and providing them opportunities to gain more skills or promote them. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> You need to have employer education to get them to understand the range of [foreign-trained immigrants'] skills. You need to train employers on how to hire appropriately. Employers in general the world over are short term in their thinking. They don't think ten to fifteen years down the road. So the small companies don't know where the economy is going, whereas the large institutions and corporate employers talk a lot about diversity, like the banks and such. They've got the handle on yes, we need to do this, but their policies don't progress beyond that. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Education was touted to be an extremely important strategy for bringing employers into conversations about foreign-trained immigrants by numerous organizational sponsors. Once again, many respondents typified their claims-

making activities towards employers in terms of the economic potential that

foreign-trained immigrants had to offer.  Interestingly, a variety of informants

identified small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) as the single most

important recipient of their foreign credential recognition claims-making

campaigns:

> The big, sophisticated employers get it and are there.  It's the SME's that are a problem.  The SME's, number one, don't have the capacity.  They are very small operations.  They don't have human resource people to focus their attention on this.  They are very difficult to reach... So, there actually needs to be a sort of one-on-one outreach, which is incredibly resource intensive.  They have to actually go knock on small employers doors selling the notion of hiring [foreign-trained immigrants].  (Academic)

And,

> I think we have two groups of business communities.  One is the small and medium-sized businesses who probably don't have time for this, since they are trying just to survive.  So it's a different strategy for them.  And then you have big corporations.  Historically in Canada, 80 percent of employment is happening within the small- and medium-sized businesses, so they are a very important group.  But the capacity of these groups to be involved is very different from those thirty big corporations who have other capacities.  I think we have to design a process for SME's to be involved, but first you have to educate them. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Also,

> What employers need is some help in understanding what the system is, and some tools to help them be able to decipher the things that are coming at them.  So, the simple fact that the majority of small and medium employers do not know that there are credential assessment agencies speaks a lot to the problem. (Federal government employee)

Indeed, many claims-makers were adamant about directing their claims-making

activities at small- and medium-sized enterprises, and described such activities as

working to educate an uninformed yet important stakeholder.

The direct engagement and inclusion of employers in the foreign

credential recognition debate was also constructed as a strategy to combat

employers' allegedly discriminatory beliefs and stereotypes regarding foreign-

trained immigrants. One respondent described the positive trickle-down effects of

the inclusion of foreign-trained immigrants in the workplace:

> I have a very maybe over simplistic view of how you deal with
> prejudices. You deal with them on an individual basis. You
> educate, you make someone with a negative point of view have a
> positive experience, and it's that one positive experience that will
> change their views. The internships, the bridge-to-work
> placements, the mentoring, these are the kinds of things that will
> change people's mindsets. (Immigrant-serving organization)

In a similar vein, another respondent suggested that an intermediary stakeholder

was required to translate immigrants foreign credentials and abilities into familiar

terms for Canadian employers:

> I think employers need trusted intermediaries to do the kinds of
> assessments that they are incapable of doing and don't have the
> capacity to do, even if they wanted to do it. So, when someone
> approaches an employer with a university degree from Queens and
> they've worked at IBM in Toronto, the employer has a pretty good
> sense of what they're getting. All those things are proxies. The
> employer has a pretty good sense that they can think, write, speak,
> problem solve – they know something about technology. When
> someone comes to them with a degree from [another country], with
> a degree they've never heard of, from a community they've never
> heard of, they just don't know what to do with this individual. So,
> they need some kind of trusted intermediary who says we've
> looked at this person's academic qualifications, their
> communication skills and their competencies, and this person is

worth your while to interview. That intermediary must be an
organization that has credibility in the eyes of employers... I think
that that could make a world of difference. (Academic)

Indeed, this intermediary was claimed to have the potential to create a currently

absent level of trust between employers and foreign-trained immigrants. Most

certainly, all claims made by respondents regarding solutions to this social

problem supported the full and appropriate inclusion of foreign-trained

immigrants into the Canadian labour market.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter has explored current claims-making activities of various

stakeholders involved in the social construction of foreign credential recognition

as a social problem. By comparing and contrasting the claims of various players

involved in this social problems game, claims-making strategies and relationship

dynamics between players were discovered. By in large, the foreign credential

recognition claims-making campaign continues to be initiated by organizational

sponsors such as immigrant-serving organizations, credential recognition and

referral agencies and academics. Regulators, employers and governments,

respectively, are largely the target audiences of organizational sponsors' claims-

making activities. While these audiences make their own claims with respect to

foreign credential recognition, this analysis has shown that such activities are

often in response to the initial claims of organizational sponsors.

Given their leadership of the social problems industry, it is not surprising

that organizational sponsors are the foremost claims-makers in this social

problems game. As discussed in the previous chapters, organizational sponsors

have the time, energy, experience, and in some cases, finances, required to

initiate, sponsor and execute extensive claims-making campaigns (Loseke, 1999).

The claims made by organizational sponsors, especially those of immigrant-

serving organizations, were markedly different than other players' claims-making

activities in their attention to both the content and context of claims, as well as

their intended audiences. Organizational sponsors were extremely conscious of

the way in which they typified their statements according to the audience they

wished to target.

Many organizational sponsors strategically utilized economic typifications

of foreign credential recognition in their claims-making activities towards

employers and the federal government. These typifications constructed foreign

credential recognition as an economically beneficial practise that corresponded

with the fiscal goals of employers and the federal government. Organizational

sponsors' construction of foreign-trained immigrants as an untapped reserve of

productive human capital in an increasingly competitive global economy

transformed definitions of highly-skilled newcomers from unfortunate victims to

powerful and valuable resources, which could be lost to other more competitive

countries. Indeed, organizational sponsors utilize what Best (1987) terms the

"rhetoric of rationality" by using new economic typifications that appeal to logic

and rationality to engage target audiences such as the government and employers.

In keeping with the rhetoric of rationality, organizational sponsors also utilized

economic typifications to emphasize the broad based impacts of foreign credential

recognition beyond just foreign-trained immigrants, but to the country as a whole,

thereby widening the audience who could potentially benefit or suffer based on

the success or failure to address foreign credential recognition.  Economic frames

of reference also tapped into existing and well-established social concerns, or

what Loseke (1999) refers to as 'cultural worries', regarding Canada's economic

competitiveness and productivity in the global knowledge economy.  Most

certainly, economic typifications constructed foreign credential recognition as

symbolic of larger concerns regarding the economic future of the country as a

whole in the ever-changing global economy.

While some organizational sponsors were clearly and admittedly

uncomfortable with utilizing economic typifications of the problem in their

claims-making activities around foreign credential recognition, many were willing

to use any and all strategies available in order to effectively advocate for change.

While organizational sponsors' use of economic typifications in their claims-

making activities undoubtedly served to reinforce the definitional shift around

foreign credential recognition, their claims were not without reference to social

justice concerns.  As this chapter illustrated, many of the claims by organizational

sponsors implicitly or explicitly accused regulators, employers and the

government of racism and discrimination based on their perceived lack of interest,

leadership or acceptance of foreign-trained immigrants.  These powerful claims

served to racialize the social problem and had far-reaching effects on their

audiences, many of which were quick to issue responses to such indictments.

Indeed, a claims competition between organizational sponsors and

professional regulatory bodies became evident over the course of this research.

Regulators were extremely responsive to organizational sponsors' accusations of

being exclusionary in their policies and practises, and as such were extremely

defensive of themselves as fair evaluators as well as responsible keepers of

competency for the sake of public safety. Regulators claims not only neutralized

organizational sponsors' suggestions that they are exclusionary gatekeepers of the

professions, but also constructed foreign-trained immigrants as part of the

problem by claiming that their international credentials and abilities went above

and beyond the capacities of their organizations. Interestingly, this heated claims

competition only emerged between organizational sponsors and regulators. While

organizational sponsors also targeted their claims-making activities towards

employers, specifically to small- and medium-sized enterprises, they approached

these relationships in much more open and collaborative ways. This degree of

patience may have been due to the fact that organizational sponsors constructed

employers as central to solutions to problems associated with foreign credential

recognition, while regulators were defined as instigators of the social problem.

This chapter has also drawn attention to the common claims-making

strategies used by various players involved in the social problems game. In

addition to identifying political leadership as essential for the coordination of the

multitude of stakeholders involved in the foreign credential recognition debate, a vast array of stakeholders also touted education and collaboration as key to making progress on this issue. In this regard, many claims-makers focused their efforts on the creation and maintenance of amicable relationships with other stakeholders in order to facilitate both the trust and confidence that many respondents claimed to be an essential ingredient for the successful evolution of this social problem.

The next chapter further explores the ways in which foreign credential recognition as a social problem is socially constructed by analyzing claims-makers construction of the drivers behind the elevation of this issue onto the policy agenda in 2001. While this chapter has utilized a social problems approach to understanding current constructions of foreign credential recognition by claims-makers, the following chapter will expand upon this foundation by examining the factors which transformed this social problem into a pressing policy priority.

## CHAPTER SIX

## THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION AS A POLICY PRIORITY

While the world is chalk full of social problems, only a select few ever

make it onto official policy agendas. How do social problems come to be

seriously considered by government officials? Why does an ideas 'time' come

when it does? In his seminal work, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies,*

Kingdon (2003) poses such questions and posits that pre-decision public policy

processes remain largely uncharted territory within the political science literature.

Drawing from Kingdon's agenda-setting framework, this chapter works towards

an understanding of the evolution of *social problems* into *policy priorities* through

an exploration of the processes that led to the inclusion of foreign credential

recognition in the 2001 Speech from the Throne – the federal government's

official policy agenda – some twenty years after initial claims-making campaigns

on the issue commenced. The social construction of foreign credential

recognition as a policy problem will be examined through the narratives of key

stakeholders and their claims about the issue's emergence as a prominent policy

prerogative in 2001. This chapter will illustrate the social construction of three

separate and distinct components in Kingdon's agenda-setting process –

problems, policies and politics – and the activities of key stakeholders which

married these forces together, resulting in the creation of sociohistorical contexts

which welcomed foreign credential recognition as a promising policy solution.

## THE CONVERGENCE OF CULTURAL WORRIES

In describing the factors which led to the elevation of foreign credential

recognition onto the government's policy radar, respondents reflected on the

contextual factors they felt to be influential in and around 2001. Several

participants claimed that unintended consequences of changes to immigration

policies in the mid-1990's began to surface in the late 1990's and became cause

for concern:

> The statistics started showing that people weren't doing as well as
> previous cohorts had done. In the early 1990's the federal
> government stopped the absorptive capacity model for setting
> immigration levels and thought they were going to continue
> bringing in immigrants at fairly significant levels regardless of
> what was happening in the economy, that had a fairly significant
> impact on how well immigrants integrated into the workforce.
> (Academic)

And,

> In the census of 2000 what we started to find was that those who
> came during the 1995 recession did far worse than those who had
> come previously. What normally happened is that [immigrants]
> did worse at the beginning but over a period of about five years
> they met and then actually started to surpass Canadian levels of
> income. But this group, that gap just went further and further post-
> 1995… And after five and six years, every group after that started
> to do worse and worse… So, because immigrants were choosing to
> live in three major cities, you started seeing income disparity and
> higher poverty and unemployment rates quite quickly. Within the
> five year period it was quite marked that these things were
> happening. So it seems to me that that was really the impetus.
> (Federal government employee)

Respondents suggested that the declining economic performance of immigrants

who had been selected for their high levels of human capital[16] initiated questions

about the ability of immigrants to fully utilize and benefit from their skills in

Canada. These findings support Kingdon's (2003) suggestion that the monitoring

of governmental programs and activities results in feedback which often alerts

decision makers to unanticipated consequences or specific problem areas. Indeed,

respondents claimed that census results pointing to the decreased productivity of

recent immigrants as compared to earlier cohorts served to highlight problems

associated with the labour market integration of highly skilled immigrants.

In addition to escalating anxieties over the meager economic performance

of recent and highly-skilled immigrants, respondents claimed that the late 1990's

were also marked by increasing concerns regarding the future of Canada's labour

market and economic productivity in light of looming demographic projections

and skills shortages:

> ... there was this move at the federal level about the knowledge
> economy and population ratios slowing down and the aging
> population. The government of Canada sought to start to attract
> immigrants so the productivity of the country would continue to
> grow. We've moved in the last 200 years away from the industrial
> revolution to the IT and knowledge-based economy, so economies
> are changing fundamentally. So if you are in a rush to get
> knowledge workers, immigration is seen as a way to attract large

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[16] Since the mid-1990's there has been a shifting emphasis on increasing the intake of economic immigrants, particularly skilled workers who possess high levels of human capital. Since 1995, an influx of immigrants with university education has arrived in Canada, who now constitute the largest proportion of annual immigrants, representing 44.7 percent of all immigrants to Canada (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005).

pools of skilled people. You can't grow them at home because you don't have population growth. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

There was a lot of discussion in the media about skills shortages and the demographic changes and the need to be able to find skilled labour from non-traditional sources. Traditionally, employers would look for recent graduates to fill their labour needs or to people from other sectors, but I think there were broad realizations that that was no longer going to be possible in light of the baby boomers retiring. (Credential recognition agency)

Also,

I know employers are very concerned, and particularly in those provinces with skills shortages. They are now desperately looking for a program service model to be able to access skilled people to hire. Businesses are quoting losses in the hundreds of millions because they can't find people to work on their projects. This is again another symptom of the demographic projections that were done. Employers knew that this was coming years ago as well. None of these things were hidden facts. StatsCan does a really good job of trying to educate people on what's coming down the pipe. But unless something is imminent, people have other things to worry about and address. So, now it's imminent. And it's a real in-your-face issue. And now people are saying let's do something about it, but it's because it's in their faces. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Most certainly, participants claimed that the emergence of concerns over labour and skills shortages in light of the upcoming retirements of the baby boomers paired with a heightened awareness of the need to stay competitive to survive in the knowledge economy led to increased levels of attention to immigration as a promising policy tool. The reference to employers' rousing sense of "imminent" challenges to their operations and productivity levels as the basis for increased attention to foreign credential recognition by the above excerpt is a significant

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finding which will be further developed later in the chapter. Indeed, many

participants claimed that the social construction of certain 'moments in time' and

'atmospheres' were important factors in the development of foreign credential

recognition as a policy priority.

In describing the development of these rising challenges, many

respondents referred to mounting statistical projections and numeric estimates.

As numerous excerpts throughout this chapter will illustrate, respondents viewed

statistical evidence as important indicators of social problems, although many

were very much aware of the socially constructed nature of such 'facts':

> My understanding is, with the statistics I've seen is that… well and
> I don't even know if we know for sure, right? But with the
> projection of how the workforce has patterned itself over the
> previous years and where we are with our population decreased
> growth, that all of our new net job growth will have to depend on
> immigration and without that, our economy is going to start to fail.
> We've got some real strangle-hold problems in certain areas.
> (Regulator)

As Kingdon (2003: 93) suggests, quantitative measures are particularly effective

indicators of policy problems since a "countable problem sometimes acquires a

power of its own that is unmatched by problems that are less countable."

Similarly, Best (1987) argues that the use of numeric estimates in claims-making

activities about social problems serves to highlight the troublesome condition's

size and potential to indiscriminately spread, thereby increasing the pool of

citizens concerned about the social problem. Indeed, the use of statistics to

construct a social problem as possessing the potential to impact all members of

society is a particularly effective claims-making strategy to harness the attention

of policy makers (Loseke, 1999; Best, 1987).

> I think the people like ourselves who have been looking at human
> capital issues began to flag the issue of demographic change in
> Canada and the rising importance of immigrants to the flow of
> human capital to build the stock. We have an aging stock, so the
> flow has got to come from either the people born in Canada who
> enter the labour force or immigrants. We began to say that the
> numbers are showing that we have an issue here and we have to do
> more about it. And other people did too. Then in the 90's and into
> this decade the analysis of human capital has become more
> sophisticated and the importance of people in the economy has
> become better understood, and that naturally opened up areas in
> which there were gaps in our use of human capital capacity. And
> immigrants are one of the important gaps, not the only one, but one
> of them. So there was the analytical improvement that raised this
> issue. (Research institute)

As the above quotes illustrate, increasing fears associated with worrisome

projections regarding economic growth and labour market participation resulted

in the construction of human capital as a policy solution. Many respondents

claimed that in light of the convergence of widespread social problems, paired

with emerging initiatives stressing the importance of human capital, immigration

came to be considered a potential source of relief for looming demographic and

labour market shifts, given its emphasis on the recruitment of highly-skilled

individuals:

> Why do I think [foreign credential recognition] has come to the
> fore now?... We have fairly significant skills shortages in certain
> areas. We have a fundamental mismatch of people coming in with
> skills and a labour market that actually needs them, and very little
> capacity to actually move the people with skills into the jobs where
> they're needed... I think people really bought into, and we're still
> not really sure about this data obviously, but the looming 2011,

>2025 projections I think grabbed hold of political imaginations and
>so people are now saying that even if we do everything we needed
>to internally, with young people, with aboriginal populations, with
>people who have traditionally not been as integrated into the
>workforce, that there would still be a very significant gap. So,
>maybe we better look at immigration as a significant issue?
>(Academic)

And,

>I think coming to the realization of the labour markets needs has to
>be addressed. I think that because of the overall global migrations,
>there is a bigger impact internationally, I think there are a number
>of countries that are actively seeking new immigrants who are
>highly educated, such as Australia and the US, and European
>countries, as well as Canada...and then the overall aging
>population and all those things that, you know, I mean, our low
>birth rates and such – so I think overall, immigration is starting to
>play a more important role in long term strategies and labour
>market issues for governments across the country and across the
>world. (Immigrant-serving organization)

As the above excerpts suggest, an increasing awareness of globalization and the

worldwide competition for human capital led to the construction of immigration

as a prominent policy tool. One respondent described why foreign credential

recognition came to the fore in 2001:

>I think its because of who we are and the way we think and the
>whole "globalization speak", which is really... well, we really
>need to replenish our labour force and the only way we can do this
>because we are not producing enough kids is to bring in skilled
>immigrants. (Federal government employee)

Participants in this study claimed that the convergence of a multitude of

burgeoning social problems, from skills shortages to an aging workforce to

decreased population growth to increasing competition for human capital as a

result of globalization, coupled with the declining performance of highly skilled

immigrants who were selected based on their potential to negate such impending

social problems, led to the construction of immigration as an essential yet

troubled policy lever. Indeed, several respondents constructed immigration as

both a key policy tool as well as a pressing social problem:

> I think there's the labour market projections and projections on the
> demographics. In Canada, all of these things are the wind behind
> our sail, so of the many things that this nation has to get right in
> order to be prosperous, its got to get this problem right. We've got
> to. There's absolutely no way that this nation will grow without
> immigration. And there's absolutely no way that it will grow well
> without making immigration work better. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

Numerous key informants in this study claimed that the development of

foreign credential recognition as a specific policy priority stemmed from the new

policy environment around immigration which resulted from the ripple effects of

the confluence of concerns over skills shortages, demographic shifts and the

labour market participation of newcomers. One participant described how the

federal government's recognition of complications associated with immigration

processes served to further escalate the urgency around foreign credential

recognition as a social problem:

> Because of this new environment and I think trying to
> address…well, the commitment from the federal government to
> better manage and maximize the benefit of immigration, so that
> piece of accreditation of foreign qualifications came onto the
> agenda. (Immigrant-serving organization)

As the above excerpts illustrate, respondents felt that foreign credential

recognition became elevated onto the official policy agenda as result of a

combination of multiple established and pending social problems, which created

an atmosphere hungry for policy innovation, change and renewal, and the simultaneous attention to immigration as a promising policy instrument. These findings are indicative of Kingdon's (2003) assertion that problems often come to the attention of policy-makers based on the altered state of systematic indicators, such as changes in the temperature of the economy or population growth or decline, which can serve to construct the context, definition and magnitude of certain policy problems. The social construction of the emergence of foreign credential recognition as a policy problem by participants in this study also demonstrate Kingdon's suggestion that very few single-factor explanations lead to the high placement of an issue on the policy agenda, but rather that the joint effects of several single indicators together become powerful agenda-setting forces.

The claims of participants presented in this section outline what Kingdon (2003) describes as the 'problem stream' in the agenda-setting process, where various indicators and feedback loops serve to define an issue as part of larger and widespread social problems, thereby constructing an otherwise nominal troublesome condition into a pressing policy issue based on its apparent diffuse breadth and reach. Foreign credential recognition came to be constructed as a symbol of larger cultural worries related to the future prosperity of the country as a whole, since it encompassed a variety of social troubles that large numbers of people were becoming increasingly concerned about. As Loseke (1999) points out, playing on the influences and events of particular sociohistorical contexts in

efforts to construct a specific social problem as an instance of larger cultural

worries is a very effective strategy for change.

## THE NATURAL SELECTION OF A POLICY IDEA

While some respondents in this study attributed the rise of foreign

credential recognition to the policy arena as a result of the convergence of various

related social problems, others identified certain players in the social problems

game and their claims-making activities as being largely influential in the

development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority.  Several

respondents accredited organizational sponsors' extensive claims-making

campaigns with elevating the issue to policy makers' attention:

> I really think the credit needs to be given to the immigrant serving
> organizations, first and foremost, because they were seeing it front
> and centre and they were the ones who were really banging hard on
> the drum saying that this was a significant issue.  And [particular
> immigrant-serving organizations] really did do quite an
> extraordinary job in raising the issue in ways that it had not been
> raised before. (Academic)

As the above quote illustrates, immigrant-serving organizations were recognized

for advocating new conceptions of foreign credential recognition as a social

problem.  As the previous chapter demonstrated, the use of new frames of

reference by organizational sponsors led to a definitional shift around foreign

credential recognition from a social justice concern to an economically beneficial

tool.  These activities reflect what Kingdon (2003: 116) describes as the natural

selection process of policy ideas, where familiar policy options are recombined

into new proposals for new problems in order to survive in the "policy primeval

soup" of policy alternatives. As will be discussed in greater detail later in the

chapter, respondents described the recombination of foreign credential

recognition from a policy problem to a policy solution as a crucial aspect of the

issue's elevation onto the government's policy agenda.

## Meeting the Criteria for Survival

Respondents also constructed the activities of immigrant-serving

organizations as extremely effective in not only raising the issue of foreign

credential recognition to policy makers, but also in presenting them with practical

and innovative implementation strategies for addressing the issue. As one senior

federal bureaucrat claimed,

> The immigrant-serving organizations are the people on the ground
> dealing with this. I've been to meetings where we think, this is
> going to be a nice sign and autograph and meet and greet, and the
> executive directors turn to us and say "I'm desperate. I've got
> people sleeping in my lobby because they can't pay their rent.
> Don't tell me you'll look at this in two years." So they are very
> vocal constituents. They have very true, compelling stories to
> tell… and they can tell them well because they are also living it. A
> lot of the ideas we get about ways to tweak our program to make it
> better are coming directly from the NGOs. They come up with
> fabulous ideas because they have to. If you have someone
> standing in your doorway everyday, you come up with some pretty
> creative ways to help them very quickly. (Federal government
> employee)

Other respondents concurred with the above statement and claimed that the ability

of immigrant-serving organizations to demonstrate policy solutions to decision-

makers was key to their successful engagement of policy communities:

> ...by trying things at a local level and demonstrating they can
> work, [immigrant-serving organizations] have been tremendously
> successful in raising this issue in various guises. (Academic)

And,

> [Immigrant-serving organizations] have their ear to the ground, so
> they have the information. They are prepared to actually do stuff –
> they can demonstrate and learn from their demonstrations. They
> are sort of the incubators for government. (Past provincial
> government employee)

By demonstrating the technical feasibility of their proposals to policy-makers,

immigrant-serving organizations came to be conceived of as adept, inventive and

trustworthy specialists on foreign credential recognition within the policy

community. Kingdon (2003) describes the technical feasibility of a policy

solution as a major factor in what he refers to as the "criteria for survival" of

policy options. The author claims that only practical, well-researched and

technically feasible policy proposals make it onto policy radars of decision-

makers since proven policy proposals convince senior officials that such solutions

will succeed when enacted. Indeed, organizational sponsors were actively aware

of the need to become trusted authorities on all things related to foreign credential

recognition in order to seriously influence key decision-makers:

> I think, like in anything, you become a subject matter expert and people
> call you. And I think that's naturally what's happened. The foundation
> over the last ten years has really taken on the subject [foreign credential
> recognition] and gone really quite deep in it, so we understand it deeply
> and the impact it has on people's lives. We also understand policy, and
> policy implications of proposals and changes. So, people come to us. The
> media comes to us, academics come to us, government comes to us.
> We've done the research, we've got the papers, so you create your little
> niche, and that's what we've done. (Immigrant-serving organization)

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As the above excerpts illustrate, respondents touted immigrant-serving organizations' robust policy solutions as playing an integral role in the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority. Most certainly, participants in this study constructed immigrant-serving organizations as shining examples of what Loseke (1999) refers to as 'organizational sponsors' and what Kingdon (2003) terms 'policy entrepreneurs' – those claims-makers who are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputations, organizational skills, and sometimes money – into extensive claims-making campaigns in the hope of a future return. As the authors point out, these returns may take the form of preferred policies, the ability to lead change, or even the mere satisfaction of participating in the social problems game.

Further to constructing the technical feasibility of policy proposals as an essential component of successful policy ideas, Kingdon (2003: 131) also claims that value acceptability within the policy community, anticipated public acquiescence and reasonable chances for receptivity among governmental decision-makers are also essential criteria that must be met for policy solutions to survive and flourish. In order to meet these 'criteria for survival', the author suggests that policy entrepreneurs often recast policy options in efforts to accentuate their proposal's ability to encourage efficiency. Similarly, both Loseke (1999) and Best (1987) suggest that claims-making activities which appeal to logic, rationality and 'organizational moralities' such as capitalism and economics are often constructed as solutions to social problems by claims-

makers, especially when attempting to reconstruct social problems in order to

capture the attention of policy-makers.

## The Recombination and Emergence of a Policy Solution

As previously mentioned, many respondents claimed that organizational

sponsors' strategic claims-making activities to redefine foreign credential

recognition as an economically beneficial policy tool were essential in elevating

this issue onto the policy agenda:

> The [major report I wrote on foreign credential recognition] was
> based on significant consultations that I did across the country, and
> I really did cris-cross the country several times, meeting with all
> the various stakeholders. And we were looking at it from an
> immigrant perspective and an employer perspective. We were not
> looking at it from a social justice issue, but as an economic issue.
> And I think that changing it from a social justice issue or a fairness
> issue to an economic issue really made a difference. (Academic)

And,

> The impetus behind moving on this was really from an economic
> perspective rather than an equity perspective. A lot of the work
> that had been done around access for skilled immigrants had been
> looked at from an equity perspective, and I think when the
> economic argument started to be made, I think government policy
> people looked at it from a different perspective. And sometimes
> money talks louder than equity. Often times, actually. (Credential
> recognition agency)

Indeed, as the previous chapter demonstrates, claims-makers were extremely

aware of the need to typify foreign credential recognition in marketable ways. As

the above excerpts illustrate, while earlier claims-making activities constructed

foreign credential recognition as a social justice *concern*, later claims-making

campaigns recast foreign credential recognition as a promising policy *solution* to

burgeoning concerns over labour shortages, demographic shifts and economic

competitiveness in the knowledge economy. Kingdon (2003) describes this

recombination of policy options in evolutionary terms, whereby common and

familiar policy solutions combine with new social problems to produce new

policy options with new twists, yet which are not constructed of entirely new

material. In fact, the author likens successful policy options to perennials,

"flowering in one season, then lying dormant, only to flower anew" (Kingdon,

2003: 141). Indeed, many participants supported Kingdon's (2003: 142)

suggestion that familiar elements often morph into new structures or proposals

over time and "become attached to a problem different from the one they started

with":

> The issue of foreign qualification or utilizing immigrants' skills
> was not a new thing for immigrants or for community
> organizations, it was something that even the government knew
> about, but it was not important enough to be on the agenda. So, I
> think a number of factors, again with the aging population,
> recognition of addressing labour market needs through
> immigration, I mean, the Conference Board of Canada coming out
> and saying that by the year 2011 one hundred percent of labour
> market growth was to come from immigration – all that led to
> provide people like us a better opportunity to go and tell them
> look, these are the issues, and one of them was foreign
> qualifications and accreditation of foreign qualifications. The
> environment was right for us as advocates to go and say look, this
> is the time to address this…But for us immigrant communities, it
> was not a new issue. International and national situations just
> provided us with opportunities to put it on the governments
> agenda, like in the Throne Speech, and then it started. (Immigrant-
> serving organization)

Numerous respondents made pointed efforts to express that the evolution of social

problems into new forms and shapes is a complicated process that can take many

years and extensive, perpetual claims-making campaigns to achieve:

> ...the reason I'm giving you this background on this issue is that
> it's not like suddenly some people do advocacy or lobbying and
> the federal government came to their senses, but there is a historic
> change happening here, involving our economic trends and our
> economy and needs and the baby boomers impacting it by retiring.
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> ...for years and years, different groups, including [our own
> organization], have advocated for a change in practises [around the
> recognition of foreign credentials]... That work has always been
> there, but as the forecast of our economy shows that the impact [of
> upcoming retirements and skills shortages] will be more severe,
> suddenly they get more allies helping them, including businesses.
> Suddenly it created that pressure on the licensing bodies and also
> government because if you look at the future, we need to do
> something.  (Immigrant-serving organization)

The reorientation of foreign credential recognition as a useful and required policy

tool in light of mounting societal fears began catching the ears of various

stakeholders in the policy community, which opened new opportunities and

environments amenable to discussing the issue in fresh ways.  This redefinition of

foreign credential recognition as a promising policy solution in light of

burgeoning cultural worries over the country's economic efficiency was claimed

to be the catalyst for the rise of foreign credential recognition onto the official

policy agenda by many respondents, in that it prompted new stakeholders who

otherwise may not have been interested to open their doors and minds to new

solutions. One respondent described the crucial role that retypification played in

gaining the issue a spot on the policy agenda:

> I think that what happened is that on one hand, people want to do
> things from a social justice perspective, but until it was couched in
> this economic language that the government could understand, I
> think that's what helped. And so many people started using it. I
> think it came from all over, you know, the business organizations
> started saying 'we have a skills shortage', organizations like banks
> started saying things like 'diversity is good for business.' And all
> the reports that came out around demographic changes around
> numbers of visible minorities and immigrants living in Ontario –
> and the Statistics Canada report that said by 2017 forty-five
> percent of Toronto was going to be visible minorities, so you
> know, organized business started to say 'we need diversity in order
> to deal with diverse clients'. So, it was an economic advantage.
> Once it shifted from this is not only an issue of social justice, but
> also an issue of economics, it started to become more legitimate for
> governments to be able to deal with it. And all the environmental
> issues just sort of came into place, you know, the globalization
> discourses and neoliberalism, and it all kind of fit together so
> nicely, that yeah, this was the right time for this. (Academic)

Indeed, the increasing concerns of other stakeholders in addition to organizational

sponsors over larger societal worries, coupled with the pointed efforts of claims-

makers to redefine foreign credential recognition as a promising policy solution in

light of those very qualms was perhaps the most crucial event in the evolution of

foreign credential recognition from a social problem to a pressing policy priority,

since their joint effects captured the attention of high-level policy-makers.

**Constructing a Climate of Receptivity**

In addition to attributing the elevation of foreign credential recognition

onto the policy agenda to their efforts to retypify the issue as a policy solution,

several organizational sponsors also claimed that their extensive claims-making

activities aimed at gaining widespread awareness of and support for this new

definition, both within the policy community and the general public, also served

to garner the issue increased attention by high-level decision-makers. One

respondent described the process by which their organization attempted to build

up support for foreign credential recognition amongst various stakeholders:

> What we did is that we pre-identified a number of ideas that we
> had done in consultation with each of the council members. We
> went out and met with each of the members and ran these ideas by
> them to validate them and enhance them. Then we set up working
> groups and around the table were employers and regulatory bodies
> and colleges and community agencies and immigrant professionals
> themselves and government. So the idea was shaped by all of
> them at one time. It brought it to an idea with everyone around the
> table. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Indeed, many organizational sponsors in this study described their efforts to bring

stakeholders together in hopes of creating an atmosphere of collaboration. As

Kingdon (2003) points out, policy proposals are greatly enhanced by the 'floating'

of ideas in the policy community and making successive improvements based on

feedback, which simultaneously gauges support of the issue, in addition to raising

awareness. The author describes the process of getting others used of new ideas

as 'softening up', which he claims to be an essential step in building the prevalent

support that is required for the placement of an issue onto policy agendas.

Several organizational sponsors were acutely aware of the need to 'soften up'

their audiences:

> So that is the big thing we do – we don't tell [decision-makers]
> what decision to make, we tell them the options they have and why
> they should care about choosing amongst those options, and
> perhaps the implications of the options. And then they make a
> decision. We do that and other people do that too, other groups.
> And if they agree with us, it kind of raises the temperature and the
> issue becomes more talked about in meetings and people mull it
> over and think maybe this is an issue that we should do something
> about in our community. (Research institute)

And,

> We got some key people together. We had a third party help us
> locate a half-dozen people and we brought them together for a
> focus group to ask them for their advice. We focussed initially on
> some key sectors and asked where are the skills shortages? What
> are the sectors that we should focus on? That was one approach.
> We approached some professional associations… to talk to them
> about trying to reach their members. We hired somebody whose
> job was to solely work with that sector – in effect a sales person
> who did cold calls, whether it was writing or cold-calling, but
> talking to people one-on-one about what we were doing and how it
> could help them. For basically a couple of years it was a lot of
> hard slogging without huge amount of results. (Credential
> recognition agency)

As the above excerpts illustrate, respondents described the process of delicately

educating others about policy issues in efforts to diffuse a policy option and

persuade audiences to support it as an extremely long and thankless battle that

demands both patience and perseverance. However, as Kingdon (2003) points

out, this preliminary work is an essential part of the agenda-setting process, since

it sets the stage for the rise of an issue onto decision-makers radars by ensuring

that important players are 'softened up' when short-lived windows of opportunity

open and welcome new policy proposals. As the author describes,

Softening up seems to be necessary before a proposal is taken seriously. Many good proposals have fallen on deaf ears because they arrived before the general public, the specialized publics, or the policy communities were ready to listen. Eventually, such a proposal might be resurrected, but only after a period of paving the way.[17]

The diffusion of policy options which meet Kingdon's 'criteria for survival' and become accepted by larger numbers of policy specialists often result in the construction of consensus around the policy idea as a preferred alternative (Kingdon, 2003). Many respondents in this study suggested that their claims-making activities had contributed to the construction of a climate of acceptance around foreign credential recognition as a real and pressing policy issue. One participant described the increased attention of decision-makers to foreign credential recognition in the following way:

> I think it's because they are realizing now there is this voice that is giving them the information and the education is taking hold now. So that is starting to take root in the thinking of the issue so they appreciate that something needs to be done about this. I think, really, before there wasn't a strong enough voice to make anybody realize and there wasn't good enough research and there wasn't enough constructive engagement work. We engage stakeholders one at a time. It takes a lot of effort. It takes three or four meetings before we engage them to a point until they are willing to listen, but we persist through that process, whereas others might give up. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Indeed, several respondents felt that their claims-making activities to increase the awareness of and consensus on foreign credential recognition as a pressing policy was a major contributing factor in the elevation of the issue onto the policy agenda. Kingdon (2003) asserts that the cumulative outcome of substantial

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[17] Kingdon, 2003: 131

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support for a policy option amongst key players in the policy arena is the

'bandwagon effect', where several important policy-makers who have been

convinced of a policy's potential come to speak of a 'growing realization' of the

issue as a serious policy solution, which in turn spearheads the rapid rise of the

policy option to the upper echelons of powerful decision-making circles. As one

respondent described,

> ...we were continuously using whatever levers and buttons to get
> things moving. And we knew that [a municipal group of
> stakeholders] was a very new and influential and powerful group,
> so you whisper in their ears, you give them the tools, they say it
> out loud themselves, and people say, wow, this is something totally
> new! Let's do it! (Academic)

Many respondents in this study claimed that foreign credential recognition

became popular due to a 'climate' of receptivity or 'new environment' of

'heightened awareness' that claims-making campaigns had constructed for senior-

level government decision-makers:

> The demographics of Canada's declining population has only
> started to sink in to the policy stakeholders. So, they are looking at
> it from the perspective of what's happening in our country with
> regards to the overall population and the only way that we're going
> to be able to sustain our quality of living and pensions and so forth,
> is if we supplement our natural growth, which is in a decline, with
> immigration as being the key engine for numerical growth and to
> sustain the economy. So, with that new heightened awareness,
> they are looking afresh at this issue that has been raised over the
> years and because of that they're saying we really need to look at
> this, and what is the greatest roadblock? And part of that
> roadblock is the recognition of foreign credentials. So, this
> professionals shortage is just something which has become a
> heightened awareness as the information has seeped down to
> various bureaucratic levels. And of course, to policy makers who

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are now recognizing something that they felt before was not
necessarily the case, but now, with more hard statistical evidence,
they're finding that what was mentioned twenty years ago was
actually a prediction that has now come true. (Past Member of
Parliament)

Indeed, numerous respondents claimed that foreign credential recognition had

gained the attention of policy-makers as a result of the combination of their

extensive claims-making activities in important policy arenas, paired with

increasing concerns over other widespread social problems:

> …we were including those key messages [about other burgeoning
> social problems] in our presentations and decks. We were trying to
> get a common message across building on what was in the public
> perception. And it was interesting, I think the first year I was
> working here when people asked what I did, I got a blank stare, but
> the second year people said that was really important. So we were
> fortunate that we were trying to push in a time of increased
> awareness. And then we started getting calls from the media. And
> we hired a media consultant to help give those press releases and
> make media contacts and that was another vehicle to get our
> message out. (Credential recognition agency)

The lengthy claims-making campaigns of organizational sponsors guided the

diffusion of foreign credential recognition as a promising policy solution to

pressing cultural worries through both policy communities and the public, which

sparked a climate of support for foreign credential recognition as a policy tool.

This heightened level of awareness augmented high-level policy-makers

receptivity to the issue, which marked another essential step towards the transition

of foreign credential recognition from a social problem into a popular policy

priority. Reflecting on her organization's role in initiating this climate of
receptivity through their claims-making activities, one respondent claimed that,

> I'm satisfied with the fact that new solutions are being looked at
> and the new solutions are interesting because they sort of invert
> where we look for solutions. We typically look for solutions to our
> federal government, and we've actually succeeded in
> demonstrating how you can tip that over and put the local
> community in charge and let them engage with everybody in the
> community to develop solutions. Then, the federal government is
> no longer at the top, but instead they're out here supporting local
> communities. I'm satisfied with that. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

While cultural worries in the 'problem stream' were becoming areas of
greater public concern, the simultaneous activities of organizational sponsors in
the 'policy stream' were constructing increased awareness and support for new
definitions of foreign credential recognition as an innovative solution to many of
the policy dilemmas in the 'problem stream'. As larger numbers of people in the
policy community became intrigued by the reorientation of foreign credential
recognition as a policy solution, a climate of receptivity emerged amongst senior-
level decision-makers. Indeed, an opportunity for claims-makers to convince
politically powerful players of the benefits of ratifying foreign credential
recognition as a serious policy priority had been constructed. One respondent
neatly summarized this circumstance:

> It could be that's it enough to talk about the need to recognize
> foreign credentials, and then this mass becomes a majority and it
> becomes talked about at different levels and then you get that
> political impulse. I think that's what's playing out right now.
> (Research institute)

**THE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL AWARENESS AND SUPPORT**

Respondents in this study made many claims in regards to the role that

they felt politics played in elevating the issue of foreign credential recognition

onto the policy agenda.  Once again, these findings support Kingdon's (2003)

suggestion that the political stream is an extremely important component of the

agenda-setting process.

**Increasing Public Awareness**

In addition to discussing the development of a climate of receptivity

amongst the policy community, several participants claimed that an atmosphere of

awareness about immigration and foreign credential recognition that was arising

in the general public helped to escalate attention around the issue:

> I'd say that settlement and immigration is coming to the forefront
> of Canadian consciousness.  And I mean that very broadly, from
> the person on the street to the [various research institutes] who
> have lately taken to this issue and issued numerous reports on the
> impact of immigration.  And I think a large part of that has to do
> with the fact that there is an acknowledgement now, an awareness I
> think within various sectors, that immigration is a tool for Canada
> to replace its demographics.  We all know that currently
> immigrants are fifty-seven percent of our new workforce, and by
> the year 2026, which is only twenty years out, its going to be one
> hundred percent.  So, I think there is this emerging sense that we
> really need to take a look at how this country is preparing our new
> immigrants, or integrating them into the workforce and society,
> and all these other areas that Canada holds dear.  (Immigrant-
> serving organization)

And,

> I think that the sort of – a popular mythology really came to the
> fore.  Everybody talks about the doctors who drive taxis even
> though there may not be that many doctors who are taxi drivers,

but that sort of popular mythology took hold and people could
relate to it. (Academic)

Respondents also claimed that new levels of awareness about immigration as an

important policy priority in light of globalization and Canada's future in the

knowledge economy fuelled the momentum that was building around foreign

credential recognition:

> There's a lot of discussion right now about there's today and
> there's the future. The 20/20 Report asked what are the big issues
> that should engage Canadians. There's federalism, Kyoto,
> Afghanistan, world peace and immigration. It always makes it on
> the list. People are concerned, they support it, but they are
> concerned about the implications of immigration on shared values,
> on shared citizenship, on what does it mean to be a Canadian, on
> security and relationships with the United States, so its always
> going to be a hotbed of discussion. It's not going away.

And,

> ...this issue has become more and more globalized in terms of its
> importance. Immigration is getting a lot more media attention in
> the last two and three years worldwide. Whether it's the US and
> issues with Mexico, or the European refugee crises, immigration is
> becoming a hot topic. It's a fad. Its becoming a bigger problem
> because people are shouting off of rooftops in Toronto and saying
> enough is enough. And politicians obviously have their ear to the
> ground and have picked up on this issue. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

Most certainly, participants claimed that new and ever-increasing levels of

attentiveness to immigration-related affairs by the general public served to ripen

the atmosphere for the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy

option and, as the above excerpt illustrates, politicians are always receptive to

widespread anxieties amongst their electorate. Another respondent furthered

constructed constituents' concerns as crucial components in the claims-making

game:

> How was it brought to the government's agenda? I think there
> were a variety of factors. Politicians in their local constituencies
> are incredibly vulnerable to their constituents. The Liberal Party
> of Canada, which was in power for most of the time we are talking
> about, draws much of its support from immigrants, so there's the
> political consideration. And also who were the immigration
> ministers and who were they vulnerable to... Then there was quite
> frankly the media. The media really loves this story and continues
> to love it. The engineer who's a taxi driver and the doctor who's a
> pizza deliverer. So, the recurring theme of wasted talent – every
> media outlet has reported on it. It's a story that they can't get
> enough of. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Indeed, many respondents credited the media with helping to raise awareness

about foreign credential recognition. The mass media can play an extremely

important role in claims-making campaigns given their ability to access

enormously large audiences, and their status as important sources of news and

information for the general public (Loseke, 1999). In this sense, as Loseke (1999:

64) notes, "the media are a major transmitter of cultural worries." While the

media are undoubtedly regarded as an important claims-maker in the social

problems game, the role of the media in the agenda-setting process has been a

subject of debate in the public policy literature. While the media acts as a

communicator, both within and outside of policy communities, and can serve to

shape and magnify policy issues, they are largely regarded as reporters of events

rather than influencers of or contributors to policy agendas in the literature

(Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg, 1995; Kingdon, 2003). As Kingdon (2003: 68)

notes, while mass media can affect public opinion, which in turn affects

politicians (especially during political campaigns), more specialized forms of

media within policy communities may have a greater impact on policy agendas

than mass media. While not explicitly explored in this study, the role of the

media in the historical development of foreign credential recognition as a social

problem and policy priority is an area worthy of further research given the

media's unique ability to socially construct and immediately promote issues to

vast public audiences, often utilizing emotion-laden real-life examples, such as

ever popular notions of the 'PhD-taxi driver syndrome'.

**Intensive Claims-making Activities and Mounting Pressure**

Several organizational sponsors in this study also credited their own

perpetual claims-making activities aimed at government policy-makers for

clearing a space for foreign credential recognition on the government's official

policy agenda. One respondent described his efforts to engage senior-level

government officials in the following way:

> ...a part of our job is that some of the issues need to come on the
> political agenda. We take it and put it on the political table by
> working with our MPs, and definitely part of that has been, and
> I've done some myself, presentations for parliamentary
> committees. In order for government to find out about these things
> they form parliamentary committees who go and do their
> homework, and very often we go and do presentations to them and
> put our issues there... You have to make sure you are singing the
> song to the ears of the governing party. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

A regulator in this study also attributed the rise of foreign credential recognition

as a policy priority to the claims-making activities of organizational sponsors.

When asked why he felt that foreign credential recognition had been included in the 2001 Speech from the Throne, he answered, "Politics. There is a very large lobby of people who fervently believe that there are highly biased and defensive practices within licensing authorities to keep strangers out – and they keep getting the ear of various ministers." Indeed, other stakeholders involved in the foreign credential debate, in addition to organizational sponsors themselves, recognized the claims-making activities of organizational sponsors as elevating this issue onto decision-makers' agendas.

Two participants from immigrant-serving organizations credited employers with forcing foreign credential recognition onto the policy agenda as a result of the pressure that their demands put on government to find new sources of labour to fill both current and looming shortages:

> Who is it behind this pushing this issue? It's not ethnic groups or advocates, in fact, its businesses that are a part of it. They want the labour. They cannot keep their business running without an adequate professional workforce. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> I think because of the attention that the business community started paying to the labour market strategy for the next twenty years, and identifying the immigrant communities as potential for providing that support to the labour market, then I think the issue became important to politicians, who put it on the agenda. So, to answer your question, it was not a new issue to immigrants or other people, but because of other external, new factors like the business community push, [politicians] started saying, okay, lets do something about this.

Without a doubt, participants in this study recognized the pointed claims-making activities immigrant-serving organizations and the increasing demands from

employers for applying the constant pressure needed to sensitize high-level

decision-makers to this issue in hopes of elevating it onto their policy agendas.

## What's in it for me?  Political Bargaining and Ratification

An overwhelming majority of respondents in this study claimed that

politics played a crucial role in the development of foreign credential recognition

as a policy priority; however, many of them did so only after describing the

impacts of other factors, such as cultural worries or their own claims-making

activities.  In fact, many respondents often alluded to the role of politics in

passing or as an aside, especially when discussing the political benefits associated

with ratifying foreign credential recognition as a pressing priority.  While

respondents appeared hesitant to raise the role of politics during the interviews,

many described it as one of the foremost factors involved in the elevation of

foreign credential recognition onto the policy agenda:

> ...but there are political issues here as well.  It's Stephen Harper
> and the Conservatives who promised that they would create a
> federal credential assessment agency.  So now [the government]
> has to find a way to deal with that.  And the reason Stephen Harper
> did that was to get after the immigrant vote in Toronto and
> wherever else.  Because pressure groups and immigrant
> associations are putting on the pressure, so they came up with that
> promise. (Credential referral agency)

And,

> ...and also, to be candid, I'm no expert on politics, but they always
> play a role and certainly the immigrant population very heavily do
> vote liberal and at the time it was a liberal government, so why
> don't we help one of our key demographic groups?  Certainly.  So
> there was a lot at play there.  So I think that was one of the real
> pushes for, okay we need foreign credential recognition and we

need it now. Let's start doing something about it. (Federal government employee)

Without a doubt, respondents in this study claimed that foreign credential recognition became a prominent policy issue as a result of large political appetites for 'immigrant votes':

> …immigrants are a loosing battle when it comes to the government and [politicians] want to grab any vote they can get. So, they said, we better act on what we have in front of us – and they implemented some of the recommendations. If there is political interest, it's going to happen. If there's no political interest, its going to collect dust on some shelf. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> [Foreign credential recognition] has been in every consecutive Speech from the Throne. Two of Chrétien's, one of Martin's and I think its even been in Stephen Harper's Speech from the Throne. And there's a real political underlay to that. People know whose votes they need, so its coming from that. Purely in my view, it's a political thing we're talking about here. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> I think the immigrants themselves are very important as voters – in Toronto, particularly, and to some extent in Montreal and Vancouver. This was a big influence because of the implications for the Liberal Party. (Research institute)

Also:

> I think every government party wants the ethnic vote, and as a result, they are going to put the issues which are going to attract that group of people to vote for them. (Immigrant-serving organization)

Indeed, respondents' sustained emphasis on the pursuance of political rewards, in the form of perceived electoral support and loyalty, as the basis for promoting foreign credential recognition onto the policy agenda throughout the interview process is one of the most significant findings of this study. Kingdon's (2003) insights into the inner workings of what he refers to as the 'political stream' in the agenda-setting process are particularly useful in making sense of this finding. The author describes the method by which politicians and governments decide to approve certain policy issues as stemming out of a 'bargaining' process, whereby political stakeholders are enticed into support by either the promises of some benefit, or out of fear of exclusion from the potential benefits of participation (Kingdon, 2003: 161). As the claims presented above illustrate, participants constructed the high placement of foreign credential recognition on the policy agenda by key decision-makers as a result of the perceived political support that immigrants would award (or potentially withdraw from) the governing party upon their ratification (or disapproval) of the issue as a policy priority. A federal bureaucrat in this study described how the government bargained with this issue:

> ...it became almost a negative backlash. Most of the stuff we see in the paper isn't positive about refugees and immigrants. You know, they are driving cabs, stealing our health care. There was just a lot of things that came together at a head and it was a forced situation where someone needed to act... it became this whole idea that the federal government is not doing what they're supposed to do. Like, this is their area – why are they not helping immigrants? So, it really became the push of, okay, we need to help immigrants. (Federal government employee)

Respondents also alluded to this process of bargaining when describing

the support of foreign credential recognition by the generalized public. Indeed,

many participants claimed that increasing public support for the issue stemmed

from an awareness of both the personal benefits or potential losses associated with

foreign credential recognition:

> I think that there is an implicit understanding… that support for
> immigration is very high. And we're probably the one nation
> where we have such undiluted support for immigration. I think it's
> partly an understanding that it's in my own self interest.
> (Academic)

And,

> Its also part of our national mythology… We're a country of
> immigrants. Not as strongly as self-interest though. And there's
> the tipping point of the economic and demographic imperative
> where people are starting to think about who is going to look after
> me when I'm seventy. There's a real pragmatic side to it as well.
> (Immigrant-serving organization)

Respondents suggested that much of the endorsement of foreign credential

recognition by the general public stemmed from concerns over personal self-

interests. In this sense, members of the public felt they had a vested interest in the

outcome of the policy issue and therefore supported foreign credential recognition

on the basis that they would personally benefit from doing so. As one participant

described:

> People know this is an issue for Canada now. They might not
> agree with it, or support it, or even like it perhaps, but I think that
> they acknowledge, that yes, demographically we're having
> difficulty. We are a very small country and the whole global
> economy stuff with China and India emerging, anybody who sits
> down and thinks about these things are aware of the fact that we as

a country have to do something about this. (Immigrant-serving
organization)

The above excerpt illustrates Kingdon's (2003: 161) concept of bargaining well:

people enter into bargaining processes upon realizing that "rigid adherence to

one's original position would cost one dearly." As the excerpts presented in this

section demonstrate, respondents constructed the evolution of foreign credential

recognition from a social problem to a prominent policy priority as contingent

upon the perception of benefits amongst both policy-makers and the generalized

public alike. Together, increasing public awareness, organizational sponsors'

targeted claims-making campaigns and successful political bargaining converged

to create widespread political consensus on the need to address foreign credential

recognition as a serious policy priority.

## "THE ALIGNMENT OF STARS": ELEVATING FOREIGN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION ONTO THE POLICY AGENDA

The atmosphere of consensus around foreign credential recognition as a

critical policy issue resulted in the opening of what Kingdon (2003: 166) refers to

as a "policy window" – "an opportunity for action on given initiatives" which

allows policy entrepreneurs to push "their conceptions of problems, their

proposals, and political forces into the choice opportunity." Once an issue

becomes pressing in the eyes of government officials and those closest to them, a

short-lived window of opportunity opens and welcomes solutions from the policy

community. One respondent described the opening of foreign credential

recognition's "policy window" as follows:

> ...for the first time immigrants weren't doing well, they were seen
> as a real necessity in terms of our demographics and our labour
> market shortages. For the first time the popular imagination and
> the political imagination was captured, and the issue came to the
> fore. (Academic)

Political support for foreign credential recognition as an important policy priority

was the last piece of the puzzle required for a window of opportunity to open.

Foreign credential recognition's 'time had come', and organizational sponsors

were prepared:

> There had been a lot of homework done... [A major report on
> foreign credential recognition] had reverted the thinking around
> what the ideas were, how the system needed to change, what
> players needed to be there. That thinking was already done and
> sitting there and this [political leadership] was the catalyst putting
> life underneath those ideas. But the groundwork was done – an
> understanding and analysis of the region and what the needs were
> and what the leverage points were. We had a very good and
> grounded understanding of the context, so those are all contextual
> factors. The spark was leadership. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

The above excerpt echoes Kingdon's suggestion that policy entrepreneurs linger

in and around government with their policy solutions in hand, waiting for

advantageous developments in the political stream to create an opportunity for

them to push their proposals onto the agenda. Indeed, many respondents in this

study suggested that foreign credential recognition developed into an official

policy priority due to the joint effects of occurrences in the problem, policy and

political stream:

> There was a confluence of forces that took the problem and made it
> even bigger. (Immigrant-serving organization)

And,

> There were a whole bunch of factors that came together and each
> of their own are actually quite dramatic. From about 2000 on you
> start seeing them all culminate together. So I think that there were
> so many pressing needs between immigrants themselves, and
> politicians who were getting calls and letters, and immigrant
> organizations who were simply flooded for five years with far
> more immigrants who needed their services without any increase
> in funding who were starting to become vocal, as well as
> employers saying well I've got ten people coming to me with their
> resumes and none of them have the skill set that I need for this job
> and I need somebody now. (Federal government employee)

Armed with the deep awareness of the need for the 'right' policy solutions to the

'right' types of problems, paired with the political support necessary to elevate an

issue onto the government's agenda, organizational sponsors merged these

disparate components of the agenda-setting process together and pushed them

towards the policy window. An executive director of an immigrant-serving

organization described the formula that allowed her organization to successfully

push foreign credential recognition onto the policy agenda in the following way:

> Well I think you need a catalyst and that catalyst [was a senior
> municipal leader]. You need a perceived neutral convening
> authority, and that was [our organization]. And you need the
> presence of high-level corporate leaders... It was those three
> together, and the fact that we came out of the blue with a new kind
> of solution that everyone was hungry for and government
> supported it... I think our success is really one of quite simply
> having the right ideas at the right time... The alignment of the stars
> allowed us to become an easy success. If those elements weren't
> there, we might not have come off the ground. (Immigrant-serving
> organization)

The above quote brilliantly describes what Kingdon terms the "coupling" of

disparate problem, policy and political streams – a crucial convergence that must

occur in the short time that a policy window is open in order to successfully push

a policy proposal onto the government's official policy agenda. Claims such as

"having the right ideas at the right time" and the "alignment of the stars" indicate

organizational sponsors' acute awareness of the components required to elevate a

policy issue onto decision-makers' agendas in certain contexts and climates. As

Kingdon (2003: 173) describes, organizational sponsors must "hook" their

solutions "onto the problem of the moment, or push them at a time that seems

propitious in the political stream." With several widespread problems brewing in

the problem stream, paired with the mature and innovative claims-making

campaigns of organizational sponsors which had constructed foreign credential

recognition as a policy solution to such cultural worries, governmental officials,

further encouraged by the potential for political benefits, became convinced that

foreign credential recognition was a promising policy tool and swiftly elevated

the issue onto the policy agenda. Indeed, the claims-making campaign that began

in 1981 at an immigrant women's conference in Ottawa had finally come to

fruition.


**DISCUSSION**

This chapter has suggested that foreign credential recognition was

elevated onto the government's official policy agenda in 2001 as a consequence

of the convergence of three contextual forces: (1) the development of widespread

social problems and cultural worries, (2) the claims-making activities of policy

entrepreneurs and, (3) receptive political climates. Indeed, the social construction of these three components as essential agenda-setting processes by respondents in this study serve to validate and enhance Kingdon's theory of pre-decision public policy processes, which suggests that problems, policies and politics must converge for a policy to be elevated onto a governmental agenda.

As various excerpts throughout this chapter demonstrate, foreign credential recognition became symbolic of widespread cultural worries related to looming demographic shifts, labor and skill shortages, and Canada's future economic prosperity in the global knowledge economy. With increasing emphases on the importance of human capital in light of these developments, contrasted with mounting evidence pointing to the declining economic performance of highly skilled immigrants, questions about the abilities of immigrants to utilize their skills in Canada arose. Indeed, immigration-related affairs were gaining increased attention as both potential policy solutions in light of projected demographic and labour market shifts, as well as social problems based on the worsening situation of highly skilled newcomers.

Meanwhile, the simultaneous claims-making activities of organizational sponsors served to enhance burgeoning acknowledgments of foreign credential recognition as a widespread and pressing social problem. Undoubtedly, the deliberate and strategic claims-making activities of immigrant-serving organizations, based on their expert understandings of the social problems game and agenda-setting processes, was as a crucial factor in the elevation of foreign

credential recognition onto the policy agenda. According to Kingdon's (2003: 124) evolutionary theory of policy problems, "the key to understanding the process is knowing the conditions under which ideas survive". Indeed, organizational sponsors' activities to redefine and demonstrate the viability of foreign credential recognition as a policy solution, paired with their perpetual and committed efforts to soften key policy players to the idea as a promising prescription for larger societal woes, socially constructed widespread awareness of and consensus for foreign credential recognition as practical policy solution both within the policy community and the general public. Foreign credential recognition thus survived as a policy priority based on organizational sponsors' activities to recombine old definitions around social justice concerns with emerging requirements for increased levels of human capital and economic productivity in the new global economy. The evolution of foreign credential recognition from a mature social problem to a fresh and promising policy solution was a crucial activity in this issue's life cycle, in that it began to capture the ears of policy-makers in ways that the original definition never could. This finding directly correlates with Kingdon's (2003) 'policy primeval soup', which considers the recombination and evolution of policy ideas to be a crucial factor in the development of agenda-bound policy alternatives.

Kingdon also characterizes political support as essential for the rise of an issue into the policy radar. The pervasive claims-making campaigns by various stakeholders in the foreign credential recognition debate served to increase both

public and political attention to the issue. While organizational sponsors targeted their claims at government policy-makers, employers also began voicing concern about labour and skills shortages. These claims sensitized high-level decision-makers to growing anxieties within both the corporate world and the general electorate, the latter of which supported foreign credential recognition as a solution to burgeoning cultural worries given their ability to affect their own well-being. With both the electoral support of immigrants and the economic self-interests of the Canadian public at stake, political support for foreign credential recognition emerged and triggered the opening of a policy window.

Given their acute insight into the agenda-setting process and extensive knowledge of the social problems game, organizational sponsors were extremely prepared for the short-lived political opportunity to couple their policy solutions to widespread social problems. Immigrant-serving organizations pushed their definitions of foreign credential recognition as a feasible policy solution to prevalent problems related to demographic shifts, labour and skills shortages, and untapped reserves of productive human capital at certain propitious moments in the political stream. By coupling the three disparate problem, policy and political streams together while the policy window was open, organizational sponsors successfully elevated foreign credential recognition onto the government's policy agenda. Immigrant-serving organizations undoubtedly emerged as the foremost player in the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority given their tireless efforts to promote the issue as an innovative and necessary

policy solution. Indeed, immigrant-serving organizations can be described as policy entrepreneurs in the foreign credential recognition debate given their concern for the issue, their search for solutions to couple to the problem, and their awareness of advantageous moments of political receptivity in which to push the package of problem and solution (Kingdon, 2003: 202).

Working from Kingdon's observations of the agenda-setting process, this research posits that the social construction of foreign credential recognition as a prominent policy priority in 2001 was a consequence of the joint effects of the presence of experienced and committed organizational sponsors, public awareness of and support for the issue, and political receptivity to economically promising policy solutions in light of burgeoning concerns over Canada's future prosperity in the global economy. Indeed, this analysis demonstrates the importance of evolution – the morphing of familiar elements into new forms based on new environments. The retypification and recombination of socially constructed definitions of foreign credential recognition by organizational sponsors were not only crucial to the issue's survival as a policy option, but also paved the way for the elevation of foreign credential recognition onto the federal government's official policy agenda in 2001, where it continues to remain to date.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## CONCLUSION

## SUMMARY

While foreign credential recognition was first raised as a problem at a National Conference on Immigrant Women in Canada in 1981, the issue did not appear on the federal government's official policy agenda, the Speech from the Throne, until 2001. This research set out to examine the way in which foreign credential recognition has been socially constructed as a social problem over time, and the factors which led to the elevation of the issue onto the government's policy radar in 2001. More specifically, this study examined how the claims-making activities of various stakeholders involved in the foreign credential recognition debate came to define the issue as a social problem, and how those activities transformed this social problem into a policy solution worthy of widespread public and political attention. These questions were examined using both a contextual constructionist perspective on the social construction of social problems, as well as political science's insights into the world of governmental agenda-setting dynamics. While the social problems framework provided insight into how social problems become constructed and defined as such through claims-making activities, the public policy literature furthered the analysis of how social problems become policy problems, or issues that are recognized as important by government officials. Together, the social constructionist perspective on social

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problems and the models of agenda-setting dynamics within the public policy

literature provide a sound theoretical basis for the analysis of the evolution of

foreign credential recognition from a private trouble, to a public worry, to a

prominent policy priority in Canada.

Two qualitative methodologies were utilized to analyze the evolution of

foreign credential recognition as both a social problem and a pressing policy

priority. While the historical analysis of federal policy documents served to

provide background and context to the development of foreign credential

recognition as a social problem, interviews with key players in the policy

community contributed to an in-depth understanding of the claims-making

dynamics from the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in current

debates about foreign credential recognition.

The use of contextual constructionism to analyze the claims-making

processes around foreign credential recognition at the federal level between 1981

and 2007 revealed an interesting phenomenon: a change in the popular political

discourse altered the typification of foreign credential recognition, which

ultimately led to its construction as a pressing policy priority. While the issue

was largely typified as a racialized issue that the federal government was hesitant

to acknowledge and address by immigrants and organizational sponsors in the

1980's, the historical analysis revealed that new definitions of foreign credential

recognition began to be promoted by governmental committees and commissions

in the 1990's, which characterized the issue as an obstacle to economic

competitiveness in the global knowledge economy of the 21$^{st}$ century.

Foreign credential recognition became a federal policy priority in 2001

when it was included in the Speech from the Throne. Since then, the federal

government has become an active claims-maker in constructing foreign credential

recognition as an important economic policy lever for the country's future

economic success. Strong neoliberal typifications continue to highlight the

economic 'waste' and 'losses' associated with the devaluation of foreign

credentials, and the substantial funding that has been devoted to the issue over the

past few years by the federal government further constructs foreign credential

recognition as a major policy concern.

Interviews with key stakeholders involved in the foreign credential

recognition debate, including immigrant-serving organizations, credential

assessment and referral agencies, federal and provincial governments,

professional regulators, research institutes and academics, revealed how various

players in the social problems game construct definitions, causes, challenges,

consequences and solutions related to foreign credential recognition through their

claims and claims-making activities. Research for this thesis found immigrant-

serving organizations, who sponsor and execute claims-making activities on

behalf of immigrant victims, to be expert players in this social problems game due

to the strategic manipulation of their claims based on their target audience. Many

organizational sponsors utilized economic typifications of foreign credential

recognition in their claims-making activities, tapping into existing and well-established social concerns regarding Canada's economic competitiveness and productivity in the global knowledge economy, and thereby widening the audience who could potentially benefit or suffer based on the success or failure to address foreign credential recognition. Organizational sponsors' use of economic typifications in their claims-making activities undoubtedly served to reinforce the definitional shift around foreign credential recognition from a social justice concern to a promising economic tool for national prosperity.

This research also revealed a claims competition between organizational sponsors and professional regulatory bodies. Indeed, regulators were extremely defensive of their policies and practices in light of organizational sponsors' accusations that they were exclusionary. Regulators neutralized such accusations by characterizing themselves as responsible keepers of public safety and also constructed foreign-trained immigrants as problematic by claiming that their international credentials were outside of the domain of regulatory organizations. While heated debates ensued between regulators and organizational sponsors, many other claims-makers focused their efforts on the creation and maintenance of amicable relationships with other stakeholders in order to facilitate the trust and confidence that many respondents claimed to be an essential ingredient for the successful evolution of this social problem.

The narratives of key stakeholders also described the emergence of foreign credential recognition as a prominent policy priority in 2001. Key informants

suggested that foreign credential recognition was elevated onto the government's official policy agenda as a consequence of the convergence of three contextual forces: (1) the development of widespread social problems and cultural worries, (2) the claims-making activities of policy entrepreneurs and, (3) receptive political climates. Indeed, foreign credential recognition became symbolic of widespread cultural worries related to looming demographic shifts, labor and skill shortages, the declining performance of highly skilled immigrants, and therefore, of Canada's future economic prosperity in the global knowledge economy.

As immigration was gaining increased attention as a policy solution in light of these escalating cultural worries, the simultaneous claims-making activities of organizational sponsors served to enhance burgeoning acknowledgments of foreign credential recognition as a widespread and pressing social problem. Undoubtedly, the deliberate and strategic claims-making activities of immigrant-serving organizations to redefine and demonstrate the viability of foreign credential recognition as a policy solution, paired with their perpetual and committed efforts to soften key policy players to the idea as a promising prescription for larger societal woes, socially constructed widespread awareness of and consensus for foreign credential recognition as practical policy solution both within the policy community and the general public. Organizational sponsors' activities to recombine old definitions around social justice concerns with emerging requirements for increased levels of human capital and economic productivity in the new global economy was a crucial factor in the elevation of

foreign credential recognition onto the policy agenda, in that it began to capture

the ears of policy-makers in ways that the original definition never did.

The pervasive claims-making campaigns by various stakeholders in the

foreign credential recognition debate increased political attention to the issue and

sensitized high-level decision-makers to growing anxieties within both the

corporate world and the general electorate, the latter of which supported foreign

credential recognition as a solution to burgeoning cultural worries given its ability

to affect their own well-being. With both the electoral support of immigrants and

the economic self-interests of the Canadian public at stake, political support for

foreign credential recognition emerged and triggered the opening of a policy

window.

Organizational sponsors successfully elevated foreign credential

recognition onto the government's policy agenda by coupling the three disparate

problem, policy and political streams involved in the agenda-setting process

together while the policy window was open (Kingdon, 2003). Indeed, immigrant-

serving organizations pushed their definitions of foreign credential recognition as

a feasible policy solution to prevalent problems related to demographic shifts,

labour and skills shortages, and untapped reserves of productive human capital at

certain propitious moments in the political stream. Immigrant-serving

organizations undoubtedly emerged as the foremost player in the development of

foreign credential recognition as a policy priority given their acute insight into the

agenda-setting process and extensive knowledge of the social problems game,

paired with their tireless efforts to promote the issue as an innovative and

necessary policy solution.

**THEORETICAL AND SUBSTANTIVE CONTRIBUTIONS**

In addition to the findings discussed above, this thesis contributes at least

six major substantive and theoretical conclusions to the literature. Firstly, a

definitional shift occurred around foreign credential recognition in the 1990's.

While the issue was largely constructed around humanitarian concerns regarding

equality of opportunity and fairness in the 1980's, claims-makers constructed

foreign credential recognition as a promising economic policy tool with the

potential to benefit the country as a whole from the 1990's onward. It has been

argued that this retypification was crucial to the development of foreign credential

recognition as a prominent policy priority since the new neoliberal problem

definition garnered the issue increased public and political attention in ways that

earlier definitions highlighting the racialization of the issue did not. Indeed, while

foreign credential recognition can be viewed from both social justice and

neoliberal perspectives, only neoliberal discourses served to construct foreign

credential recognition as a social problem worthy of government funding and

attention. This finding reinforces the social constructionist view that constructing

claims in terms of humanitarian or value-based moralities are often less successful

than those that appeal to broadly shared moralities such as capitalism and

globalization, and their promises of economic prosperity for all.

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Secondly, strong organizational sponsors were key to the development of foreign credential recognition as both a widespread social problem and a federal policy priority. Foreign credential recognition was constructed as a social problem by immigrant-serving organizations, credential recognition and referral agencies and academics, who possess an acute awareness of the social problems game and therefore tailor their claims to their target audience. This thesis argued that organizational sponsors' strategic constructions of foreign credential recognition as an economically beneficial practice, correlating with neoliberal agendas in an increasingly competitive global economy, served to reorient definitions of the issue which in turn legitimatized foreign credential recognition as a widespread social problem worthy of government attention. This finding concurs with both social constructionism (Loseke, 199) and Kingdon's (2003) model of agenda-setting, which posit that the presence of strong and committed organizational sponsors and policy entrepreneurs are essential for successful claims-making campaigns and the elevation of a policy idea onto official policy agendas. Furthermore, this finding also supports a central tenet of Kingdon's theory – that the evolution of policy problems, by recombining with new social and political contexts, is crucial for the survival of a policy issue.

Thirdly, politics played a prominent role in the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority in Canada. Both politicians and the general public were enticed into supporting foreign credential recognition as a social problem and policy priority through a bargaining process (Kingdon, 2003),

whereby the potential political or personal benefits outweighed the potential

losses that could accompany a lack of attention to the issue. Politicians and high-

level decision-makers ratified foreign credential recognition as a policy priority

due to mounting political pressures from the electorate, employers, and

organizational sponsors, coupled with their pursuance of political rewards in the

form of perceived electoral support from the promotion of foreign credential

recognition onto the policy agenda. Economic typifications of foreign credential

recognition triggered widespread public awareness of the issue, which garnered

the public's endorsement for foreign credential recognition since individuals felt

that they had a vested interest in the outcome of the issue. This finding is

illustrative of Kingdon's (2003) assertion that bargaining processes are crucial to

the development of widespread political support for a policy issue.

Fourthly, this thesis has reinforced Kingdon's theory of agenda-setting by

highlighting the importance of the convergence of problems, policies and politics

in elevating an issue onto an official policy agenda. This thesis argues that the

social construction of foreign credential recognition as a prominent policy priority

in 2001 was a consequence of the joint effects of the presence of experienced and

committed organizational sponsors, public awareness of and support for the issue,

and political receptivity to economically promising policy solutions in light of

burgeoning concerns over Canada's future prosperity in the global economy.

Additionally, the contextual constructionist approach to social problems is

particularly useful in the analysis of the development of social and policy

problems over time.  Given its consideration of claims-making activities as social constructions which occur in and are influenced by certain socio-historical contexts, contextual constructionism allows for the examination of social conditions at certain points in time, thereby helping to explain why certain issues receive attention or shape social policy.  The consideration of social context was crucial in studying the evolution of foreign credential recognition, given that the definitional shifts that occurred around the issue were intimately tied to popular socio-historical themes.

Lastly, Kingdon's (2003) model of agenda-setting can be seen as a natural extension of the social constructionist perspective on social problems.  While the constructionist approach to social problems helps to explain how certain conditions come to be viewed as problematic, the public policy literature furthers this analysis by explaining how certain social problems become topics of government attention and action.  Social constructionism's insights into the processes by which humans create meaning and definitions form an important theoretical groundwork for the analysis of both social problems and policy priorities.  Focusing on the processes of collective definition and understandings through claims-making activities are the goals of both social constructionism and Kingdon's agenda-setting model.  The two theories are extremely complementary, for where Kingdon's agenda-setting model lacks a clear explanation of how definitions and meanings come to be, social constructionism provides an extensive lesson on meaning-making; where social constructionism lacks a clear

explanation for political attention and interest in certain social problems,

Kingdon's theory of agenda-setting outlines the processes by which social

problems come to be prominent governmental agenda items.

## DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this thesis is preliminary in many ways, it has paved the way for

a more informed understanding and analysis of foreign credential recognition as a

socially constructed social problem and policy priority.  Given the plethora of

stakeholders involved in the issue of foreign credential recognition, a wealth of

research questions and opportunities exist.  Despite efforts to ensure

representative participation by the stakeholder groups involved in this research,

the final sample was skewed by greater numbers of immigrant-serving

organizations compared to government officials, regulatory bodies and academics.

Future research should attempt to gain representative samples of stakeholders in

furthering the analysis of foreign credential recognition as a social problem and

policy priority, and go beyond the stakeholders involved in the current research to

analyze the related claims-making activities of politicians, employers,

universities, community colleges, and the media.

Given that findings from this thesis indicate that politics played a crucial

role in the development of foreign credential recognition as a policy priority, the

role that politicians play in elevating a social problem onto the policy agenda

remains a curious question.  Kingdon (2003: 199) concludes his analysis of the

agenda-setting process by claiming that the process is extremely democratic, with

elected officials and their appointees possessing the foremost abilities to affect agendas. The evolution of foreign credential recognition as a social construction based on the narratives of elected officials would indeed be fascinating work, and would further understandings of the dynamics involved in constructing both social problems and policy priorities.

While this thesis has attempted to merge the social constructionist approach to social problems with Kingdon's (2003) model of agenda-setting in efforts to understand the process by which a social problem is transformed into a policy priority, researchers should further investigate this theoretical marriage by examining how other components of the public policy literature could complement the social constructionist literature in explaining the emergence of governmental agenda items. This combined theoretical perspective could provide social constructionist and public policy scholars alike with a new lens with which to view social problems and prominent policy priorities. Indeed, foreign credential recognition is but just one social problem that came to capture the attention of government decision-makers; the opportunities to understand how other various policy issues came to be socially constructed as such are limitless.

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**APPENDIX**

**Letter of Information**

**McMaster University**

Inspiring Innovation and Discovery

Amber Walker
M.A. Candidate
Department of Sociology
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

[Date]

Re: Letter of Information

Dear [Participant's Name],

I am a Master's student in the Department of Sociology at McMaster University who is studying immigration and public policy. I am conducting research for my master's thesis which addresses the recognition of immigrants' foreign educational credentials in Canada. This research focuses on the various groups who have influenced the federal government's recent attention to the barriers that highly skilled newcomers face.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your participation in a one-hour interview regarding your views on foreign credential recognition would be greatly appreciated. The interview will centre around three main topics: discussing recent political attention towards foreign credential recognition, you and/or your organization's involvement in the issue, and you and/or your organization's views on policy roadblocks and recommended policy changes with respect to the barriers which highly skilled newcomers face. The interviews are scheduled to occur during Spring/Summer 2006.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. You can refuse to answer any questions during the interview without consequence, and will still be regarded as a full participant in the research. Information obtained will be kept confidential to the full extent of the law and I will treat all information provided to me as subject to researcher-participant privilege. A pseudonym name will be used to protect your identity; however, it is possible that others in the field may be able to guess your identity based on the nature of your

remarks.  If you prefer to be identified in the report, please let me know.  You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study without consequence, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.  If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, you may contact the McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat at (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142, or via email at ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca.

If you would like to participate in this study, or require any further information, please contact me at (905) 627-3329 or via email at walkeraj@mcmaster.ca.

Best regards,

Amber Walker