

A LOT TO LEARN:
INTERNATIONALLY-TRAINED SOCIAL WORKERS REPEATING
GRADUATE DEGREES AT ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

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GRADUATE DEGREES AT ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of institutional credential devaluation and the impacts on internationally-trained social workers in Canada. International social workers are recruited to immigrate to Canada based on their credentials and experience but some discover after immigrating that their qualifications are devalued which limits or prohibits their ability to engage in professional practice. This experience is recognized within the literature in other professions; however, there has been insufficient attention given to it within social work itself and to the various stakeholders involved.

Using critical theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with internationally-trained social workers to gain insight into their experiences of devaluation and graduate degree repetition in Ontario universities. Extensive exploration of the institutional stakeholders in credential assessment, the field of social work and universities was also undertaken and provides systemic context to the experiences of international social workers.

While internationally-trained social workers have high views of Canada prior to immigrating, these perspectives change upon encountering systemic devaluation and discrimination post-immigration. They describe confusion, frustration and powerlessness as they navigate through social work systems in seeking to gain

recognition of their credentials in order to practice. When they eventually decide to return to Ontario universities to obtain the recognition they need/deserve, they experience continued devaluation. Instead of identifying different or better social work education in Ontario, they describe repetition of what they learned in their countries of origin, raising questions about the similarities and differences in international social work education. The personal costs and psychological impacts of these experiences are shared by the participants. The practices of social work and post-secondary institutions in creating systemic barriers to internationally-trained social workers are examined with recommendations for further research and policy and practice changes that will lead to greater justice and equity.

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To my classmates who made me aware of their experiences of immigrating to Canada and returning to university to repeat their degrees, thank you for sharing your stories with me. While I wish you did not have to go through this experience in order to practice in social

work, I am blessed by your friendship and grateful that we met. As well, Marius, Steve, Nana, Brian and Shona, thanks for always having an encouraging (or sarcastic) word to lighten the mood as we went through this process together. You'll notice I did not call it a 'journey'.

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"Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering." (Hebrews 13:1-3, NIV)

"Then the King will say, 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me.'" (Matthew 25:40, The Message)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Canada is often referred to as a nation of immigrants. Indigenous inhabitants welcomed the European settlers to this land and there has been a continuous flow of immigrants arriving since that time. While federal Canadian immigration policies are purported to be inclusive, Canada maintains immigration quotas that limit the number and types of people who can enter the country on an annual basis. The admission criteria prioritize highly-skilled individuals who have obtained higher education as well as experience in their countries of origin as Canada seeks to increase its skilled labour pool. Upon arriving in Canada, however, many immigrants discover that their credentials are not immediately accepted as equivalent to native-born Canadians. As a result, many immigrant professionals often undergo extensive efforts to have their credentials assessed as they seek to practice their chosen professions in their new country of residence.

1.1 Problem: Non-recognition of social work credentials

There is increasing focus on higher level credentials within many disciplines, including social work. Many internationally-trained social workers have sought to make Canada their home. In that process, they have learned that their academic and employment credentials are considered not equivalent to the credentials of their North American-trained counterparts. In addition to experiencing the challenges of immigrating to a new country and culture, they find themselves without the ability to practice their profession upon arrival. For many internationally-trained social workers, the decision is made to return to university to obtain a Canadian degree so that they can

resume their professional practice. This thesis explores the experiences of internationally-trained social workers who discovered their education and practice experience are considered not equivalent or less valuable than the education and experience of their fellow social workers in Ontario and who then have attended Ontario universities to repeat their graduate social work degrees. In particular, I am interested in how these professionals understand and give meaning to their experiences of credential non-recognition and returning to university to repeat their graduate degree. Furthermore, this thesis will investigate the processes of credential assessment used by universities, examining why and how they were developed. Lastly, there are important justice questions to be posed to the university system and the field of social work regarding whether the credential assessment processes are fair and if internationally-trained social workers are receiving anything valuable by returning to university to obtain a Canadian credential when their international credential is considered insufficient to practice.

1.2 Research impetus

This research was the result of multiple personal and professional experiences in my life. It was only in reflecting on the genesis of this research that I realized a pattern in my life since elementary school of befriending people who were new immigrants in Canada. Growing up in a home with a strong Christian ethic of caring for others who have been excluded was formational for me. When I began my social work practice, I developed working relationships and friendships with colleagues from multiple ethnic and religious backgrounds. In particular, I initially learned about the non-recognition of credentials through my interactions with interpretation services

in the Hamilton community. I was intrigued as the previous education and employment experiences of each interpreter who assisted me were **always** incommensurate with their present employment. These men and women were doctors, lawyers, teachers or other professionals in their countries of origin, holding one or more (often graduate) degrees with significant experience in their respective professions. They had more education and experience than me yet they were not able to obtain employment in their chosen fields. While I greatly valued their service, their situations appeared unjust and I wished I could change their circumstances.

The impetus for this specific research began in my first year of this M.S.W. program. I became friends with a classmate who shared with me that he had a MSW from his country of origin. However, upon immigrating to Canada, he was informed that his graduate degree was not considered equivalent with a MSW from a Canadian university. I did not understand how this assessment was made, particularly as I got to know him better. He was far more insightful and knowledgeable than I but we were considered equals by the university. Furthermore, he was not given opportunities to work as a teaching assistant for undergraduate students in spite of his education and years of experience; some of those positions were given to classmates who had just graduated from the undergraduate program and had no practice experience. In my second year of this program, I met two new classmates who also had graduate social work degrees from their respective countries of origin. They also immigrated to Canada and discovered that their social work credentials were not considered equivalent. Again, I felt that these fellow students demonstrated significant insight and practice wisdom that I felt was not recognized by the university and, by extension, the field of social work.

In describing my early experiences and awareness of marginalization through my life, I am not suggesting I have any moral superiority because I do not. I am a white, heterosexual man, who grew up in a middle class home, with all the privileges that afforded. I recognize that I have contributed to the marginalization of people, intentionally or unintentionally, and have not taken action to oppose oppression or speak out about domination. I was blind to my power and privilege for many years. At this time, I can only claim at best that some of my vision has been restored and I am aware of my continued limited vision. I believe my privileged position in society affords me a useful position from which to engage in this research. Western academic institutions are reflections of the ruling powers. While universities are often places of inquiry and social criticism, they also generate the next generation of powerful leaders who frequently appear in similar bodies to the previous generation. I have been given every privilege by the accident of my birth; I did not choose any of them nor did I earn them. I remember being taught that it is not the responsibility of oppressed people to educate their oppressors about oppression. Given my inherent participation in the dominant powers in Canada, I believe I have a responsibility to shine light into the darkness and expose the hidden workings of power and privilege I and others like me embody and call attention to the (in)actions we take that contribute to injustice and oppression.

1.3 Important terms

It is important to explain the terms that will be used in this paper to ensure clarity and consistency of language. To begin, the term 'immigrant' is used to refer to a person who has migrated from one country to another, usually with the intention of permanent residence. In this research, the

participants chose to move to Canada and accessed the Federal Skilled Worker Program after they obtained their undergraduate degrees and MSWs in their respective countries of origin. It is recognized that some internationally-trained social workers obtain academic credentials in another country before immigrating to a third country, like Canada.

Since there are multiple stakeholders in the credential assessment process, it is not surprising that there are also different words used for similar purposes. The term 'equivalency' is commonly used to reference credentials obtained outside of Canada that are accepted as equal to credentials obtained within Canada (CICIC, <http://terminologies.cicic.ca/app/?id=80>). In addition to being commonly used within literature, the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW), Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) use 'equivalency' to describe international credentials accepted as equal to Canadian credentials (T. Raso, personal communication, April 15, 2015; Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2013; CASWE, <http://caswe-acfts.ca/commission-on-accreditation/coa-faqs/>). However, the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), a voluntary organization endorsed by the federal and provincial governments as providing a quality assurance framework for international credential assessments, does not endorse the use of the term 'equivalency' because they hold that equivalence is impossible since international education is inherently different (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015). Instead, the CICIC encourages the use of 'comparability' because it specifies a "relationship of close similarity" between systems, jurisdictions or institutions and that "courses, programs, sections of programs, degrees, or

training in one system results in outcomes similar to those of another system, but that their specific contents and/or structures differ” (CICIC, <http://terminologies.cicic.ca/app/?id=43>). Another term that the CICIC endorses is ‘international’ instead of ‘foreign’ as the latter may hold negative connotations, though it is commonly used within literature on this subject as well as governmental agencies (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015). For example, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) refers to the assessment process formally as ‘foreign credential recognition’ (http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/jobs/credential_recognition/foreign/index.shtml).

In this paper, I have chosen to use the term ‘equivalent’ to reflect its common use by the credential assessment stakeholders. While I appreciate and value the important issue raised by the CICIC about the use of ‘equivalent’, the preference for ‘comparable’ has not yet been adopted by organizations completing or receiving credential assessments. Furthermore, the connotations associated with ‘equivalence’ more accurately reflect the experience of credential assessment at this time as will be explored further in this paper. Since stakeholders use the term to reflect their goal in credential assessment of determining if international credentials are the same or equal to Canadian credentials, it appears appropriate to maintain their use of this term. As will be referenced, within social work practice, the academic credentials must be assessed as the same as within Canada. Any deviation results in an assessment of non-equivalence. If an international social worker’s academic credentials are assessed as not equivalent to a Canadian BSW or MSW, the OCSWSSW will not accept their credentials as sufficient social work education and the applicant will be denied registration as a social

worker, though they can seek registration as a “non-social work applicant” (T. Raso, personal communication, April 15, 2015).

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

Canada has been a nation of immigrants since its inception and continues to grow annually through recruitment of highly-skilled immigrants to fill important roles within the country's economy (Lowe, 2010, p.25). Between 1999 and 2000, the percentage of recent male immigrants who held university degrees before arriving in Canada increased from 25% to 44% while Canadian-born males with university degrees only increased from 16% to 19% during the same period (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.58). According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada data, 20% of immigrants had university degrees (undergraduate, graduate or post-graduate) in 1997 and this increased to 32.8% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2010, p.13).

However, most immigrants experience barriers to obtaining highly-skilled employment commensurate with the credentials that contributed to their admission which are subsequently devalued by multiple stakeholders related to employment (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.427; Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.151-152). Credentials are comprised of formal education, work experience and skills that are held by an individual. Canada's immigration policy gives priority to internationally-trained professionals, who have obtained significant credentials in their country of origin. However, these same credentials are often not recognized upon their arrival as equivalent to those obtained within Canada or other western countries (Basran & Zong, 1998). Ontario universities are stakeholders in this devaluation process as they formally accept or reject applicants based on their academic credentials. Academic credentials are considered any formal education that is higher than a high

school diploma, according to Statistics Canada (Guo, 2009, p.40).

Furthermore, provincial post-secondary academic institutions have enrolled thousands of internationally-trained professionals who have experienced the non-equivalency or devaluation of their international credentials in the labour market and return to Canadian post-secondary education in order to 'westernize' their qualifications, often in the same field (Shan, 2009, p.361).

Based on the description within the literature reviewed below, there is an apparent racialized pattern in knowledge valuation in Canada. For example, in 2004, economic immigrants were primarily members of racialized groups coming from source countries of China, India, Philippines, Pakistan and Romania while employers favoured immigrants with English-speaking backgrounds or western countries with training systems most easily compared with those in Canada (Hawthorne, 2007, p.4). Canadian education and experience are valued more highly than international qualifications (Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.286). When internationally-trained professionals arrive in Canada, there are valid questions about their credentials and applicability within the Canadian context. However, as will be discussed in this chapter, the literature suggests that there are negative assumptions that often result in devaluation of credentials and continuing patterns of prejudice and discrimination.

The literature suggests there are multiple factors at play that contribute to credentials not being recognized. First, immigrants may not be informed about the credential assessment process and its potential outcomes, just as employers and professional bodies may not be familiar with international credentials (Kustec, Thompson & Li, 2007, p.26-27). It is also possible that international credentials are assessed as not equivalent

because of differences from Canadian expectations or the other country's education may be a lower quality compared with Canadian training (Girard, 2010, p.95; Kustec et al., 2007, p.26). Alternatively, structural barriers of "professional association protectionism" (Kustec et al., 2007, p.27) and overt or covert racial prejudice may contribute to assessments of non-equivalence or inferiority (Esses et al., p.115). The knowledge obtained by immigrants through education and work experience in non-western countries is often deemed "inferior" and "of less value in the Canadian labour market than local education" (Girard, 2010, p.95; see also Ferrer & Riddell, 2008, p.213; Guo, 2009, p.47). Reitz (2011) stated, "When the discounting of immigrant qualifications disproportionately affects visible minorities, as it clearly does in Canada, it is an instance of racial discrimination" (see also Esses et al., p.114, 117). Creese and Wiebe (2009) wrote, "Power and knowledge are intricately related, and failure to acknowledge prior education and experience disempowered participants while erasing their claims to knowledge" (p.62). Given Canada's active recruitment of internationally-trained professionals and the obstacles encountered to achieving employment, there are outstanding questions about the country's immigration policies and practices, how credentials are evaluated, how distinctions and differences are identified and the validity and morality of these processes.

2.1 Literature review methodology

The literature selected was gathered by searching multiple databases, including ProQuest, WorldCat, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar, as well as identifying prominent research that was referenced within chosen articles. Multiple search terms were used in

order to obtain as much research as possible before focusing the chosen literature on Canada. These terms included combinations of 'graduate studies', 'foreign', 'international', 'immigrant students', 'education', 'credential recognition', 'credential assessment' and 'accreditation'. After reviewing the abstracts and introductions, the literature selected was reviewed thoroughly and themes were documented, which will follow. Themes identified within the selected literature include identification of conflict between the admission criteria in federal immigration policies and practices and employment criteria practised at provincial and local levels, the role of structural stakeholders (including post-secondary institutions) in the credential assessment and recognition/non-recognition process and the barriers identified within the literature that push internationally-trained professionals to return to post-secondary education when their credentials are not recognized. As well, there was limited literature located regarding social work's international common core and the field's involvement in credential assessment and recognition and this will also be discussed.

2.2 Admission criteria versus employment criteria

Prior to the 1960s, Canada's need for immigrants to provide high-skilled labour was primarily filled by western Europeans and they enjoyed the privileges of citizenship. At the same time, low-skilled labour was provided by other ethnic groups and they were restricted from participating in full citizenship (e.g. Chinese immigrants who built the Canadian Pacific Railroad). However, in the aftermath of World War II, the traditional source countries of high-skilled labour retained their citizens as they engaged in the rebuilding process. As a result, Canada had to obtain labour resources from non-

traditional source countries, such as Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.424; Shan, 2009, p.353; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.343).

In 1967, the immigration point system was introduced and is utilized to this day (Shan, 2009). The primary elements on which potential immigrants are evaluated are their occupation, education, work experience and language proficiency (Guo, 2009, p.39). The system was modified in the 1990s to favour immigrants in the economic class over family, refugee or other categories as Canada wanted to recruit highly-skilled immigrants to meet increasing demands as the economy shifted from a labour to knowledge base. However, the admission criteria have been identified as different than the criteria to gain employment for which immigrants are being recruited (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.145; Mata, 1999, p.5; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.342). This discrepancy is only learned by immigrants upon arriving in Canada and they are unable to obtain employment in the fields in which they are trained and experienced (Guo, 2009, p.38).

Researchers across the political spectrum identified human capital theory as the basis for Canadian immigration policies. Human capital theory commodifies the resources of people (including skills developed from education and work experience) that can be exchanged in the labour market for financial compensation (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.4; Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013, p.183; Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.425; Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.57; Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.143; Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.277, 286; Reitz, 2005, p.413-414; Shan, 2009, p.363). The previous immigration system had explicit rules about countries from which Canada would accept immigrants and for what purposes. The new system was declared to be

objective, claiming equivalence of human capital (e.g. education, work experience) from whatever country it was obtained so that internationally-trained and Canadian-born professionals would be equal participants in the labour market. However, foreign capital (particularly non-western) continues to be devalued (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.4). International education is largely discounted in Canada overtly (by creating barriers to recognition of international credentials) and covertly (by ignoring the value of international education) (Anisef et al., 2009, p.18) and is one of the main barriers to economic integration (Girard, 2010, p.84). While the federal government endorses the credentials of internationally-trained professionals at the front door to the country, highly-skilled immigrants find the interior doors of their desired occupations locked when they try to enter (Khan, 2007). Instead, the only open doors lead to low-skilled jobs for which they are overqualified, contributing to the downward trajectory of immigrant incomes coinciding with the upward trend in education levels (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.427; Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.143; Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.277; Guo, 2009, p.42; Reitz, 2005, p.411; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.342-344).

The literature documents that immigrants frequently experience unemployment and underemployment as they cannot access occupations they want and for which they are trained in the knowledge economy (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.2; Grant & Nadin, 2007; Guo, 2009, p.43; Mata, 1999, p.3; Reitz, 2005, p.410). Internationally-trained professionals are funnelled into 'survival employment', jobs that provide subsistence wages and do not utilize the education, experience and skills that immigrants brought from their countries of origin (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.58, 61, 66). While most highly-skilled immigrants intend to continue their careers in Canada

(Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.282), they find themselves trapped in these lower-skilled jobs as they need money to support themselves and their families. The credential assessment process often demands too much energy, money and time for some immigrants (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.4); they do not have sufficient resources (financial or time) to attend schools that will grant Canadian academic credentials and access to their chosen professions (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.66; Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.277, 282-283, 296).

Social structures (such as gender and visible minority status) are significant factors in limiting opportunities for internationally-trained professionals (Anisef et al., 2009, p.18). Individual characteristics are often blamed for not gaining credential recognition or commensurate employment (e.g. lacking Canadian experience, education) instead of focusing on structural barriers (Basran & Zong, 1998). Gender plays an apparent role as immigrant women find themselves pushed into feminized employment and immigrant men often are relegated to manual labour (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.57, 62; Guo, 2009, p.44; Shan). As noted previously, research reflects that the Canadian labour market remains racialized. Grant and Nadin (2007) described “racialized Canadians with foreign training in these fields of study [prestigious professions with high incomes such as engineering, physical sciences and commerce] were the ones who tended to be most underpaid relative to white, native-born Canadians” (p.143). Similar to other voices within the literature, Danso (2009) suggests the reasons for this situation:

In Canada, the non-recognition of foreign credentials is a major barrier impeding the integration of skilled immigrants, especially ‘people of colour’. Neo-liberal and institutionalized racist policies and practices intersect in many ways to marginalize and exclude skilled immigrants of colour in Canada (p.540).

In 2000, recent immigrants with university degrees were seven times more likely to live below the low-income cut-off than their Canadian-born counterparts (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.58). Research has found that immigrants with education from Africa, Asia and Latin America experienced lower rates of employment (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013, p.184) and internationally-trained immigrants report experiencing discrimination based on their skin colour, ethnicity and English language skills that influenced the evaluation of their credentials (Basran & Zong, 1998). The institutionalized cultural capital (i.e., academic credentials) held by immigrants is colourless but the embodied cultural capital (i.e., skin colour or accent) is often not, which affects how the institutionalized cultural capital is received and converted (or not) into employment (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.60; Mata, 1999, p.25; Reitz, 2005, p.424). This “institutionalized sanctioning of their foreign credentials and work experience” (Guo, 2009, p.43) often prevents internationally-trained professionals from accessing professional jobs in Canada (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.158; Grenier & Xue, 2011, p.297; Reitz, 2005, p.425; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.346). While there are questions within research whether immigration criteria should be changed to recruit lower-skilled immigrants, this response continues to place the problem within the immigrant person and what they lack rather than addressing prevailing structures, attitudes and practices of ruling powers that are discriminatory (Lowe, 2010, p.27-28).

2.3 Regulated professions

In the 2006 Census, 62% of Canadian-born who trained for regulated professions were employed within their profession but only 24% of

internationally-educated immigrants were in the regulated profession for which they trained (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.4). Immigrants with education in regulated professions had the highest rates of unemployment among immigrants between 2000-2010, even compared with immigrants who had high school education or less (Albaugh & Seidle, p.4). Access to regulated professions was noted to vary depending on the region where education was obtained. There have been developments by federal and provincial/territorial governments to address the issue of credential recognition, as documented by Bruhel (2007, p.61). At the national level, Foreign Credential Recognition is a component of the Internationally Trained Workers Initiative led by Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC). As well, In Ontario, Bill 124, Fair Access To Regulated Professions Act, was introduced in December 2006. This legislation requires regulated professions to use standardized, “fair, transparent and expeditious regulation practices” in licensing practitioners. The Fairness Commissioner was created at that time to provide oversight of regulated professions as well (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.6).

Websites developed by provinces with information on regulated professions have been created but they do not always have sufficient information on how to apply for licensing and immigrants may not be able to access them before arriving in Canada (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.7). There has been significant attention in research given to “accreditation barriers” (Boyd, 2013, p.165) and credential recognition in regulated professions such as pharmacy (Austin & Rocchi Dean, 2006), engineering (Girard & Bauder, 2007) and physicians (Bourgeault & Neiterman, 2013; Boyd, 2013). However, there was only one piece of research located on the experiences of

internationally-trained social workers in Canada, though social work has been a regulated profession for since 2000.

2.4 International social work and social workers

Access Alliance Multicultural Community Health Centre (2006) facilitated an extensive project relating to systemic barriers encountered by visible minority social workers in the Toronto area. Through that project, a literature review was conducted and reflected on many of the issues identified in this chapter regarding the experiences of internationally-trained professionals, poor coordination between stakeholders and the frequent non-recognition of credentials. As it pertains to social work, the authors of the AAMCHC (2006) report noted, "Social work is a profession that strives to protect the rights of visible minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Yet ... it is also a profession where social workers who come from disadvantaged groups still experience individual and systemic level forms of discrimination" (p.2). They also raised questions about the lack of specific provisions that need to be followed when assessing the credentials of internationally-trained social workers (AAMCHC, 2006, p.10).

One research article was discovered that examined the commonalities and differences of social work from an international perspective. Weiss (2005) investigated through undergraduate social work students in ten countries whether social work has "a common core of values, theoretical foundations and modes of practice" or if it is "a context-contingent profession that differs in essential ways" between countries (p.101). It was revealed that similar problems were encountered by social work in those countries (e.g. poverty, social exclusion, vulnerable populations) and there was significant agreement

about social work values (e.g. social justice), though emphases and interpretations may differ (Weiss, 2005, p.102). There were also similarities and differences in the status and training of social work as a profession, including similar core curriculum and field placement requirements but different lengths of time and types of institutions offering social work education (Weiss, 2005, p.102-103). Weiss (2005) concluded that there were differences in perspectives based on socio-historical context but “the findings provide support for the claim that a common core is shared by social workers across different countries and contexts” (p.108). This raises questions about the perspective and processes of credential assessment and recognition of internationally-educated social workers by stakeholders (CASW, OCSWSSW, post-secondary institutions) within social work in Canada.

2.5 Multiple stakeholders in credential recognition

There is no central credential evaluation in Canada (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.430; Basran & Zong, 1998; Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.142). Instead, credentials are assessed separately by multiple stakeholders that utilize different criteria and do not necessarily accept the evaluations from each other (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.70; Reitz, 2005, p.420). As Hawthorne (2007) stated, “Canadian stakeholders continue to pull in different directions,” before quoting Bourgeault, who wrote that “governments do one thing, educational institutions do another, and regulatory bodies do a third” (p.12). While immigration policies and practices are determined by the federal government, employment and education policies and practices are established by provincial and territorial governments (Kustec et al., 2007,

p.26). Within provinces and territories, there are credential assessment services, post-secondary educational institutions, professional associations and employers that are given responsibility for evaluating credentials of immigrants based on their own standards that are not necessarily consistent between provinces/territories or accountable to any governing authority greater than themselves (Guo, 2009, p.42, 49; Reitz, 2005, p.419). Furthermore, there is limited information available for some immigrant source countries regarding educational institutions, curriculum and skill development as applicable within Canada (Kustec et al., 2007, p.26). Jurisdictional responsibilities contribute to difficulties in developing policy responses to the apparent issues of credential assessment and recognition (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.3).

Moreover, there are social processes and practices that attribute differential values to credentials and training produced in other countries. Within Canada, the value of western credentials is “inflated” (Shan, 2009, p.354) and “[t]he knowledge possessed by immigrants is not acceptable, transferable, or recognizable because their experiences and credentials are deemed different, deficient and, hence, inferior” (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.435; see also Shan, 2009, p.360). While the intention of credential assessment is to ensure public safety and competency through identification of legitimate differences in educational and professional expectations between countries (Mata, 1999, p.6), the lack of a centralized credential assessment prior to immigration is troubling as it contributes to subsequent personal and social problems (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Mata, 1999, p.14-16), validates exclusion (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.70) and causes immigrants’

“resulting feelings of deception” (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.344). As Lamontagne (2003) noted:

Some have described Canada’s efforts to attract qualified workers trained abroad as *seduction and abandonment*. These people are lured with promises of jobs and a quality of life that draw heavily on Canada’s reputation in other countries, but once they arrive, they are left to their own devices (p.1).

2.5.1 Credential assessment services (CAS)

To begin, there are few credential assessment services in the country and they operate separately in each province. The requirements for assessing credential are unclear, which causes a lack of clarity about the credentials (Esses et al., 2007, p.116). Furthermore, unlike in some other countries, credential assessments are not binding in Canada so employers and professional bodies do not need to accept an assessment that recognizes international credentials (Basran & Zong, 2011). As stated by the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada et al. (2008), credential evaluation “is simply a professional opinion” (p.10) that post-secondary institutions, regulatory bodies and employers can decide if and how they use.

Until 2013, credential assessments were often not pursued until immigrants arrived in Canada and discovered their credentials were not recognized (Guo, 2009, p.41). Information was not provided by the federal government and was not easily accessible outside of the country. In 2013, the Foreign Skilled Worker Program was amended to require applicants to obtain a credential assessment prior to immigrating (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.7); however, according to the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), it is only physicians and pharmacists who have their credentials assessed by their regulatory bodies (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015). For social workers, this general assessment

is not accepted by their provincial regulatory bodies, according to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), who require their own assessment that may assess social workers' credentials as equivalent or not (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Credential assessments depend on the availability of quality information (e.g. academic transcripts) and the knowledge of the education system or professional requirements in the country of origin held by the credential assessment service as well as the needs of employers (Reitz, 2005, p.420). Given the vast number of countries, schools and professional requirements in each country, there appears to be reasonable questions about the efficacy of such a process. As the available information is often imperfect, the assessment may not be helpful (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.154; Mata, 1999, p.7; Reitz, 2005, p.419). Furthermore, professional associations and employers are not required to accept the credential assessments of these services so immigrants may still find themselves unable to access their chosen occupations (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.70; Reitz, 2005, p.420).

2.5.2 Employers and professional associations/regulatory bodies

While some immigrants seek a third-party assessment of their credentials, many go directly to employers and professional associations/regulatory bodies. In regulated professions (such as social work, nursing and engineering), professional bodies are responsible for evaluating the qualifications of immigrants before they are licensed to practice and apply for employment. Regulatory bodies are one of the gatekeepers to professions and often set the minimum requirements as "the attainment of one or more specific academic degrees" (Collins, Coleman & Miller, 2002,

p.208). In non-regulated professions, employers are empowered to accept or reject the credentials of applicants. In both cases, the same challenges arise as for credential assessment services. While the sole purpose of credential assessment services is to evaluate the credentials of immigrants, professional associations and employers encounter this significant task with limited experience and resources to undertake the evaluation process.

Furthermore, professional associations and employers tend to be 'risk averse' (Hawthorne, 2007, p.7; Shan, 2009, p.360; Somerville & Walsworth, 2010, p.343). Employers often have limited information about international credentials and are uncertain how to evaluate them so employers can simply not recognize international credentials given their lack of ability to assess adequately (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.143; Guo, 2009, p.48; Kustec et al., 2007, p.26; Reitz, 2005, p.414, 420). Esses et al. (2007) identified that "because country of origin and visible minority status are so closely linked, it is especially easy to justify discrimination against visible minority immigrants as based not on prejudice, but on the supposed poorer quality of their qualifications," without even those employers being aware of the effect of such biases (p.115). It is these circumstances that allow for racially discriminatory practices to occur as the lack of information and recognition can mask prejudice as demonstrated in multiple studies (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.10).

It is much easier for professional associations and employers to direct internationally-trained professionals to re-do their qualifications in Canada since Canadian credentials are familiar to them than to expend time and resources to find out more about international credentials (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013, p.184; Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.62), let alone giving an

opportunity to practice in the absence of ideal information. International education in certain countries is accepted as equal (e.g. United Kingdom, United States) while education from non-western countries is devalued in terms of equivalency (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.8; Guo, 2009, p.45).

In the end, professional associations and employers are given authority over who gains access to occupations. Professional associations can admit internationally-trained professionals but that does not necessarily mean they will obtain employment. Employers determine who they will hire regardless of education equivalents or credential assessments (Mata, 1999, p.23). Many employers want to hire individuals with Canadian education and experience; however, Canadian experience is inaccessible because the same employers do not accept their international education and experience and will not hire immigrants with only international credentials (Reitz, 2005, p.421). This devaluation also reinforces the hegemonic control of access to professions by the regulatory bodies and employers (Mata, 1999, p.5).

2.5.3 Post-secondary institutions and regulation

Lastly and most pertinent to my research, post-secondary institutions participate as one of the “gatekeepers” for many professions, including social work (Barlow, Pelech & Badry, 2005, p.71; see also Coleman, Calhoun & Rogers, 2004, p.190; Redmond & Bright, 2007, p.167). Admission to many regulated and non-regulated professions is often based upon academic credentials achieved in accredited training programs, colleges and universities (Creese & Wiebe, 2009, p.70; Shan, 2009, p.354). For example, registration with the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW) is required to practice as a social worker in this

province. To be registered, a practitioner must have academic credentials recognized by OCSWSSW. Coleman, Calhoun and Rogers (2004) stated, "Consistent with the education of professional social workers in Canada, recent legislation regarding the regulation of social work across the country, with the exception of Alberta, recognizes the basic preparation for a professional social work credential is obtained at the university level" (p. 190). Graduates from accredited schools of social work in Canada and the United States are licensed immediately. However, internationally-trained social workers must undergo academic assessment by CASW, which may determine their academic credentials to be not equivalent to Canadian standards and, therefore, they cannot practice their profession. The basis for assessment remains the Canadian social work education standards established by Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE) and provided by Canadian universities. As a result of the recognition of Canadian credentials without further assessment except the degree granted, schools of social work in Ontario universities have a powerful position in the accreditation process of individuals who seek to practice as social workers.

This experience of credential non-recognition, like in other professions, prompts many immigrants to return to post-secondary education to 'westernize' their credentials (Shan, 2009, p.361; Anisef et al., 2009, p.18). In fact, immigrants who held highly-skilled employment prior to immigrating to Canada are more likely than those in unskilled jobs to enrol in courses after arriving in Canada (Girard, 2010, p.83). The literature indicates that the majority of immigrants admitted under the economic classification have post-secondary education but they adapt to the shifting demands of Canadian stakeholders in order to be accepted as professionals by attending post-

secondary institutions for new education or repeating education they have to gain a Canadian credential (Andersson & Guo, 2009, p.435; Anisef et al., 2009, p.18; Girard, 2010, p.82; Girard & Smith, 2009, p.8).

However, many immigrants describe feeling forced to obtain Canadian credentials through post-secondary institutions when their international credentials are not accepted (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.154). There is some reference in research to the (often indirect) social education obtained through returning to academic institutions, such as improving language proficiency and understanding social rules, norms and occupational practices (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013, p.198; Shan, 2009, p.363-364). However, the primary purpose of returning to post-secondary education appears to be convincing employers of the value of their existing skills and work experience (Grant & Nadin, 2007, p.156). At the same time, repeating the same degrees they obtained in their countries of origin was often recognized as wasteful of time, energy and financial resources to the immigrants themselves and the Canadian economy (Mata, 1999, p.9; Reitz, 2005, p.420).

Another element of the central role played by post-secondary institutions is the vast training market created through the non-recognition of credentials (Shan, 2009, p.354, 362). Immigrants who discover their international credentials are not recognized or devalued are ideal consumers since professional associations and employers validate Canadian academic credentials. It is financially advantageous for post-secondary institutions to devalue international academic credentials and recruit internationally-trained professionals to repeat education in their same field and obtain Canadian credentials or engage in different training to expand their opportunities in new fields. This devaluation occurs when post-secondary institutions receive

applications from internationally-trained professionals who obtained a degree in their countries of origin but that educational attainment is assessed as less than its Canadian equivalent. This evaluation may be conducted thoroughly but it also may be done by deferring to standardized assessments developed within the university (i.e., a Masters degree from Ghana is considered a Bachelors degree in Canada, an A+ in China is considered a B+ in Canada). While some researchers suggested that subsequent employment and increased earnings 'validated' the foreign credentials of immigrants (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.18; Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013,p.180), this conclusion appears to ignore the fact that it is primarily non-western European (i.e., eastern European, Asian and African) immigrants who engage in formal and informal education in Canada (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010, p.12). Furthermore, any professional employment and income came after receiving Canadian credentials (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2013, p.184) so it is not apparent that these gains had anything to do with their international education and experience.

2.6 Regulation and schools of social work

While there was limited literature about internationally-trained social workers, there was some more broad literature about the regulation of the profession and the roles of schools of social work. To begin, there was critique of the implementation of regulation "as the result of the neo-conservative political economy" (Coleman, Calhoun & Rogers, 2004, p.190). The push toward regulation and licensing of social work was motivated by "the need for the federal government to comply with the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) which is a post-NAFTA agreement to end barriers to

labour mobility between provinces” (Rossiter & Heron, 2011, p.305) and required professions to define themselves through the use of ‘competencies’ so that they could be standardized (Collins, Coleman & Miller, 2002). Social work as a field has adopted this activity with the Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR) developing a Canadian ‘Competency Profile’ that was finalized in 2012, though there was criticism that the values of social work (such as justice, equality and self-determination) as well as foundational skills (such as thinking, reflecting and making complex judgements) cannot be reflected in simple statements (Rossiter & Heron, 2001, p.306).

Outside of Nova Scotia, which requires supervised work experience to be licensed as a social worker, all other provinces license solely on academic credentials (Collins, Coleman & Miller, 2002, p.215). As a result, schools of social work have an important role as gatekeepers to the profession (Barlow, Pelech & Badry, 2005, p.71; Coleman, Calhoun & Rogers, 2004, p.190). As Redmond and Bright (2007) stated, “The educational responsibility of faculty members to students is coupled with a duty to serve as the primary gatekeepers to the social work profession and thus protect wider society from incompetent or dangerous graduates” (p.168-169). While the standard supportive statement of regulation and competencies is that the public will be protected from potential harm by only licensing practitioners who “possess the basic knowledge, ethical awareness, and skills required for professional practice” (Collins, Coleman & Miller, 2002, p.210), opponents highlighted that this project “creates elitist groups and erects inequitable and discriminatory barriers against professional status for minority groups ... who are less likely to possess the established educational credentials” (Collins, Coleman & Miller, 2002, p.211). Furthermore, Collins, Coleman & Miller (2002) identified

that “[e]vidence that licensing protects the public against incompetent practitioners is lacking” and “little or no empirical evidence exists to support the contention that candidates without the specified degree do not have the appropriate skills, values, and knowledge to conduct effective social work practice” (p.211). This focus of regulation is also the basis for credential assessment of internationally-trained social workers since their education is ‘foreign’ and they need to demonstrate that it is equivalent to a Canadian social work education so that the public will be protected from potential harm.

2.7 Gaps in the literature

There were multiple topics related to this issue on which there was little to no research. At a broad level, as identified by Anisef et al. (2009), “There is limited scholarly literature on RAIS [recent adult immigrant students] and the institutional response to this segment of the Canadian post-secondary student population” (p.27).

There was no apparent research that critiqued the specific practice of internationally-trained professionals returning to post-secondary institutions. There is apparent agreement between researchers that many internationally-trained professionals returned to post-secondary education, there were a few who suggest that this was a reasonable strategy to achieve employment (Adamuti-Trache & Sweet, 2010; Adamuti, Anisef & Sweet, 2013) while others criticize the non-recognition of credentials that contributed to this course of action (Grant & Nadin, 2007; Shan, 2009). However, there was no research located that examined credential assessment services and their processes. Within the literature on social work education and the role of

schools of social work, there was reference to visible minority groups but no research on visible minorities or immigrants obtaining social work education.

Furthermore, there was also no literature in which the role of universities in credential assessment and non-recognition was evaluated and what (if anything) internationally-trained professionals gained from returning to post-secondary academic institutions. While the research reflected increased employment opportunities by obtaining Canadian credentials, there was no apparent inquiry or critique about the necessity of this process. For example, if a social worker with a graduate degree from Kenya attends a graduate program in an Ontario university, what do Ontario universities expect he/she will learn that he/she did not gain from his/her previous education? What assessment was completed on his/her previous academic achievements that identified specific gaps in their knowledge and/or skills? The credential assessment process used by universities was also identified as an area where little is known. Anisef et al. (2009) pointed out York University and University of Toronto as having a “complex and seemingly opaque foreign transcript evaluation process” (p.30), though they spoke more positively of Ryerson University and colleges. The absence of research on the credential assessment processes, including those used by universities, may be a reflection of the present lack of transparency and consistency at this time.

Lastly, the silence of social work on this topic is also an important gap to be questioned. As highlighted in the AAMCHC (2006) report, social work is often on the forefront of social movements for justice and equity but there was only one item of research found in the literature on the specific experiences of internationally-trained social workers (which led to the development of the

only social work bridging program in Canada at Ryerson University). While there was one article on social work's common values across countries (Weiss, 2005) and a few examining the profession's embrace of regulation and the role of schools of social work acting as gatekeepers to the profession, there was no literature intently examining the impact of these factors on internationally-trained social workers. The absence of research within and on social work in regards to internationally-trained professionals, including social workers, is a significant void that is worthy of exploration, particularly given social work's expressed pursuit of justice and equity.

Conclusion

The research reviewed clearly identified that internationally-trained professionals experience a Canadian 'bait-and-switch' in the immigration process; while their credentials are sufficient to gain admission to Canada, the same credentials are frequently not recognized in the Canadian labour market. In particular, immigrants discover that the labour market remains racialized as their foreign capital is discounted compared to that of native-born Canadians. Furthermore, there is a lack of coordination between federal and provincial/territorial governments, the former being responsible for immigration and the latter controlling employment and education. The provincial/territorial governments give authority for credential recognition to credential assessment services, professional associations, employers and post-secondary institutions but without any significant oversight or requirements such that these stakeholders operate independently and are not accountable to any authority for their assessment of credentials. Highly-skilled immigrants are often forced into survival employment from which they

cannot extricate themselves or return to post-secondary education to gain Canadian credentials that are more accepted in the Canadian labour market. However, even when they repeat the same training, diplomas or degrees in Canada, immigrants do not necessarily find it helpful in advancing their skills.

In addition, regulated professions, such as social work, have been used by the federal government to draw internationally-trained professionals but they encounter additional barriers to practice as a result of regulations. According to the absence of literature, social work has remained largely silent in this issue in spite of its core values of equity and social justice. Many internationally-trained social workers have immigrated to Canada but been unable to engage in practice because of the challenges of engaging in credential assessments, lack of recognition of their skills and experience (since it is only academic credentials that are considered by the CASW) and the trepidation of employers to accept international credentials.

There remain significant gaps in the literature, including the limited critique of the necessity of obtaining Canadian credentials and the value of further post-secondary education to internationally-trained professionals. The credential assessment process itself has been identified as inconsistent and unclear between stakeholders but there was also an absence of evaluation of the assessment purpose and practices. Furthermore, the silence of social work in speaking out about justice issues in this regard is also curious and deserving of further attention.

Chapter 3: Theoretical perspective and methodology

3.1 Critical theory

Theory is considered like a guidebook, indicating where information can be found and how it is interpreted based on values and beliefs about the world in which we live (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 88). Critical theory is the perspective that I will utilize in this paper to examine the events and experiences described in the interviews that provide the raw data for this analysis. Kreuger and Neuman (2006) defined critical social science as “a critical process of inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to uncover the real structures in the material world in order to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves” (p.83). Critical theory is not a unified theory but a kaleidoscope of different perspectives that share several essential elements (Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.2).

Critical theory holds that knowledge is socially constructed within changing contexts of time and space (Allan, 2003, p.42; Healy, 2000, p.15-16; Kirby & McKenna, 2004, p.67; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p.86). There are many forms of knowledge, including lived experiences, that are considered valid though relative; at the same time, there are also absolute ideals, such as equity and social justice, which can be viewed as universal (Allan, 2003, p.32; Fook, 2003, p.124-125; Ife, 1999, p.219; Pease & Fook, 1999, p.11). However, ruling powers maintain social structures to inhibit awareness of these ideals and efforts to achieve them through “delusion, isolation and oppression” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p.86; see also Allan, 2003, p.33; Fook, 2003, p.124). While those in power try to define knowledge within the frame of dominant ideology in order to maintain control of others, knowledge

and power may not only be used to oppress but also to emancipate people (Allan, 2003, p.42, 43; Comstock, 1982, p.373-374). Another important consideration for critical theorists streaming from their alignment with Marxist ideology is the idea that the majority of people suffer from “false consciousness”, which is uncritically accepting the appearance of social structures as legitimate and unchangeable (Fook, 1999, p.201; Fook, 2003, p.124; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p.86). However, as stated by Quinn (2003), “People have some power and agency, even within oppressive social structures, to shape their own lives and their own personal consciousness” (p.75; see also Healy, 2000, p.14; Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.75).

According to Alvesson & Willmott (as quoted in Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003), the goal of critical theory is “to challenge the legitimacy and counter the development of oppressive institutions and practices” (p.2). Once aware of their oppression/domination and their shared interests as classes or groups, critical theory maintains the hope that dominant ideologies and structures will be rejected and people will work together to create a just and equitable society (Comstock, 1982, p.371; Pease, Allan & Briskman, 2003, p.2; Quinn, 2003, p.75). This vision is expected to be realized through dialogue and consciousness-raising whereby disempowered people become aware of their oppression while those in power can be enlightened to their domination and be active agents in their own emancipation (Healy, 2000, p.20; Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p.83; Pease, 2003, p.193).

3.2 Interpretative phenomenological analysis

I will utilize interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to generate findings from the interview transcript data. The goal of IPA is to understand

how individuals make sense of their experiences (phenomenon) in their personal and social world (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty & Hendry, 2011, p.21; Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.53). While people experience most events without awareness or reflection, there are times when people's accounts are reflective of their constructed meaning or significance to them (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.2-3). It is the goal of IPA to gather the insights of individuals regarding what is happening and how they understand it within their context (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.179). IPA is idiographic in that the individual is considered "the experiential expert on the subject" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.59) and the focus is on each participant's unique perspective, though IPA suggests that "delving deeper into the particular also draws us closer to the universal" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p.31).

Consistent with critical theory, IPA recognizes that knowledge is based upon "intersubjective interpretative activity" of people (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.184). Social reality is built on shared definitions and understandings, though these are the basis for individual's understandings of experiences in their particular context (Eatough & Smith, 2008, p.180). Another important aspect of IPA is the central role of the researcher in engaging participants in dialogue because access to their experiences depends on the accounts of the participants and what/how they choose to share (Pringle et al., 2011, p.20-21). Within this methodology, the researcher utilizes a double hermeneutic, a process in which "[t]he participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p.53).

3.3 Theoretical and methodological implications

Given the focus of critical theory and IPA methodology, the socio-historical context of participants and Ontario universities need to be explored to contribute to deeper analysis of knowledge, power and agency as related to domination and oppression. In particular, the context of participants at the time of their experiences as well as the context of their interviews will frame their responses and will reflect their awareness (or lack) of power relations. The same contextual considerations will be important in exploring the recognition (or lack) of power, domination and oppression by organizational stakeholders that have an impact on the experiences of participants. Given the semi-structured interviews with participants, IPA methodology assisted this writer to interpret and analyze the participants' accounts of their experiences of immigrating to Canada, discovering their credentials were assessed as non-equivalent and repeating their MSW in Ontario. Furthermore, IPA aided in critical reflection on the power of universities and other stakeholders as they impacted the experiences of participants. IPA required that the researcher be constantly conscious of his privileged social location compared with the participants as he engaged in analysis of their experiences of being analyzed and devalued by Canadian institutions. It was recognized that the differences in social location between the researcher and the researched may have impacted the participants' presentations of their experiences. At the same time, the researcher's position was advantageous when analyzing the responses of powerful institutions as he shares their power.

IPA methodology is consistent with critical theory in respecting the discourses of participants as valid and expressive of their unique lived

experiences. However, depending on each participant's level of consciousness of her/his personal and social world, she/he reveals her/his awareness of social structures and ruling powers that impact her/his insight into her/his own experience. Writing from this perspective, the role of the researcher in reviewing the participants' accounts was to explore and interpret their description of events and meanings attributed to the experience of having their credentials assessed as not equivalent to a Canadian MSW and repeating their MSW in an Ontario university. As well, the researcher will idiographically analyze and synthesize the clusters of themes expressive of the participants' understandings of the phenomena they experienced. Due to the double hermeneutical process, this writer recognized that there were many other themes present within the interviews but chose to limit the reporting to those identified in the following chapters according to apparent significance to the topic and the implications for the participants, the field of social work and universities as well as being expressive of the concerns of critical theory.

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1 Research design

Given the focus of this research was idiographic as well as structural, two separate approaches were required. First, to gain access to the experiences and meanings given credential non-recognition, three individuals were engaged through semi-structured interviews. Second, the credential assessment processes utilized by multiple provincial and national stakeholders were examined to gain understanding of the regulatory bodies and universities who have the power to recognize the credentials of internationally-trained social workers. The process for internationally-trained social workers to be registered with the OCSWSSW, which involves credential assessment by the CASW and at times other CASs, was studied. Furthermore, the credential assessment process used by Ontario universities was investigated in order to understand the context experienced by participants.

Ethical approval was granted by the McMaster Research Ethics Board and the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University prior to the recruitment process being undertaken at those respective institutions (Appendices K & L).

4.2 Recruitment process

Since this research has a narrow focus, participants were recruited through purposive sampling (Mason, 2002, p.123-125). The only criterion for participants was that they obtained a MSW in their country of origin before immigrating to Canada and then obtained another MSW from an Ontario

university. Indirect recruitment was undertaken to ensure that there was no perceived undue influence on individuals with whom I had a pre-existing relationship (e.g. classmates). A recruitment e-mail was sent out by administrative assistants to MSW alumni at three Ontario universities – McMaster, York and Wilfrid Laurier – as these schools of social work have MSW programs (see Appendices C-E). As well, the recruitment e-mail was also posted within the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County after the offer to do so was received by this writer (Appendix F). Attached to the recruitment e-mail was the letter of information / consent that gave further information about this study. Interested individuals were asked to contact me by e-mail. To ensure their appropriateness for this study, clarifying questions were asked regarding their academic credentials and information was shared regarding the purpose and process of this study before arranging a mutually-agreeable time and location for the interview to take place.

There were significant challenges in locating participants given the narrow sampling criteria. Furthermore, the utilization of indirect recruitment meant that individuals who may fit the criteria could not be approached more directly by the researcher or other parties as noted above. As a result, individuals who graduated but had not provided a current e-mail address to their *alma mater* for contact would not receive the e-mail. Individuals who received the e-mail may not have been interested in participating. Several Ontario schools of social work were contacted for permission to recruit through them but declined as they did not believe they had any graduates that fit the criteria or said they would not allow use of their e-mail list. There were also efforts to recruit through organizations that had contact with more individuals that would fit the criteria. The CASW, who are responsible for all

credential assessments of international social workers, initially agreed to send a recruitment e-mail to its contacts but then withdrew after being provided with further information about this research (and also told the researcher that they would not communicate with him again about this project) (F. Phelps, personal communication, April 29, 2015). A similar request was made of the OCSWSSW, with which all practicing social workers in Ontario must be registered, but the director of registration stated that this research did not appear to engage with the College's mandate of public protection or "contribute to excellence in practice and build upon the knowledge base of the social work profession" (E. McGroddy, personal communication, April 27, 2015). Recruitment through both of these organizations was believed to offer a significantly broader pool of participants but was denied. Approval for recruitment through the OCSWSSW and CASW as well as other schools was granted by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) but not realized for different reasons.

4.3 Interview process

Interviews were conducted in a private, one-on-one setting. At the beginning of each interview, the purpose of the research, process of the interview and expectations of confidentiality were reviewed with participants. Participants were advised that they would be referenced in the written documentation by a pseudonym that they or the writer would choose and no other identifying information would be used in order to preserve their anonymity. They were reminded that their participation in this study was voluntary and that they could decide not to answer certain questions or withdraw completely during the interview. The participants were asked for

permission to record the interview. Upon all of these items being reviewed, participants were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research and interview process. If they were comfortable with proceeding, they were asked to read and sign two copies of the appropriate consent form depending on their university (Appendices A and B). One copy was provided to the participant while the other copy remained with the researcher. Participants were also asked if they wished to receive a copy of this thesis and, if so, how it could be provided to them.

During the interviews, participants were asked pre-determined questions relating to their academic credentials, experiences related to credential assessment after immigrating to Canada as well as experiences in completing their MSW program in an Ontario university (Appendix J). Given the semi-structured nature of the interview, participants were able to share information that they felt was meaningful in response to questions posed. Follow-up and clarifying questions were also asked as appropriate based on the information shared by participants to ensure that I understood the details and implications being explained.

4.4 Institutional contacts/information

In addition to individual interviews, to understand the credential assessment system and stakeholders in Ontario, information was gathered from websites and individuals at multiple institutions involved with credential assessment, social work regulation and universities. The most pertinent organizations included the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

(OCSWSSW), the Ontario Universities' Registrars Association (OURA) as well as McMaster University. The information obtained from the Office of the Registrar and the School of Graduate Studies at McMaster University was provided as a reference to practices within universities throughout the province, though it is understood that each university may have different admission processes in place. This researcher identified himself as a MSW student and explained the nature of this project as the basis for his inquiries to ensure transparency.

4.5 Data analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, I engaged research assistants to aid in transcription of the recordings. Given the double hermeneutic of IPA, it was important that I participate in the interpretative process so I made notes during interviews of questions or points expressed by participants that appeared important to them as well as my efforts to understand their meanings that were reviewed during the analytical process. In addition, notes during analysis were maintained to demonstrate reliability and transparency as well as a record of the ideas that occurred and were embraced or put aside during the analytical process (Shaw, 2010). The important elements of the analysis process included:

- familiarizing myself with the data by reviewing the transcripts at least twice while making notes of my reflections;
- identifying themes through summarizing and making initial interpretations; and,
- clustering themes and organizing them according to most prominent ideas (Shaw, 2010).

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter will first present the data collected from the provincial and national stakeholders involved with credential recognition, social work regulation and education in order to describe the system encountered by international social workers who immigrate to Canada. Subsequently, the data gathered through interviews with participants who repeated their MSW will be summarized into themes following the process of credential recognition and returning to university. Following this chapter, there will be discussion of the implications of these themes for Ontario universities and the field of social work in Ontario.

As noted previously, pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity for the participants. The apparent gender of each name is not necessarily the same as the participant's actual gender. While it is recognized that providing further demographic information, such as country of origin, would also be useful in evaluating potential experiences of discrimination, this information is not included in order to maintain confidentiality given the small pool from which participants were drawn.

5.1 Professional stakeholders

As identified within the literature review, there are multiple stakeholders who have an impact on internationally-trained social workers as they seek to obtain recognition of their credentials and gain employment in the social work profession. To identify and understand the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder, it is helpful to reflect on the organizations indirectly involved with credential assessment before moving to the specific

organizations with which internationally-trained social workers interact. In particular, there are organizations involved with general credential assessments provided to internationally-trained professionals (including social workers) who are seeking to immigrate to Canada as well as associations that are directly related to the regulation of social work in Canada and credential assessments of internationally-trained social workers.

5.1.1 National institutions

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC)

In June 2010, the list of qualifying occupations for immigrating through the Federal Skilled Worker program was updated to include social work (<http://www.cicnews.com/2010/07/occupation-indemand-canada-07792.html>).

While social work is regulated provincially, this change was implemented in the federal immigration program and suggested that there was a need for social workers across the country. This demand for social workers expressed by CIC was explicitly stated by two participants, Robert and Patrick, as contributing to their decisions to immigrate to Canada.

Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)

As described previously, there is no formal credential assessment process within Canada. While immigration is controlled by the federal government through CIC, the responsibilities for employment and professional regulation are provincially-delegated. On November 4, 1997, Canada became a signatory of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education (more conveniently referred to as the Lisbon Recognition Convention), which was developed by the Council of

Europe as an international agreement between fifty-five signatory states for the purpose of facilitating the mobility of academic credentials and/or qualifications through recognition across borders (<http://cicic.ca/1398/An-overview-of-the-Lisbon-Recognition-Convention/index.canada>; <http://cicic.ca/1399/The-essence-of-the-Lisbon-Recognition-Convention/index.canada>). The Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC) was developed as the organization responsible for implementing Canada's responsibilities as a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention. CICIC was initially funded by the federal and provincial/territorial governments but the federal government withdrew their funding in recent years except for special projects (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

CICIC does not provide credential assessment services but seeks to provide standards to the credential assessment process through its development of a Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) as well as engaging in policy discussions regarding this and related issues. Furthermore, CICIC offers information to individuals who are seeking credential assessment and recognition within Canada as well as internationally (i.e., stakeholders in other countries inquiring about Canadian education) (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015). In addition, CICIC serves as the secretariat of the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) (<http://canalliance.org>). ACESC is comprised of six member organizations in three provinces (British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec) who voluntarily work together to promote consistency in credential assessment services (M. Ringuette, personal conversation, April 20, 2015). CICIC and the members of ACESC have no authority over any organizations and there is no legal

authority given to the CICIC's QAF. While the CICIC may offer suggestions about the credential assessment process, it has no power outside of its own mandate. The CICIC recognizes the autonomous authority of stakeholders in each province, including post-secondary institutions and professional regulatory bodies to determine who is admitted based on what standards or requirements (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015).

*Association of Registrars of the Universities and Colleges of Canada
(ARUCC)*

ARUCC is a voluntary national body with representation of university and college registrars from across Canada. The purpose of ARUCC is to facilitate communication and research as it pertains to administration of registration and other such tasks in post-secondary academic institutions (<http://www.arucc.ca/en/about/statement-of-purpose.html>). For this research, ARUCC is of interest as registrars are important players in university admissions. ARUCC is connected with the CICIC, which has presented information about credential assessment and recognition or updates on their own activities to ARUCC or occasionally requested input from ARUCC on projects. Information from CICIC is then disseminated to members of ARUCC but ARUCC has no formal involvement with credential assessment and recognition. ARUCC acknowledged that there is no formal coordination between post-secondary institutions and professional bodies. Regulatory bodies determine their requirements for professional recognition while post-secondary institutions determine separately whether academic credentials and credits are recognized for admission to their academic programs (A. Arida, personal communication, May 11, 2015).

Canadian Council of Social Work Regulators (CCSWR)

Though professional regulation falls to provincial/territorial professional bodies, there are national organizations with significant influence on the field of social work. CCSWR (www.ccswr-ccorts.ca) was formed in 2009 and all ten provincial regulatory bodies, including the Ontario College of Social Workers/Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW), are members (www.ccswr-ccorts.ca/board_of_directors_en.html). According to its website, “The Mission of the CCSWR is to be the privileged voice, both nationally and internationally, on social work regulatory matters in Canada.” According to the OCSWSSW, the CCSWR formed in response to the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) (B. Bindman, personal communication, May 12, 2015), which was related to NAFTA that sought to end barriers to labour mobility between provinces through the development of ‘competencies’ for all professions (Rossiter & Heron, 2011, p.305).

The CCSWR developed the ‘Entry-Level Competency Profile for the Social Work Profession in Canada’ in 2012 (www.ccswr-ccorts.ca/what_we_do_en.html) as was critiqued by Rossiter and Heron (2011). The role of the CCSWR is unclear as the OCSWSSW does not complete its own credential assessments of internationally-trained social workers for licensing purposes but refers to the CASW for credential assessments. It was suggested that the competencies do not impact licensing with the OCSWSSW because they are practice skills while licensing is focused on academic credentials and standards of accreditation (B. Bindman, personal communication, May 12, 2015). However, attempts to contact the CCSWR received no response. This writer was encouraged to

contact the Director of Registration at the OCSWSSW for more information but she did not respond either. As a result, the role of the CCSWR and its role or impact on the credential assessment of international social workers is not known.

Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE)

CASWE was founded in 1967 as a national association responsible for accrediting schools of social work in Canada (<http://caswe-acfts.ca/about-us/history/>). While there is a larger organization of accrediting bodies across Canada called the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC), the CASWE is not a member (<http://aaac.ca/english/about-us/members.php>). CASWE has a mutual degree recognition agreement with the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) in the United States so that Canadian and American social work degrees from their respective accredited institutions are recognized as equivalent in the other country (<http://caswe-acfts.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CSWE.agreement.June.27-2006.2.pdf>). However, there are no similar agreements with other countries (S. Renaud, personal communication, April 13, 2015).

Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW)

When social workers with international credentials seek to register with the provincial regulatory bodies (in Ontario, that is the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers), they are required to obtain a credential assessment by the CASW, which costs \$339 (www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/international-assessment-credentials). CASW reported that approximately half of their assessments are completed for

applicants who have already immigrated to Canada while the other half have not yet (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). As described above, CASW assesses whether an international degree is equivalent to a Canadian degree based on academic documentation provided by the applicant and the university where they obtained their education. The CASW uses the accreditation standards of the CASWE and compares the information regarding the international academic credentials provided to determine equivalency. There are three possible outcomes of the CASW assessment. First, degrees may be assessed as equivalent. For instance, an international BSW may be assessed as equivalent to a Canadian BSW with the same equivalency assessed at the graduate level. Second, an international social work degree may be assessed as equivalent to a lower level of Canadian degree. For example, an international MSW may be assessed as equivalent to a Canadian BSW. Lastly, an international social work degree may be assessed as not equivalent to a Canadian degree.

CASW requires documentation from the international university that provided the degree and from the applicant regarding the credentials being assessed. The university must provide an official transcript as well as a verification form signed and stamped by the school of social work's dean or director. CASW acknowledged that the transcript is often difficult for applicants to obtain, particularly when they are already in Canada since CASW will not accept a transcript that is not sent directly from the university (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). In addition, the applicant must provide detailed information about courses taken, including syllabi, course descriptions, learning objectives, field placements and credit hours, that can be corroborated to demonstrate that the material covered is

consistent with Canadian standards. The applicant may be required to obtain confirmation from their previous school's dean that the same content was being taught if courses have been changed over time. It is CASW's last resort to take course descriptions from the applicant if the information is not available elsewhere (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015).

Thirdly, supporting documents, such as professional association or college membership, copies of diplomas and evidence of name changes (if appropriate), are also requested to further assist in corroborating information. CASW also accesses information on the university's website (if available) regarding courses, field placements and faculty to inform their assessment.

The CASW website also indicates that they use information from the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) about whether the university is a member as well as the IASSW's World Guide to Social Work Education, which "describes the pattern of education in each country where social work is identified as a professional practice. It provides factual information on a sample of school [sic] of social work in sixty-one countries. The guide also facilitates the comparative study of social work education" (www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/international-assessment-credentials). The website reference to the use of this 'World Guide' is inconsistent with information provided by the CASW representative, who advised that each assessment was unique and did not use generalizations of countries or universities (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). Furthermore, only six of fourteen Ontario universities which offer social work education are members of the IASSW so this appears to be an inconsistent consideration.

Finally, the applicant completes a waiver regarding the province or territory where they are seeking professional registration so the assessment outcome can be provided to the appropriate regulatory body. Since all of this information may be in a language other than English or French, the applicant is also responsible for obtaining certifiable translation of all documents at their own cost (www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/international-assessment-credentials/). While the CASW website lists the approximate timeline for completion at four-to-six weeks, the CASW representative advised that most assessments are completed within one-to-two weeks if adequate information was provided (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015).

CASW advised that common issues in the equivalency assessment included an insufficient number of practicum hours or certain courses appeared inadequate as there was no apparent evidence that specific required topics were covered (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). While CASW advised that volunteer or employment history is not considered in evaluating required field placement hours, describing the CASW stance as “hard and fast” (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015), one participant, Robert, had e-mail documentation from CASW that indicated his volunteer and employment experience could be considered in being assessed for BSW equivalency while another participant, Patrick, reported that he was encouraged to engage in extensive volunteer work that would be considered toward equivalency, which will be referenced later.

When assessments of non-equivalence or lower level equivalency (i.e., an international MSW was considered equivalent to a Canadian BSW) were made, the applicants often ask what they should do to gain recognition. CASW referred applicants to schools of social work to ask what the schools

could do to assist them in graduating. CASW assumed that schools would give them credit for courses taken or assist in obtaining field placement hours (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). The CASW website hosts a 'frequently asked questions' document that states, "Some Canadian universities provide additional training to students from foreign countries so that they can qualify to become registered social workers in Canada"

(http://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/attachements/Common%20Questions%20and%20Answers_E.pdf). However, CASW acknowledged that they had no formal contact with any schools of social work about such arrangements so this is a baseless positive suggestion (S. Guy, personal communication, April 20, 2015).

Interestingly, the CASW website refers individuals to the CICIC for information on requirements to practice social work in Canada (www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/international-assessment-credentials). In spite of being the sole credential assessment provider for social work in Canada, CASW is also not a member of the AAAC (<http://aaac.ca/english/about-us/members.php>). As noted, CASW uses standards for Canadian social work education developed by the CASWE and many of the CASW assessors are university professors (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). However, schools of social work do not use CASW equivalency assessments in their admission considerations.

5.1.2 Provincial institutions

Credential Assessment Services (CAS)

In Ontario, there are three credential assessment services (CAS) and each is a member of ACESC: Comparative Education Service (CES), International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS) and World Education Service (WES) (<http://canalliance.org>). As identified in the literature, the Foreign Skilled Worker Program was amended in 2013 to require applicants to obtain a credential assessment prior to immigrating (Albaugh & Seidle, 2013, p.7). The Citizenship and Immigration Canada website states that any applicants must obtain an “Educational Credential Assessment (ECA) ... to verify that your foreign degree, diploma, certificate (or other proof of your credential) is valid and equal to a Canadian one” (<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/skilled/assessment.asp>). However, according to the CICIC, only physicians and pharmacists have their credentials assessed by their regulatory bodies at this time, though there are intentions to have all regulatory professions assess credentials in advance of immigration in the future (M. Ringuette, personal communication, April 17, 2015). All other individuals seeking registration within regulated professions, such as social work, must obtain a general assessment to demonstrate their education is equivalent to a Canadian degree. However, this general assessment is not accepted by the provincial social work regulatory bodies, according to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW), who require their own assessment that may assess the credentials of internationally-trained social workers as non-equivalent (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). The CASW acknowledged that internationally-trained social workers have expressed frustration when they

have obtained a credential assessment from one of the CAS in Ontario and have to purchase a separate assessment from the CASW, though the CASW did not appear to know that this was required by CIC before immigrating (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). The cost of credential assessments are as follows:

Comparative Education Service (CES) - \$226

(learn.utoronto.ca/international-professionals/comparative-education-service-ces/immigration/service-fees);

International Credential Assessment Service of Canada (ICAS) - \$90-280 (www.icascanada.ca/applicants/fees.aspx); and,

World Education Service (WES) - \$115-\$245

(www.wes.org/ca/fees/schedule.asp).

As a result, internationally-trained social workers who have immigrated to Canada after 2013 are required to undergo two credential assessments: first, by one of the ACESC members to meet immigration requirements, and second, by the CASW in hopes of registering with the OCSWSSW. The cost of this general credential assessment may appear minimal but it is important to remember that all the documentation required for it as well as other government and regulatory bodies may also be a significant cost.

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW)

As stated, OCSWSSW is responsible for regulation of the social work profession in Ontario. Any individuals who wish to use the title of 'social worker' must be registered with OCSWSSW. Registration in Ontario is based solely on academic credentials; only education curriculum and field placements are considered (T. Raso, personal communication, April 15,

2015). Within Canada, graduates from any university school of social work accredited by CASWE can be registered after providing only their transcript (T. Raso, personal communication, April 15, 2015). As a result of the mutual degree recognition agreement between CASWE and CSWE, OCSWSSW will also allow American graduates from CSWE-accredited schools of social work to register and practice as social workers in Ontario without further assessment.

At the completion of the CASW assessment, the outcome is forwarded to the applicant as well as the provincial/territorial regulatory body. If an internationally-trained social worker receives an assessment of equivalency to a MSW or BSW, they can be registered with OCSWSSW and begin practising social work in Ontario. However, if their education has been assessed as not equivalent, they cannot be registered with OCSWSSW. They can apply to be registered as a 'non-social work applicant', even if their education was in a university social work program (T. Raso, personal communication, April 13, 2015).

This process requires three elements: first, the applicant obtains a general academic credential assessment from one of the ACESC organizations to determine if their education is equivalent to a Canadian university degree (not specifically social work since that assessment is done by CASW). Second, the applicant must provide evidence of their practice experience. This experience can be through employment as a social worker for at least one year and/or being supervised for 700 hours by a person with a social work degree in their country of origin. The supervisor's credentials do not need to be assessed. Thirdly, the applicant must complete an application form that contains twelve content areas that mirror the content of Canadian

academic social work programs to demonstrate the applicant's social work knowledge and skills. The three elements can be weighted differently depending on the OCSWSSW assessor's perspective (T. Raso, personal communication, April 13, 2015). It is interesting that the applicant's education is considered to be non-equivalent but their supervisor's education and skill are recognized as sufficient without assessment to supervise the applicant. If OCSWSSW accepts the 'non-social work applicant' for registration, they can practice as a social worker in Ontario.

It is important to note that OCSWSSW grants the use of the title 'registered social worker' and does not differentiate between education levels. As a result, a 'non-social work applicant', applicants with a BSW or MSW are all referenced as 'registered social workers (RSW)'. At times, internationally-trained social workers and employers request specification of the education level from the OCSWSSW but this is not something the organization specifies, though it is noted on the CASW assessment (T. Raso, personal communication, April 13, 2015).

Council of Ontario Universities (COU) and Ontario Universities' Registrars Association (OURA)

COU is an organization of the province's twenty publicly-funded universities plus the Royal Military College of Canada (www.cou.on.ca/about/who-we-are). An academic affiliate of the COU is the Ontario Universities' Registrars Association (OURA), which is focused on "academic administration including, but not limited to, admissions, registration, examinations, scheduling, transcripts, systems, records, calendars, scholarships and awards, secondary school liaison, and other

activities or undertakings that may be deemed appropriate to OURA” (www.oura.ca/mandate.html). While the OURA is not a formal member of the national body of registrars, ARUCC, as each university is, the president of the OURA is on the ARUCC executive committee so there is interaction between the organizations.

One of the tasks undertaken by OURA was the development of the Graduate Studies International Admissions Placement Guide to provide Ontario universities with a foundation for assessing the quality and reliability of credentials obtained at international universities based on general research and the experience of students from those countries previously. Prior to 2002, the Placement Guide was primarily composed of information about different countries and their post-secondary education systems. However, in 2002, representatives from six universities involved with the OURA developed equivalencies for the Placement Guide (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). OURA is similar in function to the Association of Registrars of Universities and Colleges of Canada (ARUCC), with which CICIC is involved regarding credential assessment processes; however, CICIC has no involvement with OURA and did not provide any input on the development of OURA’s Placement Guide (M. Ringuette, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

OURA’s Placement Guide is used throughout the province. Some smaller schools use the Placement Guide exclusively while some larger schools have used it to develop their own admission guides (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). OURA provides access to the Placement Guide to all member institutions. Since the Placement Guide provides the foundation for graduate admission decisions related to international

applicants, attempts were made to obtain and observe the Placement Guide and learn about its development. Initially, multiple e-mails to multiple individuals connected to the OURA were ignored and no response was received. Subsequently, assistance was provided by the faculty advisor that resulted in learning of the current president, Charmaine Hack, who directed the request to another committee member who oversees graduate studies, Matt Dumouchel (he was one of the people who had been e-mailed previously but had not responded). OURA acknowledged receiving requests for access to the Placement Guide but they have refused these requests, including from this writer (M. Dumouchel, personal communication, April 24, 2015). While some universities provide their admission guides online (such as York University and University of Waterloo), others (such as McMaster University) do not at this time. OURA asked regarding this research project and said the request for contact to discuss the development and process used for the Placement Guide would be discussed at a meeting on May 4, 2015 and a response given to this researcher after that time. In spite of a follow-up message sent by this researcher on May 11, 2015, no response has been received from the OURA since that time.

While the COU and OURA are composed of publicly-funded universities, the COU and OURA are considered private entities and are not subject to Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) (S. Miranda, personal communication, May 25, 2015). Since FIPPA requests need to go to specific public institutions (i.e., universities) but the COU and OURA are not public institutions, they are allowed to maintain their documents and processes without questions or scrutiny. If contact had been received from the OURA, inquiries would have been made by this researcher

regarding the reason for the Placement Guide being kept private when its use affects the public. The reason provided by former chair of the committee that developed the Placement Guide was that OURA wants to avoid arguments about evaluations of other countries' education systems and admission decisions made upon the Guide (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). As a result, applicants with international degrees may not know how their credentials were assessed and how this assessment affected their application. Though OURA's Placement Guide is intended to provide some measure of objectivity to admission decisions as the result of research and experience, it has not been updated in over ten years and the process is not transparent, reflected in the OURA's refusal to share the Placement Guide or discuss its development. As a result, the objectivity and validity of the OURA's Placement Guide cannot be determined.

Ontario universities

While CASs and regulatory bodies are the primary providers of formal credential assessments, post-secondary institutions also engage in formal credential assessment for their own admission purposes, though it does not appear thorough or transparent. In the case of post-secondary institutions, colleges and universities receive applications for admission that includes the applicant's academic achievements at secondary and post-secondary levels. The institution uses this information to assess whether the applicant will be successful in the program of choice based their performance in previous academic pursuits. In Ontario, post-secondary institutions operate individually in making such assessments; each college and university governs itself, answering to no higher authority about admission decisions. The

institution decides which applicants are admitted based on the criteria that the institution utilizes, which may not be consistent within the institution itself, let alone between institutions in the province and across the country (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). While each university has a formal standardized process for admission, including minimum standards in previous academic achievements, there are elements within the process that allow for subjective non-standardized decision-making. Applicants to graduate programs such as social work often have to complete an application that includes the minimum standards (e.g. having an undergraduate degree, sufficient grades as demonstrated by a transcript) but also describes their personal values and experiences that lead them to seek a graduate degree. The desired attributes and achievements of applicants in different disciplines (e.g. social work, chemistry, history) will share some common features but will necessarily have differences as well that reflect the differences in values and goals of the respective fields so both standardized and non-standardized criteria are utilized.

At McMaster, the implementation of this admission process to the MSW program is administered by faculty and current graduate students, who review applications submitted and offer feedback about the applicants' appropriateness for admission compared to the other applicants. At Wilfrid Laurier, it is only faculty who review applicants to the MSW program. Given the human element, the comparison process is inherently subjective. For example, one applicant may have higher grades but another applicant may have stronger practice experience. Where one applicant demonstrates high academic achievement, another applicant may present with great determination and have overcome significant barriers in their life.

At McMaster, each reviewer is provided with an admission manual and a training session about the criteria to be used that fits within the school's guidelines but the reviewers may apply them differently. As a result, there is a great deal of subjectivity and discretion to how the process is employed by virtue of the human beings involved. Each person who reviews an application has an influence on the process and brings their similar or different values and beliefs in applying the process of the university and department/faculty. The admission process is not and should not be pursued as 'objective', as if there were universal rules about who will be successful in graduate programs, let alone be the best practitioners. Within social work, this subjectivity is necessary to pursue the discipline's values of equity and social justice. To employ the same process as another discipline with different values and aims (e.g. business, biology or art) would not be logical or desirable. However, the subjective space created for each department can be used for inclusive or exclusive decision-making based on positive or negative biases that are conscious or unconscious on the part of the reviewers involved. While the admission process is implemented in good faith, it is inherently subjective and should be recognized as such in order to protect against negative bias and influence.

At the university level, each institution uses their own process for admissions. For admission to undergraduate programs, there is a centralized application process for the province of Ontario. Applications are then distributed to the respective universities' registrars. While provincial high school applicants are auto-adjudicated by computers, applicants from high schools in other provinces, second degree applicants and those from other countries are reviewed manually by the university's registrar to determine if

the requirements for admission are met. Applicants with the minimum requirements are then forwarded to the respective departments for review and assessment of which applicants will be admitted (R. Hamilton, personal communication, May 6, 2015). If applicants are transferring from other colleges or universities, whether domestic or international, the applications go to the respective departments for admission evaluation and credit recognition. The registrar will provide information to the departments regarding international universities and whether they are accredited or not. The registrar obtains this information from various sources in North America and the United Kingdom, such as the International Association of Universities (IAU) and Undergraduate Courses At University and College (UCAS), and conducts their own research on international institutions (R. Hamilton, personal communication, May 6, 2015). In Ontario, for applicants with international credentials, academic documentation must be assessed and authenticated by either WES or CES (ICAS does not provide document authentication services). While there are countries from which credentials are viewed with significant scrutiny (e.g. India) or dismissed entirely (e.g. Afghanistan), undergraduate degrees from accredited international universities are considered equivalent to Canadian undergraduate degrees. If the degree is not from an accredited school, the applicant can be admitted to the same discipline. However, applicants with undergraduate degrees from an accredited university in another country are not able to repeat the same degree in Ontario (R. Hamilton, personal communication, May 6, 2015). This blanket recognition based on university accreditation appears to be opposite to the non-recognition given to graduate degrees from potentially the same universities.

For admission to graduate programs, universities appear to use one of two processes. First, such as at McMaster and Waterloo, applications for graduate studies are directed to the department, where they are screened and recommendations are made. As discussed previously, each department can use its own criteria for determining who is admitted. Included in that criteria is a determination of how international credentials are assessed, whether utilizing the OURA's Placement Guide, the school's own Placement Guide or some other criteria as well as whether or not to petition for approval to admit someone who does not meet the minimum requirements.

Furthermore, the subjective nature of admission evaluation allows for each faculty and the individual reviewers to influence the ranking of applicants, which could include preferential or prejudicial treatment based on the country where previous academic achievements were made. Recommendations for admission are then provided to the School of Graduate Studies, which acts as a "gatekeeper" by ensuring that minimum standards are maintained (e.g. degrees and grade levels in previous programs) (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). Other universities may direct applications to the Graduate Studies Office first, screened and then provided to the respective faculties to make admission decisions. While decisions for or against admission to post-secondary institutions can be life-altering for applicants, there is a great deal of discretion in both streams, particularly when it involves the assessment of international credentials. As described within the literature, assessments of international credentials are often made with limited knowledge or experience of the education systems in other countries. However, the more familiar a system is to its administrators, the more favourable assessments tend to be. On the contrary, the less familiar a

system, the less favourable an assessment may be. Similar to employers and professional associations, universities also tend to be risk averse by avoiding or questioning what is less familiar or unknown (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). Furthermore, given the significant subjectivity in assessing international credentials, there is also greater potential for negative bias. If an applicant to a graduate program is from a country with which the administration is unfamiliar or, more seriously, is prejudiced against, the applicant may be screened out before the next level of the application process and the potential bias may not be exposed or questioned since it is unlikely to be stated explicitly within communication by the reviewers or faculty to the School of Graduate Studies (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). This is not to suggest that such discriminatory practices are present or to accuse any person but only to highlight the potential presence of positive and negative biases as a result of the subjective process used for admission and highlight the need for greater transparency.

The credential assessment process within universities is of particular interest when applicants with international degrees apply to obtain the same degrees from Ontario universities. If an individual with a degree from a Canadian university were to apply to a different Canadian university to repeat the same degree, the person would not be admitted because they have that recognized degree already. The same recognition is given to degrees from universities in the United States and United Kingdom. In fact, there are many three-year degree programs in the United Kingdom but Ontario universities accept them as equivalent to a four-year degree “all the time” (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). However, individuals from non-

western countries who graduated with four-year degrees from universities that are modelled on the same British academic system (e.g. Bangladesh, India) do not receive the same recognition, instead are subjected to more scrutiny and questioning (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

While universities decide whether to recognize international degrees as equivalent or not, the basis for recognition or non-recognition is often deferred to other sources and is not thorough. Each university can determine for itself how it views international credentials, though many or most use the OURA's Placement Guide as at least a foundation of such decisions. Whenever the Placement Guide or other similar sources are given authority in credential assessment, the university, faculty and individual reviewers have assumed that these sources have done the work of assessment to a reasonable standard that matches the values and standards of the university, faculty and individual reviewers. However, there are no rules requiring universities to use certain criteria nor any outside authority to which the universities must justify its decisions. The use of OURA's Placement Guide or similar guides developed by universities are acknowledged as guidelines or places to start when assessing international credentials.

However, given the lack of transparency and limited accountability, there are reasons to question the validity and reliability of these credential assessment tools. Since the OURA's Placement Guide is the foundation of international credential assessments made at many or most post-secondary institutions in Ontario but its development and conclusions are not open for questioning or scrutiny, the validity and fairness of such Placement Guides cannot be determined. Furthermore, given the tremendous weight given to such Placement Guides in international credential assessments and the

enormity of their impact in assessing international credentials as non-equivalent that can lead to credential devaluation, there is an inability to externally validate assessment outcomes. This lack of transparency and unconfirmed validity should raise questions within universities about the development and use of Placement Guides as they may reinforce western superiority. Furthermore, universities can recognize credits obtained by students when they have completed similar coursework in previous programs. This recognition would be particularly beneficial for students with international credentials as it would reduce the time and financial resources for returning to university. Such recognition is at the discretion of the department and needs to be approved by the dean; however, it is rarely given aside from when the credits were obtained from other Canadian universities or colleges (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015).

5.2 International social worker participants

1. Maxwell

Years in Canada: 13

Education prior to immigration: 3 year non-social work undergraduate degree; 2 year MSW with field placements and thesis

Social work experience prior to immigration: 10 years in community development (including advocacy, poverty eradication and health promotion)

2. Patrick

Years in Canada: 2

Education prior to immigration: 3 years undergraduate degrees in political science and BSW; 2 year MSW with field placements and thesis

Social work experience prior to immigration: 10 years with national NGO working with those affected by HIV/AIDS, community work with refugees and AIDS orphans with the United Nations

3. Robert

Years in Canada: 4

Education prior to immigration: 4 year non-social work undergraduate degree; 2 year MSW with field placements and thesis

Social work experience prior to immigration: 6 years working with people with HIV/AIDS as well as developmentally delayed adults; employed for 2 years in similar work before MSW without title of social worker

As noted above, while there was variance in the amount of time each participant had been in Canada, each of them arrived with a two-year MSW from their country of origin. Maxwell and Robert did not have a BSW while Patrick did. Furthermore, each of them had at least six years of social work experience beyond their field placements. The participants were not new graduates who immigrated to Canada but rather experienced professionals.

5.2.1 Pre-immigration experience

Social work as vocation

There are many reasons why individuals chose a helping profession like social work. All three participants identified personal reasons for becoming social workers in addition to vocational aspirations. The personal satisfaction obtained from and “passion” (Maxwell) for engaging in relational work were highlighted by participants. There were also references to higher order considerations such as “my natural calling” (Patrick) and responding to the needs observed in the community and of marginalized populations. While Maxwell identified that his “passion” for social work originated in living in a community with great needs that he wanted to meet, Robert and Patrick came to social work less intentionally. Patrick entered social work education because he was not admitted to his preferred accounting program and friends encouraged him to consider social work. Robert was invited to assist with a group of youth affected by HIV/AIDS. It was through exposure to the field in academia or practice that the participants decided to pursue formal education in the profession.

Upon completion of their social work education in their countries of origin, each participant expressed feeling prepared for practice. Robert and Patrick were confident without reservation. However, Maxwell differentiated between his academic and his experiential preparation; he said he was prepared academically but would have liked more practical experience at the time he finished his first MSW. He described, "Each day is a learning process for us ... And especially when we go into the community, we see the need, we see more complexities and things." Maxwell's statement reflects his awareness of the distinction between academic and experiential learning. The former can only provide information as preparation, particularly if the student has not engaged in practice previously, while the latter plunges the new graduate into the complexities of human life that cannot be explained adequately in books. The other two participants had experience in social work-type roles prior to entering their first MSW. Patrick served a year of national service while Robert worked with children and families affected by HIV/AIDS as well as homeless people, which explains their reported confidence in their preparation, having both academic and practical preparation.

View of Canada as a better opportunity

As noted previously, Canada is regularly identified as a diverse country made up of people from around the world. Each participant described the images of Canada that attracted them and contributed to their decision to immigrate here. Robert explained that Canada's image as a "multicultural and ethnically diverse" country was attractive, which was repeated by Patrick. There were also perceptions of Canada as valuing social justice and being

more stable than the United States. Canada appeared to have greater stability, a higher standard of living and value of social justice, according to the participants. In addition, the importance of these elements for families was significant to Maxwell and Patrick as they planned for their respective children's future.

In addition to these images of Canada that influenced their personal reasons for immigrating, each participant identified professional motivation for choosing to leave their country of origin in order to move to Canada. Of greatest significance was the efforts employed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to recruit international social workers. Robert recalled receiving "a document called 'Professions In Demand In Canada' ... of which one was social work." Patrick appeared to read the same document when he described, "...there is always a list of professions that are needed based on market surveys ... social workers are in demand in Canada..." Patrick added that Canada

asked for specific professions, specific educational backgrounds, some level of experience, you understand? So that the thinking was that you needed to be somebody who is ... ready to work, not somebody they are now going to train. You understand? The thinking is, 'We are looking for professionals for some specific ... areas and, more or less, like, I don't have the time to train so you come, the job is there, come and pick up the job.'

This presentation suggested to the participants that "social workers are a very valued human resource in Canada" (Robert). Maxwell had colleagues who had immigrated to Ontario already and were practicing social workers so he had more direct evidence of the availability of social work jobs in the province. He also expressed his belief that social work was better recognized with greater compensation and working conditions in Canada than his country of origin, though Canada appeared to have lower levels of need.

There are apparent comparisons and contrasts between the participants' reasons for engaging in social work and immigrating to Canada. There are comparable personal motivations to provide for themselves and their families but also interesting contrasts in leaving countries with higher needs for Canada, which was perceived as more stable. These impressions were obtained from formal and informal sources. All three participants described obtaining some measure of information from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, whether specific recruitment documents or the immigration applications that informed them of the elements that Canada valued in immigrants. Informally, Robert visited Canada five years before immigrating while both he and Maxwell obtained information through people from their countries of origin who immigrated to Canada previously. It is important to reinforce that all three participants were educated and experienced professionals who left employment in their countries of origin based on information they were provided by the government of Canada primarily that international social workers were needed in this country. They were not refugees who were seeking asylum in Canada from war or other human or environmental disaster but chose to immigrate of their own volition.

Expectations of professional acceptance

As a result of their recruitment by the government of Canada and ability to meet the standards set out in the immigration application forms as well as the experiences of others who had gone before them, all three participants expected prompt recognition of their credentials. Robert expressed that since social work was one of the professions

deemed in demand ... in my mind, this meant that once arrived in Canada, my credentials would be recognized and my opportunities or

... possibilities to ... gain employment would be, let's say, at least open and easy to obtain.

Similar to his explanation of the requirements for immigrating above, Patrick noted:

There was ... more or less adequate information portraying the fact that you could get a job based on your training or based on your certificates and your experience as well ... And the only ... caution they give in all those documents was ... you needed some amount of money because it could take you some time before you get work. Right? Now, that was the only, I would say, caveat or warning there that it could take you some time but you will get the job anyway.

Robert and Patrick shared that they had achieved very high standings in their respective MSW programs. All three had described extensive social work practice experience that also gave them reasons to expect recognition of their credentials. Maxwell had colleagues with personal experience of immigrating to Canada as social workers prior to him. He shared:

Before I came, I had a lot of colleagues here, same type of social work as MSW here already, been working in the field, especially at schools, hospitals as well as in the community and Children's Aid. We contacted them and most of the them at that time receive in comparison to ... the Masters level. So I expected I may also get into the same...

They were employed as social workers in their respective countries of origin. The Canadian government presented that social workers were in demand in Canada so that jobs were plentiful. They had to prove their academic and professional credentials in order to immigrate to Canada. There were others who had come before them and been successful in obtaining social work employment. This evidence led the participants to reasonably expect that they would have their credentials recognized and there would be multiple opportunities for jobs within social work in a short period of time. "But", as Patrick described consistent with all three participants' experiences, "you come and you realize it's a totally different ballgame altogether."

5.3 Major stakeholders and the process of interacting with them

Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers

All three participants were aware of the requirement to be licensed in order to practice as social workers in the province of Ontario. Patrick and Robert stated that their respective countries of origin required licensing or were implementing licensing when they immigrated. Since Maxwell had colleagues in social work in Ontario prior to immigrating, he was aware of this need for registration with the OCSWSSW. At the same time, Patrick and Robert advised that they encountered jobs that required social work education but not registration with the OCSWSSW, which resulted in some confusion for them. Each participant was aware of the required credential assessment completed by the CASW in order to be a registered social worker with the OCSWSSW. Robert began the assessment process prior to immigrating while Patrick and Maxwell did not because they said it was not required in order to immigrate. Both of them expected to have their credentials recognized upon arrival so they did not begin the registration process until after they arrived.

In fact, Maxwell identified that financial costs were too high to seek registration and credential assessment immediately when there were more pressing demands at that time in providing for his family so he did not begin this process for two years. He said:

The difficulty we have is [the registration process is a] lot of money for us when we come... We are to come with a lot of money. Then our priorities, needs are different ... it takes a lot of money to assess ... money's a crunch at that time.

The experience of being recruited because of your profession and recognized education and experience by a foreign country that is viewed to have high

values of social justice and appreciation for that profession must be encouraging. However, to arrive and be unable to even begin the process of obtaining a license for that profession because the financial costs are too high would be disheartening and confusing.

Canadian Association of Social Workers

As was described above, only one participant, Robert, began the process of having his credentials assessed for the purpose of registration with the OCSWSSW prior to immigrating, though all three acknowledged they were aware of the required process. The other two, Patrick and Maxwell, described their expectation that they would receive recognition of their credentials as a result of the Canadian government's presentation of social work in demand, their ability to meet the immigration criteria for a visa and, for Maxwell, the experience of social work colleagues who already immigrated to Ontario. These three individuals were prepared and informed as best as they were able to participate in the requisite processes to engage in social work practice. It was through this process that the difference between the criteria required for immigration and the criteria required for practicing in Ontario became apparent to the participants.

All three participants advised that they provided the necessary documents to the CASW and each of them experienced devaluation in their credentials. Maxwell and Robert did not have BSWs but rather non-social work undergraduate degrees and MSWs. They were assessed as having social work education equivalent to a Canadian BSW and were able to register with the OCSWSSW and practice as social workers. Patrick, on the other hand, had a BSW and MSW but was assessed as having no social work

education equivalency and could not register with the OCSWSSW to practice as a social worker.

5.3.1 Confusion and frustration

The participants described experiencing confusion and frustration as they attempted to navigate the credential assessment process in seeking to practice as a social worker in Ontario. There was confusion and frustration as a result of the lack of coordination and consistency between the immigration and licensing requirements. Maxwell stated:

See, we have a point system, you know, that's the way we come. The MSW has a good point of immigration ... saying that is good scope of practice ... but in reality when immigration different from academic things, which is different. Immigration says one thing, academic says different thing. It's always two different things ... They don't connect.

Similarly, Patrick expressed his confusion and frustration that his education, experience and professional certification from his country of origin were required to immigrate but insufficient to practice.

So it was like social workers are in demand in Canada so if you went to Canada as a social worker and they ask for your certificates, your experiences you needed references from your previous employers and all that. So ... it wasn't just like the normal somebody's immigrating or travelling, you just go in, you don't know what is there. There was, you know, more or less adequate information portraying the fact that you could get a job based on your training or based on your certificates and your experience as well. Right? So you come and it's like your certificate qualifies you for a visa but not for a job.

On the contrary, his experience was that everything he did prior to immigrating as a social worker was invalid. After undergoing the credential assessment process, Patrick said, "That was when I was told that ... they cannot give you the license based on your ... certificates from [his country of origin] ... And I needed a Canadian education to get the license to practice as a social worker."

Robert also described significant confusion in the credential assessment process as he attempted to engage with the CASW regarding his devalued credentials. He began the process several months before immigrating so he could begin working as a social worker upon arrival. However, there were often lengthy delays in communication from the CASW. At one point, he read an e-mail to the researcher from the CASW that the evaluator would review the information he provided. However, after three weeks, Robert had not received a response and sent another message advising that he would be immigrating in three weeks and needed to know what (if any) information the CASW required so he could obtain it before leaving his country of origin. Furthermore, the CASW changed their reasons for their assessment of non-equivalency at least three times, did not appear to read the information Robert provided and claimed they did not have all the information he provided. While the CASW states explicitly that they would not consider practice experience in their credential assessments, Robert was told that they would consider his experience in order to grant him equivalency to a Canadian BSW but not for a MSW. Lastly, when he continued to respond to the CASW's changing arguments for why he did not meet the MSW requirements, Robert described his perspective:

[T]hey tried a different tactic, talk with this [other staff person at CASW], you know, some other person, to resend the whole information to this person ... all this stuff were just getting more and more weird ... They were ... in my view intentionally misinterpret the documents that I was sending to them...

Patrick also described that he was told he could engage in volunteer work that would count toward his credentials being recognized, which was the opposite of the CASW's stated evaluation process.

...based on my education, I needed Canadian education ... and experience to get the certificate and I think ... the only option they

gave me also was some long hours of volunteer work in Canada and that was like, if you put together, it was almost two years of volunteer work so I was like, why waste my time for that whilst I could just do a degree rather within a year and get the license?

The assessment process used by the CASW contributed to the confusion and frustration experienced by the participants. In spite of being an evaluation of their credentials in social work, the process is decidedly non-social. The CASW forms its assessment solely on documents related to academic credentials. The applicants need to have documents sent directly by their previous universities in signed and sealed envelopes to the CASW. The CASW insists that this is to demonstrate documents are authentic and have not been altered or forged (S. Guy, April 16, 2015). At the same time, it is the responsibility of the applicants to have the documents translated if they are not in English or French. After that, the applicants may be required to provide further explanation about documents or courses to the CASW. This arrangement presents an interesting conflict. The CASW begins from a position of skepticism, requiring documents be signed and sealed to protect from dishonest forgery; later in the process, they may ask the applicant to provide explanation. However, this is the same applicant that they perceived as potentially deceitful so it is unclear how they will receive information provided as being reliable given the starting point of distrust. Patrick questioned, "Why don't you even call me for an interview as part of the assessment process? If you assume that what I have written or ... I stole the certificate or for whatever reason you don't trust, talk to the person and even assess me."

The decision to consider only academic credentials is not explained aside from CASW stating, "CASW cannot take into consideration work experience as it cannot be assessed" without further explanation of why work

experience cannot be assessed but field placements can be assessed

(http://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/attachements/Common%20Questions%20and%20Answers_E.pdf). CASW gathers information about field placements through information provided by applicants, not field instructors, so it stands to reason that similar information can be obtained and evaluated regarding employment experience when international social work programs required a different number of field placement hours than Canada. Maxwell, Patrick and Robert came to Canada with six-to-ten years of social work practice experience in very challenging environments and populations, including children affected by HIV/AIDS, homeless people and refugees, but this was considered less valuable (or of no value) compared to months of field placement experience during their university education.

Robert questioned this position and the lack of recognition of their practice experience:

These people who repeat their MSW, I think most of them ... have also worked as social workers so that in itself is also a question of ... [why] they are not recognized academically but they were able to function as workers for ... extended period[s] of [time]. But all of a sudden, just crossing the continents, that's not valid anymore. Says who? On what grounds? For what reasons?

Patrick also asked, in light of his work experience with the United Nations, "So do they think I could not ... work in Canada as a social worker, why ... could I be working with the UN with the same education?" Robert identified that the CASW indicated his work experience would be considered toward field placement hours for BSW equivalency but not for MSW equivalency. He expressed, "Why? What makes ... the difference?" Neither received satisfactory answers and still hold these questions years later.

The participants described indirect written communication from the CASW. Robert maintained his e-mails with the CASW, which he read during the interview. In one message from the CASW, he is addressed by the wrong name, which can be an indication of disrespect or lack of attention. The e-mails demonstrated his efforts to explain information that was unclear or misunderstood by the CASW. Instead, he experienced the skeptical posture of the CASW in his interactions, as he described, “[T]hey were never asking more precise questions of, ‘Oh, let us, help us understand why that is so?’ They were just sending answers like, ‘Oh no, this can’t be so. This can’t be so. This can’t be so.’” This was reflected in e-mail exchanges where he provided information about his credentials, which the CASW ignored in their reply. For example, the CASW stated that Robert did not qualify for a MSW without a thesis because he had insufficient field placement hours. Robert replied that he completed both a thesis and the necessary field placement hours. However, in the following message, the CASW repeated that he did not have the requisite field placement hours for equivalency with a MSW without a thesis.

While the CASW states that the reasons for non-equivalency are always given in writing, Maxwell advised, “No, they don’t tell you the reason.” Maxwell did not receive information and he did not report requesting further communication from the CASW. For Patrick and Robert, they experienced continued high levels of confusion and frustration with the process so they initiated direct telephone contact with the CASW. However, in spite of his increased communication, Robert described, “[T]o date, I’m not convinced at all that the equivalency was done correctly and I didn’t [feel] that I was heard as I was explaining the reasonings.”

The devaluation of their credentials caused further confusion and frustration for Robert and Maxwell, in particular, because they were assessed as having MSWs that were equivalent to BSWs, a degree which neither of them held. Robert highlighted the problem of this equivalency outcome.

[T]his put me in a really difficult spot because ... when I would apply then the question to me was what do I write on my resume? Do I write that I have a Master in social work as my ... academic credentials will state and that was it? Or do I write I have a BSW but I have no proof of a BSW beyond this equivalation? So some time I had a few instances when employers will call me back and they would be like, 'Oh, we don't really understand. What are you? Do you have a MSW or a BSW?' And then I have to go through the whole process of explaining, 'No, academically, I have a MSW but it was equivalated for some reasons as a BSW' and all this was just adding an extra layer of explanations and sometimes people would still be unclear of my actual status.

The confusion for the individuals experiencing devaluation also transferred to potential employers. This also highlights the poor coordination between the CASW and OCSWSSW. While the OCSWSSW defers to the CASW for credential assessments of equivalency, the OCSWSSW does not use the same system of recognition. As noted previously, the CASW may assess international MSWs as equivalent to Canadian MSWs, equivalent to Canadian BSWs or not equivalent to Canadian social work education. However, if the applicant is assessed as equivalent to a MSW or BSW, the OCSWSSW refers to them only as a 'Registered Social Worker' (RSW) and refuses to reference the level of their education equivalency. The OCSWSSW is aware that this causes confusion and frustration to its members as well as employers but has refused to change its practice in this regard (T. Raso, personal communication, April 15, 2015).

5.3.2 Powerlessness

The participants also described their lack of power through the credential assessment process with the CASW. After immigrating to Canada with the expectation that they would be welcomed into the country and the social work profession, the CASW was an organization with total authority over their livelihoods. They were viewed with skepticism and had to depend on documents from their respective universities to demonstrate that they met the CASW requirements to be considered equivalent to a Canadian social worker. The indirect communication contributed to their feelings of powerlessness as they attempted to engage with the questions or responses given by the CASW. Patrick tried to interact with the CASW regarding his experience but felt shut down very quickly. He shared:

And I was like, hey, I've been working with Canadians, Americans, Japanese from around the world and I've ... excelled wherever I worked ... But they were like, 'I'm sorry but that's the system, that's the requirement too,' and there is very little you can do in such situations...

Being told that there is an impersonal and unchangeable system is a direct message of power; the system has the power and the individual does not. He further explained:

You come here and they don't value your education so it's, more or less, something that is not within ... the social work profession alone but is something ... system-wide ... but ... it becomes frustrating, you know. You feel deceived and angry as well but, like I said, you find yourself in it and there is very little you could do at that point because, one, you are powerless and, two, you have not even settled so you don't know your way around virtually.

Patrick was aware of the appeal process but he did not pursue it because he had to preserve his limited resources of time and energy:

I thought the appeal process would be an exercise in futility because it's the same. It's not as if I have any different information I'm going to present. It's the same. And it's the same, virtually the same people who are going to sit down so I'll end up wasting my time and effort and ... the little resource I had as well.

Maxwell said he was not aware of the appeal process but, if he was, “we don’t usually ... appeal because you need to move forward and it [the appeal] takes time.” He acknowledged questioning the assessment outcome during the interview but he also described accepting it, suggesting he also accepted his position of powerlessness within the system.

I thought probably I’m not that MSW level according to Canadian standard so I need to update myself. So I had to do these things to update to a level I need to be so that’s all I thought ... But I was thinking of why someone get the same degree at the same level, why the same score, the same degree, somebody is not given the same level? Most of my colleagues got into Masters and why some aren’t? It’s, again, luck. Luck was playing a lot here, I believe, so not the credentials or academic or someone gets ‘yes’, someone gets [‘no’] and nobody knows why.

Reflecting his powerless position, Maxwell did not indicate that he asked for the reasons and he did not appeal the decision; instead, he assumed the system had assessed his credentials appropriately or deferred to ‘luck’ which cannot be controlled or changed, reflecting ‘false consciousness’ described in critical theory. In fact, he accepted the assessment outcome without any reasons being provided. He stated, “... any good level of social work were all Master degree requirements which I couldn’t get a job at that level if I only had a Bachelors.” As if resigned to his powerless position, he expressed, “It’s not going to be easy here but that’s the way it is.”

Robert, on the other hand, made extensive efforts to engage with the CASW regarding their assessment of his credentials. When the CASW questioned the documents from his previous university, he tried to obtain further evidence for the CASW but the school would not provide it in the manner that the CASW expected because they had a different format. Robert stated, “It was out of my control,” reflecting his feeling of powerlessness in depending on two systems for the outcome of his professional life. When the

CASW referenced CASWE accreditation standards as the justification for his credential devaluation, Robert reviewed the standards and quoted them in his communication back to the CASW to demonstrate that he met the requirements. However, the CASW did not respond directly to the information he provided but told him to send all of his information again to another person. In summary, he stated:

...I asked for review once I got the initial evaluation. And, as I said, there was a lengthy process by which I would send very long and detailed e-mails and I would get back very short and, sometimes, not very clear explanations of why my argumentation was not considered. And after the Canadian Association of Social Workers changed their reasoning for not equivalating it as the same level three times, the fourth time I decided it's not going anywhere and whatever I'm trying to prove, it will not be changed.

In fact, Robert said this was expressed more directly to him when he called and spoke to the executive director. Robert recalled, "[H]e told me ... 'We never basically change our evaluation. Whatever mistakes we make, we can't change it.'" Not only was Robert at the mercy of the CASW but then the CASW claimed that it could not change its actions, suggestive of 'the system' that Patrick referenced. Furthermore, the communication took on a powerful tone of superiority when the executive director wrote regarding Robert's work experience that "the CASW evaluator has generously included to meet the BSW field placement hours. I trust the explanation provided clears all remaining issues," that Robert took to mean "leave me alone, that's what he's saying here."

5.3.3 Impact of deskilling on employment

All three participants described experiencing poor communication with and by the CASW, inadequate or non-existent explanations about their credential devaluation that contributed to their experiences of powerlessness

in the system of social work. While they described their initial reasons for choosing Canada as being a country with respect and appreciation for diversity and social justice, their experiences of the social work profession reflected disrespect and a lack of appreciation for those values. Even though two of the participants could begin engaging in social work practice because their academic credentials were assessed as equivalent to Canadian BSWs, this still resulted in an experience of deskilling. Patrick's credentials were devalued completely so he was absolutely deskilled since he was not able to practice legally. Maxwell and Robert obtained MSWs in their respective countries of origin but were told their education was equivalent to a lower level, which is a form of deskilling since it reduced the recognition of their credentials and their ability to pursue employment that required the graduate degree, as Maxwell stated previously.

While each participant was aware of the need to be licensed in order to practice as a registered social worker, Patrick and Robert were also aware that some jobs required social work education but not registration with the OCSWSSW. Maxwell did think he would have any success without formal registration as he applied for one job in a group home within the first year of immigrating but was unsuccessful. He stated, "We can't even think of applying [for] social work [jobs] when we come here. They don't even look at our applications. We had to go through a process... The process is start everything from the beginning." Maxwell experienced the covert discrimination typical for immigrants in having to "start everything from the beginning" even though he came to Canada with significant education and experience. Instead, he engaged in 'survival employment' (low-skill, low-pay labourer jobs) in order to provide for his basic needs and those of his family.

He began volunteering at a Children's Aid Society on weekends; he could give his skill and time to a social service organization for free but they would not employ him. Maxwell advised that he had a couple interviews but he was unsuccessful. His perception was that employers devalued his credentials and skills, that his education was from "some remote part of the world ... they don't even recognize that as a MSW. They think I don't practice the way they practice in Canada so I didn't get a positive reply from any places."

Robert began applying for jobs as a registered social worker but, as noted above, was not clear how to reference his qualifications since employers wanted his academic credentials which had been assessed at a lower level than was reflected on his resume. Robert advised:

[P]eople responded back that it's very confusing and they were not clear on how to regard my equivalency. They didn't [know] that they have to take under consideration my actual academic qualifications or they have to go with the equivalency.

When Patrick attempted to apply for employment in social service organizations, he described receiving overt discriminatory responses:

Wherever you go, you are told you needed Canadian education, Canadian experience ... I remember, like, during one of my interviews, they were like, 'The only certificate, the only experience recognized is something from the US.' Apart from that, any certificate, more or less, is useless, any experience is useless ... I've told you my work experience is doing child protection. Another time, they were like, 'Hey, those are not Canadian children' ... I knew definitely that you needed to apply for the professional certificate to practice, right? And that was spelled out clearly in all those documents but there was nothing like when you come to Canada ... you need Canadian experience or you need Canadian certificate to work in Canada.

Patrick was unable to obtain a license to practice as a registered social worker because the CASW assessed his graduate and undergraduate education as insufficient so he could not obtain formal social work jobs. However, when he sought employment in social service organizations that required social work education but not a license, he was told that he did not

have Canadian education or experience. Furthermore, the suggestion that non-Canadian children are so different from Canadian children that Patrick could not engage with them is an overt statement of discrimination. Patrick later asked rhetorically, "I wonder how Canadian children are so different from all other children that I could not work with Canadian children." He did not report being given an explanation by that potential employer about the differences between Canadian children and those in another country.

5.4 Ontario universities and schools of social work

5.4.1 Motivation for repeating their MSWs

As a result of being unable to obtain employment, register as a social worker with OCSWSSW or receive equivalency at the level they had in their country of origin, each participant made the decision to return to post-secondary education after immigrating. They described both personal and professional motivations for returning to university to repeat their MSW.

Maxwell and Robert were registered with OCSWSSW so they could practice in Ontario but did not feel they were recognized at the level that they deserved given their previous academic achievement of a MSW in their respective countries of origin. Since the difference between the CASW equivalency assessment and academic credentials on their resumes, as Robert stated, caused "confusion to me, to other institutions and, most importantly, to employers", he felt "the best way to make things clear once and for all would be to repeat my studies and to have Canadian credentials so in this way it would not be disputed." The participants were confident in their identities and skills as social workers and needed to take action to have the appropriate level of recognition given to them. Maxwell also described the

devaluation of his credentials and requirements of employers as motivation to repeat his MSW:

[T]he job requirements for most of the hospitals as well as most of the CAS, they all were looking for Masters. And any good level of social work were all Master degree requirements which I couldn't get at that level if I only had a Bachelors. That probably prompted me to get the Masters.

Being limited in the employment opportunities available with a lower level of academic equivalency was a personal and professional motivation. Patrick stated plainly that he returned to university "out of frustration" because his professional credentials were not recognized by CASW or employers. While CASW suggested almost two years of volunteer work to obtain recognition, Patrick identified that he could attend university for one year to obtain a Canadian MSW and be able to register with OCSWSSW. Given his need to provide for his family and pursue the goals he had in immigrating to Canada, the shortest route to return to practice was the most practical.

5.4.2 Discrepancies between hopes and realities of credential recognition

Upon applying to repeat their MSW at Ontario universities, the participants described different hopes for the responses they would receive from the schools of social work. Of primary interest is the participants' anticipation that the universities would be active and initiate interaction with them. This hope for active engagement would be exhibited in different ways.

In spite of the devaluation experienced through the CASW credential assessment and lack of recognition from OCSWSSW and employers, two participants believed that the universities and, in particular, the schools of social work "could provide some social justice," as Robert described, in line

with values propagated by social work through credential recognition when other institutions like CASW and OCSWSSW did not. For Patrick and Robert, they hoped that the universities would recognize their academic credentials and would offer them positions in doctorate programs instead of the graduate programs. Robert expressed that other Canadian students would not be allowed to repeat their MSW but his education was devalued without engaging with him about it. Patrick wondered:

[H]ow would ... the school even look at my application? Because you can't imagine you have a Masters degree and then applying for a Masters degree again. All that I know is probably sometimes you do, let's say, social work and you say you want to diversify so you want to do, let's say, law. So you apply for a Masters degree in law. But applying for the same degree you had again, I was initially thinking probably they may not even accept me because they may say, probably ... my certificate is doubtful. Because nobody in his right senses would want to ... do the same degree twice. Initially, those were my thinking and I was like, 'Ah [sigh], but anyway just let me do it.' Then I was also shocked when I was also accepted to do it. So what I've always been asking myself is what value does the school itself place on my ... education? Because ... somewhere along the line I was even expecting that the school may say, 'No, you already have a Masters degree so then rather applying for a Masters degree ... and wasting your time and money there, why don't you apply for a Ph.D.?'

On the contrary, Maxwell expected the university to respond the same way as CASW and OCSWSSW and described his perspective that he had a Bachelors degree, as the CASW assessment stated and which he provided to the universities when he applied.

Even if their degrees were not recognized, Robert described the hope that the school would examine his previous educational achievements and recognize certain courses that were unnecessarily repetitive in the MSW program. He stated:

My expectation was that the school will let me know if I would have any courses which could be recognized and I would not have to repeat them. And even more importantly for me as an immigrant, with scarce financial resources, if that would translate in a reduction of tuition.

There were also desires for recognition of their personal contexts as immigrants expressed by Maxwell and Robert that would take the form of active assistance in navigating the Canadian university system, which was new to them. In particular, Maxwell described expecting help in developing his skills in academic writing that were expected by the university. While his education in his country of origin was in English, the Canadian style was noted to be different.

Instead of receiving communication from the universities regarding recognition of their MSWs or courses they completed previously, the participants described silence on the part of the schools. They learned that their academic credentials were also devalued by the universities when they were admitted to their respective MSW programs, not from direct contact.

Patrick stated:

But I was so shocked, I never got any such response or comment from the university so ... my conclusion was that, well, it's the same system, people are in league to ... put such a system in place so I realized it wasn't new and I wasn't the first person to be going through that so that was the system. But that was my feeling that why would the university also, more or less, condone such a thing?

Similarly, Robert and Maxwell shared that they did not receive any communication from the university about assessment of his previous degree or courses toward reducing repetition. Robert said such communication

didn't happen and ... I wasn't also very clear around this issue if I could request such a thing. Nobody informed me if that could happen. It was just a question in my mind. I never [found] out that ... maybe I could have had some of my courses ... recognized and I would not have to repeat them and pay for them.

In addition to not knowing whether they could ask for credit recognition, the university and school of social work have all of the information on the applicants' previous academic achievements so it seems reasonable that

discussion credit recognition would be initiated by the university and/or school of social work. Furthermore, as will be described in the next section, the participants described feeling powerless in their circumstances and at risk by questioning authority. Credit recognition is commonly granted when students at other Canadian colleges or universities transfer part-way through a program to another post-secondary institutions within the country but not internationally (P. Self, personal communication, May 5, 2015). Given the marginalized position of many international social workers, including the participants, and the provision of documentation from previous universities, Canadian universities and schools of social work should take the responsibility for beginning such dialogue.

The passivity of the universities and absence of communication regarding the credential assessment process and outcome as well as potential credit recognition (for specific courses) communicated clearly that the universities assessed their credentials and previous academic achievements were “substandard without any clarification of why,” as Robert stated. The participants’ previous courses were assessed as “good enough to be recognized as an academic course,” as described by Robert, and their degrees were assessed as sufficient to enable them to attend MSW programs in Ontario but the implicit assessment was that not a single course in their respective previous MSW programs was equivalent to a course in an Ontario or Canadian MSW program. This raises questions about what assessment (if any) occurred regarding the participants’ previous educational achievements and the passivity of academic institutions when receiving applications to repeat graduate degrees. Universities and schools of social work need to ask themselves why an internationally-trained professional would choose to

repeat a degree they already have and why the institution would not allow a Canadian-trained professional to do the same.

At the same time, if the universities recognized their credentials at all or at the equivalent level but the other social work institutions (CASW, OCSWSSW, employers) did not, international social workers would be caught in 'no man's land', being unable to practice but also unable to obtain Canadian credentials that would enable them to practice. Robert stated:

So the only way to gain that recognition, the actual recognition of a MSW is to repeat it ... Now this being said, from my perspective, that's not the ideal situation. A better situation would be for people to be able to gain recognition to the level of their training or at least to be much more clear why they don't get it ... [F]or people in the situation I've been in, I would like them to continue to have the possibility to gain education and recognition to MSW but, if they don't, they should be able to apply and ... continue their studies and gain this recognition. For people not to get in this kind of situation, it has to be a better connection ... between these two different systems ... the Canadian Association [of Social Workers] and academia and transparency for the people to understand and to respond accordingly.

5.4.3 Pervasive sense of powerlessness

In the same way that participants described their experiences of powerlessness in the immigration and CASW credential assessment processes, this theme re-emerged when discussing their experiences with universities. While there was hope that the universities would actively engage with them as noted above, all three participants shared that they did not pursue interactions with the universities on these same topics. It appeared that the devaluation experiences with the CASW assessment process had communicated clearly how the Canadian system viewed them and they learned they were impotent to change those perceptions. Maxwell and Patrick both described repeatedly having to "move on" and "move forward," reflecting their reluctant acceptance and inability to change their situations. Patrick expressed, "There was not time to be stuck ... you cannot also say

you are going back home. Then you've wasted your money, your time and all that. And, you know, jobs do not wait for you ... I said, let me just move on."

There was no turning back after leaving their countries of origin, employment and uprooting their families for the promised opportunities in Canada. They could not go home but they could not fight the system. As Patrick said, "[Y]ou are powerless."

Robert's return to academia also demonstrated his pragmatic yet hesitant compliance with his vulnerable position. While he initially engaged with CASW because he felt confident in his professional and moral grounds for recognition and had nothing to lose because his credentials were already devalued, he shared that he did not actively inquire about the university's lack of credential or credit recognition because he was afraid that he would lose his admission completely.

No, I didn't ask because, well, this might sound maybe a bit weird but I came from a society where you don't really challenge the authority without some repercussions. And I was worried that if I would raise [these] kinds of questions, that might lead to losing my admission to the program.

Robert's socio-historical context and experience of devaluation with CASW reinforced his powerless position and caused him to experience anxiety about the consequences of questioning the system with the power to take away his opportunity to re-gain some measure of recognition within his new environment. Robert repeatedly cited that he did not want to use strong terms to describe his views of the university or faculty out of deference. For example, he explicitly stated he did not want to use the words "discriminatory," "useless" and "forced" to describe his devaluation and repetition of his MSW so chose to refer to it as "unnecessary," "not productive" and not "totally voluntary". He also was concerned that his

participation would be perceived as “out of spite,” which he also said was not true. His use of euphemistic language and concern about others’ perceptions of him reflected his lack of power and confidence within the Canadian system, particularly the universities and social work field.

5.4.4 Canadian ethnocentricity

Another theme that emerged through the experiences of the participants at the university (as well as CASW) was Canadian ethnocentricity. Canadian social work education was considered the standard and graduate education from any other countries had to meet its requirements to be assessed to be equivalent. As noted previously, Patrick and Robert highlighted that a graduate of a Canadian MSW would not consider and could not repeat their MSW at a different Canadian university but they needed to do so because their international degrees were considered “substandard,” as Robert described, in spite of their ability to practice in other countries without being devalued or requiring repetition.

Patrick recounted:

[W]hat makes the Canadian situation very terrible is, for instance, I have colleagues I sat in class with and I was far, far, far better than in all that and they are practising in the UK ... and they did not need to do any British ... academic work before they could qualify to work in the UK.

Patrick also described that his MSW program in Ontario was narrow in its focus and lacked diversity.

Everything about the course is Canada, Canada and ... at best ... American. You don’t see any idea of even integrating thoughts or ideas from Europe, for instance, or even Africa or Asia in some of the things ... [T]here is a tendency to see justice the Canadian way or equity the Canadian way but ... when talking about equity, justice, it’s only thought of in the sense of the individual but in other cultures like in [his country of origin], in Africa and even in Asia where the society, the family, the nation ... is also considered as important and not just

the individual's ... happiness or the individual's right but rather the collective rights ... nobody talks about it ... There is no attempt to even justify or talk about or to draw people's attention to the fact that elsewhere this is justice and this is also valid, you understand?

He further identified that instructors did not appear to recognize cultural differences and expressed that he experienced more diverse perspectives in his undergraduate program in his country of origin. Patrick noted, as an example:

[Y]ou go through the course and ... the lecturer himself or herself does not have any sense of the fact that the welfare system or the welfare state ... it's a western luxury which is not in other ... developing or third world countries ... but here everything is conceived around the welfare system, the welfare state so, for instance, if somebody is trained in this kind of system and he or she finds [him or] herself thinking or writing something about a system where there is no welfare system then the person is more or less lost.

While none of the participants reported overt statements by the universities that their previous academic achievements were of lower quality than in Canadian schools, that was the covert message received. Since Canadian MSW graduates cannot repeat their MSWs in North America, there were questions about the basis for accepting all North American degrees as equal in spite of the obvious likelihood of significant variation between programs. While the participants' educations were devalued and assessed as substantially different, Robert stated, "Are all Canadian courses in all Canadian social work programs the same? And, obviously, the answer is 'no' because there are variations in what type of courses are or the content of the courses." Patrick said he repeatedly encountered references to 'recognized institutions' and asked himself, "[D]oes my school qualify as a recognized

institution? So once, it was silly though I still did it, I said, 'Okay, let me go and Google my university to see if... And I realized [my previous university] was ... recognized..."

The pre-eminence of Canadian institutions means that international institutions must meet Canadian standards but there are questions whether a Canadian social worker in a non-western country would encounter the same expectations and barriers. Patrick recalled sharing his frustration with fellow immigrants from his country of origin:

[W]hat they tell you is, 'My friend, that is the system.' And what my ... friends used to tell me is, 'You wait, let's call for ... pizza and when the person delivers the pizza, we should ask him what is his professional background and you'll be shocked. He's an India doctor who was more or less told that ... you could practice as a doctor. You come here and they don't value your education so it's ... something that is not within ... the social work profession alone but is something [that] is system-wide ... it becomes frustrating, you know. You feel deceived and angry as well but, like I said, you find yourself in it and there is very little you could do at that point because, one, you are powerless and, two, you have not even settled so you don't know your way around virtually.

The other participants described similar experiences of Canadian ethnocentricity. Patrick candidly shared, "[I]f you're asking me from the receiving end, it does feel a bit discriminating. It does feel a bit like I had to jump through hoops through which any other Canadian citizen or permanent resident was not required to." Maxwell also identified this feeling:

[O]ne ... disadvantage we have is when somebody in Canada make two steps, I had to take four steps to get into the level they are doing. Lot of hard work, double of work they have been doing. I had to volunteer, I had to work, I had to do academic study here, prove that I can pass, plus language. They considered that I don't speak English as they speak because I may have an accent, you know. These are disadvantages for us.

5.4.5 Reflections on degree repetition

Since the participants were told that their international social work education was not equivalent to Canadian social work education (for two, in part, and one, wholly), their perspectives on repeating their MSW should be considered valuable to universities and the field of social work. They have the experience of completing MSW programs in two different countries and can provide clear evidence of the value or lack thereof in repeating the degree. If their previous degrees were truly not equivalent, it is reasonable to expect that the participants would describe gaps in their previous education compared to their Canadian experiences.

All three participants spoke of the high value they gave to continued education and studying, including Patrick and Robert sharing their considerations of pursuing doctorates in social work, as they described always being open to learning. Maxwell and Robert spoke of their pride in being accepted to their universities. Maxwell noted that he finished his first MSW approximately twelve years before repeating it in an Ontario university so there was new information that was useful. He described assignments to be easier in the program because he had completed similar study before, though he did not describe this to be beneficial to his social work practice. He also spoke positively of his practicum, which will be discussed further in the next section. Robert said he learned some things regarding social work's social justice and critical perspectives, which were consistent with his pre-existing values, and his belief that anyone could repeat a course five years later and gain some value from it. He also described important relationships with classmates and his thesis advisor as a result of returning to university. Patrick also identified new relationships through the university.

However, the more prominent themes expressed were negative. All three participants stated that they did not feel the repetition was necessary. Representative of all three participants' sentiments, Robert said, "I did the same type of courses in one MSW in [my country of origin] and I've done the same kind of courses in the second one," and the Canadian courses were "redundant ... because they didn't [add] a lot of extra knowledge..." While any reminder can be beneficial, Robert said, "[K]eep in mind that it's a very expensive reminder." He described his experience of repeating as "discriminatory" and "unnecessary". Furthermore, in line with comments by Maxwell, Robert shared:

I would say most of the principles of social work, they are – and I would expect them to be – similar across borders ... I don't think social work is different or a lot ... different in [country of origin] or in many other parts of the world than in Canada. Simply said, people are people everywhere and we all have similar social issues. Homelessness is homelessness in any part of the world and all that. It is also true that practices are different so the way we practice social work, it could be and it is different. But, this being said, it is different within Canada too. I don't think every agency [that] practice[s] social work has exactly the same practice.

Patrick was far more blunt in expressing his feelings about repeating his MSW. He stated:

[I]n one word, if I'm to describe my whole experience, I would say I feel scandalized because I went through the whole system and ... what have I gained? What is the new thing I have learned? What is it that I've now learned that I didn't know? And ... if I ask myself that question, I don't really get an answer to it because there is virtually nothing new I've learned ... And I ask myself, was it worth it? Probably apart from the fact that I needed the Canadian certificate, was it worth what I paid as fees and the one year, the reading and all those things? No.

In regards to his experience at the university, he explained that the school acted inconsistently with claimed social work values:

It's very funny how the same school will be talking about justice and equity, for instance, and then will not recognize the fact that ... making somebody go through the same degree he's done before as injustice

to them. Then you ask yourself, 'What is justice? What is equity?' ... But sometimes you think they only say those things to tickle themselves, to make themselves feel good but not really ... because you don't see ... justice in it ... [I]t's like being political so that is what people talk about but not really the fact that anybody has plans or efforts to ... be just with anybody or in the world.

Both Patrick and Maxwell described a pragmatic perspective on their repetition as they needed to obtain Canadian credentials to be able to practice with the level of recognition they felt they deserved. Maxwell portrayed his university diploma as "a fake paper," serving to validate him as a social worker to employers who otherwise devalue his non-Canadian education and experience, though it did not truly represent him as a professional. He described his view that universities welcome international social workers to repeat their graduate degrees in order to boost the success rate of their programs since the schools can have greater confidence in their academic ability since they have completed graduate education in the same discipline previously. Patrick had a different perspective on the universities' acceptance of repeating graduate degrees, "So I started asking myself then why would they accept you or would they want you to do the same thing twice? And I said, well, it's a system; it's a way to squeeze money out of you or frustrate you."

Two participants were able to describe some significant positive value from their experiences of repeating their MSWs but all three stated clearly that what they gained was not equivalent with the cost, which will be explored in further detail. Maxwell and Robert appeared to be searching for some redeeming value to their devaluation experiences whereas Patrick was not interested in reframing what was a difficult and negative experience for him.

How important is the Canadian context?

An argument commonly accepted and reflected in the literature is that the differences in cultural norms and expectations between countries validate the repetition of academic training. In this way, it is assumed, international professionals will gain understanding of the Canadian perspectives and norms. Maxwell described receiving some of this through his program and stated, "I become a better social worker in the country where I work and live." In particular, he noted the value of his field placement when he shared, "I [did] my placement in one of the unit[s] in the hospital because I was not fitting into this social work so I decided to re-work myself, especially language, culture, interacting with the patient." However, as noted previously, Maxwell also said that he needed help with meeting Canadian expectations for academic writing but this was not provided by his university.

Robert described, "I would say there was not a lot of gain in terms of ... distinctions between what I learned how social work should be practiced in [my country of origin] or in Canada ... The practices are quite similar." Furthermore, he noted, "[T]he focus of my program was not so much practical so I didn't gain a lot of practice specifics to Canadian context. No more than the bits of information from group discussions ... which [were] more informal..."

As stated previously, Patrick described he did not learn anything significant or worth spending money or a year of his life on. Maxwell expressed the same sentiment:

I don't think an immigrant has to ... go to the university program to do this. It's sort of like Ryerson offering something that is offered here. That would be more appropriate for social workers ... we need to learn the mannerism, of course, that doesn't have to go to the ... Masters program...

Patrick expressed learning about the Canadian university culture but spoke negatively of his experience in the classroom. Patrick expressed some specific concerns, including that the BSW program in his country of origin had greater breadth and diversity than his MSW in Ontario. He described some of the instructors as being “narrow-minded, shallow” and did not present with well-informed understandings of certain topics. Patrick also acknowledged that while classes were formed around discussion, instructors were perceived to affirm all opinions expressed as valid when they may not be so, referring to logical inconsistencies or misinterpretations of theories. Furthermore, he noted that some students derailed formal discussions into their own personal disclosures, causing him to rhetorically ask, “Are we joking here? ... Inasmuch in a graduate course you expect people to put across ... ideas, people should be able to think, to come out with proper ideas but it shouldn’t be that anything goes, whatever you say is okay.” These practices would not have occurred in his country of origin and he believed the interactions in his MSW in Ontario reflected a lower value of education as a result.

Maxwell and Patrick expressed that there may be value in providing orientation to Canadian culture and practice so that international social workers can engage in practice confidently and provide employers with confirmation that they have received this orientation. Patrick said:

I would have been very glad to go through a system like this. For instance ... let’s say, a three, four, five month bridging program, not really to test you but rather to orient you to ... appreciate your environment, your experiences and then ... bringing some perspectives from the Canadian culture, the Canadian experience to what you already know.

One such bridging program exists at Ryerson University for internationally educated social workers, which is the only one in Canada. Maxwell stated that he considered the IESW program but it was in its early stages at that time

and was not sure how it would be received by the field. Patrick, on the other hand, would not be accepted to the IESW program because it requires applicants to have been assessed as equivalent by CASW and his credentials were assessed as not equivalent to any Canadian social work education. Furthermore, the IESW is a full year diploma program so its commitment is the same as other MSW degree programs.

In summary, reflecting the views of the other participants, Patrick stated:

What I learned is not something I would have paid that much for, to go and learn ... I could have gotten all that experience from ... a different context, for instance ... it's not something you need to go ... for a Masters degree to go and learn. It's something I could have, for instance, learned on the job, meeting people on the job, talking to people in everyday life experience ... So it's not something that you need to go to school to ... learn or to experience.

What could be different?

There were a number of retrospective wishes of universities identified by the participants, beginning with greater coordination between academia and the field of social work (CASW and OCSWSSW). International social workers have to find their way through two different systems, though there are obvious connections and overlap. Such coordination would also increase consistency and thoroughness of assessments. Furthermore, universities and especially schools of social work should seek to live up the values they claim and reconsider whether their practices regarding internationally-trained social workers are consistent with principles of social justice and equity. Schools of social work claim that they value different ideas and oppose discrimination but the practices described by the participants suggest that international social workers need to become Canadian social workers to be 'true' social workers. As referenced previously, there was also the suggestion

that bridging programs be implemented at more universities to reduce unnecessary repetition and the significant costs of time, money and energy to immigrants who have limited resources and power. Since neither of these suggestions are in place at this time, participants also suggested the universities should be more transparent with their equivalency assessments and give more consideration to credit recognition to decrease repetition.

Robert asked:

[W]hat is the basis and how [does] the whole process work? It's a bit of a black box if I can say so ... How that looks like. On what grounds and ... is this [uniform] for all universities in Ontario, in the whole Canada? ... Is it done by certain standards? None of this was clear to me ... if I would ... have [known] how the process worked, I may have contributed to provide additional information if necessary to obtain some type, some kind of recognition from a Canadian university and maybe repeat only those parts that were absolutely necessary and not re-do the whole program.

The universities should also be taking the initiative to engage with internationally-trained social workers in their contexts as newcomers. This engagement ranged from actively providing opportunities to orient international social workers to the university system as well as social work in Canada but to being conscious of instructors' and students' presentations in courses. Robert stated, "[I]t's quite useful if people are mindful of how they use language," which include acronyms, words and phrases that may not be known to recent immigrants. At the same time, intentional awareness of the different cultural and experiential contexts of international social workers will reinforce the diversity in social work theory and practice around the world and Canada as a country. Not only should schools of social work make efforts to include international perspectives but access these international social workers in their midst as resources for knowledge and experience that faculty and students from Canada cannot know. Similarly, Patrick wished that

instructors were more available for dialogue beyond providing feedback on assignments, particularly when there are differences in communication styles. It was clearly stated by all three participants that they were willing to engage in further education and could recognize the value in gaining orientation to a new country and culture but the universities did not facilitate this in a reasonable or just way.

5.5 Major costs and psychological impacts

Money, time, energy and goals

The decision to emigrate from one's country of origin is surely not an easy one. To leave behind all that you know – family, friends, community, culture – for a foreign land is not made quickly or without great consideration and grief as no matter what the hopes for gain may be there are obvious losses. When immigrating to Canada, the participants described their hopes and expectations previously in section II. There are rarely benefits obtained without some costs; to receive, we must give. In this section, the significant costs identified by the participants will be reviewed in order to inform potential changes within the system to move toward greater justice and equity for those who choose to respond to the offers of opportunity made by Canada as a whole and social work and universities more specifically.

There were many expenses that the participants had to pay through the immigration, professional registration and university processes. There were financial demands as they needed to pay for immigration documents, application fees to OCSWSSW and universities, credential assessment fees to CASW (including translation of documents) as well as having sufficient financial resources in hand to provide for themselves and/or their families upon arriving in Canada. Each participant was employed prior to leaving their

countries of origin; they did not immigrate in the absence of stable employment. When arriving in Canada with nothing but clothing, the participants had to set up a new life that required housing and its associated costs, food, transportation and all the things that people who have not been in that situation likely take for granted. These arrangements also needed to be made in an unfamiliar part of the world with an unfamiliar culture and possibly without support as they may not know anyone else in the area. It is then that they need to find financial resources to pay OCSWSSW (\$375) and CASW (\$339) to have their credentials assessed and, if given equivalency, register as a social worker in order to seek employment. Because of these high financial costs, Maxwell was not able to apply for two years after immigrating, as he described, “[I]t takes a lot of money to assess ... money’s a crunch at that time.” As a result, he had to ‘survival’ employment as a labourer in order to provide for his family, a common experience for immigrants. While Patrick and Robert did not seek ‘survival’ jobs before returning to university, each expressed similar “financial strain”, as Robert stated, in providing for their own needs as well as the costs of attending university for “something you already achieved,” which Robert described as a “very expensive reminder.”

The participants also described the time investment required from preparing to immigrate and arranging to leave everything and everyone they know. Upon arrival, the participants described seeking employment before returning to university. When they were unable to find employment in social work, they attended universities to obtain Canadian credentials that would enable them to obtain jobs at the level of recognition they felt they deserved. In spite of choosing to immigrate to Canada in response to the great opportunities for personal and professional advancement, the participants had

to spend significant amounts of time discovering they could not access those prospects and repeating their MSW education. Patrick and Robert described the time required as “wasted” and “not productive” in which they could not move on with life in the way they had planned.

All of these efforts required physical and emotional energy and those demands increased when they encountered barriers to obtaining goals they set and expected to reach prior to immigrating. Patrick described the energy demanded by “unnecessary battles at the expense of your family ... So it ... became how you could cope with the system, what you could do to make the best out of what is at hand rather than trying to fight the system.” This theme of conflict and battle with a system is also reflected in the previous findings about frustration and powerlessness. Regarding the CASW assessment process and the demand for more documentation, Robert expressed, “I’m making all [these] efforts. I spend lots of money to send him the documentation. I have to take days off from work to go to the university and ... everybody looked at me and said, ‘What the heck do you want from us? We gave you all the documents, sent them and that’s it.’” This description also reflects the costs of being caught between two systems in the country of origin and in Canada, trying to understand both and explain them to each other to satisfy the requirements of the new country only to result in the experience of being denied their credentials and hopes for their new lives in their new country.

These costs of financial resources, time and energy also reflect the participants’ loss of free choice and the requirements of further sacrifice. Robert described the whole process as “an investment of life” since it was all-consuming. Their respective future plans were put on hold as they had to

give up these resources in order to repeat their graduate degrees in order to pursue their original goals. The participants did not come to Canada as refugees, seeking safety from war or disaster; they were invited by Canada to utilize their skills to benefit this country and receive the opportunities offered as a result to them and their families. Instead, they described struggling with basic survival tasks as immigrants for themselves. After completing their Canadian MSW, the participants did not express having gained something better or different. Rather, they described going through the motions to obtain a “fake paper” to satisfy the prejudicial and discriminatory perspectives of the Canadian social work system and its employers. Furthermore, this sacrifice by the participants was described to go even further by Patrick. He expressed his previous interest in pursuing a Ph.D. but sadly shared, “Canada killed all my ambitions for academic work.” It was not only that the participants had to give up these things but they also had some of them taken away as yet another reminder of their lack of power in this system that presented a very different picture of itself before the participants immigrated.

Stoic acceptance, loss of power, regret, denial, deception and resilience

The participants described many feelings experienced through their credential assessment and university experiences. While Maxwell expressed that he was proud of being accepted into university and Robert also described feeling happy at his acceptance, there were no other significant positive emotions expressed in their descriptions, though Maxwell and Patrick described resilience in spite of their circumstances. At points, Maxwell described a measure of stoicism in response to his credentials being devalued by CASW. He stated, “Emotionally, I don’t know how much emotion

I can have here ... I should move forward so no emotion.” However, he also expressed:

It is frustrating in one way because we have other priorities such as living a life ... especially an immigrant like me who must work to maintain a family and going to school is a secondary thing ... but we have to do this to survive in this country, get into a job so that way it is frustrating. Studying it was, I don't mind studying any, I like to study. But after a couple of years coming here, working, the study dynamics go inside me, it's very hard.

As described previously, Maxwell presented with a passive acceptance of the devaluation process and barriers he encountered. This could be the result of having seen more life-threatening and less hopeful situations in his life as he described, “I have seen real hardship in life ... I lived with people in community where they struggle...” In addition, Maxwell shared his different perspective on the make-up of a social worker that does not hold academic qualifications, College registration and professional designation as greater than the intentions and heart of the profession. He stated:

[T]he social worker is somebody who has an attitude. Maybe a social worker if he is an academic or he doesn't have a Master - doesn't matter. They'll be a social worker wherever they go, I believe. The compassion, the care ... [they] stand for people whom [they] believe [are] right. So a social worker is always a professional [who] stand[s] for that. So once I have that attitude, of course, I don't mind any academic credentials. I will be there ... When formal in institution or informally, I'll be a social worker there.

There is a commitment and resilience in this perspective that is inspiring. However, the practical side is that the opportunities to use the formal training in paid employment under the title of 'social worker' are limited by credential assessment, devaluation and licensing in this province. Attitude and values are not considered in licensing.

Robert expressed his feelings of frustration and loss of power through his experiences as he could not influence the devaluation assessments of his credentials and had to put his life on hold in order to repeat his MSW. In

particular, he reported significant efforts to engage with CASW to obtain the equivalency he believed he deserved. In spite of being a very intelligent individual with multiple degrees, he could not understand the processes being used, often as a result of a lack of information, reinforcing his lack of power and causing confusion. As noted previously, he also felt anxious and threatened after that experience as his previous understanding of engaging with authorities in his country of origin was fraught with risk. As a result, he did not pursue credential or credit recognition with the university, a decision he expressed that he later regretted. Robert said, "So now looking back, I think that was a big mistake. I should have posed the question..." He also described:

deep feelings of reactions to all this. I could tell you this – it's really unpleasant. Somebody to tell you that your education is substandard without any clarification of why ... you feel denied, not only in the level of knowledge you have but also in your experience...

As stated previously, Robert was measured in his responses and concerned about the strength of the words he used, often stating a stronger word (e.g. "discriminatory") but then softening it (e.g. "unnecessary"). He described his concern for the feelings of his university instructors, thereby subjugating his own thoughts and feelings of being devalued and disempowered to those with power.

The strongest descriptions of the psychological impacts of their experiences were expressed by Patrick. Just as Robert spoke of feeling "denied", Patrick stated, "You realize that ... you were more or less deceived into coming to Canada" and described feeling "cheated" because he left his country of origin, family, friends and employment in response to the promise of recognition as a desired professional that was not fulfilled as described. He described feeling threatened by engaging in a "difficult battle" in which his

family's survival was at stake. This threat was also reflected in his statement that "you have to do something to keep your head afloat," in which the metaphor implies drowning. Patrick and the other participants did not come to Canada to survive but found themselves in with greater needs than they had before they immigrated. Patrick described his degree repetition experience as "a source of ... excruciating pain and stress" because of the financial and time costs as well as the repetition and lack of gaining useful information or skill. As mentioned in the previous section, Patrick described his academic ambitions being "killed" by Canada, reflecting his experience of great loss of a future goal through an intentional act of violence, which matches his descriptions of being at battle and in conflict. He stated his perception that the impersonal "system" sought to "squeeze money out of you or frustrate you" but that he and his fellow immigrants would not give up. Patrick's resilience and strength were unfortunately tested through his experiences, which he described using a cultural metaphor:

Like, in my language, we say that if whoever is chasing you has not stopped, you also don't stop. Or if whatever is chasing you has not stopped, you don't stop running so you have to keep running ... I needed to move on. There was no time to be stuck.

Through the participants' expressions and descriptions of their experiences and insights, it is clear that there were significant personal and professional costs as well as psychological impacts as a result of their devaluation experiences after immigrating and repeating their MSWs at Ontario universities. However, in spite of their negative experiences with the social work field and universities, they did not give up on their goals. Robert appeared to speak the shared hope for the participants and this researcher when he said:

I'm definitely sure this could be improved and that's one of the reasons I am participating in your study, sharing my story that, hopefully, somebody could look back and say, 'Oh, maybe we can do it better for the next generation.'

Chapter 6: Discussion

Through research such as this and opportunities for international social workers to join together and demand more just and equitable recognition by national and provincial institutions, the possibility of liberation becomes realized. While institutions often have noble purposes at their beginnings, they can become entrenched in their own practices and lose sight of their original intentions. By seeking to engage in dialogue with those who are being affected by the decisions made by powerful institutions, there is the possibility of consciousness-raising and greater awareness of oppression and domination.

However, when entrenched practices of institutions are questioned, there can often be defensive responses to such perceived threats. Institutions and the individuals within them may seek to protect themselves against challenges that suggest their practices are contrary to their high ideals and are in fact contributing to injustice. Such accusations may be particularly difficult for social work institutions and practitioners. Social work seeks to protect and oppose oppression; the possibility that we have directly or indirectly contributed to marginalization is unsettling and disturbing.

Even though this reality is discussed in academia and workplaces in the abstract, those with power will understandably recoil from the suggestion that they are participating in its reality. This researcher's intention is not to condemn anyone but to call everyone and every institution interested in social justice into reflective dialogue with the marginalized people whom we claim have so much to teach us. Instead of responding with cynical or defensive responses about why the participants (and the others whom they represent)

did not understand the process or must not be correct about details, it is hoped that protective walls will be lowered and the perspectives of the participants will be accepted as being valid and informative for becoming more consistent in acting on our stated ideals. The participants courageously offered their accounts of undergoing credential assessment, devaluation and returning to university to obtain Canadian graduate degrees and their reasons for doing so. Instead of viewing the participants as threats, they should be viewed as trustworthy colleagues who share the same values and principles of social work as native-born social workers. In fact, the participants may appreciate Canadian values and systems more than native-born Canadians since they chose to immigrate to Canada over other countries and spoke of respect for the best of what Canada has to offer.

The purpose of this research was two-fold: first, to engage participants in dialogue with a person of the dominant class and provide some recognition of their circumstances in hopes that it contributes in some small way to their personal validation and emancipation. Second, as a member of the dominant class, the researcher wants to share the stories of the marginalized participants with the ruling institutions and the individuals within them as an opportunity to reflect on their dominance and seek to make changes to their entrenched practices and policies so that those in power will live up to the ideals they proclaim.

Critical theory offers significant insight and explanation of the experiences of international social workers who immigrate to Canada and repeat their graduate degrees (in addition to more broad application to internationally-trained professionals). As previously identified, the goal of critical theory is to reveal hidden structures that order what is observed to facilitate progress

toward improved individual and social experiences of the world. In addition, interpretative phenomenological analysis provides the pathway for accessing the lived experiences of internationally-trained social workers who have engaged with these powerful institutions and offers affirmation for others in the same circumstances as well as insights to such experiences for outsiders. This research has offered the opportunity to thoroughly examine the institutional structures that govern the field of social work as well as post-secondary education and how they impact the lives of international social workers in Ontario. This chapter will focus on highlighting the barriers faced by international social workers after immigrating to Ontario through a critical lens. While it is hoped that this research will stimulate further inquiry and dialogue about the experiences of internationally-trained social workers, this chapter will present three primary opportunities for institutional stakeholders to reflect upon and act.

6.1 Issues with equivalency assessments

Since the regulation of social work restricts who can use the title of 'social worker' with the intention of protecting the public, it is here that the impact on internationally-trained social workers begins. Registration in Ontario is only based on academic credentials established by the CASWE so practice experience is devalued when CASW (and OCSWSSW by extension) focuses only on curriculum and field placement. Instead of recognizing post-education social work employment as potentially demonstrating effective social work practice, field placement hours are considered more valuable in reflecting social work skills than years of social work practice through employment. CASW states that they "cannot take into consideration work experience as it

cannot be assessed. Work experience cannot compensate for a lack of field work hours because it is not part of an educational process”

(http://www.casw-acts.ca/sites/default/files/attachements/Common%20Questions%20and%20Answers_E.pdf). This position appears without further explanation on their

website and no explanation was offered during contact with CASW (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). This position begs the question, why? Why can field placements in foreign countries be assessed but work experience cannot? If international schools of social work require field placements with an accompanying seminar but may have fewer hours required, it seems reasonable that subsequent years of social work employment could make up for the discrepancy. After all, what employer or service user would prefer a new graduate with six months (900 hours) of placement experience over a practicing social worker with one year (1800 hours) of experience? CASWE standards for field placement hours are not based on a universal formula for practice preparation but a minimum requirement that had to be defined. If another country's social work standard was 850 hours of placement experience, it would not be suggested that the discrepant 50 hours could be demonstrated to be integral to preparation.

While the field placement requirements exist for all students in Canadian schools of social work, the requirements affect international social workers differently because they have completed the academic requirements in their country of origin (including supervised field placements) but then find their whole degree and ability to practice discounted for a few missing hours.

While the participants identified that they felt academically prepared for practice upon graduating from the MSW programs in their countries of origin,

Maxwell distinguished between having academic knowledge and lacking practice experience. His comment reflects that field placements are good but limited in value and the further knowledge and skill are developed upon leaving academia and practicing in the field. The participants were successful in practicing in their countries of origin and recruited to immigrate based on the combination of their academic and practice credentials. As Robert stated:

These people who repeat their MSW, I think most of them already have also worked as social workers so that in itself is also question of, ok, they are not recognized academically but they were able to function as workers for, some times, extended period of times but all of a sudden, just crossing the continents, that's not valid anymore. Says who? On what grounds? For what reasons?

Unfortunately, the CASW ended communication with the researcher so these valid questions have no answer at this time. Furthermore, the fact that Patrick and Robert share that the CASW offered recognition of work and/or volunteer experience in their circumstances demonstrates that the CASW can and will assess non-field placement experience. The fact that they would only do so toward BSW equivalency appears unreasonable.

In addition, the CASW process maintains expectations of international social work programs that are not considered valuable by all Ontario or Canadian schools of social work and contradict its own principles. For example, the CASW claims that it engages in unique assessments of international social workers and considers each assessment without generalizations. For example, they do not compile lists of international social work programs that have been assessed as equivalent so that future assessments can use that information (S. Guy, personal communication, April 16, 2015). In doing so, the CASW contributes to the isolation of international social workers as each assessment is dependent on the assessor rather than a cumulative assessment process that occurred before them.

Yet, at the same time, the CASW states that membership in the IASSW for an international school of social work “gives an indication of whether the institution is recognized as a professional social work training centre and whether it views itself as a part of the international social work community” (<http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/international-assessment-credentials>). However, membership is granted to schools upon payment (\$345 a year for a North American school), not evaluation and recognition. As well, only six Ontario schools of social work (King’s University College at Western, Laurentian, McMaster, Renison University College at Waterloo and York) are members of the IASSW while eight are not (Algoma, Carleton, Lakehead, Ottawa, Toronto, Trent, Wilfrid Laurier and Windsor). In fact, across Canada, there are only eight other institutional members (British Columbia, Calgary, Manitoba, McGill, Montreal, Regina, St. Thomas and Victoria). Does this indicate that the majority of Ontario and Canadian schools of social work are not recognized as “professional social work training centres” or that they do not consider themselves “part of the international social work community”? On the contrary, it reflects that many Canadian schools of social work do not consider the IASSW to be a necessary organization and the CASW holds international schools of social work to standards not expected of Canadian schools. Further inconsistency is reflected in the fact that the CASW is the sole credential assessment provider for the profession nationally but they are not a member of the Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC); this suggests, according to their own principle, that the CASW does not consider itself as a part of the national (let alone international) accreditation community. However, if the IASSW has useful information to offer, as this researcher believes it does, it would behave

the CASW to engage with the IASSW to develop beneficial relationships with international schools of social work (beyond names on a list) that would inform their credential assessments.

Internationally-trained social workers may receive licensure in Ontario if the school of social work they attended meets the requirements of Canadian standards, which raises questions about western social work's dominant position. The credential assessment process used in social work, both in the field and academic institutions, has not been subjected to questions about its intent, foundation, values and processes. Social work is used to criticizing other institutions about the absence of justice and presence of discrimination but there has been an absence of scrutiny applied by social work and its institutions to itself. In completing assessments on international social workers with the power to deny their education and experience recognition as equivalent in value to a Canadian social worker (whose education is assumed, not assessed, to be sufficient since it was obtained in North America), the CASW and schools of social work require international social work programs to meet North American standards, suggestive of a professional xenophobia that 'foreigners' pose a threat to the Canadian/western practice of social work. However, the participants describe receiving similar education in their countries of origin as they did when they repeated their degrees in Ontario. These responses suggest that the credential assessment process is flawed as there was minimal content described by the participants to be novel in their Ontario MSW programs in terms of social work principles and practice. It is not known if western education and experience is viewed with such suspicion and potentially

devalued in non-western countries, though it seems unlikely given western dominance throughout the world.

Just as the OCSWSSW defers its credential assessments and responsibility to the CASW and the CASW defers to the CASWE standards, most universities and schools of social work appear to depend on the assessments of other organizations for assessing the academic credentials of internationally-trained social workers. As stated previously, the OURA's Graduate Studies International Admission Placement Guide is a primary source of information for universities even though this Placement Guide has not been updated in almost ten years. Given the OURA's lack of transparency and accountability, universities and especially schools of social work should be taking more responsibility for assessing the credentials of international social workers. It is concerning that public universities could form an association (OURA) that is beyond the reach of government oversight and public inquiry. The fact that the OURA will not share its information or processes should raise serious questions about its intentions and reliability.

Universities have no apparent impetus to reconsider their practices of credential assessment and facilitating degree and course repetition as there is no oversight of their decisions. On the contrary, they have reasons to maintain these practices, though these are inconsistent with their stated values and the values of social work. As noted previously, the lack of credential recognition for internationally-trained has created a training market in Canada that results in increased revenue for universities. When international social workers experience credential devaluation, they may need to repeat their degree in order to engage in practice in Canada. Ontario universities not only obtain a paying student that would otherwise not seek

enrolment but, as Maxwell expressed, they can have increased confidence that the student will be successful because the student has already completed graduate studies in his/her country of origin, which boosts their graduation rates and results in future students considering that university. As noted previously, it is sometimes suggested that international professionals (including social workers) need greater English language skills or knowledge of the Canadian context. However, previous research noted in the literature review and the participants in this research clearly identified that repeating their graduate degree did not provide such language skills or context. Furthermore, education on Canadian systems and social norms was not greater through degree repetition than learning through employment experience like any other new graduate. Schools of social work should be engaging differently with international social workers and seeking to uphold social work values for themselves and their students but also presenting an example to the rest of the university.

Some, like Maxwell, accept the assessment outcome that the system has found them lacking. However, others like Patrick and Robert question this devaluation and maintain at least internally that they do not accept the Canadian judgement that they are less than equivalent. All three participants experienced some degree of 'false consciousness', whether it was Maxwell accepting that he must be missing something compared to his Canadian-educated counterparts though he did not know what it was, or Patrick and Robert eventually acquiescing to the demand for Canadian credentials through repeating their MSW because they could not fight the system or see hope for the outcome to change. This reflects the great power held by the institutions involved; the lack of transparency and accountability protects the

ruling powers from criticism. Since the credential assessment process and devaluation experiences of the participants (insofar as they reflect the experiences of other international social workers) were endured as individuals, they experienced isolation, just as critical theory describes. As well, the lack of genuine dialogue described by the participants with the institutions contributes to their continued oppression. Some individuals may act on their personal power and agency to try to engage with the system in their quest for recognition, like Robert did, but they have been solitary figures fighting dominant powers that can choose to ignore the questions without consequence. In this way, the hope of critical theory that the revelation of hidden structures (which are actively or passively facilitated by institutional structures and powers) may contribute to emancipation cannot be achieved in isolation. While critical theory asserts that individuals have agency, consciousness-raising alone will not necessarily result in emancipation since their choices are still limited (or eliminated) by the ruling powers. This problem requires the powerful institutions to recognize the untenable positions in which they are placing international social workers and act to counter their own domination and share power with those who are being marginalized.

6.2 Uncoordinated institutions

There is little to no coordination between institutions at this time, which results in confusion and frustration for internationally-trained social workers as the participants described. To begin, the federal government actively recruits based on academic and professional credentials but the provincial regulatory bodies may not recognize the same credentials once people have

immigrated. While the federal government is now requiring pre-immigration credential assessments, these are being completed by general CASs instead of the CASW so the same problem exists because international social workers are obtaining general credential assessments for the immigration process that are not accepted by the OCSWSSW as sufficient for registration.

The continued conflict between 'admission criteria' for immigration and 'employment criteria' rages on and international social workers are among the casualties. It is imperative that the federal government (CIC), provincial/territorial governments and social work regulatory bodies improve communication and coordination to ensure that international social workers are not being recruited to this country but denied recognition of their credentials after immigrating. This simple step would improve consistency in the immigration process, address employers' reticence to accept international credentials and positively change the experience of international social workers across the country. Social work should be taking the lead role in this issue as it not only affects the profession but also members who are marginalized. International social workers who are considering immigrating to Canada would likely rather know that their credentials may not be recognized for registration or employment in advance of applying so they can make decisions from a fully informed position instead of being "deceived," as Patrick described the experience.

In regards to social work, OCSWSSW defers the assessment of social work credentials to the CASW, which is not consistent in its practices nor is it accountable for its decisions in spite of far-reaching consequences in the lives of internationally-trained social workers. As Robert described, he was unable to obtain satisfactory answers to questions about the credential assessment

process and the answers given changed multiple times. Furthermore, two participants reported experiences that were inconsistent with the CASW stated process. The CASW executive director also abruptly ended communication with this researcher, raising questions about how the CASW handles questions from internationally-trained social workers who are most affected by CASW decisions. In fact, the Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) has offered a critique of OCSWSSW in this regard. The OFC stated that “it was not clear ... what measures the OCSWSSW takes to hold ... [third parties like the CASW] accountable for making fair assessments” and were encouraged to “take measures to ensure that assessments conducted by academic credential assessment agencies are transparent, objective, impartial and fair” (Office of the Fairness Commissioner, 2014, p.11). In addition, the OFC also described inconsistent statements by OCSWSSW regarding their compliance with Fair Access to Regulated Professions and Compulsory Trades Act (FARPACTA). OCSWSSW subsequently could not provide documentation to demonstrate that their staff and committee members were being trained on the FARPACTA objectives, resulting in the OFC stating that OCSWSSW was not able to prove it was “meeting its obligations with respect to impartiality” (Office of the Fairness Commissioner, 2014, p.13).

There is a lack of accountability between OCSWSSW and the CASW and to the international social workers affected. The CASW can complete an assessment that devalues an international social worker’s credentials but the CASW does not have to defend its decision to a higher authority. The international social worker can appeal the decision but, as Patrick stated, there questions about the legitimacy of such a process since the original

decision is being re-evaluated by the same organization. Furthermore, Robert recounted being told by the CASW executive director that the organization does not generally change its decisions. The OCSWSSW can avoid responsibility for devaluation because it was the CASW's assessment, not the OCSWSSW, though they endorse it by accepting it. The lack of accountability provides limited recourse for the individual affected. While the participants and others like them could try to appeal to a higher authority like the OFC in Ontario, they would need to know about such a possibility. As well, it is not clear if the OFC would have any jurisdiction over the CASW given the former is provincial and the latter is a national organization. As noted above, in June 2014, the OFC directed the OCSWSSW to take steps to hold the CASW accountable for decisions but there had been no specific action reported by the OCSWSSW on this matter to this time (B. Bindman, personal communication, May 12, 2015). These social work stakeholders should be seeking to improve their coordination with each other as well as the larger field of social work. If they are not willing or able to demonstrate improvements in this regard, the provincial government should intervene and provide formal oversight.

In the event that the credentials of internationally-trained social workers are legitimately assessed as insufficient to practice or be recognized at the level of their previous academic achievements, they may choose to return to university to obtain Canadian credentials. However, there is no coordination between CASW and schools of social work in spite of the CASW's assessment being based on CASWE standards that are also the basis for the accreditation of schools of social work. Just as the OCSWSSW defers responsibility to the CASW, the CASW defers to the CASWE and avoids

accountability. Since each institution owns separate steps of the credential assessment and licensing process, they are not held responsible for the practices and decisions of the others. This arrangement also suggests a form of professional protectionism. Instead of being able to attend university to complete only certain courses or gain more field placement hours, international social workers have to repeat their graduate degrees and, in some schools, complete a one-year update to their undergraduate degree (e.g. King's University College at Western). While participants described valuing the opportunity to orient themselves to their new country, which was consistent with the literature, they identified that this was not what they obtained by repeating their graduate degree and were more interested in a bridging program. However, the Internationally Educated Social Work Professionals (IESW) Bridging Program at Ryerson University requires students to have received an assessment of equivalence by the CASW (the only school to do so). By endorsing the CASW assessment, the only bridging program in Canada also excludes some international social workers.

Schools of social work do not necessarily engage in thorough assessment of credentials but often rely on the assessment of another party, such as their graduate studies office or OURA's Graduate Studies International Admissions Placement Guide, to evaluate the level of academic training and grades of internationally-trained social workers. As with the CASW and OCSWSSW, international social workers are again experiencing devaluation by the universities and schools of social work as their academic credentials and prior learning are not recognized and there is no explanation offered or required. They have their skills and practice experience ignored (since the CASW says that practice experience "cannot be assessed") and they have to repeat their

graduate degree without recognition of individual courses that would reduce their workload. This situation reflects the lack of engaged assessment by the schools of social work since credit recognition would indicate intentional and thorough consideration of courses to prevent unnecessary repetition.

On the contrary, there is also a lack of coordination within universities in this regard. For example, at McMaster University, international undergraduate degrees from accredited universities are considered equivalent and the same degree cannot be repeated (R. Hamilton, personal communication, May 7, 2015). However, some international graduate social work degrees from accredited universities are not considered equivalent and individuals need to repeat their MSWs instead of having their international degree recognized and being able to proceed to a higher level of education (i.e., doctorate) after immigrating to Canada. This repetition of their MSW and each course was described by the participants to be unnecessary, expensive and discriminatory. The general acceptance of international undergraduate education but non-acceptance of some international graduate education by schools of social work is peculiar and without explanation at this time.

It appears illogical and unreasonable to propose that all Canadian and American schools of social work provide the same education on the same material, which is essentially the claim of the CASWE and CASW. Ontario schools of social work are known to have significant differences in perspectives and their graduate programs contain obvious differences (e.g. the presence or absence of a thesis) so it seems likely that there are differences between provinces and certainly between Canada and the United States. To require assessment of international social workers and their academic programs in order to grant equivalency while American social

workers are not subjected to formal assessment before being licensed to practice in Canada appears prejudicial. In fact, it is the natural differences and diversity that schools of social work should be promoting. In a country as diverse as Canada, international social workers bring values, knowledge and skills that can sharpen those of their Canadian colleagues. Credential recognition facilitates equal participation in professional practice and only enhances Canadian social work as opposed to threatening or detracting from it.

Lastly, it should not be the responsibility of marginalized social workers to call the attention of the social work institutions to their marginalization. Social work more than other disciplines declares itself to be conscious of oppression and active to oppose domination. Schools of social work are frequently leaders of dialogue in the field and should be recognizing the potential for marginalization of international social workers and seeking to prevent it within the academy and challenging it in the field. The response to non-recognition of international credentials should be met with scepticism, investigation and advocacy for our international colleagues in addition to creating increased opportunities for achievement of recognition without full repetition of degrees where possible.

6.3 Discrepancy between Canadian value claims and actions on international social workers' credentials

Before practical changes can be made, it is necessary to reflect on the perspectives held that inform decisions. All major stakeholders at national and provincial/territorial levels, including the field of social work as well as academic institutions, express strong support for equality for marginalized

people and produce formal value statements to this end. However, declarations of values are only as meaningful as they are reflected in practice. The literature details the disconnection between the statements and actions of stakeholders as internationally-trained professionals described experiencing deception and discrimination upon immigrating to Canada. This research reflects similar experiences of three international social workers who immigrated to Ontario, raising important questions for the field of social work as well as universities about how immigrants, their countries of origin, international educational systems and international social work are viewed and what informs these perceptions.

Though Canada is viewed internationally as a welcoming country that embraces diversity and stands opposed to discrimination, participants describe changes in these views once immigrants arrive and experience the inconsistency between the country's claims and its truth. The reality that internationally-trained professionals (and immigrants, in general) experience discrimination and prejudice is not surprising to the field of social work or to other disciplines in academia. In particular, social workers are often in formal positions to hear sad stories of oppression and disempowerment. Conversely, social workers are less aware and prepared to hear that they may be participants in their colleagues' stories of oppression, whether passive or active. It is here that social work and universities need to begin reflecting on their values and actions in respect to internationally-trained social workers (as well as other professionals).

While written endorsements of social work values of social justice and equity are made by federal and provincial governments, within the field of social work (such as CASW and OCSWSSW) as well as at schools of social

work and universities across the country, the participants described experiencing unjust and inequitable treatment in regards to recognition of their credentials and/or treatment by these institutions. These ruling powers also demonstrated their apparent lack of commitment to such values through, for some, their policies and practices and, for others, their outright refusal to discuss their policies and practices. The lack of transparency and unwillingness to answer questions suggests dominant arrogance and/or fear, both of which are problematic for international social workers. In addition, this lack of accountability should be problematic and unacceptable to social workers in Canada and around the world. These institutions hold great power over the lives of international social workers who have immigrated to Ontario. They have claimed values that they do not practice or do so inconsistently, rendering their declarations of justice and equity as empty or unfulfilled.

As stated in the literature review, "Social work is a profession that strives to protect the rights of visible minorities and other disadvantaged groups. Yet ... it is also a profession where social workers who come from disadvantaged groups still experience individual and systemic level forms of discrimination" (AAMCHC, 2006, p.2). The absence of research on this topic reflects the lack of recognition of the plight of the international social workers in this province and country. The reality that international social workers experience discrimination in their interactions with institutional stakeholders should drive the field to a period of reflection and consideration as well as dialogue. This dialogue should prioritize the experiences of international social workers after immigrating in order to inform necessary changes to immigration, credential recognition and regulation systems in this country and province. Furthermore, the intentional engagement with international social workers will

enlighten universities and the field of social work regarding international education, the similarities and differences and improve the basis for comparison.

At the present time, the responsibility is on international social workers to indirectly prove through academic documentation that they have equivalent credentials in order to practice their profession in this country and province or to pursue higher levels of education. The national and provincial stakeholders have no responsibility to demonstrate that international social workers lack the professional values and skills to practice or obtain post-graduate degrees; instead, the stakeholders only need to reject international credentials and international social workers need to conform to the Canadian and Ontarian system to gain some recognition. The powerless have to gain approval from the powerful while the powerful are often (at least, in social work) claiming to be advocates for the powerless. The assumption is that 'foreign' is different and to be treated with suspicion, whether individuals or education. Since international social workers are judged solely on academic documents which may be out-dated, translated poorly or misunderstood by assessors, they have no ability to demonstrate their values, knowledge and skills to the regulatory bodies and employers. Instead of viewing international social workers as members of the profession with much to offer the public and profession in this country, Canadian and Ontarian social work institutions engage in discriminatory professional protectionism under the guise of public protection and high standards. Uninformed risk aversion becomes discrimination which becomes denial of achievement and the ability to survive as employment cannot be obtained.

In the same way, schools of social work and universities appear to have adopted the same devalued perspective of internationally-trained social workers as Canadian and Ontarian social work institutions, though more ignorantly (i.e., uncritically). While this researcher learned that one school of social work in Ontario, King's University College at the University of Western Ontario, has been engaging more intentionally with this issue, others appear to passively endorse devaluation of the knowledge and practice of international social workers. This disengaged acceptance of discriminatory experiences should be troubling to academic institutions and schools of social work as leaders in cultural dialogue. The unstated assumption is that international education is different and lower in quality than Canadian education. This position is reflected in the blanket acceptance of social work degrees from any North American schools of social work, though there are certainly differences between schools in the same provinces, let alone between provinces and countries (the United States). This lack of recognition was experienced by one participant, Robert, who felt he was passed over for tutorial assistant (TA) positions in favour of those with Canadian degrees, some of whom had just graduated from the undergraduate program and had only field placement experience. He believed that his high academic achievement in his country of origin (including grades of 100% in his first MSW) and years of practice experience were devalued compared to some of his inexperienced classmates who were given TA positions over him. Not only does devaluation suggest scepticism and/or apathy toward international social workers but it also questions the values, knowledge, skills and purposes of international universities and schools of social work. When an internationally-trained social worker is required or allowed to repeat their

graduate degree without thorough individual assessment of their credentials, the Ontario school of social work and university receiving them are implying that the social worker's previous academic institutions were inadequate and/or incompetent to teach the values, knowledge and skills of the social work profession. Organizations such as the OURA and CASW that focus on assessing academic credentials are also making such statements about international academic institutions. It is possible that this is in fact a true statement on the previous academic institutions; however, in the absence of sufficient assessment and evidence, this is an indictment of the Ontario institutions, not international universities or social work.

Given the social construction of knowledge is ever-changing in the context of time and geography, a country like Canada that has a long history of immigration and claims progressive values would reasonably be expected to be generous in recognizing the worth of perspectives of people from different parts of the world. This recognition cannot merely be simple acknowledgement of different points of view but a pursuit of the knowledge that others hold in order to appreciate, understand and integrate varying ideas and experiences that are not known or less understood in this part of the world. Instead, the experiences of the participants are consistent with the literature that knowledge held by immigrants, including international social workers, is valued differently in Canada at best and devalued or denied at worst while Canadian knowledge is considered the minimum standard or greater within social work and universities. The field of social work and universities should be active in evaluating themselves and their participation in discriminatory practices in order to change their perspectives and refocus

their pursuit of social justice and equity as it affects international social workers.

6.4 Limitations of this study

It is acknowledged that this research was born out of the researcher's relationships with individuals impacted by credential devaluation so the potential for bias is recognized. However, without these relationships, this researcher may not have ever known about this topic or its impact on the lives of international social workers. The choices of IPA methodology and critical theory were intended to allow the participants to speak for themselves about their experiences with the dominant group, of which the researcher is a member. While the involvement of multiple researchers and/or assistants would be beneficial to share consultations and interpretations and provide a greater protection from bias, this was not possible with the present limitations of a Master level thesis and resources.

While the sample size was small, the experiences shared by the participants were consistent with each other as well as with the experiences of other internationally-trained professionals who immigrated to Canada and experienced credential devaluation as discussed in the literature, demonstrating validity. The extensive exploration of organizations operating nationally and provincially also contributed significant data about the processes involved in credential recognition and provided the systemic context for the experiences of international social workers. At the same time, the interpretative nature of this project means that the assertions and conclusions may not be consistent with the experiences of every internationally-trained social worker. Furthermore, given the double

hermeneutic of IPA, the researcher's interpretative engagement may also be different from the participants, though every effort was made to remain faithful to their descriptions.

It should be noted that the exclusion of reference to the participants' country of origin was a requirement of the McMaster Research Ethics Board due to their concern about maintaining anonymity and protecting from potential risk. This researcher recognized and agreed with the desire to avoid negative repercussions for participants. At the same time, this requirement 'colour-blinds' the experiences of the participants and the actions of the institutions as it is this researcher's contention that devaluation does not affect those with credentials from 'white' academic institutions (i.e., degrees from Canada, the USA, western Europe and Australia).

Lastly, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, there may be suggestions that the participants (and others like them) did not understand the information provided by CIC or processes used by the CASW, OCSWSSW or universities and schools of social work. It is recognized that this is possible. However, to begin from such a position suggests a defensive posture that is not interested in reflecting and learning but of defending territory. It is hoped that the reader will accept the descriptions shared by the participants as accurate reflections of their subjective experiences from which those of us with and in power can discover how our professional colleagues and fellow human beings are being treated by us and the systems we maintain.

6.5 Implications for practice and research

As a result of this research, there are a number of recommendations for national and provincial stakeholders. These suggestions include:

1. National social work dialogue regarding the challenges faced by international social workers with further research undertaken on this subject;
2. CASW
 - i. Engage in dialogue with other stakeholders (particularly international social workers) regarding the validity of the present assessment to discern whether assessment is accurately capturing core social work values, knowledge and skills as well as principles that seek to be inclusive rather than exclusive;
 - ii. Engage with IASSW and its members to gather current information on international social work programs;
 - iii. Increase transparency and accountability to internationally-trained social workers and field by giving more information about the credential assessment principles and processes;
 - iv. Implement direct communication in assessment process to increase clarity of information for assessment and international social worker being assessed;
 - v. Formally modify assessment to include practice experience obtained through employment;
 - vi. Advocate with federal government for pre-immigration credential assessments to be completed by CASW;

- vii. Engage with Canadian schools of social work to develop opportunities for internationally-trained social workers who may require limited enhancements to their credentials (e.g. specific courses, field placement hours) but do not require full repetition of their degree;
- viii. Develop new appeal process and external review for critical feedback on principles and processes of assessment (e.g. including internationally-trained social workers on staff and/or committees).

3. OCSWSSW

- i. Advocate with federal government for pre-immigration credential assessments to be completed by CASW or another government regulated public body focused on social work;
- ii. Increase involvement with CASW regarding credential assessment process to ensure internationally-trained social workers are being assessed fairly and transparently;
- iii. Specify degree level when asked by members or employers since it is information documented in CASW credential assessment.

4. Universities and schools of social work

- i. Review processes of assessing international credentials to ensure that international credentials are done so fairly and transparently with attention to being inclusive rather than exclusive;

- ii. Increase direct communication with internationally-trained applicants to ensure that they have understanding of credential assessment process;
 - iii. Provide on-going support to recent immigrants in navigating the education system;
 - iv. Explore greater coordination with social work stakeholders in credential assessment, offering opportunities for completing courses and/or field placements to facilitate degree recognition;
 - v. Facilitate credit recognition for internationally-trained social workers to reduce unnecessary course repetition;
 - vi. Develop further bridging programs for internationally-trained social workers that will provide orientation to new country/province and facilitate prompt engagement with employment;
 - vii. Take leadership role in dialogue on credential recognition in social work in order to validate international social work education and international social workers;
 - viii. Demand increased transparency and accountability from OURA for their role in credential recognition.
5. Federal & provincial/territorial governments
- i. Improve clear communication to potential immigrants regarding potential barriers to employment;
 - ii. Increase coordination regarding admission criteria and employment criteria;

- iii. Pre-immigration credential assessments should be completed by the CASW, not CAS;
- iv. Develop some method of oversight to ensure that credentials are more fairly assessed while regulatory bodies and employers are not refusing credential recognition, including the CASW, OCSWSSW, universities and OURA.

As noted in the literature review, the field of social work has expended significant time and energy assessing other disciplines and highlighting injustice and discrimination but there has been no attention given to these issues experienced by internationally-trained social workers. Further research should occur regarding the comparability of social work values, knowledge and skills around the world and what specifically international social workers want and/or need after immigrating to Canada.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

At national and provincial levels, international professionals have not merely been invited to immigrate but have been actively pursued. Professionals from around the world are recruited to fill important roles in this country's infrastructure, including social services, that its citizens hold dear. While Canadian schools of social work continue to grant degrees annually, international social workers have also been asked to bring their credentials and skills to this land in exchange for attractive opportunities not available in their countries of origin.

While some have immigrated and been able to engage in practice, others have arrived and discovered that their credentials and experience that enabled them to enter the country were subsequently considered inadequate to gain entry to practice or the next level of academic study. Instead of being able to resume their professional practice and achieving personal and professional goals that they believed were available for them in Canada, some international social workers find themselves seeking survival employment to provide for their families and/or attending universities to obtain Canadian credentials that will enable them to be licensed to practice and gain employment in their new country. Internationally-trained social workers who find their credentials devalued experience significant confusion, frustration and powerlessness in their interactions with the CASW rather than the enthusiastic welcome they were expecting.

The foundations of social work include taking up the cause of marginalized people, defending the weak, poor and oppressed. However, when those being marginalized are international social workers, social work

as a field has remained silent. At the same time, social work institutions such as the CASW, employers and schools of social work have been active in devaluing international credentials, declaring to our international colleagues on our behalf that we do not consider them our equals in the profession. Some social workers will give in to this devaluative assessment while others will seek to alter it; however, given their isolation and lack of power, they cannot overcome the barriers erected so they acquiesce to the demand of Canadian credentials.

Returning to university, an institution known around the world for its high ideals and attention to social justice issues, internationally-trained social workers hope for recognition in whole or in part of their previous academic achievements and experience. However, in Ontario, they receive further devaluation instead. Universities do not recognize their previous graduate degrees or any of their previous courses, resulting in international social workers repeating their MSW. The participants expressed disappointment at the disengagement of schools of social work in recognizing them as immigrants in a new country or colleagues with experience in the field. They described feeling like they had no choice but to repeat their MSW in order to satisfy prejudicial and discriminatory expectations for Canadian credentials.

If international social workers repeated their MSWs and were able to describe the new things they learned that were necessary for practice in Ontario and Canada, it may seem like a reasonable requirement. Instead, the participants in this research expressed clearly that the material they were taught in Ontario schools of social work was consistent with the education in their countries of origin. For one participant, his undergraduate program was more advanced than the Ontario graduate program. In addition, the

consideration that providing Canadian cultural instruction would be valuable was also minimized by the participants as the cultural orientation either did not occur or the repetition of a graduate degree was an inappropriate expectation to gain what could be received through employment.

International social workers experience significant sacrifice to come to Canada and when they find their new country and profession have devalued them, they feel deceived and alone.

Ontario schools of social work are missing out on an important leadership opportunity in the field as they prepare most social work practitioners in Canada for practice. As Robert shared, if international social workers had their credentials devalued by CASW and OCSWSSW but recognized as equivalent by schools of social work, this would present international social workers with another systemic barrier to recognition in the field. At this time, all national and provincial social work institutions accept the potential devaluation of international credentials. If schools of social work recognized equivalency in situations where the CASW and OCSWSSW did not, international social workers would be caught in a different trap from which they could not escape where the present trap allows escape upon repetition of a Canadian graduate social work program. However, schools of social work could be leading the dialogue about credential recognition for international social workers by turning attention to credential recognition, valuing their colleagues at international universities and learning about social work education in other countries through dialogue. Such efforts would increase justice and equity for international social workers as it could lead to great coordination between schools of social work and important institutions such as the OCSWSSW and CASW.

Given the isolation of their immigration and devaluation experiences, it is understandable that the plight of international social workers who have immigrated to Canada and repeated their graduate degrees in Ontario universities would not be widely known. The national and provincial institutions involved in immigration, credential assessments, social work regulation, universities and schools of social work are or can be aware of the marginalization of internationally-trained social workers. As a result of this research and the courage of the participants, ignorance is no plea. Their experiences are similar to those of other immigrant professionals found within the literature.

While social work rightly decries the lack of diversity in corporations and that management positions do not reflect the diverse make-up of organizations, the field has not reflected on its own treatment of international social workers and the diversity that is missing within its ranks as a result of devaluation. How many internationally-trained social workers with years of experience in dire circumstances greater than those faced in a welfare state are relegated to working in a factory because they were assessed by the CASW to not have adequate academic documentation and cannot be licensed to practice? How many international social workers could be productive employees in social work positions if Canadian and Ontario institutions would recognize their education and experience and give them opportunities to demonstrate their values, knowledge and skills, just like any other Canadian social worker, instead of treating them prejudicially and forcing them to undergo trials that those trained in our systems do not? The institutional stakeholders should not allow their lack of coordination to

contribute to the continued marginalization of international social workers in Ontario and Canada.

There are changes that need to be made within these institutions to reduce or eliminate prejudicial and discriminatory policies and practices and return to the pursuit of social work values of justice and equity. Rather than reducing the expectations of the field, turning the critical lens on itself will reflect social work's genuine efforts to live up to its ideals. This project will require humility and honesty but will reap significant benefits for the international social workers affected, social work education and the field in Canada and abroad, let alone greater social change.

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[Behavioural / Non-Medical]

Date: Feb.25/15	Application Status: New: [X] Change Request: []	Protocol #:
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- For [<help>](#) with completing this form or the ethics review process, contact the Ethics Secretariat at ext. 23142, or 26117 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca
- To change a previously cleared protocol, please submit the "[< Change Request >](#)" form.

PLEASE SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION PLUS SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS (scanned PDF signature) BY E-MAIL

You can also send the signed signature page to: **Ethics Secretariat, Research Office for Administration, Development and Support (ROADS), Room 305 Gilmour Hall, ext. 23142, ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca.**

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Study Titles: (Insert in space below)

Title: A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating graduate degrees at Ontario universities

1a: Grant Title: (Required for funded research. Click this [< link >](#) to determine your "grant title").

2. Investigator Information: **This form is not to be completed by [< Faculty of Health Science researchers >](#) .**

***Faculty and staff information should be inserted above the black bar in this table.**

Student researcher and faculty supervisor information should be inserted below the black bar in the table below.

	Full Name	Department & or name of university if different from McMaster	Telephone Number(s) & Extension(s)	E-mail Address (Address you regularly use)
Principal Investigator*				
Co-Investigator(s) (Insert additional rows as required.)				
Research Assistants or Project Coordinators*				
Student Investigator(s)*	Joel Martin	Social work	905-545-0655	martij@mcmaster.ca
Faculty Supervisor(s)*	Stephanie Baker Collins	Social work	905-525-9140 x 23779	sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

3. Study Timelines: (Contact the Ethics Secretariat at X 23142 or ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca for urgent requests.)

(a) What is the date you plan to begin recruiting participants or obtain their permission to review their private documents (Provide a specific date)? March 1, 2015

(b) What is the estimated last date for data collection with human participants? June 1, 2015

4. Location of Research: List the location(s) where research will be conducted. Move your mouse over this [< Helpful Hint >](#) for more information on foreign country or school board reviews and contact the Ethics Office at X 23142 or 26117 for information on possible additional requirements:

- (a) McMaster University ☒ [X]
(b) Community ☐ [] Specify Site(s)
(c) Hospital ☐ [] Specify Site(s)
(d) Outside of Canada ☐ [] Specify Site(s)
(e) School Boards ☐ [] Specify Site(s)
(f) Other ☒ [X] Specify Site(s): **Sir Wilfrid Laurier University, York University, Ryerson University, University of Toronto, Canadian Association of Social Workers, Children's Aid Society of Oxford County**

5. Other Research Ethics Board Clearance

(a) Are researchers from outside McMaster also conducting this research? If **yes**, please provide their information in Section 2 above. ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(b) Has any other institutional Research Ethics Board already cleared this project? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(c) If **Yes** to (5b), complete this application and provide a copy of the ethics clearance certificate /approval letter.

(d) Please provide the following information:

Title of the project cleared elsewhere:
Name of the other institution:
Name of the other board:
Date of the other ethics review board's decision:
Contact name & phone number for the other board:

(e) Will any other Research Ethics Board(s) or equivalent be asked for clearance? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No
If yes, please provide the name and location of board(s).

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS AND HELPFUL TIPS (Please read first):

*Please be as **clear** and **concise** as possible and **avoid technical jargon**. Keep in mind that your protocol could be read by reviewers who may not be specialists in your field. Feel free to use headings, bolding and bullets to organize your information. Content boxes on this application expand.*

6. Research Involving Canadian Aboriginal Peoples i.e., First Nations, Inuit and Métis (Check all that apply)

(a) Will the research be conducted on Canadian Aboriginal lands? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(b) Will recruitment criteria include Canadian Aboriginal identity as either a factor for the entire study or for a subgroup in the study? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(c) Will the research seek input from participants regarding a Canadian Aboriginal community's cultural heritage, artifacts, traditional knowledge or unique characteristics? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(d) Will research in which Canadian Aboriginal identity or membership in an Aboriginal community be used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

(e) Will interpretation of research results refer to Canadian Aboriginal communities, peoples, language, history or culture? ☐ [] Yes ☒ [X] No

If "Yes" was selected for any questions 6.a-6.e above, please note that the TCPS (Chapter 9) requires that researchers shall offer the option of engagement with Canadian Aboriginal communities

involved in the research. <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter9-chapitre9/>. For advice regarding TCPS guidelines for conducting research with Canadian Aboriginal peoples, please contact Karen Szala-Meneok at X 26117 or szalak@mcmaster.ca

(f) Please describe the nature and extent of your engagement with the Aboriginal community(s) being researched. The nature of community engagement should be appropriate to the unique characteristics of the community(s) and the research. The extent of community engagement should be determined jointly by the researchers and the relevant communities. Include any information/advice received from or about the Aboriginal community under study. **The TCPS notes; “although researchers shall offer the option of engagement, a community may choose to engage nominally or not at all, despite being willing to allow the research to proceed”. If conducted research with several Aboriginal communities or sub-groups, please use headings to organize your information.**

ATTACHMENTS: Provide copies of all documents that indicate how community engagement has been or will be established (e.g., letters of support), where appropriate.

Not applicable.

(g) Has or will a research agreement be created between the researcher and the Aboriginal community?
[] Yes [X] No

If **Yes**, please provide details about the agreement below (e.g., written or verbal agreement etc.).

ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any written research agreements, if applicable. See the MREB website for a sample customizable research agreement <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> or visit the CIHR website <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/29134.html>

Not applicable.

(h) Are you seeking a waiver of the community engagement requirement? (A waiver may be granted if the REB is satisfied that, Aboriginal participants will not be identified with a community or that the welfare of relevant communities will not be affected by the research.)
[] Yes [X] No

If **yes**, please provide the rationale for this waiver request in the space below.

Not applicable.

7. Level of the Project (Check all that apply)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Research | <input type="checkbox"/> Post-Doctoral | <input type="checkbox"/> Ph.D. | <input type="checkbox"/> Staff/Administration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Master's (Major Research Paper - MRP) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Master's (Thesis) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate (Honour's Thesis) | <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate (Independent Research) | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) | | | |

8. Funding of the Project

- (a) Is this project currently being funded? [] Yes [X] No
- (b) If **No**, is funding being sought? [] Yes [X] No
- (c) Period of Funding: **From:** [] **To:** []
(mm/dd/yyyy) (mm/dd/yyyy)

(d) Funding agency (funded or applied to) & agency number (i.e., number assigned by agency), if applicable.

Click this < [link](#) > to determine your “agency number”. (This is not your PIN number).

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CIHR & agency # | <input type="checkbox"/> NSERC & agency # |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SSHRC & agency # | <input type="checkbox"/> ARB |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health Canada & agency # | <input type="checkbox"/> CFI & agency # |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Graduate Scholarship & Agency # | <input type="checkbox"/> Post Graduate Scholarship & Agency # |
| <input type="checkbox"/> USRA | <input type="checkbox"/> Other agency & # (Specify) |

(e): Are you requesting ethics clearance for a research project that was not originally designed to collect data from human participants or their records (i.e., your research project originally did not involve collecting data from humans or their records) but you now intend to do so?
[] Yes [X] No

9. Conflicts of Interest

- (a) Do any researchers conducting this study, have multiple roles with potential participants (e.g., acting as both researcher and as a therapist, health care provider, family member, caregiver, teacher, advisor, consultant, supervisor, student/student peer, or employer/employee or other dual role) that may create real, potential, or perceived conflicts, undue influences, power imbalances or coercion, that could affect relationships with others and affect decision-making processes such as consent to participate? [X] Yes [] No

- (i) If **yes**, please describe the multiple roles between the researcher(s) and any participants.

I have been in the part-time M.S.W. program for the past three years so there may be participants who were my student peers in the M.S.W. program. Furthermore, I have a working relationship with one potential participant, who was first a peer in the M.S.W. program and is now my supervisee at the Children's Aid Society, where I am employed as a Supervisor.

- (ii) Describe how any conflicts of interest identified above will be avoided, minimized or managed.

Participants will be recruited indirectly through an e-mail sent by the administrative assistants in the Schools of Social Work and other organizations through which I am recruiting. Indirect recruitment will allow potential participants to decide if they would like to participate without direct requests from me to reduce the perception of any pressure or expectation to do so.

In regards to my colleague who is now my supervisee, it was through his experience of repeating his M.S.W. at McMaster that I became aware of this issue so I believe it is fair to offer the opportunity to participate if he decides to do so. We became friends during our time in the M.S.W. program and have engaged in multiple discussions about his experience so he may be interested in participating in my formal research. If he responds with interest to the indirect recruitment e-mail, I will reassure him that I have other participants that I can access so his decision is based on his interest alone and not influenced by our working relationship. My research does **not** involve the subject of our employment (child welfare) or our relationship.

- (b) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

- (i) receive any personal benefits (for example a financial benefit such as remuneration, intellectual property rights, rights of employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options etc.) as a result of or being connected to this study? [] Yes [X] No

- (ii) If **yes**, please describe the benefits below. (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally).

Not applicable.

- (c) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s), if applicable.

Not applicable.

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

10. Rationale

For the proposed research, please describe the background and the purpose concisely and in lay terms, as well as any overarching research questions or hypotheses to be examined.

Please do not cut and paste full sections from your research proposal.

Much research has described the reasons for foreign-trained professionals to return to university after

immigrating to Canada but there appears to be limited critique of this practice or the role of universities in credential recognition, even within social work where we claim greater awareness of and opposition to oppression. Why do foreign-trained professionals need to repeat their degrees in Ontario universities and what is their experience in doing so? I will explore the motivation for foreign-trained social workers to repeat their graduate degree in Ontario as well as their reflections on the usefulness (if any) of the program in their professional development. I also intend to review how Ontario universities evaluate the academic credentials of foreign-trained professionals by examining the Ontario Universities Registrars' Association's Graduate Studies International Admission Placement Guide.

11. Participants

Please use the space below to describe the:

- (a) approximate number of participants required for this study
- (b) salient participant characteristics (e.g., age, gender, location, affiliation, etc.)

If researching several sub-populations, use headings to organize details for items (a) and (b).

I will have four-to-six participants who obtained a M.S.W. in a foreign country and before obtaining a M.S.W. from an Ontario university.

12. Recruitment

Please describe in the space below:

- (a) how each type of participant will be recruited,
- (b) who will recruit each type of participant,
- (c) relationships (if any) between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student; manager-employee, family member, student peers, fellow club members, no relationship etc.),
- (d) permission you have or plan to obtain, for your mode of recruitment for each type of participant, if applicable.

If researching several sub-populations, use headings to organize details for items (a) – (d). Click [“Tips and Samples”](#) to find the “How to Unpack the Recruitment Details” worksheet and other samples.

ATTACHMENTS: Provide copies of all recruitment posters, advertisements letters, flyers, and/or email scripts etc. and label these as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1).

I have obtained permission from the Schools of Social Work at McMaster University, York University and Sir Wilfrid Laurier University (with approval from WLU REB) to send a recruitment e-mail to M.S.W. alumni. The e-mail will be sent by the respective administrative assistants in the Schools and organizations through which I am recruiting so participants will be recruited by indirect contact. I have been invited to send a recruitment e-mail through the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County as well as be included in the Canadian Association of Social Worker's monthly newsletter. I am also seeking permission to recruit through the University of Toronto Factor-Inwentash School of Social Work.

Participants may have been student peers of the researcher. I have a working relationship with one potential participant whom I supervise and meets the sampling criteria. Please see question 9(ii) for more detail regarding on how I will manage potential conflicts of interest.

I will also ask participants if they can pass my Letter Of Information / Consent to other individuals they may know that meet the sampling criteria (snowball sampling).

13. Methods

Describe sequentially, and in detail all data collection procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, focus groups, lab experiments, participant observation, surveys, physical assessments etc. —*this is not an exhaustive list*). Include information about who will conduct the research, how long it will take, where data collection will take place, and the ways in which data will be collected (e.g., computer responses, handwritten notes, audio/video/photo recordings etc.).

If your research will be conducted with several sub-populations or progress in successive phases; use sub-headings to organize your description of methodological techniques.

ATTACHMENTS: Provide copies of all questionnaires, interview questions, test or data collection instruments etc. Label supporting documents as appendices (e.g., Appendix A or 1) and submit them as separate documents - not pasted into this application.

Click [“Tips and Samples”](#) to find the “How to Unpack the Methods” worksheet and other samples.

1. I will recruit four-to-six participants who obtained a M.S.W. from a non-western university in a foreign country before attending an Ontario university and obtaining another M.S.W.
2. I am seeking to understand the experience of foreign-trained workers as it relates to their university education. It is my understanding that many foreign-trained social workers who obtain graduate degrees in non-western countries discover that their academic credentials are devalued upon arriving in Canada. As a result, in order to practice in Canada, they often choose to return to university and repeat the same graduate degree. I want to understand how they discovered their education was devalued, how they experienced that and what motivated them to repeat their degree. As well, I want to explore what (if anything) they assessed that they gained after completing the degree again in an Ontario university.
3. Furthermore, I will utilize information received from participants about their previous education to explore how Ontario universities evaluate foreign academic credentials. In particular, Ontario universities utilize the Ontario Universities Registrars' Association's Graduate Studies International Admission Placement Guide. I will use the information from participants about their credentials to explore the development and use of this Placement Guide and how it affects credential recognition.
4. I will interview research participants individually in a location and at a time they choose. With the permission of the participant, I will audio-record the interview as well as make written notes. Each interview is anticipated to take approximately one hour.
5. I will request the participant's consent to contact them by telephone or e-mail at a later time if I require clarification on the information they provided during the interview.
6. I may employ the assistance of a transcriber who will document the content of the interviews.
7. Recruitment of participants will begin upon receipt of approval from the McMaster Research Ethics Board (hopefully in mid-March 2015).
8. I will interview participants in April 2015.

14. Secondary Use of Identifiable Data (e.g. the use of personally identifiable data of participants contained in records that have been collected for a purpose other than your current research project):

(a) Do you plan on using identifiable data of participants in your research for which the original purpose that data was collected is different than the purpose of your current research project? [☐] Yes [☒] No

If **yes**, please answer the next set of questions:

(b) Do you plan to link this identifiable data to other data sets? [☐] Yes [☐] No
If **yes**, please describe in the space below:

Not applicable.

(c) What type of identifiable data from this data set are you planning to access and use?
[☐] Student records (please specify in the space below)
[☐] Health records/clinic/office files (please specify in the space below)
[☐] Other personal records (please specify in the space below)

Not applicable.

(d) What personally identifiable data (e.g., name, student number, telephone number, date of birth etc.) from this data set do you plan on using in your research? Please explain why you need to collect this identifiable data and justify why each item is required to conduct your research.

Not applicable.

(e) Describe the details of any agreement you have, or will have, in place with the owner of this data to allow you to use this data for your research. **ATTACHMENTS: Submit a copy of any data access agreements.**

Not applicable.

(f) When participants first contributed their data to this data set, were there any known preferences expressed by participants at that time about how their information would be used in the future?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If **yes**, please explain in the space below.

Not applicable.

(g) What is the likelihood of adverse effects happening to the participants to whom this secondary use of data relates? Please explain.

Not applicable.

(h) Will participants whose information is stored in this data set (which you plan to use for secondary purposes) consent to your use of this data?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Please explain in the space below.

Not applicable.

15. Research Database

Does your research involve the creation and/or modification of a research database (databank) containing human participant information? A research database is a collection of data maintained for use in **future** research. The human participant information stored in the research database can be identifiable or anonymous.

☐ Yes ☒ No

If "Yes" was answered to the above question, you will need to fill out and submit MREB's "Supplementary Form for Creating or Modifying a Research Database Containing Human Participant Information" along with this application.

NOTE: If you intend to collect or store personally-identifying health information, now or at a later stage in your research, your protocol must be cleared by Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) rather than MREB. For further advice contact MREB at x 23142 or X 26117 or HIREB x 905 521-2100 X 44574.

16. Experience

What is your experience with this kind of research? Include information on the experience of all **individual(s)** who will have contact with the research participants or their data. **For example, you could mention your familiarity with the proposed methods, the study population(s) and/or the research topic.**

I have been practicing in the field of social work for over fourteen years and have significant experience interviewing individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds.

17. Compensation

(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation?

	Yes	No
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Financial	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(b) If yes was answered for any of the above choices, please provide details. See < [Helpful Hints](#) > for **funded research projects**.

Not applicable.

(c) If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with their compensation?

Not applicable.

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

18. Possible Risks

(a) Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

i.) Physical risk (including any bodily contact or administration of any substance)? [] Yes [X] No

ii.) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset)? [X] Yes [] No

iii.) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy and / or reputation as well as economic risks)? [X] Yes [] No

iv.) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those the participants might encounter in their everyday life? [] Yes [X] No

(b) If you checked **yes** for any of questions **i – iv** above, please describe the risk(s) in the space below.

Participants may be upset when discussing their experiences with the subject matter. Furthermore, they may worry that their identities may be recognized based on information they share (loss of privacy) and impact their reputation if faculty believed they expressed negative statements about their experience at the university.

(c) Management of Risks: Describe how each of the risks identified above will be managed or minimized. Please, include an explanation regarding why alternative approaches cannot be used.

Participants will be referenced only through pseudonyms. Participants will be reminded that there are a small number of foreign-trained professionals in the M.S.W. program so they may be identified by information they share. I will not include any information about participants' countries of origin or identify the university they attended so their identities will not be known. I will be recruiting participants through three universities so this will increase anonymity.

If participants are emotionally upset, I will offer my own support as well as provide information regarding community services that provide support and assistance to immigrants, which will be familiar with this issue and the experiences of immigrants.

(d) Deception: Is there any deception involved in this research? [] Yes [X] No

i.) If deception is to be used in your methods, describe the details of the deception (including what information will be withheld from participants) and justify the use of deception.

Not applicable.

ii.) Please describe when participants will be given an explanation about why deception was used and how they will be debriefed about the study (for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research).

ATTACHMENTS: Please provide a copy of the written debriefing form or script, if applicable.

Not applicable.

19. Possible Benefits

Discuss any potential benefits to the participants and or scientific community/society that justify involvement of participants in this study. (***Please note: benefits should not be confused with compensation or reimbursement for taking part in the study.***)

My hope is that this research will benefit participants by providing them with recognition of their experiences of having their credentials devalued and repeating their degree in Ontario. I also hope that this research will assist the Schools of Social Work as well as the whole universities consider how they assess the academic achievements of foreign-trained professionals. This research may help other foreign-trained professionals in the future by contributing to greater reflection within the field of social work in Ontario to increase recognition of the academic credentials of more foreign-trained social workers. Alternately, social work may consider a more organized educational process for foreign-trained social workers that recognizes their credentials and

skills and offers training in specific education that foreign-trained social workers identify they want and need instead of repeating their degree.

SECTION D – THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

20. The Consent Process

(a) Please describe how consent will be documented. Provide a copy of the Letter of Information / Consent Form (if applicable). If a written consent form will not be used to document consent, please explain why and describe the alternative means that will be used. While oral consent may be acceptable in certain circumstances, it may still be appropriate to provide participants with a Letter of Information to participants about the study.

Click “[Tips and Samples](#)” for the McMaster REB recommended sample “Letter of Information / Consent Form”, to be written at the appropriate reading level. The “Guide to Converting Documents into Plain Language” is also found under “[Tips and Samples](#)”.

ATTACHMENTS: Provide a copy of the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) or oral or telephone script(s) to be used in the consent process for each of your study populations, where applicable.

Written consent will be obtained through the Letter of Information / Consent Form.

(b): Please describe the process the investigator(s) will use to obtain informed consent, including who will be obtaining informed consent. Describe plans for on-going consent, if applicable.

Prior to the interview, I will provide the participants with the Letter of Information / Consent Form and allow them to ask any questions related to the research. If they would like to participate, I will ensure they sign the consent form and provide them with a copy.

21. Consent by an authorized person

If participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate consent process. ***ATTACHMENTS: Attach the Letter of Information and Consent form(s) to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternate consent. Click “[Tips and Samples](#)” to find samples.***

Not applicable.

22. Alternatives to prior individual consent

If obtaining written or oral documentation of an individual participant's consent prior to start of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process. ***ATTACHMENTS: Please provide any Letters of Information and or Consent Forms.***

Not applicable.

23. Providing participants with study results

How will participants be able to learn about the study results (e.g., mailed/emailed brief summary of results in plain language; posting on website or other appropriate means for this population)?

Participants will be asked if they would like a summary of the results or the full document. If they want either, I will obtain the appropriate mail or e-mail address to send it upon completion. I will also inform them that the thesis will be posted online.

24. Participant withdrawal

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Describe the procedures which will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw through the Letter of Information / Consent Form. As well, I will state their right to withdraw at any time during the study until May 1, 2015. I will tell participants that they can express their desire to withdraw in person or by e-mail.

b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences which withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on the participant's compensation or continuation of services (if applicable).

If a participant decides to withdraw from the study, there will be no consequences to them as there is no compensation or service being provided. The information they have shared to that point (if any) will be destroyed.

c) If the participants will not have the right to withdraw from the research, please explain.

Not applicable.

25. SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality concerns the protection, privacy and security of research data. Consult the Data Security Checklist at <http://reo.mcmaster.ca/educational-resources> for best practices to secure electronic and hard copy versions of data and study documents.

(a) Will the data you collect be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members?

☒ Yes ☐ No

If **No**, then explain why not, and describe what steps you be put in place to advise participants that data will not be kept protected, private and secure from non-research team members.

Not applicable.

(b) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure that the data you collect in your research will be kept protected, private, and secure from non-research team members. In your description, explain who will have access to the data and what data security measures will be put in place during data transfer and data storage.

I will keep paper notes in a locked cabinet and computer files (audio-recordings and typed notes) in a password-protected folder. I will be the only person with access to these documents.

(c) Will the research data be kept indefinitely or will it be deleted after a certain time period? Please explain. In your answer, describe why you plan to keep data indefinitely or not. If deleting data after a certain time period, explain why you chose the time period you did. Describe how participants will be informed whether their data will be deleted or not.

The data will be deleted immediately after my thesis has been accepted as I will not be using this data for further research.

Anonymity concerns whether participant identities are made known or not. The anonymity promised to participants can be different during different stages of research (i.e., during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings).

(d) Describe the extent to which participant identities will be made known in each of the following activities: during recruitment, during data collection, during data storage, and during the dissemination of research findings. In your description, explain what steps or procedures you plan to put in place to keep participant identities unknown in each of those activities.

Recruitment: Participant identities will be known only to me if they respond to the recruitment e-mail sent to all graduate alumni by the administrative assistants in the Schools of Social Work or the other organizations through which I am recruiting. Their participation will be known to others only if they identify themselves by disclosing their participation in this research.

Data collection, storage and dissemination: Participant identities will be known only to me and they will choose a pseudonym used in documentation to protect their identities. The pseudonym will be used in all documentation. Participants will only be known to others if they identify themselves by disclosing their participation in this research.

SECTION F -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

26. Adverse Events, Change Requests and Annual Renewal/Project Status Report

- a) **Adverse events** (Unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) must be reported by faculty researcher or supervisor to the REB Secretariat (Ethics Office – Ext. 23142) and the MREB Chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after they occur.
See: https://reo.mcmaster.ca/policies/copy_of_guidelines#12-0-adverse-events
- b) **Changes to cleared research:** To obtain clearance for a change to a protocol that has already received ethics clearance, please complete the “< [Change Request](#) >” form available on the MREB website or by clicking this link. Proposed changes may not begin before they receive ethics clearance.
- c) **Annual Renewal/Project Status Report** Ethics clearance is for only one year.
The minimum requirement for renewing clearance is the completion of a “Annual Renewal/Project Status Report” in advance of the (1 year) anniversary of the original ethics clearance date. ”

PLEASE NOTE:

It is the investigator's responsibility to complete the Annual Project Status Report that is sent each year by email 8 weeks in advance of the anniversary of the original ethics clearance to comply with the Research Integrity Policy. If ethics clearance expires the Research Ethics Board is obliged to notify Research Finance who in accordance with university and funding agency regulations will put a hold on funds.

27. **Additional Information:** Use this section or additional page(s) to complete any part of this form, or for any other information relevant to this project which you wish to provide to the Research Ethics Board.

None.

28. POSTING OF APPROVED PROTOCOLS ON THE RESEARCH ETHICS WEBSITE

- a) It is the policy of MREB to post a list of cleared protocols on the Research Ethics website.
Posted information usually includes: title, names of principal investigators, principal investigator department, type of project (i.e. Faculty; PhD; Masters, Undergraduate etc.)
- b) You may request that the title be deleted from the posted information.
- c) Do you request that the title be eliminated from the posted information? [] Yes [X] No
- d) The ethics board will honour your request if you answer **Yes** to the above question **27 c)** but we ask you to provide a reason for making this request for the information of the Board. You may also use the space for any other special requests.
- e) < [List of MREB Cleared Protocols](#) > < [List of Undergraduate SREC Cleared Protocols](#) >

Not applicable.

Supporting Materials Checklist:

Instructions:

Complete this checklist to identify and describe your supporting materials to ensure your application form is complete

- When supplying supporting materials, ensure that they are properly labeled (e.g., “Appendix C: Interview Guide for Teachers”) and referenced in your protocol (e.g., “The interview guide for teachers – see Appendix C – is...”).
- Do not cut and paste supporting materials directly into the application form; submit each as a separate appendix.
- If you have multiple supporting materials of the same type (e.g., multiple letters of information that target different populations), list each supporting material on a separate row in this checklist. Add a new row to the table if necessary.

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study <i>(Insert X below)</i>	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol <i>(Insert X below)</i>	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol <i>(e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)</i>
Recruitment Materials			
Study Information Brochure			
Video/audio recording that explains study details			
Participant Screening Form			
Recruitment Advertisements			
Recruitment Poster			
Recruitment Script – Verbal/Telephone			
Recruitment Script – Email (direct to participant)			
Recruitment Script – Email (From holder of participant's contact information)	X		Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H – Email Recruitment Scripts – Holder of Participants' Contact Information
Recruitment for follow-up interview			
Snowball Recruitment script			
Reminder/thank you/ card/script/email			
Appreciation Letter/certificate – For Participants			
Other			
Informed Consent Materials			
Consent Log (to record oral consent)			
Oral/Telephone Consent Script			
Letter of Information & Consent Form – Participants	X		Appendix A – Letter Of Information / Consent
Letter of Information & Consent Form – Parent			
Letter of Information & Consent Form - Guardian or Substitute Decision Maker			
Letter of Information & Assent Form – Minors			
Online survey brief information/consent and implied consent buttons			
Letter of Support for Study			
Research Agreement			
Other			
Data Collection Materials			
Information Sharing/Data Access/Transfer Agreement (for secondary use of data)			
Demographic form - Participant's			
Instructions for participants			
Interview Guide – (Questions for face to face, telephone, Internet/email interview)	X		Appendix I – Interview guide
Interview Guide – Questions for Focus Groups			
Questionnaire or Survey questions & instructions (Paper and pencil or online formats)			
Rating Scales/inventories/Assessment Instruments			
Role-play/simulation scripts			
Stimuli used to elicit responses			
Images (photos, diagrams etc.) depicting instruments, equipment, exercises etc.			
Other			
Debriefing Materials			
Debriefing Form			
Deception Study - Debriefing Letter & post debriefing consent form			
Deception Study- Debriefing script – verbal			
Other			
Confidentiality Materials			
Confidentiality Oath/ Agreement	X		Appendix J
Confidential Study Code Key Log			
Other			
Materials for previous review by other REBs			
Application form –Other REBs (Original)			
Application form – Other REBs (Revised)			

Supporting Materials Checklist	I will use this type of material in my study (Insert X below)	I have attached a copy of this material in my protocol (Insert X below)	This is how I labeled and titled this material in my protocol (e.g., Appendix A – “Email Recruitment Script for Organizational Workers”)
Communication between REB & researcher (letters, emails, faxes etc.)			
Clearance Certificate (Other REBs)			
Other			
Other Supporting Materials			
Compensation Log			
List of support services for participants			
Participant Appreciation - letter, script, email or certificate etc.			
Researcher Training Certificates			
Scientific Licenses			
Other			

29. Researcher Assurance: [< SECTION G – SIGNATURES >](#)

[X] I confirm that I have read the McMaster University Research Integrity Policy <http://www.mcmaster.ca/policy/faculty/Research/Research%20Integrity%20Policy.pdf> , and I agree to comply with this and other university policies, guidelines and the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) and of my profession or discipline regarding the ethical conduct of research involving humans.

[X] In addition, I understand that the following *all constitute violations of the McMaster University's Research Integrity Policy*:

- failure to obtain research ethics clearance;
- carrying out research in a manner that was not cleared by one of the university's REBs;
- failure to submit a **Change Request** to obtain ethics clearance prior to implementing changes to a cleared study;
- failure to report an **Adverse Event** (i.e., an unanticipated negative consequence or result affecting participants) by the investigator or faculty supervisor of student research to the MREB secretariat and the MREB chair, as soon as possible and in any event, no more than 3 days after the event occurs;
- failure to submit an **Annual Renewal/Project Status Report** in advance of the 1 year anniversary of the original ethics clearance date.



Joel Martin

Feb.16/15

Signature of Faculty, Student or Staff Researcher
(Add lines for additional researchers.)

PLEASE PRINT NAME HERE

Date

Supervisor Assurance for Graduate or Undergraduate Student Research:

[X] “I am the supervisor for this proposed student research and have read this ethics application and supporting documents and deem the project to be valid and worthwhile, and I will provide the necessary supervision of the student(s) researcher(s) throughout the project including ensuring that the project will be conducted as cleared and to make myself available should problems arise during the course of the research.



Stephanie Baker Collins

February 14,

2015

Signature of Faculty Supervisor of Student Research
(Add lines for additional supervisors.)



PLEASE PRINT NAME HERE



Date

The signature page may also be emailed as a scanned PDF or be sent by campus mail to GH-305.

MREB Clearance Certificate

https://ethics.mcmaster.ca/mreb/print_approval_brian.cfm?ID=3525

		McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB) c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca	
CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH			
Application Status: New <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input type="checkbox"/> Project Number: 2015 040			
TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating graduate degrees at Ontario universities			
Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
S. Baker-Collins	Social Work	23779	stcollins@mcmaster.ca
Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Martin	Social Work	905-545-06	martij@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below. 			
COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.			
Reporting Frequency:		Annual: Mar-10-2016	Other:
Date: Mar-10-2015 Chair, Dr. B. Detlor 			

 Inspiring Innovation and Discovery		McMaster University Research Ethics Board (MREB) c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support, MREB Secretariat, GH-305, e-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca	
CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS CLEARANCE TO INVOLVE HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH			
Application Status: New <input type="checkbox"/> Addendum <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Project Number: 2015 040			
TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT:			
A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating graduate degrees at Ontario universities			
Faculty Investigator(s)/ Supervisor(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
S. Baker-Collins	Social Work	23779	stbcollins@mcmaster.ca
Student Investigator(s)	Dept./Address	Phone	E-Mail
J. Martin	Social Work	905-545-06	martij@mcmaster.ca
The application in support of the above research project has been reviewed by the MREB to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster University Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants. The following ethics certification is provided by the MREB: <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as presented without questions or requests for modification. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared as revised without questions or requests for modification. <input type="checkbox"/> The application protocol is cleared subject to clarification and/or modification as appended or identified below:			
COMMENTS AND CONDITIONS: Ongoing clearance is contingent on completing the annual completed/status report. A "Change Request" or amendment must be made and cleared before any alterations are made to the research.			
Amendment#1, cleared April 29, 2015			
Reporting Frequency:		Annual: Mar-10-2016	Other:
Date: Mar-10-2015		Chair, Dr. B. Detlor 	

McMaster University Mail - REB Approval by another Institution

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/?ui=2&ik=b9b1741962&view=pt&c...>



JOEL MARTIN <martij@mcmaster.ca>

REB Approval by another Institution

REB@wlu.ca <REB@wlu.ca>

Thu, Mar 26, 2015 at 10:04 AM

To: "Mr. Joel Martin (Principal Investigator)" <martij@mcmaster.ca>

Cc: REB@wlu.ca



March 26, 2015

Dear Joel,

REB # 4422

Project, "A lot to learn: Foreign-trained social workers repeating graduate degrees at Ontario universities"

REB Clearance Issued: March 26, 2015

REB Expiry / End Date: March 30, 2016

Your project was previously approved by the Research Ethics Board at McMaster University on March 10, 2015. I have reviewed your proposal on behalf of the University Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University and determined that it is ethically sound. As part of this approval please add to your script / invitation a short statement noting that this project has been reviewed and approved by the REB at WLU under file #4422.

If the research plan and methods should change in a way that may bring into question the project's adherence to acceptable norms, please submit a "Request for Ethics Clearance of a Revision or Modification" form for approval before the changes are put into place.

If any participants in your research project have a negative experience (either physical, psychological or emotional) you are required to submit an "Adverse Events Form" to the Research Office within 24 hours of the event.

You must complete the online "Annual/Final Progress Report on Human Research Projects" form annually and upon completion of the project. ROMEO will automatically keep track of these annual reports for you. When you have a report due within 30 days (and/or an overdue report) it will be listed under the 'My Reminders' quick link on your ROMEO home screen; the number in brackets next to 'My Reminders' will tell you how many reports need to be submitted.

All the best for the successful completion of your project.

(Useful links: [ROMEO Login Screen](#) ; [ROMEO Quick Reference Guide](#) ; [REB webpage](#))

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Bass".

McMaster University Mail - REB Approval by another Institution

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/?ui=2&ik=b9b1741962&view=pt&c...>

Robert Basso, PhD
Chair, University Research Ethics Board
Wilfrid Laurier University

/pb

Date: March 7, 2015



APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A study of the value given to the academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers by Ontario universities

Student Investigator:

Joel Martin
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 966-6534
E-mail: martij@mcmaster.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23779
E-mail: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

What am I trying to discover?

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained professionals who obtained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university to complete the M.S.W. program after immigrating to Canada. For my Master's thesis, I want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. I am hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree.

What will happen during the study?

I will meet with you for a private interview lasting approximately one hour at a location of your choice. With your permission, I will record our discussion and make handwritten notes. I will ask you to answer questions about your demographic information (such as your age and country of origin) as well as your education and work experience prior to attending university in Ontario. I will inquire about the circumstances that led you to repeat your M.S.W. after coming to Canada. I will also ask you about your goals in attending university in Ontario and whether those goals were met now that you have completed the program.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

My hope is that this research will benefit you by giving you an opportunity to share your experiences in repeating your degree and give recognition to your previous education and work experience. I also hope that your experience will assist Schools of Social Work at Ontario universities as well as universities as a whole consider how they assess the academic achievements of foreign-trained professionals. This research may help other foreign-trained professionals and contribute to greater reflection within the field of social work in Ontario.

Are there any risks to doing this study?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may worry about how people connected to the university (e.g. former professors) may react to what you share about your experiences. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or make you feel uncomfortable. I describe the steps that I will take to protect your privacy below.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name in my records or documentation; instead, I will use a pseudonym that you choose. Given the small number of students from other countries who attend graduate social work programs, references to your country of origin may identify you to faculty and staff so I will not use any geographic references. As well, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

The information you provide to me will be kept in a locked cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, the data will be maintained until my thesis is approved and then will be deleted/destroyed.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can change your mind and withdraw from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form and completing the interview, until May 1, 2015. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you do not have to but you can still be in the study.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately September 2015. If you would like a summary of the results or the whole thesis, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

How do I ask other questions about the study?

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

martij@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Joel Martin of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately May 1, 2015.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded. ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address: _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted after the interview if the researcher requires clarification or further information. I understand that I can always decline the request at that time.

☐ Yes

Please contact me by e-mail/phone: _____

☐ No

Name of participant (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Date: March 25, 2015



APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A study of the value given to the academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers by Ontario universities

Student Investigator:

Joel Martin
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 966-6534
E-mail: martij@mcmaster.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Stephanie Baker Collins
Department of Social Work
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
(905) 525-9140 ext. 23779
E-mail: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

What am I trying to discover?

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained professionals who obtained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university to complete the M.S.W. program after immigrating to Canada. For my Master's thesis, I want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. I am hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree.

What will happen during the study?

I will meet with you for a private interview lasting approximately one hour at a location of your choice. With your permission, I will record our discussion and make handwritten notes. I will ask you to answer questions about your demographic information (such as your age and country of origin) as well as your education and work experience prior to attending university in Ontario. I will inquire about the circumstances that led you to repeat your M.S.W. after coming to Canada. I will also ask you about your goals in attending university in Ontario and whether those goals were met now that you have completed the program.

Are there any benefits to doing this study?

My hope is that this research will benefit you by giving you an opportunity to share your experiences in repeating your degree and give recognition to your previous education and work experience. I also hope that your experience will assist Schools of Social Work at Ontario universities as well as universities as a whole consider how they assess the academic achievements of foreign-trained professionals. This research may help other foreign-trained professionals and contribute to greater reflection within the field of social work in Ontario.

Are there any risks to doing this study?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may worry about how people connected to the university (e.g. former professors) may react to what you share about your experiences. You do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or make you feel uncomfortable. I describe the steps that I will take to protect your privacy below.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name in my records or documentation; instead, I will use a pseudonym that you choose. Given the small number of students from other countries who attend graduate social work programs, references to your country of origin may identify you to faculty and staff so I will not use any geographic references. As well, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

The information you provide to me will be kept in a locked cabinet where only I will have access to it. Information kept on a computer will be protected by a password. Once the study has been completed, the data will be maintained until my thesis is approved and then will be deleted/destroyed.

What if I change my mind about being in the study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to be part of the study, you can change your mind and withdraw from the interview for whatever reason, even after signing the consent form and completing the interview, until May 1, 2015. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed. If you do not want to answer some of the questions, you do not have to but you can still be in the study.

How do I find out what was learned in this study?

I expect to have this study completed by approximately September 2015. If you would like a summary of the results or the whole thesis, please let me know how you would like it sent to you.

How do I ask other questions about the study?

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact me at:

martij@mcmaster.ca

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Joel Martin of McMaster University.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.
- I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time or up until approximately May 1, 2015.
- I have been given a copy of this form.
- I agree to participate in the study.

1. I agree that the interview can be audio recorded. ☐ Yes ☐ No

2. ☐ Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results.

Please send them to me at this email address: _____

Or to this mailing address: _____

☐ No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.

3. I agree to be contacted after the interview if the researcher requires clarification or further information. I understand that I can always decline the request at that time.

☐ Yes

Please contact me by e-mail/phone: _____

☐ No

Name of participant (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

4. I give permission to use quotes from my interview in the study's report.

☐ Yes

☐ No

Name of participant (printed): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX C

**E-mail Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Joel Martin, B.A., B.S.W.
Masters Candidate in Social Work
Study Title:**

A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating degrees at Ontario universities

Sample e-mail subject line: Study about foreign-trained social workers repeating M.S.W. degrees at McMaster

Dear McMaster M.S.W. alumni:

Joel Martin, a McMaster student, is seeking participants for a study he is doing about credential devaluation and non-recognition at Ontario universities. This research is part of his Master of Social Work program at McMaster University. The following is a brief description of his study.

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained social workers who attained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university in Ontario to complete the M.S.W. program again after immigrating to Canada. For his Master's thesis, Joel want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. He is hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree. Furthermore, he intends to examine how Ontario universities evaluate the prior academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers and explore the faculty of social work's response to this process.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in this study, please contact Joel directly through his McMaster e-mail address (martij@mcmaster.ca). Your participation will remain confidential. Joel will not disclose your expression of interest or participation to anyone at McMaster or any other university. You can withdraw from the study at any time or not answer certain questions during the interview.

A copy of his information letter and consent form is attached to this e-mail, which will give further details about his study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Darlene Savoy
Director's/Graduate Administrative Assistant

APPENDIX D

**E-mail Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Joel Martin, B.A., B.S.W.
Masters Candidate in Social Work
Study Title:**

A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating degrees at Ontario universities

Sample e-mail subject line: Study about foreign-trained social workers repeating M.S.W. degrees at Ontario universities

Dear York M.S.W. alumni:

Joel Martin, a McMaster student, is seeking participants for a study he is doing about credential devaluation and non-recognition at Ontario universities. This research is part of his Master of Social Work program at McMaster University. The following is a brief description of his study.

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained social workers who attained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university in Ontario to complete the M.S.W. program again after immigrating to Canada. For his Master's thesis, Joel want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. He is hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree. Furthermore, he intends to examine how Ontario universities evaluate the prior academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers and explore the faculty of social work's response to this process.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in this study, please contact Joel directly through his McMaster e-mail address (martij@mcmaster.ca). Your participation will remain confidential. Joel will not disclose your expression of interest or participation to anyone at York or any other university. You can withdraw from the study at any time or not answer certain questions during the interview.

A copy of his information letter and consent form is attached to this e-mail, which will give further details about his study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

William Woolrich
Graduate Program Co-ordinator

APPENDIX E

**E-mail Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Joel Martin, B.A., B.S.W.
Masters Candidate in Social Work
Study Title:**

A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating degrees at Ontario universities

Sample e-mail subject line: Study about foreign-trained social workers repeating M.S.W. degrees at Ontario universities

Dear Wilfrid Laurier M.S.W. alumni:

Joel Martin, a McMaster student, is seeking participants for a study he is doing about credential devaluation and non-recognition at Ontario universities. This research is part of his Master of Social Work program at McMaster University. The following is a brief description of his study.

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained social workers who attained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university in Ontario to complete the M.S.W. program again after immigrating to Canada. For his Master's thesis, Joel want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. He is hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree. Furthermore, he intends to examine how Ontario universities evaluate the prior academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers and explore the faculty of social work's response to this process.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in this study, please contact Joel directly through his McMaster e-mail address (martij@mcmaster.ca). Your participation will remain confidential. Joel will not disclose your expression of interest or participation to anyone at Wilfrid Laurier or any other university. You can withdraw from the study at any time or not answer certain questions during the interview.

A copy of his information letter and consent form is attached to this e-mail, which will give further details about his study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board as well as Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (file 4422). If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Tanya Diriye
Administrative Assistant

APPENDIX F

**E-mail Recruitment Script
Sent on Behalf of the Researcher
by the Holder of the Participants' Contact Information**

**Joel Martin, B.A., B.S.W.
Masters Candidate in Social Work
Study Title:**

A lot to learn: foreign-trained social workers repeating degrees at Ontario universities

Sample e-mail subject line: Study about foreign-trained social workers repeating M.S.W. degrees at Ontario universities

Dear Children's Aid Society of Oxford County employee:

Joel Martin, a McMaster student, is seeking participants for a study he is doing about credential devaluation and non-recognition at Ontario universities. This research is part of his Master of Social Work program at McMaster University. The following is a brief description of his study.

Canada seeks foreign-trained professionals to immigrate to Canada. However, upon arriving in Canada, the majority of people from non-western countries discover their academic credentials and work experiences are devalued or not recognized. To gain Canadian credentials, many professionals return to universities in their same disciplines, often obtaining the same degrees they achieved in their countries of origin.

You are invited to take part in this study on foreign-trained social workers who attained their M.S.W. in non-western countries and returned to university in Ontario to complete the M.S.W. program again after immigrating to Canada. For his Master's thesis, Joel want to explore the evaluation of your previous graduate social work degree and the factors for your return to university to obtain the same graduate degree in Canada. He is hoping to learn what you perceive to have gained (if anything) by completing the same degree. Furthermore, he intends to examine how Ontario universities evaluate the prior academic credentials of foreign-trained social workers and explore the faculty of social work's response to this process.

If you are interested in getting more information about taking part in this study, please contact Joel directly through his McMaster e-mail address (martij@mcmaster.ca). Your participation will remain confidential. Joel will not disclose your expression of interest or participation to anyone at the Children's Aid Society of Oxford County or any university. You can withdraw from the study at any time or not answer certain questions during the interview.

A copy of his information letter and consent form is attached to this e-mail, which will give further details about his study.

In addition, this study has been reviewed and cleared by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
Gilmour Hall – Room 305 (ROADS)
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

Sincerely,

Administrative Assistant

Appendix G Interview Questions

A lot to learn: Foreign-trained social workers repeating graduate degrees in Ontario universities **Joel Martin, B.A., B.S.W. (Master of Social Work student)** **School of Social Work – McMaster University**

Information about these interview questions:

This list gives you an idea what I would like to learn about your experience repeating your M.S.W. when you came to Canada. Interviews will be one-on-one and will be open-ended (not just “yes” or “no” answers). Because of this, the exact wording may change a little. Sometimes I will use other short questions to make sure I understand what you told me or if I need more information when we are talking (such as, “*Are saying that...?*”), to get more information (“*Please tell me more about...*”) or to learn what you think or feel about something (“*Why do you think that is...?*”).

- 1) **Information about you:** How old are you? Where were you born? Where did you grow up? How old were you when you attended university? When did you come to Canada?
- 2) **Information about your education:** What university/universities have you attended prior to attending university in Ontario? What degrees have you obtained? Did you feel prepared for practice when you completed your degree(s) before coming to Canada?
- 3) **Information about your work experience:** What social work employment experience did you have prior to coming to Canada?
- 4) **Information about your immigration experience as it relates to your education:** Prior to immigrating, what were your expectations regarding how your educational credentials would be perceived in Canada? Did you seek employment when you arrived in Canada? If so, how did employers respond to your academic credentials? Did you register with any professional associations when you arrived in Canada? If so, did those associations recognize your previous education?
- 5) **Information about your decision to return to university in Ontario:** What prompted you to attend university for the same degree you already completed? How did you discover that your M.S.W. was not considered equivalent to a M.S.W. from an Ontario university? What were your goals in attending university in Ontario and obtaining a Canadian M.S.W.?
- 6) **Information about your experience at McMaster:** Did you find the M.S.W. program to be useful? If so, in what ways? Were there elements that were not useful? Is there anything you wish the Ontario university you attended had done differently for you?
- 7) Is there anything else that you feel is important that we did not discuss? Is there anything else you think I need to know about your experience at the Ontario university you attended?

END