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Workplace (In)Equality:
Making Critical Sense of Hong Kong Chinese Immigrant Experiences in the Canadian Workplace

BY
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Approval of Dissertation

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Dedication

To my Lord, Jesus, who gives me hope.

To my father, Kwok-Yeung Chan, who taught me think.

To my husband, Rod, who shows me love.

To my children, Calla, Jonathan and Nathan, who hold me dear.

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Abstract

This thesis reports on an exploratory study of how professional immigrants from Hong Kong to Canada make sense of their immigration experiences and what this can tell us about why a substantial number leave in their first year in Canada. In particular, I focus on how Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of workplace opportunities. The study involves in-depth interviews with 19 informants from the Hong Kong Chinese community in Canada. The study was framed by a critical sensemaking approach and Foucauldian discursive analysis in which the local and formative contexts of sensemaking are analyzed.

An analysis of the interviews demonstrates that immigrants' identities are grounded by contextual sensemaking elements. Data show that informants have accepted unchallenged assumptions: (1) that the government is providing help for them to 'get in' the workplace; and (2) that the ethnic service organizations are offering positive guidance to their workplace opportunities. At the organizational level, a master discourse emphasizing integration has mediated immigrants' struggles. Within these frustrations, many have internalized a hidden discourse of inadequate or deficient selves and adopted a sacrificial position in order to maintain a positive sense of identity. There is no question that racism exists on systemic and personal levels. However, immigrants are unaware of the ways their

assumptions may be informed by racism; hence they might accept unequal practices as “normal.” Although contextual elements are powerful, some immigrants have developed strategies at the micro-level to resist.

I contend that a critical sensemaking approach allows greater insights into immigration processes than realist surveys and interviews, which tend to impose a pre-packaged sense of the immigrant experience. Through critical sensemaking, immigrants’ own sense (understanding) of process is given voice; this encourages them to rethink the current role of ethnic service organizations in the immigration system. This thesis ends with a conclusion emphasizing my contributions and the value of a critical sensemaking framework in studying complex issues among broader societal discourses.

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Chapter 1: Making Sense of the Immigrant Experience

Outline of the Study

This study is about immigrants' workplace experiences in Canada, more specifically focusing on Hong Kong Chinese permanent immigrants who have come (through an application process) to Canada with the purpose of entering the workforce. The government calls them economic *professional and skilled worker* immigrants, implying that they are *contributors* to the Canadian economy. Immigration policy, then, is "working," but in what way and at whose cost?

This study has been triggered by questions about immigrants' relative lack of "success" in employment settlement in Canada (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). For example, why is there such a high return rate among visible minority[1] professional and skilled immigrants (Guo & DeVoretz, 2006)? Six out of ten economic immigrants leave Canada within the first year of arrival (Statistics Canada, 2006).[2] Why do they leave? There is substantial evidence showing that recent immigrants have had difficulties entering the Canadian labour market or obtaining earnings equal to those of native-born Canadian despite their higher

[1] The term visible minority is used to define racial "non-White" people in Canada (Abella, 1984, p. 46).

[2] Between 1991 and 2000, 2.2 million permanent immigrants were admitted to Canada (Dewing & Leman, 2006). Minister Kenney (Citizenship and Immigrant Canada, 2012 October) is expecting another 240,000 to 265,000 new immigrants in 2013. Sixty percent of them (i.e., 144,000 to 159,000) come through economic channels, rather than as refugees or under the family reunion provision. When six out of ten economic immigrants leave Canada in the first year of their arrival, this reflects a range of 86,400 to 95,400 immigrants who return to their original countries or go elsewhere.

qualifications (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008; Grant, 2008; Reitz, 2007; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007). Why and how are some immigrants more "successful" than others in their experience of Canadian workplace opportunities? Why do visible minority immigrants from the same area or region (e.g., Hong Kong) not all face the same sets of constraints (or discrimination)? Are they not imprinted with the same class, same race, and same ethnic background? I am particularly interested in this phenomenon among those who have obtained adequate credentials[3] and are proficient in English, since the inability to speak English and not having credentials seem to be the most often mentioned barriers to immigrant "success" in accessing their intended occupations and obtaining appropriate earnings (Al-Waqfi & Jain, 2006; Grant, 2008; Grenier & Xue, 2011; Yoshida & Smith, 2005).

Answers to these questions have traditionally been framed in workplace studies by a structural perspective (e.g., Reitz & Banerjee, 2007), with a focus on the outcome of systemic discrimination and its embeddedness within the structures of workplace practices (Abella, 1984; Agócs, 2002; Guo & DeVoretz, 2006; Jain & Kanungo, 1977; E. S. W. Ng & Burke, 2010) and cultures (Agocs, Jain, & Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2001). Nevertheless, these answers have never been able to alleviate the suffering of immigrants. These deep-rooted issues are common in many western economies. For instance, American

[3] What is considered *adequate credentials* can vary depending on the intended occupations of informants. I am interested in people who have some post-secondary education, such as master's degrees or bachelor's degrees, to pursue non-regulated professional designations (such as office managers). Further sample requirements will be explained in Chapter 4.

researchers (e.g., Bonacich, 1972; Reich, Gordon, & Edwards, 1973) have long laid the foundation for research on immigrants and discrimination from the perspective of economic exploitation (such as dual/split labour market theory and labour market segmentation theory). In addition, the pioneer work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1984) has revealed the unequal situations of Polish immigrants in Europe and America. Nonetheless, Ong, Bonacich, and Cheng (1994) argue that economic exploitation is less a concern for "new" Asian immigrants, who differ in many ways from those who arrived prior to World War Two. This study asks the question, "Does this phenomenon remain?"

Indeed, over the past 25 years much of the debate about equality at work in Canada has been framed by the structural systemic approach of the Abella Commission Report (1984), which has influenced the way Canadian researchers have focused on the visible minority immigrant experience at work (e.g., Reitz, 2001; Reitz, Curtis, & Elrick, 2013; Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; Mighty, 1997). As valuable as these approaches have undoubtedly been and continue to be, they miss, I will argue, two important elements that can provide us with crucial insights into the immigrant experience, namely, the *reflections* and the *voices* of the immigrants themselves.

To understand immigrant experiences in the Canadian workplace, we need not only to know about how the thinking of dominant established institutions is translated into systemic thinking and practices (e.g., policies or practices that are

part of the normal operation of employment and immigration systems) but also what sense immigrants make of the structures and processes they confront—their reflections. We not only need to understand how dominant systems have contributed to the identity work of the immigrant, but we also need to hear and understand the voices of the immigrants themselves, who struggle within these situations. What are the *senses* (understandings) they have made out of their situations?

Gramsci's (1971) notion of cultural hegemony helps partially explain how and why dominant groups can continually exercise influence over the subordinate majority through cultural understanding. A political element or world view that is maintained by dominant groups continually works against the interests of the subordinate majority. Gramsci argues that, through cultural hegemony, the mass media, governments, and other dominant elites can popularize world views and practices that sustain the population's acceptance of certain ideologies. In this way, power is exercised not so much through coercion but through consensual and contested processes (Grandy, 2007; Ives, 2004).

In a similar vein, Foucauldian discourse considers how a particular world view is constructed as knowledge through which people draw their "soft" power (Foucault, 1979; 1980). In Foucault's view, power in modernity mostly operates through knowledge and the seemingly gentle means of guiding and defining (as a guiding force), and it exists at all levels. By examining discourse, he exposes the

ways power works and comes to understand how individuals accept and buy into institutionalized practices. In this way, Foucault's genealogical studies of discourse provide a way to detect how immigrants come to act within and resist institutionalized power.

To tackle some of these complex issues differently, I propose a study that describes and analyzes the "sensemaking" processes (Weick, 1995; 2001) of first-generation Hong Kong Chinese immigrants to Canada in relation to their workplace opportunities. The concept of sensemaking developed by Weick (1995) means "the making of sense" (p. 4) and is an "ethnomethodology of organizing" (Mills, 2008, p. 29). It is an alternative approach for understanding the process of organizing everyday life in organizations (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010; Mills, 2008). To make sense is to ask questions like "what's happening?" or "what's the story?" in searching for direction (Weick, 1995). Sensemaking draws from the phenomenology paradigm and is particularly useful in studying experiences. Within this frame, I propose to formulate my key research question: *How do Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of their workplace experience, individually and collectively?*

The study focuses on how a selected sample of immigrants (i.e., Hong Kong Chinese) makes sense of workplace experiences in the context of systemic thinking. *Systemic* is best understood in this context as "sets of power relations [Clegg, 1989] that are deeply embedded in the institutionalized practices and

taken-for-granted rules" (Hardy & Phillips, 1999, p. 5) of an organization. The structuration processes produce patterns of institutionalization that give advantage to some members at the expense of others. To focus on sensemaking should also take into account the social context ("members of a local social scene"; see Garfinkel, 1967) and power relations in which sensemaking occurs. To that end, my approach will draw on the work of Helms Mills and her colleagues and their approach of critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills & Mills, 2000, 2009; Helms Mills et al., 2010; Mills, 2008; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004; Thurlow, 2010), and adopts a broad *racioethnic* paradigmatic framework that attempts to understand those studied from their own ethnic backgrounds and perspectives (Cox, 1990; Mills, Helms Mills, Bratton, & Foreshaw, 2007).

Why Use a Postpositivist Framework?

Collinson (2003) warns us that mainstream theorizing views "human beings as unitary, coherent and autonomous individuals who are separate and separable from social relations and organizations" (p. 527). Yet, arguably, people's identities are partially defined by their access to power, privilege, and prestige, and a lack of access to these resources can be problematic—particularly for visible minority immigrants (J. M. Anderson & Lynam, 1987; Henry & Tator, 2002; McCoy & Masuch, 2007). In many ways, when in the process of making their sense of self, visible minority immigrants may also lack some of the

important cues coded in the dominant culture. Quite often, they are treated as a uniform group, and policy-makers tend to universalize their problems. Thus many traditional research strategies are not well suited to study visible minority immigrants' experience.

In recent years, there have been a growing number of approaches from within the *postpostitivist* tradition (Prasad, 2005). Prasad (2005) has provided insights and the methodological strategies for studying identity work and *power* in context. These include racioethnic approaches (Cox, 1990; Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2005), as well as postcolonial theory (Prasad, 1996; 2001; Said, 1978), which looks at events from the perspective of the so-called Other. Helms Mills (2002) has used critical sensemaking to explore identity work in the context of those (female employees) who struggle to make sense of discrimination. Critical discourse analysis (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) has captured alternative voices where power is in play. Narrative analysis (Boje, 2001; McKenna, 1999, 2010), ethnomethodological analysis (Weick, 1993), standpoint theory (Harding, 1987; Smith, 1987), and critical hermeneutics (Prasad, 2002; Prasad & Mir, 2002) are all gaining wider acceptance by organizational scholars, and to a limited extent these approaches have been used to study immigrant workplace experiences in Canada (Hardy & Phillips, 1999; Jones, 2008; McCoy & Masuch, 2007; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Mirchandani, 1998; R. Ng, 1996).

Building on Prasad (2005), Bryman, Bell, Mills, and Yue (2011) define postpositivism as "a disparate number of 'intellectual traditions' that share a common rejection of fundamental tenets of positivism—especially the insistence on emulating the natural sciences in the study of human society, and its characterization as a unified scientific community of practice" (p. 58). I contend that a postpositivist framework is a useful starting point in studying the immigrant experience in an unequal social system. For example, ethnomethodologists (such as Garfinkel, 1967) and phenomenologists (e.g., Goffman, 1959) have written about the methods of practical reasoning that underlie the accomplishment of identity as a way of revealing everyday social relations. Feminists have long argued that gender is not so much a result of apparently essential characteristics arising from sex or gender roles, but rather "an axis of inequality/domination-subordination where gender relations are hierarchical power relations" (Calás & Smircich, 2009, p. 247; also see Smith, 1987, on *ruling relation*). In fact, Litvin (1997, p. 203) has rejected the "essentializing discourse of diversity" in which workforce diversity was presented as demographic category membership (such as race, ethnicity, or gender) while denying that individuals were influenced and pressured by macro-level social, political, and economic forces. More recent research has also pointed to the role of intersectionality (a nexus of race, gender, class, and a number of other potential identity points) as a way of making sense of identity work (Bagilhole, 2010; McCall, 2005).

Nevertheless, one of the postpositivist intellectual traditions referred to by Prasad (2005) is poststructuralism, which offers a radical critique of modernist thinking. This approach attempts to understand the relationship among texts (broadly defined), power, and discursive practices. To put it simply, texts are seen as discursive outcomes of, yet also influences on, patterns of behaviour. Texts, for example, are not structures that obscure underlying meanings (as structuralists would argue) but rather they are simultaneously outcomes and processes in the development of meaning. In offering a poststructuralist account within a postpositivist framework, I intend to examine the complex conditions and processes of discursive practices within an unequal power system in which people's lives are inextricably interwoven with the social world. My goal is to bring to the surface the hidden discourses that mediate the workplace opportunities of visible minority immigrants.

To that end, I collected some publicly available documents (see Table 4.1, p. 65) and conducted a series of interviews with first-generation (Hong Kong Chinese) immigrants[4] to Canada. From these data I developed a critical discursive analysis of their sensemaking processes and associated identity work (Brown, 2000, 2001, 2006; Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008). For the rest of this chapter, I introduce an *insider* perspective, some key definitions, and an outline of

[4] For simplicity, this study uses the term *immigrant* to refer to all first-generation Hong Kong Chinese, whether they have obtained citizenship or not.

this study's contribution to the field. Near the end of the chapter, I offer a road map for the rest of the thesis.

An Insider Perspective

Early in 1997, I left a senior management position in Hong Kong and came to Canada alone as a professional and skilled immigrant. I believed that having prior work experience and a sufficient level of education (a master's degree) would lead me to a "better" quality of life. In the beginning (for about six months), I was only able to work in a low-paying, entry-level job that was also associated with a lower social status. I asked myself over and over again, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" These significant "shocks"—or discrepancies—disrupted my routines. I tried to search for reasons and simultaneously intensified my efforts at identity-making (e.g., Ibarra, 1999). Such activities have come to be called "identity-work, which is anything that people do, individually and collectively, to give meaning to themselves or others" (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115).

Retrospectively, my inadequate *social* network was also reflected in my struggles. I cannot *enact* the *cues* that make *plausible ongoing* sense of the workplace events that my *identity* was built upon (the italicized words here are the seven socio-psychological properties outlined by Weick, 1995). These struggles reveal how the making of sense (e.g., common sense or cultural sense) helps or

harms the making of the immigrant's identity in a foreign land. I eventually came to realize that I can only organize meanings based on formative contexts (Unger, 1987b, 1987c), which are widespread social practices and behavioural routines that influence people's behaviour, and which limit what can be imagined and done within an unequal social system. My personal story is echoed by Morgan's (2006) famous statement: "We all construct or enact our realities but not necessarily under circumstances of our own choosing" (p. 147). This observation has illuminated two important elements—sensemaking (socially constructed understanding) and formative context (widespread social practices and imaginings)—that aid my understanding of what shapes the workplace experiences of visible minority professional and skilled immigrants.

Some Definitions

Sensemaking is defined as "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409, also see *cognitive dissonance theory* in Festinger, 1957; and *studies in ethnomethodology* in Garfinkel, 1967). Sensemaking tends to occur strongly when the perceived state of the world is different from the expected. Weick names these discrepancies or interruptions *shocks* (1990, 1993) that trigger an intensified period of sensemaking. As sensemaking unfolds, people deal with uncertainty, search for reasons, try to resume the interrupted activity, and remain in action.

Action by itself tends to stir up information that can suggest direction and the next step. This process of sensemaking has at least seven properties: it takes place in a social context; it involves identity construction; it is retrospective; it is ongoing; it involves enactment (that is, it takes place in action); it involves elaboration of salient cues into broader meaning; and its goal is plausible meaning rather than accurate account. Further, the process of sensemaking affects not only the initial sense one develops of a situation, but more importantly the extent to which people will *update* that sense. These properties have an effect on the willingness of people to disengage from their initial story (and discourse) and adopt a newer or modified discourse that is more sensitive to the particulars of the present context. This is why a sensemaking framework is an alternative approach in the explanation of how different meanings are generated and assigned in relation to the same event. I contend that the sense that immigrants make is crucial for the opportunities they find. I will further elaborate on the seven properties of sensemaking and my methodological approach (Weick, 1995, 2001, 2008; Weick et al., 2005) in Chapter 3: Methodological Approach.

The term *immigrant* can be used discursively to refer to a person of colour, and/or someone from a Third World or (supposedly) developing country, who does not speak English well and holds a position low in the occupational hierarchy (Estable & Meyer, 1989). This common definition is problematic and stereotypical, if not offensive. In fact, other than Aboriginal groups, who in

Canada can truly claim to be native? Are not most of us immigrants (so-called first-generation immigrants) or the descendants of immigrants (second- , third-, or subsequent-generation immigrants)—people whose origins are overseas? This identity label is either *accomplished* by others (the more powerful players) through unequal social interactions (Garfinkel, 1967; also see Goffman, 1963, on *stigma*), or internalized by oneself within a network of socio-cultural discourses. By affirming the (stigmatized) status of immigrant identities and images, and by dividing up the population between immigrant and Canadian in organizations and in society at large, this identity division regulates or normalizes those who are defined as "normal" or "appropriate" subjects (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Foucault, 1979, 1982) in opposition to those who are defined as "inappropriate" and "abnormal." These Foucauldian (1979, 1982) insights reveal that "deviants" are created and then marginalized through hierarchical distinctions and divisions. It is also noteworthy that this binary and hierarchical division occurs not merely between immigrant (the deviant) and Canadian (the normal), but sometimes among visible minority immigrants themselves (Flowerdew, Li, & Tran, 2002; Geddes & Konrad, 2003). For instance, a division of various levels of immigrant identity characterizes new versus established immigrants or Canadians versus Canadians-in-training.

Identity labels, as Collinson (2003) argues, can only be relatively stable and unambiguous in collectivist cultures with relatively simple divisions of

labour. If that is the case, identities tend to be ascribed by birth and legitimized through religion and family status. However, immigrant culture is neither collective nor simple; this study chooses the term immigrant as a flux identity label that is shifting and temporary (see *flux perspective* in Simpson & Carroll, 2008; *structural symbolic interactionism* in Stryker, 1980; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), "a sign that evokes meaning" around which "there is always room for negotiation" (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, pp. 115–116). *Identity* is a socially constructed term that often signifies power, status and agency in a society and refers to the "qualities of the identity claimant" (p. 115). For instance, one born overseas but educated in Canada when young (although still originally an immigrant) might consider him/herself Canadian. This subjective label signifies his/her identity and status in society, while simultaneously rejecting an immigrant (stigmatized) label that implies a lower status and quality. Goffman (1963) pioneered the use of the term *stigma* to refer to "the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance" (Preface). In this sense, a person constructs an identity that reflects his/her qualities depending on the cues s/he draws upon in a particular time. This example illustrates the potential for dynamic identity construction in which individuals may choose certain definitions and discourses to embrace or distance themselves from different times and in different situations (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Simpson & Carroll, 2008; Stryker, 1968).

More importantly, we should acknowledge that at least the ability to make sense of events in a new country could be drastically different for so-called first-generation immigrants (who are born and probably raised overseas) than for those born and raised in Canada, the so-called second-generation immigrants (Reitz & Banerjee, 2007; also see *Mannheim's Sociology of Generations* in Pilcher, 1994). It is important to note that where immigrants are raised is also where they learn and inherit cultural beliefs, values, and practices. The role of culture might directly mediate the way immigrants extract cues, as well as the way they make sense of an organization's inherent power and language. Sometimes culture is an advantage; at other times it may become a burden (see Chapter 6: Intra-Ethnic Oppression).

By *language*, here, I mean neither dialect nor the linguistic background of a natural language such as English or French, but the "text and talk" people do when they create, support, and contest identity "through the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts" (Hardy, 2001, p. 28). Identity, then, "emanate[s] from interactions between the social groups and the complex societal structures in which the discourse is embedded" (p. 28). The effects of colonial discourse (Prasad, 2005; Said, 1978) on identity work also must not be overlooked, as Hong Kong was formerly a colonized city. Psychological and cultural influences can play a significant retrospective role in organizing immigrants' identities. Scholars (Cesaire, 1950; Fanon, 1963, 1967; Said, 1978)

argue that "not only does colonialism oppress and exploit entire nations, but it also turns their inhabitants into objectified commodities" (Prasad, 2005, p. 264) where they lose their cultural identity. I will further elaborate on these ideas in Chapter 5: Capturing Discursive Elements of the Formative Context Retrospectively.

The Contribution of This Study

Since important aspects of identity can be imposed by others (more powerful players) through social interactions (McCall & Simmons, 1966; Stryker, 1968; also see s*ymbolic interactionism* in Serpe & Stryker, 2011), and can be constructed by oneself within the context of socio-cultural and organizational discourses, how one makes sense of one's identity labels becomes a part of the key research question of this study. This process of identity work may affect immigrants' survival (i.e., making a living) or social mobility in their Canadian workplace. Nevertheless, rejecting or distancing oneself from immigrant identity labels does not necessarily imply that people will have faced less (or no) discrimination in the workplace. Rather, the discrimination might take different forms that require different strategies to counteract or resist (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). Thus, locating the hidden discourses and the associated discursive practices that mediate immigrant acclimatization is my intended contribution to the literature in this field.

While we often accept that discourses of discrimination begin from the imposition of the dominant white male culture onto the visible minority racialized female, some striking findings note that discriminatory discursive practices can originate within a visible minority or an ethno-linguistic group (Flowerdew et al., 2002; Geddes & Konrad, 2003). Thus, an examination of the direction of discrimination—between white and non-white, versus among the same racioethnic group—may uncover new phenomena that contribute to new theories (Davis, 1971).

Using my own ethnic and linguistic background (that is, my subject position; see Phillips and Hardy, 1997) as research resources, and examining the problem closer to the root, this study sets out to contribute new insights to the current literature through proposing the key question—*how do Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of their workplace experience, individually and collectively?*—as well as three sub-questions:

1. Context: How do Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make retrospective sense in Canada? (Chapter 5)
2. Rules: Where and how do immigrants search for plausible cues to act at institutional level? (chapter 6)
3. Identity labels (agency): How do immigrants develop strategies in their identity work? (Chapter 7)

In a poststructuralist paradigm, power is viewed as "exercised rather than possessed, closely bound to resistance through multiple power relations, and productive or constitutive rather than simply oppressive" (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004, p. 141). Hence through the informants' reflections and voices, I set out to see how context, rules, or identity labels are accepted or resisted. Taking power and other discursive elements into account, investigation of the above questions can help us to understand what kinds of assumptions and practices are associated with socio-political contexts, and hence widen our understanding of the processes by which immigrants integrate and settle (or not) in Canada.

In addition to the contribution to the literature and practices, the theoretical and methodological contributions of this study to the broader literature of immigrant adjustment are four-fold. First, examining how immigrants make sense of their situations and events (e.g., context, rules, and identity labels) bridges our understanding of how power emerges historically, helping us to see how the micro-level analysis (the individual) is engaged by (or subjected to) the macro-level (structural and societal discourse) in a more critical sense. Second, exploring the narratives of immigration experience can provide a theory and a critique of the systemic need for a "deviant" to be outside the boundaries of the acceptable. Third, by adopting a rather underutilized approach (the critical sensemaking framework), this study helps develop a new way to study complex topics such as immigrant experience and workplace equality. Fourth, this research

provides an empirical investigation of how discursive activities contribute to immigrants' mobility and sequentially enhance our understanding of the role of power in immigrants' lives (i.e., the possibilities of resistance [agency] over the fact of domination). In short, this study aims to use socio-psychological properties and identity work as heuristics to locate hidden discourses and see how they operate among visible minority immigrants' lives in the Canadian workplace. Without this kind of work, the general public may remain largely unaware of the complexity of how racism is historically embedded (the context); institutionally informed (the rules); systemically maintained (the discourse); and micro-politically resisted (agency) in our everyday lives.

Organization of the Rest of the Thesis

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature that identifies what has been done and locates the gaps in immigrant identity literature. I outline three themes: (1) how immigrant experience and discrimination studies have been treated and framed in the structural approach and what is missing; (2) how social constructionism has the potential to help understand identity-making, but lacks insights about socio-political stances; (3) how poststructuralist literature on identity work has shed light on organizational control and discursive practices, yet immigrants' voices and reflections in Canada still remain silenced. This is the gap I seek to bridge.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodological approach used in this study. In order to ascertain how Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of their experiences in situations of differential power, a poststructuralist lens and poststructuralist methods are employed. Critical sensemaking is one of these poststructuralist approaches that probes beneath the surfaces of workplace relations and reveals identity work and other associated issues. As Thurlow (2010) stresses, “critical sensemaking provides a lens through which to analyze the power relationship reflected in theses inequalities within organizations and the consequence of those power effects for individuals” (p. 257). I demonstrate how the critical sensemaking framework and Foucauldian discursive analysis (Foucault, 1979; Phillips & Hardy, 2002) can be used to analyze immigrants’ narratives.

Chapter 4 provides details of the research design: my institutional access; the background of the informants; the process of data collection, translation, and transcription; and some thoughts on reflexivity and the ethical considerations for this study. I also include descriptions of other publicly available texts, such as websites and brochures, in which I locate the structural issues in context. Last but not least, I develop a conceptual framework that guides and organizes my approach to data analysis and discussions.

Chapter 5 outlines the idea of retrospective sensemaking and reveals the contexts of the study. I discuss two aspects of the formative context: first, the

historical events that demonstrate how Chinese immigrants have been treated in Canada; second, the historical and cultural background of the sensemakers' origin, Hong Kong, one of the colonized cities. My emphasis is on how cues were extracted retrospectively by informants when they were engaging in the contextual sensemaking.

Chapter 6 explores the institutionalized discourses and organizational rules that immigrants face. Here two main themes emerge. First, the dominant discourse of integration; and second, the silent discourse of exploitation within an Other. The local site and its organizational background will be highlighted as backdrops of the analysis, thus demonstrating how organizational rules shape informants' sensemaking processes. In this chapter, we hear more voices of acceptance and resistance when immigrants deal with the institutional discourses.

Chapter 7 is anchored on the idea of agency in the process of individual sensemaking. Its main focus is on how professional immigrants produce orders and develop strategies in their identity work and identity labels. It offers a more textured understanding of the role of power in immigrants' lives and reveals the forms of resistance at the individual level. Why and how do people construct different meanings for the same event? How are they influenced by competing normative discourses about the right kind of immigrant and the right kind of Canadian (citizen)?

In the final chapter, I will bring all elements (from chapters 5 to 7) together with the goal of unpacking the different dimensions of workplace inequality. I will discuss the implications for theory and practice, highlight the contributions, the limitations, potential research directions, and draw my final reflections on this study.

Chapter 2: Deconstructing Immigrant Identity Work

Overview of This Chapter

Theoretical analysis of the immigrant experience (voice and reflection) at work is an underdeveloped area of study. Traditional research is more rooted, as I have explained above, in structural accounts, but previous studies also focus on outcomes rather than the human processes involved (e.g., how sense is made from the experience of *becoming* a Canadian). Policies, laws, and regulations were established by the federal government to prevent systemic discrimination. However, immigrant settlement and integration issues have never disappeared. In the literature reviewed for this chapter, the issues about immigrants are largely studied for their *outcomes* in both access and treatment discrimination (see VanderPlaat, 2007). The literature categorizes and highlights the discriminatory aspects of organizations, yet few researchers focus on the *processes* that translate discrimination into changing senses of the self (e.g., through identity labels). This study attempts to fill that gap. More specifically, when looking at the issue, it is not so much what is there—the *being* of identity—but rather a more important question: the *becoming* of identity (or in ethnomethodologists' terms, the *accomplishment* of identity [Garfinkel, 1967]), and the practices that produce and maintain that identity. One of the ways to make the issues more visible for analysis is to draw upon theories of identity work (Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson,

Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996) and Weick's (1995) work on the socio-psychological properties of sensemaking. This body of literature contributes to the explanation of the making (production and reproduction) of immigrant identity. The role of power, structure, and discourse is largely neglected in the literature, and thus, near the end of this chapter, I turn to the poststructuralist literature concerning identity in order to include some consideration of power, resistance, and related issues. This approach furthers our understanding of the ways that immigrant identities are achieved through ambiguities and struggles. Only then can counter-strategies and techniques be deployed for immigrants and/or by immigrants in changing the complex and deep-rooted issues of organizational hierarchy.

This chapter outlines a selection of literature and research findings on three themes of particular relevance to this study. The first theme is visible minority immigrant research (Cox, 1990) framed within a structural account. These studies focus on immigrant outcomes in both *access discrimination* (before being hired), such as denial of jobs or job interviews, lower starting salaries, or lack of access to jobs at higher levels, and *treatment discrimination* (after being hired), such as biased performance evaluation or inaccurate feedback, slower rates of promotion, or limited access to training and resources. These studies identify some areas and suggest others that need attention to avoid systemic discrimination and to ensure that policies and practices do not encourage discriminatory

practices. However, previous studies in this area are mostly conceptual or descriptive and have rarely sought to explain why individuals accept or reject the specific immigrant identities that get them into the situations and outcomes they are in. Further, it is likely that "a reluctance to recognize and address how certain actions and arrangements sustain and reinforce asymmetrical relations of power" makes these studies politically naive (Alvesson, 2002, p. 123). Therefore this study looks at how individuals enact, organize, and process discourses, in order to further understand the formation of immigrant identities.

This leads to our second theme on identity construction, which could shed light on how people make sense of (or organize) their identities. In this approach, identity construction can occur in two traditions: (1) as part of the self-concept, and thus an activity of individuals (with little or no external influence); or (2) as a group process, collectively, where identities are constructed, used, and changed in interaction with others (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; also see *symbolic interactionism* in Serpe & Stryker, 2011). The latter approach is pioneered by social constructionism (Burke, 1980; 2009; McCall & Simmons, 1966; Goffman, 1961, 1963; Stryker, 1968; 1980), including the literature of identity work and certain socio-psychological properties of sensemaking (Weick, 1995). However, some social constructionists underemphasize the role of power in the classification process (for instance, good and bad, immigrant and Canadian), thus "mistakenly suggesting a multidirectional flow of influence and agency" (Cerulo,

1997, p. 391). In order to more adequately address the complex issues of immigrant identity, I turn to the poststructuralist literature on identity that is the third theme of the literature, in which the issues of power and context are taken into account. This offers an alternative way of understanding social change. Each theme is outlined below.

Theme One: Structural Approaches to Visible Minority Immigrants

Most literature on visible minority immigrants in the workplace belongs to one of two traditions: (1) diversity management, which often highlights the business case for doing diversity work (e.g., Gilbert, Stead, & Ivancevich, 1999; McMahon, 2010; Pitts, Hicklin, Hawes, & Melton, 2010; Richard, Barnett, Dwyer, & Chadwick 2004; Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, & Monga, 2009), or (2) a more radical approach to employment equity, which falls within Cox's (1990) racioethnic paradigm and addresses racial and/or ethnic discrimination (e.g., Al-Waqfi & Jain, 2006; Boyd, 1984; Elliott & Smith, 2004; Kamenou & Fearfull, 2006; Koopmans, 2010; for a comprehensive review, see Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Seminal works in this tradition focus on inequality and look at the differential price of labour (see dual/spit labour market theory, e.g., Bonacich, 1972) and labour market differences among groups (see labour market segmentation theory, e.g., Reich et al., 1973). Recent literature in workplace discrimination can be classified into two groups: access discrimination and treatment discrimination

(VanderPlaat, 2007). Türegün (2011), Grant (2008) and Grenier & Xue (2011) deal with the first type, discrimination in gaining access to the workplace, involving obstacles such as credential transferability and hiring barriers respectively. Al-Waqfi and Jain (2006) and Yoshida and Smith (2005) contribute to the second category, involving such issues as earnings and training. These researchers seek to understand the variables (such as characteristics of discrimination, legal cases, and complaints; see Al-Waqfi & Jain, 2006) and effects (on training received) of workplace discrimination practices. One of the common strategies of these studies is to identify the factors (or variables) that cause the problem (the discrimination), based on the assumption that human behaviour is highly remediable and systematically manipulable. In other words, if the variable—interpersonal skills—causes discrimination, then one should "fix" the skill of the person. To employ this individual focus, it is necessary for researchers to assume that workplace inequality is largely due to the individual's deficiency rather than the influence of the dominant practices or an organizational structure (Mills, Simmons, & Helms Mills, 2005) in which power and privilege mediate outcomes. Most mainstream literature acknowledges neither the discursive, cultural, and political nature of social relations, nor issues of control and contestation. These limitations restrict the ability of this literature to deal with the *realities* of organizational life (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). This type of

research treats human beings as autonomous individuals who are separate and separable from social relations and organizations (Collinson, 2003).

While the literature of race and ethnicity is rather limited and under-researched according to Cox (1990; Nkomi & Cox, 1996), he suggests that this could be due to the challenges of gaining access to the research field or to barriers to acceptance by mainstream journal editors (e.g., one could be labelled a fringe researcher). Cox further argues that distinct classification of groups by race or ethnicity seems inappropriate because these labels imply “a group is either biologically or culturally distinct from another, whereas it generally is both” (p. 7). The term *racioethnic* is used to “refer to biologically and/or culturally distinct groups” (p. 7). However, seeing visible minorities (i.e., non-white immigrants) as homogenous and non-hierarchical (e.g., Mighty, 1997; Greenhalgh, 1998) is equally problematic. Mighty (1997) selected 14 immigrant women of colour, but treated the term immigrant as denoting ethnic and demographic differences rather than generational identity. Since the data collection only targeted first-generation visible minority immigrants, the study mistakenly concluded that the whole ethnic group, including later generations, was subjected to the same discriminatory practices.

It is arguable that among first-generation immigrants there can be significant difficulties in sensemaking compared with other generations (Pilcher, 1994). They could have fewer *sensemaking cues* (e.g., common sense) about

culture, probably questioning their *identities* when there is a lack of *retrospective sense* for a given situation. Being outside of a *social sensemaking* community, they might have little *ongoing sense* of people and events to make them and their actions appear *plausible*, in particular when they lack power and/or authority to *enact* new senses of situations (italicized words constitute Weick's [1995] seven socio-psychological properties of sensemaking). The variations in the ways that different generations respond to social interactions are not adequately explained (Pilcher, 1994). This leads us to the second theme in the literature, which focuses on social constructionism.

Theme Two: Identity Construction through Social Constructionism

Social constructionism has many roots and can be discussed according to multiple ontological positions/meanings. In this chapter, I use the term in relation to the meaning that is antithetical to objectivism but not antithetical to realism. Symbolic interactionism, dramaturgy, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology are among the theoretical perspectives in this paradigm. Social constructionism informs much of the work on identity (Cerulo, 1997), taking us in a different direction in understanding racioethnicity studies. In this paradigm, identity is conceptualized through interactional accomplishment and (re)negotiated via linguistic exchanges and social performances (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1961, 1963; also see Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Social constructionism often

scrutinizes agents of socialization and how they organize and project affective, cognitive, and behavioural data that individuals use to construct a self (Cerulo, 1997; Garfinkel, 1967; Goffman, 1961). For example, Weick (1993) uses cognitive and behavioural data to analyze the Mann Gulch disaster, in which 13 firefighters perished. Firefighters' identities are closely tied with their tools. When they were asked to drop their tools and to run for their lives while putting out a forest fire, their identities were threatened and they could not make plausible sense of the situation (due to the weight of their tools, they were unable to escape the fire and so perished). In this case, their identities became the stumbling block in the process of organizing their situations. In fact, identity work is often prompted and intensified by organizational shock (Weick, 1995), crisis (Weick, 1993; Beech, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Watson, 2008) or during radical transitions (e.g., Ibarra, 1999). In organizations (see Weick, 1995, 2001), sensemaking properties provide a strong bridge for understanding identity construction; sensemaking links our understanding of internal personal self-identities to external, social identities. Indeed, Weick (1995) proclaims that identity construction is the foremost and crucial element in the framework because "sensemaking begins with a sensemaker" (p. 18). He emphasizes the importance of the "agent" when highlighting identity construction, inasmuch as the sensemaking process is often "triggered by a failure," occurs for "a consistent, positive self-conception," enables the agent to learn through enactment (or

projection), and is "self-referential" (p. 23). Helms Mills (2003) refers to this as "projective sensemaking" (p. 70). In this sense, social interactions and the influences of powerful social actors should significantly influence the plausibility of one's claim, thus limiting the potential applicability of explanations of "self-referential" identity (Weick, 1995, p. 23) as a freewill choice. Weick neglects the explicit effects of power and structure (Helms Mills, 2003).

Complementing the sensemaking properties developed by Weick (1995), some constructionists build on the idea of a racial and ethnic "identity shift" and its implications (e.g., Alba, 1990; McCall & Simmons, 1966; Nagel, 1995; Stryker, 1968; Waters, 1990). Their research stresses the benefits and the attractiveness of a double-edged value (i.e., "sitting on the fence" while sustaining two or more national identities) in understanding the ongoing process of identity construction. Scholars in this camp draw heavily on participants' narratives by extracting cues from cultural resources, participants' own memories, and social discourse (Ybema et al., 2009). Some common themes connected to identity construction in this literature are ethics (Gunz & Gunz, 2007), organizational change (Corley, 2004; Down & Reveley, 2009), identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Gotsi, Andriopoulos, Lewis, & Ingram, 2010), legitimacy and rhetoric (Kitay & Wright, 2007), flexible work (Grote & Raeder, 2009; Whittle, 2005), work transition (Ibarra, 1999), and cultural stigma (Slay & Smith, 2011), yet the visible minority immigrant voice is still missing.

More recent work has been done on how identity changes (Beech, 2008, 2011). Beech (2008) draws attention to the importance of resistance. He theorizes the route to meaning construction of multiple identity narratives of managers, in which least resistance and power dynamics are modelled. Another factor in changing identity is explored by Kreiner, Hollensbe, and Sheep (2006) on the interface between individual and organizational identities, where the micro-identity can be seen through the macro-identity (the organizational identity) and as a result, it can be seen that "individual behaviour is more 'macro' than we usually recognize" (Chatman, Bell, & Staw, 1986, p. 211). This micro/macro lens provides analytical insights into the interface, interaction, and co-construction between the agent (micro-level) and the structure, the external discourses, and culture (the macro-level; see also Watson, 2009) of inquiry. This provides a good foundation for the flux perspective on identity that I will adopt in this study.

Despite the growing literature concerned with identity work and reconstruction (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ybema et al., 2009) that has greatly broadened our understanding of the (active) processes of social construction of identity in the workplace, it is disappointing to see that this approach has a rather limited appeal in the field. Within the organizational context of identity work, most studies merely focus on the concept of managerial identity or related issues (e.g., Beech, 2008; Down & Reveley, 2009; Watson, 2008, 2009; Wright, 2008) through collecting narrative accounts of managers or equivalent figures (e.g.,

consultants or entrepreneurs). To a certain extent, such studies shy away from the possibility of other voices in the workplace. As Martin (2002) observes, “one of the most critical contributions of cultural research has been to give voice to the perceptions and opinions of those who are less powerful or marginalized” (p. 11), to allow more voices to be heard from the bottom up, such as Pio’s (2005) work on Indian women migrants’ ethnic identity at work and Denissen’s (2010) research on women in the building trade sector. Despite special issues on identity work in two prominent academic journals (*Human Relations,* 2009, vol. 62[3]; *Organization,* 2008, vol. 15[1]), the situation has not changed. With a total of 10 published (excluding the editors’ introductions) articles, eight studies in these special issues analyze and/or argue the issue through findings that come from the top or near the top of the hierarchy (e.g., from supervisors, managers, consultants, or entrepreneurs), while alternative voices are silenced. This is another gap that I aim to fill with this study by examining a wider range of occupations at different hierarchical levels, in order to give voice to those who have been too low in organizational life to be heard; and to see how power is exercised through different forms of resistance (Foucault, 1982; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). The good news is that more scholars are willing to depart from the traditional paradigm in scrutinizing the knowledge of organizational realities and have thus made a postmodernist turn. It seems appropriate to turn our attention now to the

third theme in the literature, understanding what poststructuralist literature can help us to see, which otherwise is missing and thus invisible.

Theme Three: Poststructuralist Literature on Identity work

Sharing some common interests with constructionists, poststructuralist scholars (Prasad, 2005) have also provided focused research on managers and management, but in a much different way from the social constructivists. From this perspective, often found in Critical Management Studies (CMS), narrative is a form of discursive practice that not only provides contextual tools for analyzing the exercise of power over others in organizations, but also functions as a disciplinary form that constitutes organizations and their participants in particular discursive ways (Foucault, 1979, 1980). As Clegg (1989) observes, “to the extent that meanings become fixed or reified in certain forms, which then articulate particular practices, agents and relations, this *fixity* is power” (p. 183). In other words, the “fixity” also shares common ground with “rules,” which are used to control or mediate organizational activities and behaviour. Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) expand on how rules can be used, as an approach, to explore and explain organizational configurations. This perspective provides a fundamental way of seeing how the deep-rooted context and structure of an organization come to be as they are. To be specific, poststructuralist research (as part of CMS) crucially involves being sensitive to issues of power and control, as well as hegemony and

resistance, that are historically embedded in organizational practices and discourses.

In recent years, some interesting themes related to critical identity work have emerged in research exploring various sites, such as call centres (Carroll, Helms Mills, & Mills, 2008), knowledge intensive firms (Deetz, 1994; Karreman & Alvesson, 2004), audit firms (Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006) and architecture firms (Brown, Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2010). While much of this research is focused on management and leadership discourse (Carroll & Levy, 2008; Clark, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004), with its concerns about identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Simon & Oakes, 2006) and ethics (Kornberger & Brown, 2007), much less attention is given to workplace insecurity and anxiety (Collinson, 2003) and workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). The research on race and ethnicity is still relatively minimal (e.g., Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009; Kalonaityte, 2010; Swan, 2010; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003), and for this reason, such cases as that of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants' experiences have not yet been given voice.

Theories of identity work and the philosophical position of this study have been briefly discussed in Chapter 1 and through the above literature. The key question of how Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of their workplace experiences, individually and collectively, is the entrance point of this study. To

be able to analyze the practices that constitute the social world and probe beneath surface appearances through observation of the people being studied is a vital quality in qualitative research (Bryman et al., 2011). Thus, I must remain aware that the identity work of immigrants is highly influenced by socio-psychological factors (see Weick, 1995) and the power relations involved in these routine activities. As such, immigrants often bear strong imprints from others exercising power over their interpretations (Alvesson, 2010; Foucault, 1980, 1982; Helms Mills & Mills, 2000). Embedded discourses and external forces (including deep-rooted structure and practices) combine to produce an individual's position and identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002), rather than the autonomous individual him/herself. In other words, it is difficult to find someone who can authentically construct his/her own identity without being affected by external forces such as oppression or suppression. To a certain extent, identity is partially a discursive effect. This suggests that identity work cannot be studied solely from the informant's point of view through narration; the research must include broader contexts. In the following chapters, I further explain how my choice of methodology highlights some of these effects, which are otherwise hidden in organizational life.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

Overview of This Chapter

Through the literature review, it is clear that immigrants' sensemaking and their associated identity work are under-researched and have been largely ignored in mainstream organizational literature and theorizing. In order to answer the key research question and its related three sub-questions (see p. 17 above), and to bridge the gaps that I have identified, I maintain that a poststructuralist approach is essential. While Weick's (1995) framework fails to address discursive elements and, arguably, Foucault (1980) pays relatively little attention to the micro-processes of agency, I will adopt the newer approach of critical sensemaking (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010) as an analytical framework for getting inside of the experiences of the immigrants.

Immigrants' sensemaking, ways of organizing, actions, and identities are difficult to detect and interpret for someone without any ethnic and linguistic understanding of the specific immigrant group. Even experienced researchers may find it challenging to get inside of the thinking of immigrants when cultural resources are unavailable. This also implies that simple frameworks that deal with either micro- or macro-level elements might not be suitable for conceptualizing complex phenomena. When considering a conceptual framework, Alvesson (2010) maps out the ontological terrain of identity images. He produces seven

images or conceptualizations (self-doubters, strugglers, surfers, storytellers, strategists, stencils, and soldiers) that researchers have adopted in capturing the self-identity constructions in organizations. What is missing is an approach that can simultaneously acknowledge the ontology of the “individual doing identity construction” and the “context providing direction for identity construction” (Alvesson, 2010, p. 209); Alvesson assumes that approaches can capture either one or the other, but not both. Critical sensemaking is a multi-dimensional approach that can simultaneously embrace both ontological positions in capturing identity work and the interconnected relationships among which it occurs (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). The four elements (context, rules, discourse, and sensemaking) allow it to adequately address complex phenomena. With these tools, it is possible to open up space for alternative voices and get inside the world view of immigrants (through their narratives).

In this chapter, I discuss my methodological approaches in detail. First, I discuss why and how the poststructuralist approach is appropriate for and compatible with my problematic. Second, I elaborate on how the critical sensemaking approach can be used as a conceptual framework to guide the analysis of immigrants’ experiences and their corresponding identity work. The four critical sensemaking elements (socio-psychological properties, formative context, organizational rules, and Foucauldian discourse) will also be outlined in detail.

The Poststructuralist Perspective

Postmodernism can be used to refer to "intellectual positions intended to offer a radical critique of the entire fabric of modern Western thinking from both within and outside it" (Prasad, 2005, p. 211). It rejects modernist assumptions of "social coherence and linear causality in favor of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy" (Best & Kellner, 1991, cited in Prasad, 2005, p. 219). Commentators such as Lemert (1997) make strong arguments in distinguishing different categories of postmodernism. Lemert describes poststructuralism as a form of "strategic postmodernism" in which the strategic postmodernist "neither gives up on nor overrates modernity's power" (p. 52). In order to conceptualize the process of identity work that leads to workplace (in)equality, I need to understand what power relations are about. Rather than understanding power relations directly, Foucault (1982) focuses on investigating and observing the "form of resistance" and struggle because the "aim of these struggles is the power effects" (p. 780). He suggests taking a series of oppositions as a starting point, for example, the power of men over women, of parents over children, of psychiatry over the mentally ill—or of multi-ethnic service organizations over visible minority immigrants. These are some common sites where power relations are evident. As such, in order to focus on the power effects of visible minority immigrants' struggles, this study investigates a specific multi-

ethnic service organization. I will introduce this multi-ethnic service organization in detail in Chapter 6.

A poststructuralist approach deconstructs and re-reads long-embedded structures and practices (usually including texts) that have been taken for granted. These structures and practices are usually governed by dominating centres (e.g. hospital, church, or school) that supposedly provide a gentle, humane, and liberal guiding force, for instance, to heal the sick, to understand social life, and to rehabilitate the criminal. These institutions are interested in using moral and formal instructions (such as teaching, training, and guiding) to discipline people because the cultural values of modernity prohibit direct physical force. Discipline, in this form, is an exercise of power that works through the gentle means of guiding and defining (or a guiding force). This is also how power is drawn through knowledge (Foucault, 1980; Lemert, 1997). For example, when an immigration officer hands out a welcome handbook to newcomers, s/he is in fact exercising power through knowledge, defining what is considered appropriate "immigrant" behaviour, and staging the societal discourse of immigration in Canada. Poststructuralists also refuse to take modernity at face value. They believe appearances are in fact the very opposite of reality (Lemert, 1997).

Poststructuralist techniques concentrate on deconstruction, language, discourse, meaning, and symbols (Alevsson & Sköldberg, 2009). Simply, poststructuralists focus on discursive and linguistic (e.g., narrative) patterns and

behaviours, and believe language or discourse is fundamental to any science of the human (Lemert, 1997). Within the tradition of poststructuralism, there are a number of theorists, such as Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida (Lemert, 1997). They share common theoretical views: first, a commitment to reinterpret the modern classic social thinkers (such as Freud, Nietzsche, and Husserl); second, a conviction that language or discourse is fundamental to any human knowledge; and third, a rejection of any versions of the ideal of a universal essence, totality or centre as a basis for social thought (Lemert, 1997). Lacan rewrites classical Freudian psychoanalysis while Derrida focuses on rhetorical and textual analysis (Alevsson & Sköldberg, 2009; Lemert, 1997; Linstead, 2010; Prasad, 2005). Derrida's work focuses on transforming the dominant text into a subordinate text, in search of what is hidden (or absent) through deconstruction (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009; Linstead, 2010; Prasad, 2005). Although their approaches are widely used, the present study prefers the Foucauldian genre of poststructuralism, which rewrites the history of modern knowledge.

Foucault's work emphasizes how embedded structures and discursive practices (discourse) affect *subjects*, or actors (Foucault, 1982), and how power and knowledge influence one another (Foucault, 1980, 1979). Foucault's work also concerns the ways that power acts on others (Foucault, 1982, 1979), and he has "introduced more 'holistic' attempts to rethink history and dominating ideas with the help of alternative ways of understanding" (Alevsson & Sköldberg, 2009,

p. 181; Lemert, 1997). Knights (1992) paraphrases Foucault's (1980) ideas: "management knowledge is never independent of the power that managers and their corporations exercise" (p. 516).

In Foucauldian thinking, power is everywhere and "discourse secures our assent (or compliance) not so much by the threat of punitive sanctions as by persuading us to internalize the norms and values that prevail within the social order" (Linstead, 2010, p. 706). Most importantly, through this normative process that Foucault (1982) calls "dividing practices," the subject (the actor) is either divided inside her/himself or divided by others (p. 777). This dividing process in a way objectifies the actor. It is a hierarchical division that classifies and contains the *deviant* but also *normalizes* the rest of the population. For example, stigma (an identity label) can be attached to the sick, the mad, the criminal, the black, the poor, the immigrant, the unemployed, the uneducated, and so on. Such deviants are marginalized—divided from the rest of the population—and their "visibility is a constant reminder to others to conform" (Knights, 1992, p. 518; also see Foucault, 1965, 1979). Linstead (2010, p. 706) describes this as "disciplinary power" (see Foucault, 1979). This approach problematizes our everyday life (our practices), challenges the ways theories are constructed (our assumptions and authorship), and offers important impulses toward a reflexive social science.

For all these reasons, I believe adopting a poststructuralist approach to capture immigrants' experiences could strengthen the conceptualization of the

processes of identity work (labels) within the context of discursive practices (discourse). This may help locate the power dynamics that lead to workplace (in)equality. In Foucault's thinking (1980), power reaches into every grain of individuals and it is exercised within the social body rather than simply from the top (the authority) (Mills & Helm Mills, 2004). No matter how far people adopt or resist identity labels (thus exercising agency), identity is always a partial discursive effect and immigrant identity is always in progress.

The poststructuralist epistemological position is consistent with the aims of this study, which is to reveal how identities are formed and to emancipate the subordinated voices of the marginalized. According to Foucault, in order to see where power is located, we need to locate resistance and struggle. Then the centre of power and its relations, locations, applications, and methods become visible (1979, 1982). He states, "in order to understand what power relations are about, perhaps we should investigate the form of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations" (1982, p. 780). The notion of resistance in a poststructuralist paradigm is not simply about the power relationship between domination and victimization, but is rather a move towards an understanding of the ways that power resides in deviants' lives. In other words, the power relationship makes visible the possibilities of micro-politics of resistance over the fact of the domination (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004).

Thus, by investigating the discursive practices residing within the social body in immigrants' everyday routines, this study opens up space to identify how discourses work and what makes them effective. This study may potentially reveal techniques and strategies used by visible minority immigrants—the subjects (those with agency)—to resist and counter the structured inequalities of the workplace. Rabinow and Rose (1994) observe that Foucault's theories "set out to open things up, not close them down; to complicate, not simplify; not to police the boundaries of an oeuvre but to multiply lines of investigation and possibilities of thought" (p. vii). Foucauldian ideas and a poststructuralist perspective (broadly defined) complement my own epistemological position in investigating immigrant experience, where deep-rooted structures and practices may shift the unstable identities and the sensemaking of immigrants in the workplace.

Critical Sensemaking as a Conceptual Framework

Some of the things that are missing from a Foucauldian analysis are the role and the voice of the actor (the sensemaker) despite his later work (Foucault, 1988b) in *Technologies of the Self* (Helms Mills & Mills, 2009). The critical sensemaking perspective (Helms Mills et al., 2010), as one poststructuralist lens, can aid in understanding the ongoing interconnected relationship between the micro-elements (the sensemaker) and the macro-elements (the context). This critical sensemaking perspective reinserts a sense of agency (Nord & Fox, 1996)

into poststructuralist analysis by utilizing Weick's (1995) seven social psychological properties of sensemaking (sensemaking is social, focused on identity construction, retrospective, and ongoing; it takes place in action, extracting salient cues into a plausible meaning). However, fusing Weick's sensemaking with poststructuralist ideas raises epistemological issues. Weick's sensemaking (1995) draws on ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and interpretative approaches. At times, it more or less grounds its explanations in a definite set of positivist explainable thoughts, such as coherent scientific knowledge. Helms Mills et al. (2010) offer some useful insights to resolve the paradoxical nature of Weick's sensemaking. They address the issue by first, seeking a triangulation of methodologies to provide a different frame of reference that can simultaneously ground and problematize what they call critical sensemaking claims. Second, they emphases the conscious, *heuristic* as opposed to scientific characteristics of the social psychological properties of Weick's sensemaking. Third, they propose using a reflective approach as a way to maintain the consistency of epistemological assumptions (Helm Mills et al., 2010).

With these concerns in mind, the critical sensemaking perspective can be a powerful tool in understanding the multiple natures of human lives. To explain critical sensemaking, I focus on four elements—(1) the socio-psychological processes in which people engage (Weick, 2001); (2) the organizational context(s)

in which they make sense (Mills and Murgatroyd, 1991); (3) the discursive processes involved in making sense (Foucault, 1979); and (4) the sedimented, formative context that serves as the broader social framework in which people interact (Unger, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c). The elements are not meant to be used separately, nor is sensemaking a clear-cut process where a clear divide can be drawn between elements. The elements are simultaneously processing and mediating each other while a person is making sense of his/her situation. Therefore, the framework can neither be restricted as in a four-stage analysis nor can each element be used as a standalone tool. One possible way to make a complex framework comprehensible is to develop an analytical framework metaphorically for data analysis purpose (see Figure 4.1 [p. 72] for studying immigrant experience in Canada). The value of the critical sensemaking perspective lies in its ability to conceptualize the magnitude of the combined effects and the interactions across the various clusters of elements. Because of its emphasis on agency, a critical sensemaking approach helps us to explore the issues of how and why some (but not other) experiences become subjectively meaningful for Hong Kong Chinese immigrants. Nevertheless, for reasons of clarity, I elaborate on the four elements separately as follows:

Element One: Socio-psychological Properties

Weick (1995, 2001, 2008) draws on some early work by Garfinkel (1967, on decision making in juries), Goffman (1961, on *total institutions*) and Festinger (1957, on *cognitive dissonance theory*) in developing the sensemaking framework. He argues that sensemaking incidents are often triggered by shocks, which can include interruption of routines, breakdowns, disconfirmations, opportunities, or discrepancies. These disruptions and shocks are common triggers to intensify the processes of sensemaking for immigrants who have to begin new or re-establish previous professions in foreign lands. While the sensemaker searches for meanings in an inexplicable stream of experience, Weick (1995) asserts, there are at least seven properties that can have an effect on the process of making sense out of a situation (the initial story):

(1) ***Identity construction***. Weick (1995) states that "Sensemaking begins with a sensemaker" (p. 18). Identities are shaped and stabilized in a setting based on how the sensemaker interprets his/her own role and how others treat him/her in that role; thus identities are affected by social sensemaking elements. Through an ongoing refining process (see #4 below), the subject maintains a consistent and positive self-identity and self-image. What the situation will mean to me is dictated by the identity I adopt in dealing with it, so changing the sense of a situation

will also change the sense of a self, such as an immigrant finding a job in a new land. Identity construction is a pivotal element because it is at the root of the sensemaking process. It can substantially influence the other six properties (Helms Mills, 2003).

(2) ***Social context***. Sensemaking is affected by the actual, implied or imagined presence of others (see Merton, 1968). Sensemaking is a social activity that includes sharing ideas and labels with others, and influencing how others make sense of events. Social sensemaking is also about how people have been socialized to see *labelling* as acceptable (see Becker, 1966). Sensible meanings tend to be socially supported and consensually validated, with shared relevance. This element is also tied to identity construction.

(3) ***Retrospection***. Sensemaking is influenced by what people notice in past events, how far back they look and how well they remember the past and its associated experiences. People rely on past experience in a similar setting to compare and interpret current occurrences. Weick (2008) contends, "action is always just a tiny bit ahead of cognition" (p. 1406) and thus we can only make retrospective sense.

(4) ***Ongoing projects***. Sensemaking interprets a constant stream of experience that has neither a starting point nor an end point. People insert brackets into (or chop up) the continuous flow of events in order to ex-

tract cues from the moments and make sense of a situation (Weick, 1995). Thus, sensemaking is shaped by the speed with which interpretations become out of date and by the need for a current (refreshed) sense of the situations. Often, moments of shock force sensemakers to update the process of sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

(5) ***Enactment***. Sensemaking is about thinking in action, acting in order to think, and thinking while acting. As people act they think about their action and, in the process, make sense of it. The enactment of sensemaking includes activities of sensing anomalies, imposing order onto flux, and being shaped by externalities. What efforts at sensemaking tend not to do is to discontinue action (the search for salient cues) in the interest of detached analysis (Weick, 2008).

(6) ***Salient cues***. Sensemaking is about the elaboration of traces into full-blown stories. An initial linkage between a particular cue and a category is elaborated into a more confident diagnosis through successive rounds of selective searching for confirming evidence. In the process, past events may be extracted retrospectively. However, people tend to focus on specific cues consistent with their beliefs while ignoring others, so the choice of salient cues, retrospective construction, and the requirement for plausibility have direct influence on one another.

(7) ***Plausibility rather than accuracy***. Sensemaking is about creating meaning that is good enough to proceed with current projects, rather than producing a completely accurate account. Often, imposing plausible labels on interdependent events is a way to stabilize the "ongoing, unknown, and unpredictable streaming of experience" (Weick, 2005, p. 411), and by doing this to generate common ground on which to base plausible actions.

Weick's sensemaking properties do not occur in any particular order, nor is sensemaking a linear process (Helms Mills et al., 2010). It is not particularly clear whether Weick sees these *properties* as *real*, verifiable aspects of a person's socio-psychological make-up, whether they constitute a theoretical framework or "recipe" (Weick, 1996, p. 4), or some combination of the two (Nord and Fox, 1996).

I view the idea of socio-psychological properties as a useful framework for comprehending how individuals process events and understandings of reality (Helms Mills et al., 2010). From this perspective, the idea of socio-psychological properties attempts to capture a distinct aspect of a person's sensemaking processes, and yet, as theoretical constructs, these properties cannot be easily or totally separated from one another. They may be simultaneously processing and influencing each other; and perhaps over time, some elements may drop out as the

sensemaking process of a particular event becomes weakened. In sum, sensemaking is about the ongoing interplay of action and interpretation. I use these properties as a heuristic framework for watching how people create (Helms Mills et al., 2010) and produce order. As such, critical sensemaking is an attempt to foreground the role of agency in the analysis of various socio-psychological properties. This helps reveal the processes behind identity construction and the way that a sense of a situation is made, particularly in terms of the cues upon which that plausible understanding is created. This is why sensemaking is a useful starting point for studying immigrant experiences (Helms Mills and Mills, 2009).

For Helms Mills and her colleagues (Helms Mills et al., 2010), the limitations of Weick's original sensemaking framework are its insensitivity to the issue of power and intersubjectivity (i.e. how people make different sense of the same event). They therefore rely on the work of Unger (1987a) to address the formative context of how senses are shaped at the societal level (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Element Two: Formative Contexts

One specific element of the critical sensemaking framework is the sensemakers' formative context (Helms Mills et al., 2010). According to Unger (1987a), formative context refers to "an order, framework or structure of social life" (p. 58). The formative context is part of the broad normative process and

refers to the imaginative (the possible and desirable forms of human behaviour) and established routines in which organizations are located (Helms Mills, 2003; Unger, 1987a). The formative context is hard to challenge, to revise, or to identify in the midst of everyday social situations. It is partly made up of an extended set of institutional arrangements that shape ordinary deals, arguments, and conflicts. By far the most important of the routines it shapes are the conflicts over the possession of another's labour and loyalty. The key resources that serve as objects of such conflicts are "governmental power, economic capital, technical expertise, and the ability to enlist widely accepted ideals and normative arguments in the defense of particular interests and opinions" (Unger, 1987a, p. 58). For example, since the Royal Commission report on workplace inequality (Abella, 1984), institutional practices and legislation have been developed to demonstrate the imaginative arrangements of *equality* in the workplace. While explicitly rejecting the visible minority group is prohibited, institutional standards tacitly favour *local* qualifications and experiences. This has become an ideal normative practice for avoiding discriminatory judgement while defending the particular interests and opinions of the dominant group. I will further discuss other contextual elements that influence the sensemaking process in Chapter 5.

Element Three: Organizational Rules

Since organizational rules can be developed through institutional and imaginative arrangements of the formative context, rules become a means for people to make sense of situations. Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) state that organizational rules, "in the broadest sense, are outline steps for the conduct of action" (p. 30). Depending on different situations, rules are experienced as forces that control, guide, and define the conduct of actions within organizations. They can be a combination of written versus unwritten, tacit versus expressed, formal versus informal, and normative, moralistic, or/and legalistic. Rules can contribute to our understandings of who is considered an ideal and appropriate self in the workplace (e.g., how should one act), and thus they allow us to discriminate between appropriate and inappropriate selves. More often, configurations of rules are experienced as the culture of an organization (i.e., the way we do things around here), within which a person strives to gain legitimacy and to reduce potential resistance. Studying how the rules change over time can indeed enhance our understanding of how the trajectory of discriminatory practices develops at the institutional level (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991).

Element Four: Foucauldian Discourse

How rules are enacted by individuals or groups can also be affected by how the rules are embedded in powerful discourses. Foucault's (1979) notion of discursive practice explains how a world view is constructed as knowledge. Thus, exploring the development of meaning allows me to explain why certain immigrant experiences become more central to individuals. Foucauldian discursive analysis leads to an understanding of how the linguistic, semantic, and interactional aspects of meaning are produced and used within the local context. As power resides in discursive practices, through the normalization of certain identities, I can see how discourses work and what make them acceptable. Phillips and Hardy (2002, pp. 58–59) explain that discourse analysis caught their interest because of its capabilities to understand "identity" and "power," and to provide a "different view" from that of traditional theoretical approaches. Rather than condensing meanings (like traditional content analysis), critical discourse analysis aims "to identify (some of) the multiple meanings assigned to texts" (p. 74) and "traces their implications" (p. 78) in context. Discourse analysis reveals what is underneath the surface of workplace narratives and practices.

In short, a critical sensemaking approach "offers an analysis of how these forces combine to allow individuals to make sense of their environments and take action on a day-to-day basis" (Helms Mills et al., 2010, p. 190). By using the

critical sensemaking perspective, I will see how identities are constructed and legitimized, how different meanings are assigned to the same event, which formative contexts and rules people draw upon in rationalizing their decisions and directions, and how certain discursive practices are reproduced through immigrants' retrospective narratives. Previous studies that have a similar focus on how people make sense of their identities have employed this framework effectively (see Carroll et al., 2008; Thurlow, 2007; Tomkins & Eatough, 2012). Critical sensemaking thus reveals how identity work was accomplished in immigrants' lives. This provides a holistic sense of what critical sensemaking is.

In sum, this study is a poststructuralist account of the concept of identity work that addresses discursive formation and practices (Alvesson, 2010; Alvesson et al., 2008; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). By utilizing the critical sensemaking framework (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010) that has evolved from Weick's (1995) sensemaking theory, I am able to discuss the discursive elements, such as power, discourses, rules, and formative context (Helms Mills, 2003; Helms Mills et al., 2010), that are located in unequal systems. The value of critical sensemaking is its emphasis on agency, which helps me to focus on why and how some (but not other) experiences become subjectively meaningful for people, particularly in the normalization of specific identities (Foucault, 1982). As such, I conclude that critical sensemaking is the most appropriate choice in analyzing organizational events, situations, and people

in order to advance my understanding of the immigrant workplace experience. I shall explain how the study was executed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Design

Recognizing the disparate natures of those termed *immigrants*, I focused on a selected sample of people who have migrated to Canada, namely, Hong Kong Chinese. My choice was based on my own experiences as part of that broadly defined community. I also recognized that, from a poststructuralist perspective, studies of selected people—while throwing light on the immigrant experience—are not meant to be generalizable, but are rather intended to provide clues to human experience in context. This study collected stories and narratives through loosely structured interviews (see Appendix A) in one of the metropolitan cities in Canada where a sizeable number of Hong Kong Chinese professional and skilled immigrants permanently reside (i.e., those who immigrated to Canada with the purpose of entering the workforce).

In this chapter, I will begin with some practical issues: access, sample requirements, the interview process, the translation and transcribing process, and the other texts required. I will then address some of the considerations of ethical research and my reflexivity in relation to the study. Near the end, I will explain the data analysis process in which themes/concepts are developed and conceptualized. These considerations lead to the development of an analytical framework that will be used to guide the findings and discussions in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

My Access and the Informants

In order to understand the power relations that surround the immigrant experience, I approached one of the multi-ethnic service organizations in Canada. The name of the organization, "Chinese Open Resource Network' (CORN), is fictitious, and the location is disguised to protect informants' confidentiality. The acronym CORN also implies a source of basic grains that helps people live (and survive); the organization's real name connotes similarly supportive ideas.

CORN gave me access through a formal application procedure in a process that was mostly done by email. This factor, along with my Anglo-sounding name—Rosalie Hilde—may have inadvertently masked my identity as a Hong Kong Chinese person. As per CORN's request, I wrote a short research proposal explaining the purposes of this study, the required sample size and characteristics, the assistance I would require, and the approximate time frame of access. Access was granted to me from a formal standing committee, which is comprised of people who have dealt with academic research and researchers in the past. In retrospect, I realize that I was granted access in large part due to my Caucasian surname (Hilde) and the university with which I was associated. This much was clear when visiting CORN's office managers and finding that they had expected to meet with a white female researcher, instead of me—a Chinese-looking female.

In terms of sample requirements, I asked to interview 10–14 Hong Kong Chinese immigrants who had obtained sufficient education to be eligible to work in their chosen fields and who were proficient in English. This study seeks to bring to the surface hidden discourse(s) beneath sensemakers' responses. Generally speaking, "naturally occurring texts" that appear in normal day-to-day activities are favoured for analysis because they are actual examples of language in use (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 70). Although interviews would not be classified as naturally occurring data, Phillips and Hardy argue that they are appropriate if the study is about the socially constructed self of the individual, owing to the fact that how respondents construct themselves in "an interview with a researcher may be similar to how they construct themselves in other arenas of talk" (p. 72).

On pre-arranged days, I waited in one of CORN's offices soliciting potential candidates. I introduced myself as an independent researcher who was not part of the services provided by CORN. Through mall intercept and snowball sampling (referral), I conducted 17 interviews with 19 Hong Kong Chinese permanent immigrants (two interviews were done with couples). 15 interviewees were directly recruited through different offices of CORN, while four were referred by participating informants. The informants included staff (7), ex-staff (2), volunteers (2), clients (4), and referrals (4); 68% are females and 32% are males. Of the 19 informants, approximately 90% of them had obtained post-

secondary qualifications, and five held master's degrees from Hong Kong, Canadian, and/or other overseas institutions (such as in the UK). Most have been in Canada for 8 to 18 years, except for one (who has been here for 4 years). Even though age was never asked in the interviews, some informants revealed their approximate age. The informants' ages ranged from the early forties to the late fifties. This implies that when they first arrived, they were in their mid-thirties to early forties, at the peak of their careers. Only three of them currently work at non-Chinese-owned or -operated organizations in Canada. Except for one informant, all of them have at least one child. Based on my social and cultural understandings and the informants' concrete or implied information, I have estimated their earnings (before and after immigration) and their associated occupation ranks (see Appendix B: Summary of Informants). This suggests a level of discrepancy or shock that the informants faced when coming to Canada.

Interviews were loosely structured with three broad questions (see Appendix A). These questions aim to help me understand the sensemaking elements that are associated with the formative context (Chapter 5), the organizational and institutional rules (Chapter 6), and the identity labels being used (Chapter 7) respectively. All informants were asked the same set of broad questions regardless of their relationship with CORN. The informants' participation was completely voluntary. In the beginning of the interview, I provided some basic information about this study and answered their concerns

and questions. Sometimes I was asked about my own experience as a Hong Kong Chinese immigrant who came 16 years ago. My initial work struggles in many cases were similar to those of the informants. However, my experience was comparatively positive than theirs (more details in Chapter 7: Ignorance is strength). Sharing my story facilitated dialogue and established mutual trust. This appears to be an important part of the beginning stage of these interviews, which allowed informants to speak naturally about their situations. Since data are personal and sensitive, all interviews were done on a one-to-one basis in a private setting (except for the couples). All interviews were voice recorded with the permission of the informants. I reassured them of confidentiality and anonymity before and after the interviews. It took from half an hour to slightly over two hours to complete each interview, for a total of 14 interview hours. Even though all informants are fluent in both English and Cantonese, they preferred their mother tongue of Cantonese in the interviews. I completed all interviews in the month of November 2011 and translated them verbatim.

Translation and Transcription

In order to preserve meanings and voices during the transcribing and translating processes, I listened to the audio tapes over and over again (ranging from four to seven times). The first time, I focused on the basic meanings and vocabulary—not only the meaning of a word, but also the meaning of an act,

including pauses and sounds (chuckling or smiling). The meanings of words are contextually grounded. In the second and subsequent rounds, I focused on the development of meanings, whose voices were represented or suppressed, and so on. I added extra field notes where I wrote down my thoughts, references, and quotations used as they occurred.

The translation process posed many challenges. With the grammatical differences between Cantonese (a dialect) and English, I had to translate not only literally, but also culturally. For example, if I use Gmail Translation to translate the Cantonese passage "妳是否找我,妳再打電話比我," the result is "would become you I, you then call than I am." In fact, this passage means, "Are you looking for me? You can call me by telephone again." Cultural translation was necessary as words and expressions in one language (e.g., food bank) do not exist in the other language, often because a particular social practice has no relevance in the other socio-cultural environment. Furthermore, Chinese linguistic culture tends not to be explicitly clear when describing an issue. People will circle around and around the issue and give hints so that others can make sense of their utterance. Due to their political history (for instance, during the Cultural Revolution), Cantonese people tend to use a "cover the butt" or a "closing the back door" strategy when expressing their feelings, to allow them a certain deniability. Some people are cautious about what they say and how they say it. They utilize a face barrier that is hard to get through to what they truly mean.

They want to tell a story, but they don’t like to bluntly come out and say that there is an issue or what it is about. They use instead a gentle style of discourse and want the listener to figure out what they mean, especially in an interview setting. Once they think the meaning is articulated, they will move on to the next issue.

They use this subtle method of communicating because they do not want to take ownership of their words, especially if the narrative has negative connotations, so they avoid confrontation or any kind of negative feedback and the subsequent judgements. For example, one might say “CORN has used tremendous amount of volunteers [the speaker’s expression implies that volunteers are exploitatively used], but this might be good so that people can network and get some work experience.” The first part of the statement is what the informant wants to say; the second half blunts the sharpness of the statement so as to avoid confrontation. Given that the purpose here is to get inside the informants’ sensemaking, exact, word-for-word translation is not useful; instead, my translation very cautiously considers the meaning of the utterance when interpreted according to my cultural understanding. It can be argued that the translated scripts should be reconfirmed by informants; however, this may result in endless rounds of sensemaking when the transcripts are read. Additionally, my own voice may possibly be embedded in the narratives, as I am also a professional immigrant from Hong Kong. In this sense, this thesis features not 19, but 20

voices of professional Hong Kong Chinese immigrants, since I have attempted to make sense of the sensemaking process of the informants (McKenna, 2010).

In many cases, given the unequal power relationship between researcher and informants, socially desirable answers will become standard sources of error. However, as the goal of this study is to locate how immigrants' identities are structured by the dominant discourse, socially desirable answers also seem to be the most appropriate data. The collection of data relating to the socially desirable template of "how I should act like a Canadian" reveals what kinds of socially desirable selves are embedded in discursive practices.

Other Texts

"Data source triangulation" (Evers & van Staa, 2010) was used to produce rich data relating to the context. As Phillips and Hardy (2002) contend, "no aspect of social reality depends on a single text" and "the aim of discourse analysis is to study these bodies of texts that constitute discourse" (p. 86). Thus I also collected other publicly available published material (both online and offline) and analyzed the rules and systems that the multi-ethnic service organization designs (such as the process of applying for a job, or how things are done here). These can also be significant factors in the manipulation of meaning and the creation of how I should act—the organizational template (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Willmott, 1993).

I also collected government brochures and website information that popularizes the institutional, cultural, or societal level of immigration discourses that the immigrant should adopt—the desirable or appropriate selves—and used these texts to examine how the officials cover these topics (Foucault, 1980). Table 4.1 below lists the included documents. The collection of these documents more or less resulted from the interviews, where informants either provided or pointed me to certain documentation. In most cases, these documents provided cues in the informants' sensemaking processes. I have analyzed these texts in order to understand the institutional rules and CORN's practice (see Chapter 6: Organizational rules and funding requirements).

Table 4.1. The Textual Documents

CORN's documents	**Government documents**
· 50+ web pages of the organizational website.	· Citizenship and Immigration Canada website (the "Work in Canada" pages)
· Annual reports of 1986, 1988, 1989, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2010, and 2011.	· Provincial Newcomer's Guide

· Program flyers and pamphlets of employment services (career planning, employment counselling, employment workshop, job search guidance, job referral & placement, job finding support group, job mentoring, labour market trends updates, and online job posting system)	
· Employment Workshop handouts	

Ethical Considerations and Reflexivity

Doing research ethically is a responsibility of the researcher. As this research involved human subjects during the data collection process, special attention was paid to the ethical treatment of these subjects. This study has followed the guidelines provided by the *Tri-council Policy Statement* (December 2010). It was reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Committee and has been considered a minimal risk project (see Appendix C: Athabasca University Research Ethics Approval). Additionally, a letter of information and consent form were used during the interview collection period (see Appendix D) to ensure informants' rights were upheld.

Whose voice is centred and whose voice is marginalized are vital considerations when undertaking poststructuralist research. The writing style often exemplifies the need to write reflexively (Linstead, 2010). I am very much aware that my interpretation of the data will carry imprints of my own narratives. I am also aware that the informants and I are context-dependent when generating the stories and narrations. Because of these methodological issues and my political position, I reflect on my own influence on data collection and generation, as well as on the methods that are used, interpretations to be made, and findings that will be drawn upon that affect the quality and integrity of this study.

During the research process, for example, I wondered if a different social dynamic would be generated if I were a male researcher, since Chinese culture is historically male-dominated and males usually do not discuss their struggles with females in social settings.

Furthermore, interviews are theoretically and linguistically complex events, and in conducting them I needed to be reflectively aware that informants might be engaged not merely in the recounting of facts and/or experiences but in political action, script following, and actions as social accomplishments (Brown et al., 2008; Garfinkel, 1967; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In fact, within an ethnomethodological tradition, the accuracy of an account is less a concern; rather, I am interested in *how* the account is conveyed.

When relating the informants' experience and stories to my own, I am also engaged in rounds of identity work within the sensemaking framework. The interview process allows informants to revisit their initial stories, and they may choose to adopt (or reject) a newer story that is more sensible in their present context. Each time they recount their stories, they once again try to make sense of (and rationalize) their situations. The data that I collected are not so much about their sensemaking processes in the past, but a focus on how their sensemaking processes in the present look back at their past experience—the retrospective nature of sensemaking.

In addition, in sensemaking interviews, it is almost impossible to capture pure individual sensemaking as individuals are making sense of things on their own. In an interview setting, the sensemaking process is elicited in the presence of another (the interviewer). Thus, these are in fact sessions of social sensemaking where informants share ideas and labels with me, the interviewer. To eliminate the possible influences of the presence of this other (myself), I try not to give any appearance of passing judgment on the informant's opinions or feelings. In this way, I can allow more space for some individual sensemaking to take place, with the hope of generating authentic data.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in the qualitative tradition is not a clear-cut process and is highly dependent on context. To unpack qualitative data and to discover how informants invoke categories and/or experiences of self and narrate tales of self is regarded as this research's major contribution to the data on identity literature (Bryman et al., 2011). However, sensemaking is not a linear process and analysis does not happen in a particular sequence (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2010). Guided by the complex elements of critical sensemaking, my role is to see how sense and organizing emerge when a story begins to come together and identities begin to make sense. The identities and the actions of the informants will provide a sense of narrative rationality, and I can then connect plot and character from the data (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2012). This of course requires an iterative manner, to create and confirm themes (or concepts) for interpretation. Specific attention is given to understanding discursive elements that surface in the data and how they are relevant to the lived experience of the informants (their agency). For example:

1. How do informants make ongoing sense and retrospective sense of a given situation/event? (Chapter 5)
2. What and whose information do they consider plausible? (Chapter 6)

3. Which social sensemaking communities or social discourses do they take part in? (Chapter 6)
4. How do informants enact their identity labels? What cues do they draw on? (Chapter 7)

Such analysis is not a bounded process; rather this is a multi-dynamic disorganized situation, particularly in the beginning. It involves a close, line-by-line reading of the text, and a noting of the thoughts, ideas, impressions, feelings, and initial interpretation that the text evokes. I then develop and refine these interpretations, attempting to move away from descriptive to more conceptual and thematic levels of analysis. The aim is to derive a collection of themes that have enough particularity to be grounded; and enough abstraction to be conceptualized. I am particularly interested in how the view of agency in context is fleshed out in the informants' narratives. I use the notion of identity labels—foregrounded in a Foucauldian poststructuralist paradigm—as my primary conceptual anchor, to examine my informants' identity work.

The key was to understand how informants produce order, rather than to investigate the accuracy of the data. Special attention is paid to the elements of rules and to the intersection of a number of formative contexts and other discursive practices (discourses) that are involved in the identity work of each informant (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Thurlow, 2010). Moreover, hierarchical

divisions and labels adopted in the identity construction processes also help in locating "voices" and dominant discourses (Foucault, 1982; Knights, 1992). From these, I am able to conceptualize the process of identify work that reveals the forms of the "micro-politics of resistance" at the individual level (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004, p. 142).

To recall our theoretical approach of critical sensemaking and to provide a contextual sense of the findings, I metaphorically illustrate an analytical framework (see Figure 4.1, p. 72) to capture some of the interconnected relationships of the framework. A professional immigrant's sense of his/her situation is intensified by the shock of realizing that his/her past experience and education are not recognized in the quest for employment. During the sensemaking process, s/he tries to regain a sense of control in creating and searching for meanings (labels and directions) for that situation. The meanings are mediated by the unseen organizational rules and institutional discourses (of the multi-ethnic service organization) that simultaneously inform and are informed by the formative context and societal discourse. It is important to note that, to a certain extent, agency shapes discourse and discourse shapes agency (Hardy & Phillips, 1999). This can also explain why some are more constrained by or resistant to the contextual elements at the individual level than others are.

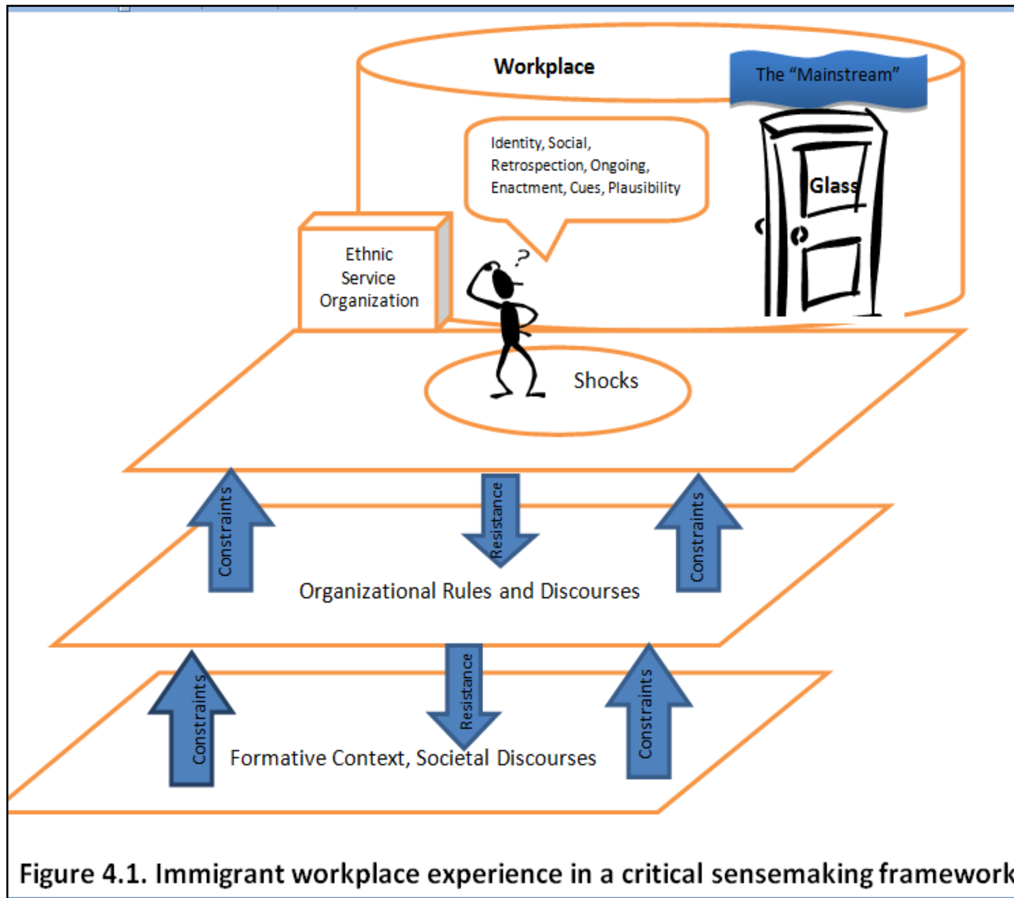

Figure 4.1. Immigrant workplace experience in a critical sensemaking framework.

In Phillips and Hardy's view (2002), "discourse constructs objects and concepts" (p. 76). Therefore, in order to locate the hidden discourses, data are analyzed to see which objects are represented and how each object is constructed differently. As Phillips and Hardy warn us, writing up an account of discourse is like constructing a persuasive narrative. I must be able to see what those themes tell me while navigating the data; justify and make sense of my evidence and findings as legitimate whilst constructing arguments; offer insightful and

interesting interpretations with contextual underpinnings; and remain sensitive to my political stance when doing reflexive research.

The critical sensemaking framework is not a four-level analysis, but consists of four interconnected elements (i.e., formative context, rules, discourses, and agency) that simultaneously influence and mediate the sensemaker. At the risk of oversimplification, I can say that there are at least three layers of interactions (at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels; see Figure 4.1, p. 72) that are available for observation. These layers help organize the findings and discussions in the following chapters.

Chapter 5 will deal with the interactions among formative context, the societal level of discourses and the immigrants' retrospective sense—the least noticeable set of constraints against the sensemaker. This sheds light on research sub-question 1 (p. 17): how do Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make retrospective sense in Canada? This layer is the hardest to identify in the midst of everyday social interactions. I will present themes and discourses that shape immigrants' contextual sensemaking.

Chapter 6 will discuss the more direct effects of institutional discourses and the organizational rules (and templates) where the immigrant interacts with the CORN and the overall institutional constraints. The analysis of the themes highlights the dominant and silent discourses of integration and exploitation

respectively. This chapter aims to answer sub-question 2 (p. 17) on agents of plausibility and the notion of social sensemaking.

Chapter 7 will anchor the idea of agency in the process of individual sensemaking, in light of how professional immigrants produce orders and develop strategies in their identity work. This chapter responds to the sub-question 3 (p. 17), with emphasis on the role of agency in developing divergences of meaning. This will help reveal the forms of resistance residing at the individual level when some choose to push against the discursive context. I then tie all elements (i.e. chapters 5, 6, and 7) together in the final chapter to unpack the implications and to draw my conclusions for the study.

In summary, this chapter has provided an overview of my research design. By using the critical sensemaking framework as a heuristic method, I shed light on my problematic. I have provided a sense of how I look, where I look, and what tools I will use to investigate my problematic. Critical sensemaking analysis is a complex method that has the capacity to bridge our understanding between socio-psychological elements and a broader societal context (formative context, rules, and discourses) of power and privilege. As Hardy and Phillips (1999) point to the lack of critical attention to the role played by broader societal discourses, I contend that critical sensemaking can provide insights. Although critical sensemaking is in its infancy with relatively few empirical studies (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Helms Mills & Mills, 2009), examining the framework empirically will

enrich our understanding of how it can be applied. In the following chapters, I shall continue this journey by discussing some of the contextual and historical cues that shape immigrants' contextual sensemaking process.

Chapter 5: Capturing Discursive Elements of the Formative Context Retrospectively

In the poststructuralist tradition, sensemakers and their contexts are not independent (Nord & Fox, 1996; van Dijk, 2008). This chapter provides the specific details of the present and historical contexts in which sensemakers are situated. It is important to remember that salient cues and events relevant to a particular problem may appear to be insignificant against the backdrop of other events that carry greater weight at that time. I give an overview of the macro-elements such as the concept of formative context (Unger, 1987a) and its relationship to the critical sensemaking framework (Helms Mills et al., 2010). These contexts provide a sense of the history, the politics, the societal discourses, colonial influences, and culture in which sensemakers enact their everyday lives. Helms Mills et al. (2010) call this “a link between dominant social values and individual action” (p. 189). This chapter explores this link in informants’ lives.

After an introduction of the formative context, I briefly describe Canadian immigration policies and review the history of the treatment of Chinese immigrants. This is followed by some factors that motivated Hong Kong Chinese to emigrate, such as their political sense of Chinese administration and the dominant western lifestyle discourse of the time. Then other salient cues from workplace culture and colonial influences that immigrants drew upon heavily are

discussed, thus providing information about the informants' contextual background and their interactions with the contextual elements and societal discourses (see the lowest layer of framework in Figure 4.1, p. 72) while they make sense of their Canadian workplace experience. These contexts are important but fluid in the sensemaking processes, as we can see how different meanings come to be associated with the discourse of immigration, and how societal discourses and context were accepted or contested.

Formative Context

Unger's (1987a, 1987b, 1987c) notion of formative context refers to an order, framework, or structure of social arrangements that shapes ordinary conflicts and is hard to challenge. These imaginative or institutionalized arrangements or routines, in which organizations are located, are usually by-products of the resolution of social conflicts. The key resources that serve as objects of such conflicts are the possession of another's labour, and the ability to solicit widely accepted ideals and normative arguments (loyalty) and thus to protect one's own interests. This is why the formative context can be part of the broad normative process. For example, government policies, institutional arrangements, and immigrants draw heavily on the Royal Commission's report about employment equity (Abella, 1984) in their everyday routines. The conflict Abella identified between employers and visible minority workers has been

transformed into the 1986 Employment Equity Act of Canada, which requires employers to engage in proactive employment practices to increase the representation of the four designated groups (that is women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples, and visible minorities). Thus the conflict was transformed into the institutional and imaginative arrangements (the possible and desirable forms of behaviour) that followed its resolution. Now organizations cannot reject a candidate who belongs to one of these designated groups directly; instead some employers may have to use other subtle barriers (such as lack of native language skills and/or local workplace experience) to discriminate against these groups of people.

Whenever conflicts arise, the formative context is retrieved and sensemakers enact their identities in situations where they need to make sense of their everyday routines. For example, when immigrants (sensemakers) face conflicts in their job search and workplace situations, they can retrieve the formative context of Canadian immigration policy (e.g., who has the right to be employed) and their previous work experience and culture, so as to accomplish their senses of self in response to these contexts. Blackler (1992) summarizes the notion:

> As conflicts are temporarily resolved, solutions become supported by particular organizational and technological styles, by emerging group

> interests, patterns of privilege, and the ways in which a basic grammar of social interactions becomes articulated in official dogmas. The imaginative schemas of participants interact with the institutional frameworks in which they operate. (p. 279)

Institutional practices are highly dependent on the formative context that shapes these conflicts and resources. The formative context guides how the institutional fields develop the organizational rules from which immigrants develop behavioural routines, extract cues, perceive plausibility, and enact their sense of identity in response to situations (Helms Mills et al., 2010). I will further explore these relationships in Chapter 6.

Here, I am interested not simply in how these contexts are formed but also how they shape immigrants' understanding of their situations (including their shock). People tend to design routines in response to a situationally determined context that has mediating and filtering (or formatting) properties with respect to their culture, and of which they are not aware (Ciborra & Lanzara, 1994). In other words, these routines are directed at a specific context. Helms Mills et al. (2010) conclude that some elements in particular—formative contexts, dominant social values, and background factors—can influence how people act and how sense is made. In the following sections, I will give an overview of what these elements are and the events in which routines are formatted and shaped.

The History of Chinese Immigrants in Canada and Canadian Immigration Policy

Canadian immigration policy has played an important role in building the nation of Canada but also has a long history of racism. Out of all racial minority groups, the Chinese have one of the longest histories in Canada (Li, 1998; Tan & Roy, 1985), and—with the exception of First Nations—their experience is perhaps the most painful. The first settlers arrived on Canada's west coast in 1858 in search of gold. They were mostly single men from the southern province of China. They came as coolie workers in the hope of finding opportunities. Later, they were extensively used during the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (Li, 1998; Tan & Roy, 1985). Other Chinese immigrants at that time were either engaged in extremely dangerous work or labouring in occupations in a secondary industry (Porter, 1965).

The wages of the CPR Chinese workers were a dollar a day, and they had to pay for their food, camping, and cooking gear, whereas their counterparts, white labourers, did not have to pay for these things even though they were paid more money ($1.50–$2.50 per day). As well as being paid less, Chinese workers were given the most backbreaking and dangerous work to do. They were given the job of tunneling and handling explosives. Accidents, fires, disasters,

landslides, and dynamite blasts killed many. Diet and living conditions were poor. Many became sick and died (CCNC, 2012; Li, 1998; Tan & Roy, 1985).

However, once the railway was complete, the Chinese immigrants were no longer welcome. The Chinese on the west coast were subject to an ancient identity of Other in the Canadian imagination. Identity labels of *west* and *east*, *white* and *non-white*, and *master* and *slave* were common (K. J. Anderson, 1995). With these pressures, the government imposed an unreasonable head tax on incoming Chinese to control their entry. It began at $50 in 1885, and then was raised to $100 in 1900 and to $500 in 1904; $500 was equal to two years' wages. While the head tax was not an effective method to keep Chinese out, the Canadian federal government had passed the Chinese Immigration (Exclusion) Act in 1923, which practically prohibited all Chinese immigration to Canada (CCNC, 2012; Li, 1998). During that time, the Chinese were not allowed to vote, nor to enter certain professional occupations, nor to acquire Crown land (Tan & Roy, 1985). The contribution of the Chinese was not recognized and their lives were marginalized. The Act was repealed in 1947 largely because Canada had signed the United Nations Charter, which affirmed the existence of human rights, and because of the financial support and help Chinese had contributed during wartime (CCNC, 2012; Li, 1998).

Racial background was used as a selection criterion in Canada for about a century. During that time, a clear social division signified *white* as most desirable

and *non-white* as undesirable (Guo, 2007). Until the mid-1960s, skilled labour was required to help build the booming Canadian economy. When the traditional source of immigrants was not able to fulfill these needs, the Canadian government turned its efforts to restricted races, including the Chinese. This led to the introduction of a point system in 1967. The selection criteria shifted away from racial background. Instead, education, skills, and resources were prioritized. However, by then, Canada had carried out the *initial* step of the concept of so-called colour blindness toward racial discrimination. In one sense, the point system has proved to be successful; there has been an increase in immigrants from Asia and other developing countries (Whitaker, 1991; Li, 2003). However, the new selection system was criticized for favouring some racial groups over others, simply a makeover of racial discrimination (Matas, 1996). For example, not all potential immigrants have the same opportunities to meet the education requirement, due to the fact that accessible education may not be available in their home countries. Additionally, women's participation in the labour force may also be limited in their country of origin. Some suggest that one of the more explicit forms of discrimination can be found in the investor or business immigrant class (accounting for 60% of the total annual allotment), which allows wealthy individuals to effectively buy access to Canada by bringing significant financial capital into the domestic economy. Such opportunities are only available to

certain economic classes and denied to those of limited wealth and income (Makarenko, 2010).

Nevertheless, keeping out the undesirables did not stop at the implementation of the point system; instead it has been done more subtly and institutionally. Although immigrants are allowed into the country, institutional standards deny and delay their access to employment. The same credentials, language skills, and work experience that were evaluated when awarding immigrants' landed status are either discounted or devalued by employers and practitioners (Andersson & Guo, 2009). In the midst of resolving these conflicts, the federal government has broadcast the barriers to finding a permanent job in Canada on the official website (see Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012), to legitimize the issue. It has also used multi-ethnic service organizations to popularize these standards, an alternative form of using knowledge as power (Andersson & Guo, 2009; Foucault, 1980) and using credential assessment as one of its "technologies of power" (Foucault, 1988b, p. 18). This is the structure of social arrangements that the government has formed in dealing with conflicts—the formative context of this study. The formative context guides ethnic service organizations and immigrants to the possible and desirable forms of behaviour.

The Chinese in Canada have also faced other kinds of ongoing discrimination from time to time, such as the *W5* episode aired on CTV in 1979 that accused Chinese students of taking away educational opportunities from

Canadian students who could not get into Canadian medical schools (CCNC, 2012). In *Dim Sum Diaries* broadcasted on CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) Radio in 1991, the accents of Chinese immigrants and their behaviour were caricatured (CCNC, 2012; Guo, 2007). In a more recent incident, Carole Bell, the deputy mayor of Markham, Ontario, gave a speech in 1995, in which the city's ethnic concentration of Chinese were blamed as a cause of social conflict; their presence was blamed for destroying a traditional neighbourhood and transforming the city into another Hong Kong (CCNC, 2012; Guo, 2007). Her comments not only stimulated racism, but also encouraged racial intolerance, mainly against Chinese citizens. These incidents suggest that despite a long history in Canada, Chinese are still seen as foreigners and a public burden. Some of the events have provided immigrants with a sense of the deep-rooted issues of racial antagonism of the Chinese in Canada (CCNC, 2012; Li, n.d.).

Immigrant Interview Accounts

Dave, one informant, was an international student who studied in Canada at one point in his life. He figured he had all it would take to be hired by a *mainstream*[5] organization: local qualifications, local experience, and English, the criteria were set by the government website. In reflecting on his experiences, he

[5] The term *mainstream* has been used repeatedly among the informants. To them, it means non-racial organizations that are managed by so-called white face people, including non-preferred immigrants (see Woodsworth, 1972).

suspected that racism still exists in the Canadian workplace and society at large. His sense of the situation was drawn from the identity label he adopted (skilled worker immigrant) and cues extracted retrospectively:

> *Dave*: To be honest, I knew this was what I would face. I had graduated and worked here previously. I knew the mindset of the mainstream was like this [racist]. I thought that, with the changed attitudes of Canadian foreign policy toward China, the broader Canadian society would have changed. However, I was surprised; there is no change at the industry level. For example, the recent policy allows overseas students to work in Canada. It shows that the government cherishes their skills. So the government has changed. As I have said, I graduated in Canada, had worked here [for 5 years], and I thought that I wouldn't face any problems; but I didn't have any responses to my job search ... Perhaps due to my status as skilled-worker immigrant, there is nothing available for me.

Edward was also once an international student in Canada. After he had graduated from university, before leaving Canada, he was offered landed immigrant status by an immigration officer. However, he refused to stay at that time because of the sense of racism (second-class citizenship). This is how he rationalizes his past decision:

> *Edward*: I regretted that I didn't stay. I had been asked by an immigration officer. He had given me a form to fill out, but I was too young. I wasn't thinking of staying as the four years of education were pretty boring. I was there alone with no family or relatives. In addition, it was the 1980s and Hong Kong's future was quite promising, in terms of making good money and developing a career. I eagerly wanted to go back to enjoy the economic take-off of Hong Kong. I didn't think I had made the wrong decision ... perhaps I should have accepted immigration status before I left [as a backup]. But back then, I really didn't care. I didn't want to become a second-class citizen. I turned down the generousness of the immigration officer. So, yes ... I did regret it ... But life is humorous, and I am now back where I was ... Everyone says we are 2nd class citizens, but in fact it isn't that bad. Canadian society is basically equal, but if you think there is no discrimination, that is not truth. It depends on how you take it.

Edward disengaged from his initial story of racism since he decided to reapply for immigration status in Canada. His sense of identity also shifted from a proud Hong Kong citizen to a Canadian second-class citizen; he was willing to lower his pride. In this process, he has normalized and adopted an identity he once characterized as second-class citizenship. Both Dave and Edward drew heavily on cues extracted retrospectively in searching for meanings and rationalizing what

they are doing. They both realized racial discrimination is embedded in the society, but simultaneously accepted that this is part of the trajectory.

The idea or experience of discrimination and racism is notable in the other narratives as well. However, some stories were told in a subtle way as the informants were sensitive to being labelled as “excluded,” “different,” or “deviant” (Foucault, 1982; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). Despite the issues of racism, the numbers of Hong Kong Chinese immigrating to Canada were at an all-time high from the mid-1970s until 1997—prior to the official Hong Kong handover to China. Why?

The Political Sense of Chinese Administration

According to Wong (1992), there have been three major waves of emigration from Hong Kong since World War Two. The first wave arrived between 1958 and 1961, due to a major change in the agriculture sector that was impacted by the Mao Zedong’s agriculture policies in China (the famine in China during the period of the Great Leap; cf. Ashton, Hill, Piazza, & Zeitz, 1984). The second wave was triggered by the 1967 riot in Hong Kong. The riot was a spill-over effect of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1967). It started as a local demonstration, but ended with violence, bombs, and political instability. Many Hong Kong elites left for the United States or Canada. The third wave was triggered around the time of the discussions about and signing of the 1984 Sino-

British Agreement. To many Hong Kong Chinese, this agreement determined the future of Hong Kong. Many did not trust the Chinese communist party's assurance of stability. The number of immigrants from Hong Kong steadily increased from the 1980s to 1997. Around the same time, Canadian immigration policy-makers instituted a program to encourage businessmen and entrepreneurs to immigrate, bringing their managerial skills and capital so as to create additional employment opportunities. Many immigrants have brought substantial capital and jobs to Canada during that period of time. This group of immigrants included young, educated, middle-class professionals. What has not been mentioned in Wong's (1992) findings is that the political effects generated by the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989 escalated the emigration movement and extended the third wave until the handover ceremony in 1997. Many entrepreneurs and professionals and their families moved to Canada to avoid potential political instability in Hong Kong. The informants in this study are mainly drawn from this pool. The major political, social, and economic changes occurring in China during this period contributed to the immigration of Chinese to Canada. Teresa recounts the time when she decided to immigrate:

> *Teresa*: I came because of the events of June 4 [the Tiananmen Square Massacre in 1989]. I thought about the events for a while and then decided to come. So I was considered a latecomer, much later than the early group in the 1980s ... If there was no violence then I wouldn't even have thought

> of this. I had never thought of emigrating.

Jack and Jane, a married couple with three children, chose Canada specifically due to its image as a liberal society:

> *Jack*: I can't deny it was because we were in a time of political instability ... As we had the opportunity [to immigrate], we decided to give it a try ... I think I have made the right choice. I feel honoured to be here [in Canada] as this is a liberal society even though sometimes the government makes weird decisions. People are open and friendly.

Kate and Ken, a couple, echo similar thoughts:

> *Ken*: We don't like the communist party of China ... I like Canada. I like the environment and the things [society and politics] here.

The discourse of immigration here is partly about escaping from potential political crisis but also assumes an ability to prosper in a new life.

The Lifestyle Discourse

Avoiding Chinese administration is one of the dominant themes among informants, but the influence of social activity (through shared labels and meanings) and the ideology of better western lifestyles are evidenced in

informants' responses. Susan has a unique perspective on Canada when describing her ideology and her reality:

> *Susan*: When I was in my early twenties, I had a positive impression of Canada. I remember I was amazed when I opened the fridge and saw big jugs of milk and juices [when she was a visitor]. In Hong Kong, things were in much smaller sizes. I wanted to have a two-level house. But of course, now this is just a part of our lives. I would much rather to move up to an apartment, so I don't have to shovel snow. So when comparing the feelings about living in Canada, the time before arrival versus after arrival is very different. Before I arrived, I had a strong desire to come and to enjoy freedom, a peaceful and relaxing life. I didn't think I would have any challenges in finding work. Perhaps I was young and naive. However, after I arrived, I realized that I needed to adjust [lower her pride] before I could work again.

In contrast, Edward chose Hong Kong after his education in the 1980s because of better career opportunities. Later, he returned to Canada as an immigrant because of the possibility of a simple and stable lifestyle:

> *Edward*: I absolutely was not afraid of 1997. However, there were significant events after the 1997 handover, including the East Asia financial crisis (July 1997–1998), the collapse of the dot-com bubble in

> 2001, and the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) virus inflections in 2002. The economy of Hong Kong was ruined. I was working in Hong Kong and found the economy was getting worse and worse. I was disappointed with the politics and how the government was handling things, including the governor at that time. I was getting a little disappointed about things in Hong Kong. It's not the same as the old British days. In addition, I was getting older. I was looking for a simple and stable lifestyle.

Edward anticipated that his lifestyle would improve when he returned back to Canada as an immigrant; instead he also faces difficulties in his job search. Linda's and Nancy's decisions to come to Canada were more or less a by-product of social interactions; they were influenced by the dominant social discourse of emigration at that time:

> *Linda*: Why did I come? Because of the problems of 1997 [the handover of Hong Kong]. We initially were not very keen, but one of our business partners from China was applying, so we thought we should apply too!

Nancy was a senior administrator of a British law firm in Hong Kong, managing over 70 staff. She proclaimed that immigration to the "west" was a way to validate her social class and identity.

> *Nancy*: ... Eventually immigrating overseas seemed like a good thing.
>
> *Interviewer*: Why do you feel emigrating overseas was a good thing?
>
> *Nancy*: Because at that time [before 1997], I realized that some people had started to emigrate overseas, different from what is happening now. It's a good thing [as many wealthy people were going]. Going overseas [to the west] ... it seems to be something to be proud of, very prestigious. So I haven't left since I arrived [in Canada], even though making a living is tough here.

Both narratives have drawn heavily on the meaning of their identity construction and the property of social sensemaking. To Nancy, the act of immigration seemed a display of accumulated wealth and self-worth. This demonstrated her ability to own and consume material goods, including the *product* of immigration. Her admiration of the west can also be explained in part as an effect of colonialism.

In the Shadow of Whiteness: The Colonial Influence

In addition to the political situation in Hong Kong, the cultural damage it has experienced as a colonized city has also played a role in immigrant experiences. Hong Kong culture was rooted in China (e.g., taking concepts like feng shui, destiny, and luck very seriously in the workplace) but was also

influenced by British colonialism and the concept of "East meets West." Western supremacy is a by-product of European colonialism (Prasad, 2005). A number of Hong Kong people were afraid of the shadow of the communist administration, especially after the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre. This fear can be partially explained by the power relations between west and non-west, which privilege western capitalist economic and social structures (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008). Worried that the non-western administration would ruin their future, many Hong Kong Chinese favoured Canada because of its reputation for democracy and its lifestyle. In this sense, they embraced western supremacy rather than seeking decolonization (Prasad, 2003). People continue to accept the unquestioned sovereignty of western epistemological, economic, political, and cultural categories (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008), and this was true for these emigrants even though there was resentment from grass-roots activists accusing those departing of betraying Hong Kong. The emigrants indeed possessed a wealth of intellectual and capital resources or they would not have been qualified for the rigorous immigration requirements of the receiving country.

One of the dominant social values (one that betrays colonial thinking) is that parenting in western societies is often superior and probably easier. Many informants were trying to extract cues and to identify with the notion of western supremacy in making sense of themselves as parents and immigrants (Prasad, 2003). Children's needs seem to offer a more socially acceptable reason to leave

Hong Kong than escaping from the Chinese administration. Amanda and Mary echo these ideas:

> *Amanda*: I thought this place would be where I could enjoy a simple life. I wanted to see my kids grow. I have to be a full time mom and I had to get away from Hong Kong because it is so expensive to do this [the western style of living] over there ... because of this, I have started my *full-time* mom career. Ha ... ha ... ha ... [a bit embarrassed]
>
> *Mary*: Because of my kid. I believe the education system in Hong Kong is not suited to him. I chose to come to Canada ... He was three. I thought the environment in Hong Kong was rather complex. His personality didn't suit the environment in Hong Kong because he has a strong tendency to intimidate others. In Hong Kong, I needed to work and to take care of him. It would be problematic. To me, the events of 1997 were secondary.

To phrase this differently, the ongoing effects of colonialism had led people to accept the uneven power relations as they were in a colonized country (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008). Things produced from the west are considered superior. Western supremacy is not limited to the economy; the effects of colonialism also mediate how sensemakers accept discriminatory practices. For example, immigrants consider the western education system far superior to that where they come from. Joyce and Wayne shared the same view:

> *Joyce*: I want my two daughters to continue high school in Canada and then later they can enter university.
>
> *Interviewer*: Why Canada?
>
> *Joyce*: I thought if I came to Canada, my daughters would also be able to get good education, and I wouldn't need to pay international tuition. All I was thinking was about the rest of my life and my daughters' prospects and their education ...
>
> *Wayne*: The main reason I came was, when my daughter was one year old, I thought, Canada has better education [than Hong Kong], so I applied to come to Canada.

Maggie used to manage a team of over a thousand staff in a publicly owned organization. She had a similar belief about the Canadian system and society:

> *Maggie*: We have a daughter with a disability. He [my husband] thought the western system was better. Our daughter's future will be better as there is comparatively less discrimination against disabled people here. Looking at it retrospectively, this was the right decision [giving up my career]. But back then, when I couldn't see or sort this out, it was very hard on me. We had given up a lot for this.

The role Maggie adopted here changed her sense of self from a senior administrator to a caring mother. In her terms, she took a humble position in her identity work. On the one hand, she admitted the idea of western supremacy. On the other hand, she defined her work and her choice of immigration as a sacrifice. Her sacrificial identity gave her a position of power within the family and a positive sense of self among her peers. More intriguing is the idea that many of the narratives in this study portrayed this idea when engaging in unfulfilling work. Informants reflected upon the parenting-educational discourse of giving children the best education and opportunities they could, and they believed this cannot be obtained in Hong Kong. In that context, inequality in Canada seemed to be more tolerable (Sennett & Cobb, 1973) because this gave informants a sense of pride or glory in the process of sacrifice.

Hong Kong Workplace Culture and Work Identity

The work culture of Hong Kong Chinese is unique. Generally speaking, the value of work and career are weighted above the importance of personal life and family commitment in that society. Working without pay (e.g., volunteering) is not part of the workplace norms. People work for financial rewards and social status. Many are fairly submissive at work and are willing to be exploited economically (i.e., work longer and harder to move up the corporate ladder) (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006). Susan's experience provides one example:

> *Susan*: When I was working in Hong Kong, I was very busy. I had a fixed time to be at work, but didn't have a fixed finishing time to go home [at the end of the day]. I sometimes worked until midnight...
>
> *Interviewer*: Why didn't you find a job that was less demanding?
>
> *Susan*: I wouldn't. I wouldn't find a job that was lower. This is the mentality of Hong Kong people. I have very good career prospects. I worked in IT, and I was in project management in banking, a highly sought skill ... My satisfaction was huge; nothing was more important. I was keen on working—money was not the big issue to me.

Susan's identity work was based on her occupational achievement and her identification with her work. She would not lower her work identity in Hong Kong but was willing to do so in Canada (see her narrative on pp. 86–87 above). Like Susan, many professional immigrants are committed and devoted workers and anchor their lives around the associated symbolic status of work and hierarchical position. In other words, they are willing to take a job working long hours with a fixed salary (economically being taken advantage of) but not a lower-ranking position in the workplace. The job positions they held and professions in which they worked in Hong Kong were highly linked to and reflected upon their social status (identity) and class position (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006). Many have great ambition and are materialistic. They are willing to

work all hours. Questions about where you work and your job title (rank) are often asked in social interactions. Maggie, for instance, found it hard to imagine the reality that she had to face upon arrival. Maggie used to hold a senior manager position and earned over HK$100,000 per month (equivalent to CAD$13,000). When she recounted her first job offer in Canada, she was rather shocked and emotional:

> *Maggie*: I refused it [the job offer] as I didn't want to work at a home-based office. It was undesirable. I wasn't happy. I felt very bad and emotionally low and very down that week. I had never imagined I would have to work at a home-based office that had a rather narrow social network [instead of a proper office environment]. It didn't look like a workplace. That was why I turned the job down.

In the working culture of Hong Kong, working at home is associated with an image and identity of the late sixties and seventies, lower-class, uneducated people—those considered not decent enough to find an "outside" job. Maggie feels that she has some good education (even though it is not recognized in Canada), and she had been taking training classes in Canada to sharpen her job search skills and expand her network; she was shocked to realize that she had to start from the *very* bottom. How could she socialize and tell her peers where she worked? This is one of the reasons why she refused a job that offered reasonable

pay. She used her past experience to make sense of her present event. When the discrepancy (shock) was large, her need to update her ongoing sense was also more urgent. In another part of her narrative (see p. 116 below), she explained how she sorted out her thoughts about why unrecognized overseas qualification and experience deserves a low paying entry level job.

Winnie used to work in the field of social work in Hong Kong. She was also worried that her job title (status) would degrade her identity in the eyes of her peers from Hong Kong:

> *Winnie*: I should have let go of my own baggage [my past experiences, pride, ego, etc.] earlier. This is why I initially found it difficult to search for work because I didn't let go of my ego. I initially thought ... Wow, I used to work in a privileged position. I had a pretty good social status. Would I be wasting myself to take up a low-paid, low-status work? What would other people think about me?

Winnie negotiated her identity (self-worth) according to what was plausible rather than what was accurate (i.e., would taking a low-paying job change her public image? Was this good enough to move her job search forward?).

In general, Hong Kong people have a reputation for being hard working, upbeat, and enthusiastic. They respect humility (and thus are less vocal), sacrifice, tolerance, perseverance, and dedication to work. They challenge neither authority

nor the social/cultural norms. Nevertheless, they are also competitive people and willing to get on with demanding tasks. Nancy and Edward share some interesting contrary experiences related to how Hong Kong Chinese work culture is interpreted in Canada:

> *Edward*: ... Some Chinese men are so bounded by the Confucius (Chinese) culture, thinking of humility, acting rather passively, and thinking that things will work out if they are silent. However, in North American culture, people don't respect this. They would rather see you voicing your concerns and standing up for yourself.

> *Nancy*: Working in Hong Kong, you have to be really smart and alert; otherwise, others could really marginalize yourself. In addition, you need to be a bit tricky rather than being straightforward like Canadians. Otherwise, you can't survive. You have to not only have a good heart and good skills but you can't be 100% honest. You would be *dead*. In Hong Kong …over a period of eight years I had built up my *status*. No one would dare to even speak loud to me! With my status, I felt so great and proud of myself! However, in Canada, even though they'd paid me at the same level—but I think it would never happen—there were only five staff [when she was a manager in a Canadian company]. It became boring. Being an administrator in Hong Kong, once I had established the office's policies, I could re-

> lax and enjoy my cup of tea or coffee. I had lots of free time plus a good salary! Here ... the social status is very different, unless I worked for something that was really meaningful, working with my passion; otherwise there was only five staff!!

Nancy revealed that in Hong Kong her social status and authority were not challenged; office politics and cultures are substantially different than in Canada. Once people have reached middle or upper management in their careers, their social status and the power relations will change. This could imply that the process of moving up to desirable work may be part of the trajectory and tentative. This is perhaps why Mike accepted a junior position at the airport, despite his past accomplishments (see Appendix B). He also faced some cultural frustrations at work:

> *Mike*: It was ridiculous! What could I do?! Another week passed and all of her [the head chef's] responsibilities had now become mine and she was chatting all day. I really couldn't bear this kind of inequality. Then, she was not only giving me a piece of fruit from the plate, but the whole plate [as bribery]. She asked me not to let other people see this. You can imagine ... What on earth?!! The system here [Canada] makes me feel so fed up. Adding up the experience in the Italian restaurant [where his wages were held back for a few months because he was a new immigrant] with

> that kind of person ... in fact, the Caucasian head chef in the North Point Hotel was the same, and then working at the airport it was again the same! Wow!! Afterwards, at the airport, I met a few Hong Kong chefs—one had been my student in Hong Kong—and they told me that people were like this here. I then realized things were like this. I was very unhappy. How could people live like this?

Since the work ethic in Hong Kong considers passing on workload and extensive chatting to be unprofessional conduct, Mike resisted the cultural norms that worked against his belief. He was expecting a workplace culture and rules similar to those he experienced in Hong Kong, where people are supposed to work hard and talk less during work hours.

These workplace disruptions, or what Weick (1995) calls shocks, are triggered and shaped by context. Shocks can take different forms. For example, Nancy, Jack, and Jane saw political instability as workplace opportunities for potential advancement; Maggie and Winnie struggled with disconfirmations of their social identities; and Mike experienced shock in the workplace culture. These shocks are associated with the desire to be in the west or/and in the quest for employment, which perhaps reduces some people's awareness of the racial discrimination that is embedded in the formative context. These contextual issues significantly mediate the way Hong Kong Chinese make sense of their workplace experiences in Canada, but in a subtle manner. The interactions in this layer (the

lowest layer of Figure 4.1, p. 72) are a partial effect of discursive practices and a part of the normative process derived from the formative context (i.e., it is *normal* for immigrants to have difficulty in finding work in Canada). The strength of constraints is strong but resistance is less noticeable, due to the idea that the formative context is well established and is hard to challenge and change (Unger, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c).

This chapter has provided an overview of how various meanings are associated with the discursive elements of immigration in the study. I have provided a sense of how contexts shape immigrants' sensemaking in relation to work in Canada. The contextual cues (e.g., political stabilities) and social elements (e.g., immigration trends and work identity) provide some initial insights into the discourse of immigration that created their assumptions: (1) emigration to Canada would bring a better quality of life; (2) racist and cultural shocks are perhaps part of the trajectory and/or they are temporary and tolerable. This allows the immigrants to justify why they came and how they enact their identities in their everyday life. The dominant colonial effects of western supremacy and cultural environments have constrained how sense is made of immigrants' experience within the formative context. More remarkable is that contextual sensemaking has played a vital role in sustaining and rationalizing the sensemakers' beliefs—beliefs that marginalize them, such as their belief that overseas education is inferior to that in Canada. What is interesting here is that the

power relations are very subtle, unlike when early Chinese settlers were marginalized publicly. I will further explore how the institutional field and multi-ethnic service organizations influence immigrants' experiences when they search for plausible meanings in their moments of shock in the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Searching for Plausible Cues and Institutional Rules: The Politics of Normality

Frequent moments of shock force immigrants to constantly update the process of sensemaking. In order to stabilize the ongoing, unknown, unpredictable streams of work experience, immigrants search for plausible cues (or rules of the game). In search of the agents of plausibility from whom immigrants collect information to make sense of, I gathered interviews through a Canadian multi-ethnic service organization that I am calling CORN. Often, an ethnic service organization is one of the first service points for immigrants. With CORN's reputation, history, and the services it provides, it serves as an agent of plausibility among the immigrant community. As argued in Chapter 3, multi-ethnic service organizations can be a fruitful ground to investigate for the power effects of immigrants' struggles. The standardized routines and processes provided by CORN (i.e., the organizational templates that they have provided to their clients) serve as an institutional background for the analysis. This provides some information about what the rules of the game are and its effects on sensemakers.

The chapter anchors my analysis and discussions with the "meso-elements," the organizational rules and institutional discourses that constitute one of the elements of critical sensemaking (see Figure 4.1, p. 72). This includes the

development of the institutional field (the multi-ethnic service organizations) and the organization, its rules, and some of its historical experiences. These affect immigrant sensemaking more directly when they interact with the organization and the associated "meta-rules" (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991, p. 26) of the institutional field. My analysis highlights how the dominant discourse of integration and the silent discourse of exploitation at this level influence the informants' social sensemaking and their search for plausible cues. As Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) point out, there are at least 17 ways to look at rules in organizations. My initial analysis pays special attention to the conflicts and the rule systems—the rules of the game—that were (re)produced and understood (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) through institutional discourses by CORN's staff, ex-staff, clients, and volunteers, thus unfolding power relations within the organization. I see systems of control (rules) as a central feature of organizing (Clegg, 1981). The notion of rules was introduced by Clegg (1975). He proclaims that power relations within organizations can only be understood as part of the rules of the game within the context. Members then act within the framework of rules, a framework that provides a ready-made sense of reality as a guide to action within the organization.

Rules have to be interpreted and enacted. Through this process, actors may decide to comply, ignore, change, challenge, or reject the rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). It is suggested (in Chapter 5) that institutional practices are

highly dependent on the formative context that shapes conflicts and resources. In addition, challenging authority or breaking the rules is not among the cultural norms of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants. With this formative context (i.e., the dominant social values and background factors) in mind, I investigate the power dynamics revealed by these questions: How do certain institutional discourses and organizational rules (and templates) produce meaning and become plausible? What makes discriminatory practices become “normal” and acceptable? What are the implications for identity work?

I organize the chapter into two parts. Part one focuses on the formal, written rules. I will first investigate the approach and practices in the field of multi-ethnic service organizations in Canada. Then I will produce an account of why certain practices and policies were established by CORN. Most data about the formal rules are extracted from government publications and CORN’s documents (see Table 4.1, p. 65: Textual Documents). Part two focuses on the binary discourses that are discursively produced and understood by the staff, the volunteers, and the clients. I will identify the elements of the dominant discourse of integration that is popularized by CORN’s staff and the silent discourse of exploitation that describes the lives some informants face.

The Institutional Field and the Notion of a Deficient Self

Approximately 137 multi-ethnic (non-governmental, or NGO) service organizations in Canada provide services that include employment referral, mentoring, training, and counselling for immigrants (Simich, Beiser, Stewart, & Mwakarimba, 2005). They often work independently of one another because Canada does not have a unified approach to providing services and programs for new immigrants (Makarenko, 2010). Within this institutional field, they often compete with rather than complement each other, with little effort at cooperation (Simich et al., 2005). Amanda is one of the staff at CORN; she described how the field works:

> *Amanda*: Now, when I think back [about her job search experience], the government provided a lot of resources for immigrants, but there were too many. They didn't have a one-stop unit. For example, when I went to A agency, they said they could only deal with initial assessment. Later, when I was ready to write my resume, they would place me at B Agency. If I needed work experience, then they would refer me to an internship firm. When a new immigrant needed to find work, s/he wouldn't know that there were many different kinds of services. Looking back, why don't we have a one-stop unit? Like a case manager or whatever within an office, so that things can be done in a single, familiar setting instead of letting a cli-

ent go to one place and then have to travel to another place to find another person. I think the government has many resources that overlap. For example, ABC [another service provider in the area] has employment services; so does CORN. There are many, but everything overlaps. When they hire facilitators for employment services, there are many other costs, such as office rental, equipment, and everything. These costs are contributed by government funding. Often I think that the government has wasted the funds available. The government has contracted the same service out to different organizations. I think one organization should take care of all employment services. But now, ABC, CORN, and Adult College all have parts of the employment services. There are many agencies/organizations in this city that supply part of these services. In some situations, funding is divided based on district, which is okay. However, within my district, ABC, CORN, government, and Adult College all have a share in providing employment services. It's confusing and wasteful.

Amanda drew heavily on salient cues in making sense of her experiences with multi-ethnic service organizations. She elaborated from traces of information to a full-blown, more confident diagnostic story in successive rounds. The search has confirmed her belief that government funding is wasted. As she is now part of the

staff at CORN, she can draw upon her past to make sense of her present, where limitation of funds has also threatened her job security. She continues:

> *Amanda:* … we just received notice that the whole employment section will be closed after March 2012. The contract is finished and the government does not want to renew it. It has decided to give it to another multi-ethnic service organization, so the whole section will be unemployed and will live on employment insurance.

In fact, multi-ethnic service organizations are usually low on resources, understaffed, and function from inadequate physical locations (Jenkins, 1988). The short-term nature of funding has also contributed to a sense of insecurity and inflexibility in organizational development. Ng (1996) argues that funding is a form of social control through so-called funding requirements and accountability procedures that prevent such organizations from coming together with a united voice to combat racism. Put differently, multi-ethnic service organizations offer the government an alternative way to brush away potential racial conflicts and to reproduce class domination, thus eliminating their attempts at advocacy (R. Ng, 1996).

Funding issues do manipulate the development of multi-ethnic service organizations. The organizations have to comply with the immigration policy of

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and its current “advice” on “Finding a permanent job in Canada”—a Canadian workplace template for immigrants-to-be:

> Finding a job in Canada may be different from finding a job in your home country. New immigrants face some significant challenges when trying to get jobs in Canada:
>
> - Your *credentials may not be recognized*.
> - Your *language skills may not be sufficient*.
> - You might need *Canadian work experience*.
>
> You may also need *to learn new job search skills*, *create a new group of contacts* and find out *what Canadian employers want*. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada [CIC], 2012; italics added)

The paradoxical nature of this template is that immigrants’ credentials, language skills, and work experiences were recognized by the Canadian immigration officers who granted the immigrant status; however, once the immigrants arrive, their overseas qualifications and experiences are deemed inferior. In a sense, the government advice has constrained immigrants’ access to employment and legitimizes employers’ discriminatory practices, thus contributing to the idea of the immigrant’s deficient self. These double standards could benefit a different government agenda (e.g., increase Canadian population) at the cost of

immigrants' prosperity. Nonetheless, this advice implies that the knowledge possessed by immigrants is inferior because their real and alleged differences are claimed to be incompatible with the rigorous standards of Canadian knowledge. This is what Foucault (1982, p. 777) calls "dividing practices." This hierarchy of knowledge and power is rooted in Canada's ethnocentric past, which I have discussed in Chapter 5. In other words, it can be argued that this is another form of racism that sustains the interests of dominant groups (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wikinson, 2000). The elements listed above are part of the funding guidelines that establish the foundations of multi-ethnic service organizations' operations, and that are enacted in their everyday practices and routines. I will look at this in more depth later in this chapter, exploring how these ideas are translated into practice.

At the individual level, the job search template publicized by the government (also see "state rule" in Clegg, 1981, p. 558; Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991) has different influences on immigrants' sensemaking. A number of informants recalled their frustrations explicitly when they were trying to make sense of one or more pieces of government advice. Some informants who had previously worked in Canada or in the overseas offices of Canadian companies struggled when that previous experience was *unrecognized* as *local* experience. Others, who had never worked in Canada previously, could not figure out how to get Canadian experience if no one was willing to hire them for the first time. The

rule of getting Canadian experience as a prerequisite is hard to meet. When they cannot make sense of the problems, some draw on their identity work and their identity labels. Edward, Dave, and Winnie provide the following perspectives:

> *Edward*: On the one hand, it could be because I was a new immigrant. On the other hand, people in the industry were looking for Canadian experience. No matter how good I was (like a CEO of xyz large corporation), they choose not to recognize it. That's it! I really can't do anything about it. Even though I once worked for Northern Telecom in their Hong Kong office, that was before the company went downhill—it had a big name and was reputable in the industry—but nobody considered that I had worked for a Canadian company. That was a problem!

> *Dave*: I can't say what they are [the barriers] … but I guess my Canadian work experience [5 years] is not considered. I am not sure if mainstream employers think that way … however, from the Chinese community, this is what I have heard … I recently read a study that said when an applicant has an Asian surname, their chances for a job interview will be significantly reduced.

> *Winnie*: At that time, I didn't have much experience in Canada and didn't know how to find work. My mindset was simple. I was thinking the same way that I did in Hong Kong: if I wanted to look for a junior position, like

> a salesperson, it should be easy. I asked around and dropped off my resumes but I did not hear back. I met a few department store personnel. They pointed out that I didn't have local work experience. I was frustrated as no one would give me a chance, so how could I get local working experience? I was turning round and round like a wishing circle. I couldn't make sense of this.

Mike, too, had tried to find a full-time job. Nevertheless, when his professional skills and qualifications (see appendix B) were not recognized, he followed the government template to acquire local qualifications, to take part in volunteer work, and to expand his networks. In his sensemaking narrative, he was sensing anomalies, he acted in order to think, and he hoped to make sense of his situation. Nevertheless, his situation remained unchanged. This made him draw on the cues of racial discrimination:

> *Mike*: I learned that I had to obtain a teaching certificate—an instructional diploma. It is rather ... strange that I was required to obtain a teaching certificate. In Hong Kong, I was a certified lecturer/teacher. Nothing is recognized here … I was asked to take another seven courses, such as classroom management, etc. The curriculum was very close to what I had learned … so I went to the department head [at the school] requested exemptions ...
>
> I did try everything to go back to my own profession [educator],

> but it was extremely difficult. I was a culinary art instructor/lecturer [in western cuisine] in a community college in Hong Kong. I can't teach other courses. Here, most colleges only trust Caucasians to teach western cooking. This is a *fact* and *reality*. I think the idea that the mainstream colleges do not trust me probably makes sense. I taught [French cuisine] at a school for troubled young adults where my Caucasian students didn't trust me either, although only briefly at the beginning. It's like a Caucasian instructor who teaches Chinese Dim Sum cooking. At that time, I had to teach them culture [French cooking] and techniques; it was hard for my students to accept this [from a Chinese teacher]. If you say there is no racial discrimination; that's a lie. We have to face it, no matter what … I have tried everything [from the government advice and CORN's template], they are excuses, and nothing works.

Mike rationalized that racialized snap judgements about people's knowledge and authority are embedded in human relations. He believed that the government template is a way to cover up the racial discrimination in Canada. Like Mike, Maggie felt that ethnic background was a factor in how others saw her authority in the workplace. Although Maggie had worked with a British team for a few years, and had obtained university degrees from Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, she bought into the government template and believed that her English skills were probably not sufficient in the Canadian workplace. She claims that her

degrees were not from local institutions, and thus rationalizes her low-paying, entry-level employment:

> Maggie: I sorted it out after I had depression … I had no local qualifications so I chose to look for jobs at the lower entry levels. The first job I applied for was an administrative assistant position … My wages were not too bad, at least slightly above minimum wage ... I knew I needed time to search for jobs and expected that I would not find a job that was the same as I had had in Hong Kong. I used to work in the area of personnel management as a middle-level human resources manager. I expected that I wouldn't find work at that level, although my English was quite good in the workplace in Hong Kong. How could I manage a native [English] speaker here, given that I have an accent? I wouldn't think they [the locals] would listen to me, so I thought I had to work at a lower level position … Although my English is probably good, I am not like the local people who speak flawless English.

Maggie accepted the discriminatory practice of working in a low-paying job, even while she recognized that her education and English skills were probably sufficient. She chose to make sense of her situation in another way: she drew on her plausible cues and the institutional rules, and concluded that she has not yet met the institutional requirements (local education, local experience, and good

English). While accepting an entry-level position that implies a lower social status, she simultaneously accepts the notion of a deficient self (see mortification of self in *Asylums* by Goffman, 1961). Maggie is not the only one who experienced depression. In another narrative (see p. 170 below), Sophie implies that "lowering her pride" was an important step to help her come out of her clinical depression. Weick (1995) explains that when the shock (the discrepancy between the expectation and the reality) is large, the need to update the ongoing sense is more urgent. By accepting the deficient self as normal, the immigrant can detach his/her analysis from the mysterious stream of workplace experience in Canada that s/he can't make sense of. This process simultaneously de-intensified the sensemaking process (also see *cognitive dissonance theory* in Festinger, 1957).

The institutional rules here serve as a normative process in creating a deficient self. This is also how the notion of a deficient self is therefore formed and normalized institutionally among immigrants. In the situations of Edward, Dave, Mike, Winnie, and Maggie, the informants have either defined themselves as "inadequate," or they have had the identity of an "inadequate" imposed upon them by others. Foucault (1982) calls this normative process the *dividing practice*. Soft power is drawn from what is considered to be desirable or adequate knowledge in the quest for employment.

These cases illustrate some phenomena among immigrants' lives. Almost all informants in this study experienced systemic barriers similar to those listed on the federal government official website (CIC, 2012; also see p. 111 above). This pre-packaged template universalizes the immigrant job search experience, and to a certain extent delays or devalues their access to employment. The institutional hurdles (e.g., only recognizing Canadian training and education, or local work experience in Canada) are kept vague by practitioners or employers so the bar is hard to challenge, hence the notion of a deficient immigrant is maintained. Through normative processes, these systemic barriers and the government website have become plausible explanations for some immigrants to act upon. Other informants believe these are the non-negotiable requirements—a ready-made path to "success"—if one wants to find a decent job (see Clegg, 1981, p. 558, regarding state rules). But how are these requirements enacted and interpreted at the organizational level?

Organizational Rules and Funding Requirements[6]

CORN, like many other multi-ethnic service organizations, provides employment-related services to diverse ethnic groups. It was founded as a community-initiated, voluntary organization in the mid-1960s. It was registered as

[6] Data that supports the discussion in this section is paraphrased (instead of providing the quotes directly) and is listed in Table 4.1, p. 65; this is done in order to disguise the real name of CORN so as to protect the identity of the informants of the study.

a non-profit and non-political association. Initially it was funded as a three-year project that provided a link between the mainstream social service agencies and the newly arrived Chinese immigrants. It provided basic settlement services such as language interpretation. Today, it has developed as a multi-ethnic service organization that serves both Chinese and non-Chinese in the community. Although many documents don't specify a racial focus, CORN's main clients have been from Hong Kong, especially from the mid-1970s to 1997; since then its clientele has diversified to include mainland Chinese and Taiwanese, and lately Filipino, Iranian, Korean, Indian, and Vietnamese. In short, CORN's clients are visible minority immigrants (CORN annual reports[7]; see Table 4.1, p. 65).

When immigrants seek advice at CORN about finding a job/work, they are asked to follow a set of established institutional processes and routines—the organizational rules—including participating in credential assessments, having their qualifications and professions recognized, attending a local educational program to upgrade their skills (usually including language) and credentials, joining networking and mentoring programs (to connect with other experienced workers), volunteering in the community (including volunteering for CORN) to gain Canadian "local" experience, and so on. These programs can be considered part of the CORN rules, the formal procedure for handling a client. It is through this process that the government template is enacted and translated into practice.

[7] The annual reports that document this information are not included in the References in order to protect informants' confidentiality by not revealing CORN's real name.

A similar diagram (Figure 6.1, p. 120) is used in many offices of CORN to guide new immigrants, the job seekers.

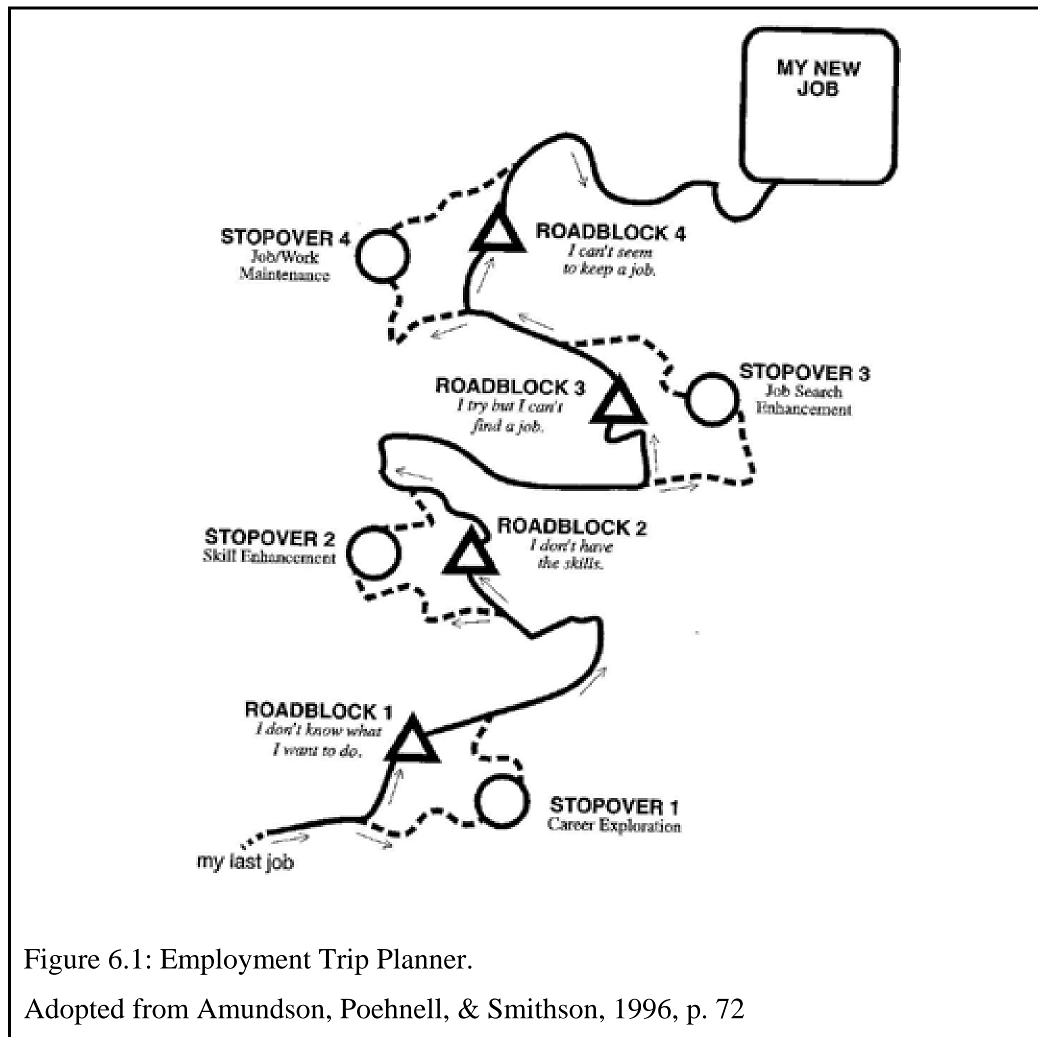

Figure 6.1: Employment Trip Planner.
Adopted from Amundson, Poehnell, & Smithson, 1996, p. 72

In stopover 1, job seekers are asked to attend employment assessment sessions to have their credentials assessed. In most cases, one or more skills/qualifications are considered inadequate or not local, so they will be referred to stopover 2: skill enhancement. They will be asked to take classes,

courses, and training to upgrade their skills (including language skills) and credentials to meet Canadian standards. After skill enhancement is completed, they will be asked to try to search for work, and job search techniques (stopover 3) are introduced, including writing a resume, interview skills, job market information searches, and networking skills. In most cases, immigrants have completed these three steps. They are stuck at roadblock 3, in that they can't find the job that they want. CORN will suggest that clients expand their network by joining a networking club, take volunteer (unpaid) positions to gain local experience, and/or accept that finding a job is supposedly difficult (i.e., accept that things are like this in Canada and immigrants need to be patient). Moreover, most requirements are fairly abstract and hard to measure (how much is enough networking?), so to define a client who is not yet *ready* probably is not hard. Since most of CORN's funding (based on head counts) will cover services up to stopover 3, as long as CORN can convince its clients to continue to accept this process, the organization will continue to be funded. Figure 6.1 (p. 120) above also legitimizes the reality of finding jobs as supposedly full of obstacles and time consuming; therefore, the need to *fix* the defective immigrant is inevitable.

Thus CORN and the other multi-ethnic services organizations, at the institutional level, have to reproduce an image of inadequate immigrants, and hence maintain discriminatory practices that marginalize immigrants over time. In other words, there is organizational pressure to accept the notion of a deficient

immigrant self as more normal than the idea that the immigrant is good enough to proceed. This further lightens the load in the sensemaking conflict (shock) of discovering that one is good enough to be accepted as an immigrant, but not good enough to be hired. The idea of a deficient immigrant self thus helps reduce a significant amount of shock when the immigrant is searching for meaning in an unpredictable job search experience. The idea of normalizing every immigrant as defective resolves many issues, including mental illnesses such as clinical depression. I will return to this in Chapter 7.

The elements listed on the government website above (see p. 111 above) are part of the funding guidelines that influence how CORN (and other multi-ethnic service organizations) is operated in its everyday practices and routines. In order to continue expanding the organization (i.e., number of locations, number of staff, operating budgets, and fixed assets, including office building, service centres, etc.), CORN must mirror government expectations within its practices. This can be seen in CORN's early diversified services, offered to other ethnic groups when the federal government provided funding for multilingual services, and later on in the development of the training centre (CORN annual reports[8]; see Table 4.1, p. 65). Whenever Canadian policy shifted, CORN's activities shifted accordingly. In this sense, the organization can arguably be seen as having lost its

[8] The annual reports that document this information and provide the figures about CORN's growth that follow are not included in the References in order to protect informants' confidentiality by not revealing CORN's real name.

initial mandate of servicing immigrants, and is now serving the government and legitimizing the government's policies and agenda. Government funding to multi-ethnic service organizations can thus be seen as an inexpensive and less coercive alternative to racial discrimination (Ng, 1996). Arguably, credential assessment and recognition are like the head tax during the early settlers' period (Guo, 2007), as they are unreasonable requirements imposed only on immigrants. To provide a sense of the scope of CORN's expansion, it started with an annual budget of $100,000, which grew to reach a recent peak of over $30 million; it has grown from 3 full-time staff to more than 350 staff members in 14 locations. Over 70% of the budget income is from the three levels of Canadian government (CORN annual reports, see Table 4.1, p. 65). This implies the strength of government influences on CORN's practices and operations. CORN is also considered one of the most influential representatives for the visible minority, both officially and unofficially, and is an agent of plausibility in the immigrant community.

The Dominant Discourse of Integration

CORN's founding mission was to *help* immigrants to *integrate* into *mainstream* society. The idea of helping, integration, and being part of the mainstream are articulated throughout many organizational texts (see, for example, Table 4.1). These ideas have become official dogma. CORN's publicly available documents, such as annual reports, newsletters, program brochures, and

web pages, reveal four consistent themes in its mission: (1) to bridge the linguistic and cultural barriers between new immigrants and mainstream service organizations; (2) to help and educate immigrants to become responsible citizens; (3) to promote integration into mainstream society; and (4) to act as a united voice (an advocate) for the immigrant community. CORN's literature echoes the discourse of what a multi-ethnic service organization is supposed to do (Jenkins, 1988): to act as a cultural and linguistic service provider, maintain ethnic identities, and promote integration. In a sense, the discourse of integration acts as a master discourse mediating in the field of multi-ethnic services organizations, not merely CORN. All programs and activities funded by government are linked directly or indirectly to the ideology of integration. Immigrants are tacitly measured if they have gotten in or integrated into the so-called mainstream workplace. Such measurements include (1) being employed by a white employer rather than an ethnic employer (compare appendix B: the informant's summary); (2) being engaged in activities of the Caucasian culture, such as networking and volunteering; (3) being a contributing citizen; (4) having education from local institutions (other western education is excluded, including those earned from United Kingdom or Australia). The following narratives illustrate how these tacit rules of integration are produced and understood in everyday lives.

(1) Employed by a white employer. When asked about his perception of his career achievement at CORN, Wayne explained, "I am not mainstreamed yet.

Many of our clients are really successful and have entered into the mainstream workplace." To Wayne, a successful career has something to do with working within mainstream organizations.

(2) Part of the Caucasian culture. Amanda, also a staff member, embraced the ideology of integration not simply in her workplace but also in her personal life. Moving away from the ethnic community is for her a means of integration:

> *Amanda*: I intended to move into this area, so that we could be away from the ethnic community. I really want my kids to integrate and they should integrate to the Canadian society in the future. To do that, one must get away from the Chinese community. As those stayed within the Chinese community grew up, they spoke the language, and they probably didn't need to speak any English. This would also affect their integration. After they grew up, if they wanted to work in Canada ... you know you have to be a Canadian and be a part of the culture … I really wanted my kids to take part in cultural artistic creativities … We need to learn communication with *English-speaking* people; we have to *be in a group* …

In her mind, there is a clear social division between those who have integrated (into the mainstream) and the Other. Her admiration for integration could also be partly an effect of the colonial notion of western supremacy that was discussed in

Chapter 5. In addition, Edward, also working at CORN, thinks staying on top of community information is another way to integrate:

> *Edward*: You should try your best to integrate into local life. I read many local newspapers and watched local TV a lot when I first came, in addition to Chinese newspapers and Chinese TV channels, so that I knew what was going on … such as voting for the city council. This is a common problem for many Chinese who have no sense of what is going on in the city, like my wife. I think I should try to fulfill my duty as citizen and enjoy my own rights. You should try as much as possible to increase your knowledge and information about your immediate locale. Many Chinese only know what is happening in China or Hong Kong, but neglect their involvement here.

(3) Contributing citizen. The idea of being a useful citizen also lurks in some narratives, such as Winnie's:

> *Winnie*: At the start, I felt that it could seem useless if someone were not working. I thought, I'm not a useless person who has nothing to give. Lack of contribution could apply in two ways: financial contribution and societal contribution. This could be due to my previous profession in social services. Servicing and helping people are very important. After I had travelled around [in Canada], sightseeing and hiking for a while, I thought finding a job might be a pretty good idea to integrate. I thought I shouldn't

waste some of my working experience in my profession.

(4) Education from local institutions. When asked why a local degree is important, Maggie offers her assertion:

> *Maggie*: If they [immigrants] are truly highly qualified people, they should have obtained a local degree ... I also know people work in the mainstream. Most of them get a local degree, some get it after they've landed, and some were obtained from other provinces. Others may still be unqualified [to work in the mainstream] or they may prefer to stay in their comfort zones [within the Chinese community].

To Maggie, there is a clear hierarchical division that divides what knowledge qualifies and what knowledge does not. In her sense, mainstream employment implies quality and a local degree signifies a highly qualified person. The hierarchical divisions of what is "desirable" and what is "deviant" have become "real" in her life.

These are merely some examples of meaning production in the ideology of integration. Some informants imply that employment for economic reasons is secondary; it is a way to obtain a desirable identity as a useful, helpful, contributing Canadian. The ideas of progressing, transitioning, or achieving the social status of mainstream and whiteness are demonstrated in many narratives.

The integration template that CORN's staff has embraced is strong and the rules of the game are well established.

The Integration Game

Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) contest the idea that powerful organizational members have a stronger say over the definition of organizational reality than others do. When CORN staff (all narratives below are extracted from CORN's staff or ex-staff) were asked about how they advise a friend or immigrant job-seeker about getting into the mainstream workplace—a desirable goal—everywhere in their narratives they spoke of networking, volunteering, taking training courses, demonstrating adequate language skills, enacting the cultural manifestations of being Canadian, and lowering one's pride (suppressing one's previous achievement and social status). This provides a sense of the informal rules and how the game should be played in the Canadian workplace. The following section demonstrates how some well-intentioned people come to engage in discriminatory practices.

Rule #1: Networking

> *Teresa*: … start with whatever you have and build up more networks. Networking is very important in Canada, much more important than in Hong Kong. New immigrants find this frustrating. But this is the reality.

> One can see networking as something negative. When there are more applicants than available postings, if you are able to build up a relationship through networking, you are a step ahead. When an employer can learn about you and find that you are capable, that your personality can be a good fit into the Canadian culture, and that you fit all the job requirements, why would the employer find someone else? So their considerations in hiring make sense. We can't blame them.

Teresa realized that networking is against the workplace rules of Hong Kong. She rationalized that conformity was an important step toward integration. To Hong Kong immigrants, networking refers using a back door, which implies that the person's success is achieved merely through relationship rather than true quality. This tactic also implies that one is less capable and perhaps inadequate to get a job on his/her own.

Rule #2: Volunteering

When Susan shared her job search experience, she observed that volunteering was highly valued in Canada, even though this is not part of the workplace norm in Hong Kong:

> Susan: Working as a volunteer is kind of like having an opportunity to expose myself to the Canadian society, to explore the work environment in

> [mainstream] Canada, as I thought I would like to work one day … so this was not bad! ... Perhaps I had done a fine job while volunteering, so she [the manager in-charge] approached me when there was vacancy …
>
> *Interviewer*: Interesting. Do you think your job search tactic is volunteering?
>
> *Susan*: I totally agree. My opportunity comes from this … Employers do care about this … this is probably why I was offered a paid job.

Instead of searching for accuracy, Susan settled for what she thought was a good enough understanding to proceed. She drew her conclusion by trying and thinking; and then made sense out of it. She realized that volunteering (giving away free labour) was not so much a freewill choice about one's passion in a good cause, but a crucial and essential step (i.e., a free sample) toward employment.

Rule #3: Local Qualifications

> *Maggie*: In Canada, local academic qualification and local experience are important. In this province, most employers do not provide training for their staff. The employers will expect local training to be obtained by an employee prior to employment. For example, if they are hiring an administrative assistant, very often they will expect a local certificate in office administration. Here, you can study anything you want to do. Many people

> started their job search by obtaining local qualifications. That makes things easier. When you arrive, be patient, take time to improve your English, and then take a skilled trade course. You have to invest a bit in a 10-, six-, or three-month training program; your job opportunities will be better. I am talking about skilled work. If you want be a human resources manager, it will be very difficult. This is true … Truly highly qualified people should have obtained a local degree!

According to her advice (rules), things will be *easier* and the job opportunity will be *better… but* if one wants to find a highly desirable position (like human resources manager), there are more barriers. The notion that immigrants possess inferior credentials and work experience has to be normalized in order to make sense of the shock immigrants encounter in the Canadian workplace. The shock is not so much that people can't find work, but also that their work experiences and credentials are "suddenly" devalued. Other than taking local courses, English language skills are mentioned as an important factor. Edward agreed with this, but also suggested a potential stereotype.

Rule # 4: Speak Well

> *Edward:* However, the sad thing is that people privilege those who can talk well. This is North American culture. As long as you can speak well, like Obama, then people will think you are brilliant. In Canada, it might be

> slightly better than the States… but as long as you can speak convincingly, they think you can do the job well. In reality, it is not true. On a rare occasion, you will see a Caucasian who can speak well and do well, but often, whites were privileged because they can talk rather than because they can do the job well! This happens a lot in the sales and marketing or the event-planning fields. It also explains why so many Chinese become accountants or IT specialists because well-spoken English is not a core requirement [for those jobs].

Edward suggested that cultural rules are the main factor in who is privileged. This reveals an informal rule in the workplace that he has witnessed. He continued to develop his strategies when things didn't work well in his first year.

Rule #5: Cultural Rules

> Edward: … in the 2nd year, I reflected and decided to start all over again, to learn the Canadian way of doing things … I went to Open Door because I thought CORN was mainly for Chinese immigrants; I preferred to learn this from a mainstream organization. I had learned how to write a Canadian style of resume and cover letter; how to prepare for an interview; and how to know the Canadian way of doing things … The employers here had set their rules of the game. If they went through 100 resume/cover letters, they only knew how to read the Canadian-style resume! Ah! It's a joke!

> But when we are here, we have to follow their rules, so we have to do what works!
>
> ... When I arrived, I didn't want to attach to a Chinese organization, and CORN had a very strong Chinese identity … For some reason, I ultimately work for CORN. At that time, however, I wanted to know how a main-stream organization works ... Through the process, three to four months, I learned how they communicate; how they use certain terms to describe things; some local Canadian ways of doing things; how they make small talk. Slowly I learned how to act like a Canadian. When I was in an inter-view, I could use the same gestures and manners to form the conversa-tions. For example, they like to ask after each other, and hold a coffee [mug] in their hands and further chat on something meaningless. I had to learn the way of casual, ice-breaking chat because they liked this, so then I was considered part of them ... This was what they felt about me, so hold-ing a mug of coffee was essential; chatting about the hockey game would help as well. That's the culture here.

Edward drew heavily on salient cues to understand Canadian culture with the intention of suppressing his own. He went through many rounds of trial and errors before he came to these insights about cultural domination and exclusion. He enacted the cultural rules by thinking while acting and acting while thinking. Only

through this process, he made sense of how to *integrate* and *become* a Canadian. His shifting sense of his self is clear in his resistance to and then acceptance of the idea of working at CORN, a Chinese organization, rather than in the mainstream. While trying to become a mainstream Canadian, he ended up caught in the middle—mainstream, but not quite the mainstream—where he had to lower his pride and to work at CORN.

Rule #6: Lower Your Pride

> *Maggie*: You have to lower yourself (your ego and pride) and be flexible ... Being flexible is very important. As Hong Kong immigrants, you can't expect to work at the same seniority you had in Hong Kong. You may need to change your career. Like me, I was a personnel manager, and now I'm an employment counsellor … In fact, they [the clients] didn't know enough to pass the hurdles [of the institutional structure/ rules]. Their attitudes make it difficult for us to help the clients.

Maggie not only lowered her pride and suppressed her past achievements and social status; she also encouraged others to do so. This normalizing process of lowering oneself implies shifting a sense of self from a dominant identity to a subordinate identity and simultaneously accepting the notion of a deficient self. This rationalization stabilized the shocks to her sense of identity and allowed her

to detach herself from further analysis that might have caused the depression she experienced.

These rules generate some common ground on which to base plausible actions. They suggest that there are inevitable steps before one can be considered ready to enter the mainstream workforce. The idea of a Canadian-in-training is evident in the above and other narratives. These informal rules are produced by the institutional field but maintained by social sensemaking activities. The normalizing process of sharing meanings and labels with others develops what is considered desirable. The meaning production process (the rules of the game) described above is socially supported and consensually validated in many narratives. These rules beneath the surface all point to one thing—a sense that the identity of the immigrants is that of the deficient self, outside the boundaries of full acceptance, a stigma. Once people adopted the image of a deficient self as normal, the effects could be long lasting. What makes this process effective is the combination of internalization (self-surveillance) and social control (discourse). This is what Lianos (2003) calls "institutional normativity and institutional sociality" (p. 412).

How these rules were made sense of has much to do with the ethnocentric past and an enacted sense of the organization. As Mills & Helms Mills (2004) emphasize, "an enacted sense of an organization is a powerful influence on sensemaking as it takes the thinking out of the process and provides a heuristic for

action" (p. 148). CORN staff, in this case, have enacted the rules of the game of integration as the only plausible rules through many rounds of rehearsals. Perhaps they have never thought of how their unchallenged assumptions are informed by racism and unconsciously reaffirm the white/non-white hierarchical division of Canadian culture.

To recap the critical sensemaking framework in Figure 4.1, p. 70, immigrants are kept outside to ensure and reinforce the rules of entry. The door of the Canadian workplace ("mainstream") is systemically shut or metaphorically made of glass (like a glass ceiling). The government uses multi-ethnic service organizations to "help" immigrants to get through this door. However, these practices have reproduced a hierarchy wherein the Other has a lower status than other applicants. These institutional rules are supposed to control the entry of non-white immigrants into a "white" Canada, but in some cases they are used by non-white employers as well. Linda, a long-term volunteer at CORN, offers a perspective:

> *Interviewer:* Have you thought about working at CORN if they have a paid position available?
>
> *Linda*: But it requires such-and-such degree from a *local* university.
>
> *Interview*: Local university?
>
> *Linda*: Yes, I went on their website and read a lot. They only want to hire

> local university graduates … CORN requires local work experience as well. It has very high expectations and requirements [like mainstream employers], but the pay is too little [like Chinese organizations] … so why bother?

CORN's hiring practice, in one sense, can also be seen as reaffirming the government agenda by devaluing overseas education and experience. In short, the Canadian employment system appears to have entry points, but no matter how hard immigrants in this study try using the prescribed methods, their efforts often seem wasted. The production and maintenance of an integration discourse results in more than just brushing immigrants off and leaving them outside of the boundaries of acceptance. It functions as a technology of power (Foucault, 1988b) to detour and delay them indefinitely.

Silent Discourse of Exploitation

Ong et al. (1994) argue that economic exploitation is less a concern for "new" Asian immigrants, who differ in many ways from those who arrived prior to World War Two. Nonetheless, the form of exploitation is (re)produced in a far more subtle and complex way than it was for earlier settlers. Instead of being imposed on non-white immigrants by white settlers, it has evolved and is disseminated among non-white immigrants themselves.

Immigrants' skills and labour can be seen as "an instrument used by one group of people to exploit and dominate others" (Morgan, 2006, pp. 321-322). In its broadest sense, "exploitation is about making use of some vulnerability in another person in order to use them to attain one's own ends at their expense" (Exploitation, 2012, para. 1). From a Marxist perspective, wage labour is a form of exploitation in which the working class is exploited by capital. Marxism depicts the capitalist relations of power and production. In its simplest definition, A takes unfair advantage of B.

Within the institutional field, there is widespread unwritten acceptance that Chinese employers pay less but are demanding. When immigrants can't find work in the mainstream, they may face a different set of rules in the game.

Intra-Ethnic Oppression: Being in a CORNer

Owing to the workplace culture in Hong Kong, the initial appearance of economic exploitation may be seen more or less as a temporary transition. The cultural norm is that once people have reached middle management, the power relations will change, as does the power one possesses. Informants report a systemic economic exploitation inside and outside of CORN due to intra-ethnic oppression. This phenomenon is well established at the institutional level when immigrants are brushed off and confined to "CORNers"—to the identity of a deficient self.

Established Chinese capitalists also recognize the widespread institutional rules (practices) of employment. Combating workplace inequality is not part of the cultural norms; rather, taking advantage of market (capitalist) opportunities is. Exploiting people from the same cultural background may be easier, as they share the same cultural rules (Flowerdew, Li, & Tran, 2002; Geddes & Konrad, 2003). Some Chinese immigrants who have established themselves as managers or business owners can adopt a "progressive white" identity as they have gained more control in the Canadian environment through their success, which legitimizes their embodied power. In this sense, the shared cultural rules become an advantage for them but a burden to working immigrants.

In the following section, I have selected six examples of immigrants' lives outside the boundaries of acceptance, to provide a sense of what is like to be a CORNer immigrant. This sheds light on why people buy in to the ideology of integration and the idea of becoming mainstreamed. This demonstrates the idea that the consequence of being deviant is a constant reminder to others to conform (Knights, 1992; also see Foucault, 1965, 1979).

Working in Chinese-owned Organizations: Life Outside the Mainstream

Edward: I had emotionally prepared before I came. But the differences were huge ... I worked in seven different places in the first year. Each job

was rather short, but I did try hard to find anything. I didn't have physical strength. Week after week, I realized that I couldn't make a living … Here, even though I was willing to lower my status, I still couldn't do it. That was really tragic and miserable.

Mike: So simultaneously I was teaching cooking class in the evening and I taught the EI students at CORN … One thing I've forgotten to mention. When I was teaching at CORN, because I only taught three days, I had two days to spare, so I also worked at the airport to make a living … I thought of it a lot. I'd taught at CORN, but had been laid off. Afterward, at the school for young adults, I was *again* laid off. This time once again it was due to the shortage of government funding …

Kate: I was hired as an executive assistant, such a *prestigious* title, but in reality I was a general helper. It was very different from my experience in Hong Kong (a commercial bank). I used to have a tea lady to care for the coffee room and serve tea every morning; another staff would take care of emptying the garbage bins; I only needed to sit there and work. But here, I had to do everything including emptying garbage bin. Sometimes, when the janitor is unavailable, I even need to plunge the clogged toilet … It was unbearable! I was a *one man band*.

Outside of the mainstream, employment is considered unreliable and work is mostly part time. Workers often have multiple jobs or work both days and nights, often at physical labour. These jobs pay neither enough for rent nor to raise a family.

Instrumental Exploitation

Wayne: I had worked there for roughly two weeks, and then he [the boss] laid me off. However in about one week's time, he called me back because one of his staff had requested a pay raise and he wasn't willing to pay the extra, so wanted to replace him. Even though I returned, in about one to two months he laid me off again as he found a cheaper person … It's the management style … It's likely that he didn't want to increase the pay, so he hired another person to replace the first staff. Once the boss found someone else who could take over the work, he would then lay off the *newbie* as well. We are simply a *thing* to be used and exploited. Once he has exploited you, he gets rid of you!

Co-workers: Established Immigrants

Jack: My first working experience in the city was working as a chef in a Chinese restaurant. I felt so uncomfortable. I didn't know if they [the Chinese co-workers] were acting intentionally. No matter whether they were happy or not, they used rude language to insult me. I felt very bad as they

were only my co-workers; they were not even my boss. They didn't have the authority to yell at me all the time. When they didn't like the way that I performed my work, they used foul language. They didn't know how to respect others. This gave the boss a very bad impression that I couldn't work along with them. I had only worked there for a very short period of time. They didn't just do this to me, but also to other co-workers. They really made everyone feel awful and dreadful. I have been in Canada for 18 years; this is my worst workplace experience!

Harshness

Mary: In a Chinese-owned company, people are rather bossy. Even for just a piece of paper—we would be reminded that we had to recycle the paper (i.e., print on the other side when one side has already been used). Sometimes when we had many customers in front of us, it was hard to remember to change to the paper tray for recycled papers. If that happened, we would rather trash the one-sided copy and reprint it on a recycled paper, to avoid criticism. Chinese-owned companies also pay less. In addition, they wouldn't count my previous experience, even though it is Canadian experience. I have most of the requirements that they were asking for.

Linda: …finding related work was not hard. However, the companies here are not quite like those in Hong Kong. The [Chinese] employer was quite

mean. They didn’t even provide me a chair while working. I was required to stand all day. I have a medical condition where I can’t really stand for such a long period of time … He paid me minimum wage. He said he could even have given me a lower wage because I didn’t have Canadian experience. He knows I was a university graduate from Hong Kong Poly University, and he knows I had experience in Hong Kong, but the minimum wage of CAD$8.00 was considered generous. They didn’t consider my volunteer work experience at CORN. I had worked for CORN many years … One time, the employer asked me to count the labels [for clothes]. When his wife saw it, she yelled at me and said I shouldn’t do this. I told her this is what I was told by her husband, my boss. But she insisted that I shouldn’t do it. This is really ridiculous and insulting!

Accepting the Unacceptable

Maggie: It was the hardest job in my entire life during these 6 months … The changes were huge. I was an administrative assistant. I was supposed to do everything—a one-man band. I was responsible for handling work from two managers and four employment counselors, which gave me six bosses … Yes, me alone! It was incredible. I had to handle non-stop telephone calls. I also had to handle filing and word-processing tasks. More unacceptable was that I had to move huge packs of printing paper to

> the photocopy room after it was delivered. They were very heavy for me. But that was still lighter than replacing the drinking-water bottle [18 litres]! I never thought replacing drinking water was part of my duties.
>
> *Interviewer:* Did you ask about the nature of the job in advance?
>
> *Maggie*: No, I didn't ask about this. From the job title, I never thought about this. The only exceptions were cleaning the bathroom and clearing the garbage bins as they [the bosses] had hired janitors. My immediate supervisor was a harsh and demanding person. She [a Chinese manager] thought that I should have no problem in fulfilling the tasks. She thought I shouldn't complain about the job. Because of this, we had some quarrels. She used to work at my position. Because she was promoted, so I was hired to take over the work she used to perform. Her background [in Hong Kong] was a senior training manager working in a public organization. She was in a very senior management position in Hong Kong, even more senior than I used to be. She was able to lower herself. The reason why we were arguing was that she thought I was not flexible enough. I had learned about this only in Canada—to be available anytime to do the requested work. Like a slave, on standby 24/7 …

Intra-ethnic oppression is perpetuated when people set their own example and handle the tough environment and so expect other Chinese to follow suit. Intra-

ethnic exploitation is reproduced by passing it on. The harsh boss has tolerated the intolerable him/herself in the past, and thus justifies workplace exploitation.

Voluntary Exploitation

> *Ken*: In Canada, in general, although Chinese bosses pay below-average wages, they've given me an opportunity. So I think it is fair to me as it is up to me to accept the job or not. As soon as I find a better paying job, I can leave, so this is basically a supply and demand thing even though one Chinese is taken advantage of by another Chinese.

Ken accepted and justified the widely adopted practice and rationalized his decision as voluntary and fair. Nevertheless, Maggie and others struggled with various forms of intra-ethnic exploitation where coercive power was embodied in the power holder. Micro-processes of resistance started to be more visible at the institutional level. The exploitation might have occurred due to people's familiarity with the cultural norms of both societies (Hong Kong and Canadian). The strength of resistance (in their voices and reflections) is also stronger and explicit when producing meanings about non-mainstream work environments. In this sense, the cultural template plays a significant role in providing sense and direction in enabling people to rationalize what they do. It shows how some contextual factors (e.g., culture) interact and mediate organizational rules and institutional discourses, the elements at the meso-layer. Owing to the potential

hardship of working for non-mainstream employers, such as Chinese employers, the discourse of integration is strengthened and reaffirmed.

Informants' sensemaking is without question mediated by institutional rules and discourses. After rounds of diagnosis and suffering, however, immigrants connect the traces of information to a full-blown story. The normalizing process forces immigrants to lower their pride and accept institutional barriers as "normal" when finding appropriate work. In the midst of wondering why their qualifications and experience are devalued, they are left outside the category of mainstream. They search for plausible meanings in the hope of regaining a sense of control and stabilizing uncertainty. Through the power of the discourse of normality, the notion of deficient self is imposed and internalized so as to rationalize what they have experienced. The power effect of institutionalized discourses and rules of the game, in other words, takes different forms.

It is striking that in order to make sense of what one is doing when s/he can't overcome the institutional barriers, one accepts the identity of deficient self so as to detach from the enormous rounds of sensemaking. This is especially true for those who live with the possibility of suicide and/or developmental depression (more details in Chapter 7). However, accepting the identity label of deficient self (a stigma) doesn't stop the game; instead it requires the immigrant subject to accept a different set of rules to play outside the boundary of the mainstream.

In this chapter, it is clear who has set the rules of the game in the quest for employment. The federal government reiterates the state's rules based on the institutional barriers that widely exist in Canadian workplace, and then uses CORN and the institutional field to normalize discriminatory practices in reaffirming the government agenda. The power effects are visible in what constitutes acceptable knowledge in the quest to be employed. Although the context of the Canadian environment can be a powerful force in determining the immigrant's fate, institutional rules and work culture fail to explain why certain immigrants are more successful than others in their workplace opportunities, when they are all situated in the same context. Why do some practices, language, and experience become meaningful to some immigrants but not others? In the next chapter, I shall further explore how individual sensemaking processes—agency—take place. Why are certain sensemakers constrained by the context, while others can push against the contexts through different forms of resistance?

Chapter 7: Agency and Identity Labels: The Micro-Processes of Resistance

Powerful discourse and institutional rules can limit and confine what immigrants can imagine, and thus systemic discrimination positions the Other on the margins. However, even though context can construct or shape subject positions powerfully, immigrants neither simply step into pre-packaged selves nor are they mechanically put into them by others (Alvesson et al., 2008). This implies that there may be agency in the process. The idea that different understandings make different opportunities is one of the research gaps (see p. 22); here I focus on the *processes* that accept and/or resist discriminatory practices through changing senses of self (identity labels). This chapter explores how the role of agency makes such a difference among immigrants' experiences.

Agency is broadly defined as "the ways in which human beings make sense of their life-worlds and the options and restrictions within them" (Tomkins & Eatough, 2012, p. 13). In other words, it refers to a person's ability to act, to choose, and to take action. Agency and context are implicated in a mutually constitutive, formative process whereby discourse shapes agency and agency shapes discourse (Tomkins & Eatough, 2012). Agency can shed light on how some immigrants were able to resist the structural constraints and the "plausible" discourses that were discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

In poststructuralism, the thought of resistance is triggered when a person feels some kind of disconnection between his/her sense of self and the environment in which s/he is operating (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). Mills and Helms Mills (2004) suggest that "resistance may depend in large part on whether the individual actor is able to link her behaviour to a particular sense of identity" (p. 148). Possibly, loosening some aspects of identity construction may encourage certain actors to resist aspects of received "knowledge" and practice, and as a result shift power relations. This requires agency to engage in the process of resistance. The identity that immigrants construct thus becomes central to the opportunities they find. The changing sense of self also opens up a new way for immigrants to deal with structural constraints. This does not mean that they will necessarily face less discrimination but it does suggest that they may face different forms of discrimination, requiring different strategies.

Building on the notion of a deficient self, discussed in Chapter 6, some comply with the widespread institutional rules and the structural and discursive elements. However, other immigrants experience intensified shocks and adopt different routes to identity work and the associated identity labels. This chapter aims to gain insights into the refractions of resistance and identity work. I see immigrants' identity work and identity labels as a central aspect of agency. They can be negotiable, shifting, contingent, and temporary (see flux perspective in Simpson & Carroll, 2008; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). I first discuss how

professional immigrants give meaning to identity labels in context. How do actors decide to ignore, change, challenge, or reject the identity labels? Second, I explore how immigrants' identity work is influenced by competing discourses of integration and exploitation. This reveals the confused and compromised experience of being an immigrant in context. Third, I examine the implications and the interconnected relationships between the notion of a "deficient" self and mental health issues among immigrants. This reveals the effects of searching for explanation and removal of ambiguity in the sensemaking process. Lastly, I draw on "successful" immigrant narratives to illustrate the idea that "ignorance is strength" in resisting the constraints imposed by power structures. In short, this chapter aims to understand immigrants' identity construction, its oscillations, influences, and restrictions as agency in context. My discussion and analysis are anchored on the top layer of the framework (see Figure 4.1, p. 72), the micro-elements of critical sensemaking.

Identity Labels

An identity label is "a sign that evokes meaning" around the "qualities of the identity claimant" (Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996, p. 115). It signifies the hierarchical division of one's identity and status in society, while simultaneously rejecting a stigmatizing label that implies a lower status and social acceptance. These labels can be legalistic or discursive; they may be adopted by oneself or

given by others. Regardless, identity labels influence how immigrants make sense of who they are and how they act. A focus on identity work illustrates how discriminatory practices can be activated or deactivated by the changing sense of the self. For example, Joyce and Barbara were very sensitive to the identity label of immigrant. When I asked, “What is it like for you, as an immigrant finding a job?” they responded as follows:

> Joyce: I have always considered myself Canadian, a resident. I am part of this society. I was educated here for all my high school and university years.
>
> Barbara: I got used to this place very easily. I didn’t think of myself as an immigrant to Canada.

This broad question was asked in every interview. However, only Joyce and Barbara contested meaning in this way, seeing the identity label as central in defining who they are. Their reactions signified the status and the connotations associated with the identity label “immigrant”. Like Joyce, Dave and Edward were also educated in Canada for some time. They chose to identify themselves more closely with the label of immigrant (Merton, 1938; see Dave’s narrative on pp. 82–83). More interesting is the fact that Barbara never lived outside of Hong Kong prior to moving to Canada; in her narrative she paid little attention to the

discursive elements, but focused more on her authentic sense of identity construction.

Refuse to Play the Game

Others who were more aware of the structural and discursive constraints undertook various forms of resistance and rejection, such as (1) challenging the norm, (2) ceasing to pursue a career, or (3) returning to their place of origin. The normalized understanding of working for non-mainstream employers positions this work as harsh and exploitative. To maintain a positive self, Linda challenged the norm:

> *Linda*: … the employees at my first job seemed to be very afraid of the employer. For example, I was asked to open a file to keep a record of a customer's information. I asked for a piece of paper. My co-worker, who had worked there for many years, said that she would bring some paper for me the next day. I wondered if there was no paper in the employer's office. But she said she would rather take the paper from her own home. I was surprised that my co-worker was so afraid to ask for paper. Why did they have to be so afraid of the boss?

This illustrates how oppressive practices can be deactivated by questioning received constructions of identity. Rather than accept that her employer would

really expect her to do the job without supplies, Linda felt it was reasonable for an "employee" to ask for what is needed to perform the task. She accepted neither a passive role nor the discourse of subordination that constitutes ideas about non-mainstream employment. Kate and Linda refused to play the game; they stopped pursuing a career at the individual level:

> *Kate*: I had only worked there for six months. In the beginning, I had some money. Moreover, the working pride that I had previously made this [job] feel insulting. What they [the Chinese employers] had told me initially was quite different from the work I actually did.
>
> *Linda*: … I had attended the second interview [for a different job], but even though he decided to hire me, I probably wouldn't work there. He is Chinese as well … Each interview took over an hour, with many nonsense questions about my job skills … but he said those skills were not required. He kept asking me, "What else do you know?"… So at one point, I was fed up. I told him that I could even replace him because I used to own a company in Hong Kong. I can handle almost every aspect of a business ... My husband said the job did not offer much money [minimum wage]. It would be better to focus my attention to our child.

When they couldn't find desirable work, instead of lowering their pride or accepting the idea of deficient self, both chose to stop following the rules of the

game, at least for a period of time. In order to maintain a positive sense of self, they both refused to associate with the normalized image of deficient immigrant. They came to realize that there was no fair rule that demanded that they engage with the exploitative workplace. Their careers would only be immobilized on the margins, outside the boundaries of the acceptable. This situation perhaps can tell us about why a substantial number of Hong Kong immigrants leave in their first year in Canada. Edward points out:

> *Edward*: At the end, some will choose to return back to their origins, adopting the astronaut culture: they leave their wives and children in Canada, and the husbands return to their origin to make a living. The family will travel between the two places when they have holidays. In some cases, the men will remain in contact with their previous employers. If it doesn't work out in Canada, going back is their back-up plan. If they have some sort of back-up plan, 90% of them will return back to their origins. Even when they were hired for their first job in Canada, it probably won't be something with satisfactory salary or status, so choosing to return is easier as they can maintain their earnings and social status.

In other words, those who choose to leave in the first year noticed the structural barriers in the Canadian workplace. They had back-up plans in place in order to

maintain a positive sense of self, and they rejected any identity labels that implied they were substandard.

The Deficient Self

Some informants in this study, like Amanda, considered that accepting the identity label of substandard and second-class was essential to survive in Canada:

> *Amanda*: I am willing … because this is about overcoming myself. In a new environment, there are many who can't overcome the self, especially men. I think women are superb. They think about reality. We really can't compare [life in Canada to the past], or we would just die. Once we think back to how great we were, we can't lower our ego; we would never survive. Here is another life—another totally different life …

Amanda admitted that accepting a *lesser* identity was essential to survival. She believed that women were well suited to achieve this role. If this is the truth, then are women supposed to be "deficient" and "substandard" so as to fulfill this gender identity?

Gendering

Gender analysis is not a goal of this study, but the effects of gender did play a part in understanding immigrants' identity work. Edward expresses his struggles to perform masculinity:

> *Edward*: In fact, I struggled a while in the process of lowering my own ego. Ultimately, it was very hard to be humiliated by a young female who had little work experience. Her instructions and ways of doing things were hard to agree with. But I have no way out. This is a foreign land. I knew it! Even though I tried to convince myself that this was a new life and I was starting a new chapter, I couldn't overcome my hard feeling especially as I am a middle-aged male.

Edward struggled between his lived reality and his identity as a masculine subject. He rationalized that his life as an immigrant had brought him down but found it difficult to re-think what a *normal* man should resist. His response aligns with research on gendered expectations at work in organizations (Acker, 1990) and helps to understand my informants' identity work:

> *Edward:* ... One advantage of my job is that I can retrospectively reflect on what I experienced ... I would encourage them [clients] not to look at this [inequality] so negatively. I ask them to try to overcome the hurdles. This

> is especially hard for men, while women can handle this much easier. Women can lower themselves and are willing to work in a lot of different types of jobs. Working at supermarket as a cashier or anything would be fine with them. But men cannot. Even though they may want to work as a cashier, a man might not be hired. In addition, most men [immigrants] are usually over the age of 35, and many are experienced and established managers or professionals. All of a sudden, this shock and the changes are too harsh for them. It is hard to accept.

For Edward, gender seems to allow more room for men to maintain a positive sense of self than for women in the discourse of exploitation. For instance, he claims that women “adjust more easily” and are likely to be hired if they are willing to be exploited or to accept a lower status. In that sense, immigrant men are less fortunate because of their “difficulty” in lowering their ego and pride. Does this suggest that the discursive effect of immigrant womanhood is perceived as a more available instrument for oppression? Calás & Smircich (2009) call this “an axis of inequality/domination-subordination where gender relations are hierarchical power relations” (p. 247). Mary contests the notion that she was “fortunate” in her role as a woman:

> *Mary:* My ex-husband thought I was very fortunate. I didn’t have any luck, but I didn’t tell him when others shouted at me. I just didn’t tell him

> … how much I could tell him? I also needed to take care of my child. Whatever happened at work, I just left those things at work. I chose not to bring my unhappiness home. I sometimes vented my unhappiness with my colleagues. What else I could do?

Using the lens of gender to explore my data was not part of my initial interpretive strategy, but I have found it increasingly helpful to draw upon gendered expectations to help understand the incongruencies and oscillations of immigrants' identity work.

The In-Between Self

Although some immigrants settle into their identity labels and associated roles, most are in the processes of contesting the flux nature of identity work and removing the ambiguity of their self-worth and self-identity. They seem to live with an ongoing sense of something beyond and within their authentic selves—a sense of "at hand but not in hand" (Schuetz, 1944, p. 504). They feel inside but also outside and I am but I am not; I call these feelings an in-between self. In this process, they may be monitoring themselves against the templates (labels) of normality for the immigrant-at-work.

Labelling is used to stabilize the shocks where rounds of diagnostics take place in the sensemaking process (see Becker, 1966). Labelling is used by the self to stabilize the endless thinking in the search for explanations, particularly when

things don't make sense (or sound right). Here I examine this stabilizing process in order to highlight contradictory elements in the signs of competing discourses of integration and exploitation as informants make sense of or try to reconcile the contradictory, ambivalent, conflicting meaning. I discuss identity work among those who are struggling between a defiant self and a deficient self. In this investigation, several paradoxical themes emerged:

1. Helpful but Also Helpless

The idea of refractions in between a deficient self and a defiant self are particularly noticeable among CORN's staff. They want to help immigrants to get in, but they are also on the margins themselves due to the pressures of funding requirements. Their identities swing between *helpful* and *helpless*. Amanda recollected:

> *Amanda*: We had spent a fair amount of time serving citizens, which is not under the government contract. The contract criteria had a target to serve a certain percentage of new immigrants, using, say, 90% of resources; whereas 10% is for citizens. The problem is that we don't reject clients. It's hard for us to say, we have seen enough citizens this month, so we can't see you because you are citizen ... I feel if I have more time, I can help the client further ... So the services are a bit superficial, rather than radically helping them [because of the way the government runs these pro-

grams].

... He [a co-worker] was very helpful but now he doesn't have a job anymore because we just received notice that the whole employment section will be closed … the whole section will be unemployed and will live on EI.

2. Useful but Also Useless

Another in-between self exists in the space between the idea of contributing to the society as becoming *useful*, and the notion that credentials or past experience are considered *useless*:

Winnie: I felt that it could seem useless if someone was not working. I thought I wasn't a useless person, I could contribute ... I have to admit that … I belong to the past. But I am coming back now to try to be useful ... I am already at this age, but I still try to be useful.

3. Good but Not Good Enough

Some informants constantly contradicted their own identity by positioning themselves between binary identities as highly qualified people, but at the same time people who were not good enough to enter to the workplace, resulting in a sense of lost direction and desperation:

Dave: As I have said, I don't have to work in my area of expertise; I am willing to work in planning or consulting work on company strategies, or marketing or IT. I am happy to help out. I didn't mind working in those areas … I am also willing to change my career. I might consider working as a financial planner. Should I spend some time studying this? CORN is able to have me to do an assessment. I will consider this option depending on the situation of the job market and the environment here. With my personality, my characteristics, and my work experience, would I fit into this new career? I hope this can provide me with a long-term career.

4. Racism but Not Racism

Informants experienced racial (subtle) discrimination, but also denied that racism existed in their workplace:

Edward: That was when I was young. Now I have experienced so much, my mind has changed. Everyone says we are second-class citizens, but in fact it isn't that bad. Canadian society is basically equal, but if you think there is no discrimination, that is not truth. It depends on how you take it. When I was a university student, I thought this was not acceptable. I thought when I went back to Hong Kong—that that was truly my place—where I could truly utilize my skills. However … returning to and settling in Canada was still a good choice. I didn't overly care about being a

second-class citizen. It really depends on how you look at it. I think my mentality and status have changed.

Dave: I think it is not quite discrimination, but I recently read something that said that when an applicant has an Asian surname, their chances for a job interview will be significantly reduced … There was inequality when I first came. I thought it would be better after 15 years, but it is unlikely Canada is moving in that direction. Perhaps the government has realized the situation, but people at the organizational level don't want any changes to happen. This is why I was disappointed because I felt there was more discrimination than 15 years ago. We should judge an applicant based on qualifications and skill; this should be the top priority in the filtering process. Who knows where there are other ethnic issues behind the scene?

5. Chinese but Not Quite Chinese

All informants in this study are part of the Hong Kong Chinese community. However, identifying as a Chinese meant associating with an identity that the dominant culture in Canada labels deviant, as well as accepting the discourse of exploitation. In many cases, intra-ethnic oppression makes many reject such an identity:

Maggie: Because they [Chinese employers] do not dare to take advantage

of other ethnic groups … and their English is probably not good enough. They have limited words for shouting because English isn't their first language. They do not dare deal with other ethnicities as people here are always talking about human rights.

Edward: But if I had presented myself as a typical Chinese, fairly uptight, and only answered "yes" or "no" in interviews, then it wouldn't go very far. They could have thought I was not a team player. This was what they felt about me, so holding a mug of coffee was essential; chatting about the hockey game would help as well. That's the culture here.

6. Canadian but Not Canadian

Legally, immigrants are permanent residents. After fulfilling three years of residency, residents can apply for Canadian status. All informants in this study are legally Canadian, but somehow never felt like a full member of society—being Canadian in their everyday lives. The gap between "the promise of citizenship and the reality of exclusion" (cited in Simich et al., 2005, p. 266) has impacted the informants' well-being:

Amanda: With an immigrant identity …Yes, we lower ourselves. Even though we are engineers, we shouldn't insist on an engineering job. Because working as an engineer here is very different than being an engineer

> in Hong Kong. The most important thing is that you must convince yourself, "I am a Canadian now!" Do whatever a Canadian should do. Don't think back to what you have achieved in the past. Once you think back, you will never be able to work it out. If you can't let go of your ego, if you can't let go of the "value" comparison, you can never pass the hurdle.

7. Struggling In-between

Despite the common struggles that immigrants face, without a complete story, they lack a holistic sense of the oscillation of personhood. Mike was a typical example of many professional immigrants who think they are decent people but find that they are unable to re-enter their profession. Mike struggled for stability within his many identity labels (new immigrant, Chinese person, chef, college lecturer, responsible father, husband, and son) and his sense of the constraints on his experience (the need for good English and local qualifications, racialized discrimination). Even though he had proven himself and was once employed for two years full time by a "mainstream" employer, his story still shifts back and forth, developing multiple meanings in relation to his different senses of his identities. He described his story as "fortunate" within a variety of unfortunate experiences (lay-offs, racism, and office politics) and he echoed the nature of the in-between self of immigrant identity. His pride in his identity was higher or lower depending on his employment ranks (full time vs. part time; an instructor

vs. a chef). He faced an identity dilemma between a harmonized family and a professional career:

> *Mike:* As a new immigrant … I found myself fortunate as I ultimately am a chef, but teaching again was difficult … I was hired to teach people who were receiving EI (employment insurance), who I had to teach in English. I wasn't used to it but after a while, I started to feel comfortable about this … I'd applied for jobs at the school board. They were quite interested in my credentials and asked me to teach a cooking class. At that time, I had already gotten my instructional diploma. So in the evenings, I taught cooking class; during the day, I taught the EI students at CORN … a chef who had appreciated my skills also hired me to teach at his shop at $50 per hour, which was unbelievable ... Fortunately, the Chinese Television channel also knew about me ... At that time, people started to know me—this Chinese guy…. After the five terms [six months each] teaching at CORN, all of a sudden, the federal and provincial governments both cut budgets. I'd received layoff notices but was very fortunate; within days I found another job that was probably the best job I had in Canada. Even now, I still think it was the most meaningful job. I was hired to teach problem youth and young adults aged 18 to 25. They were all Caucasians ... This was very exciting. I had to use my English, but they were far more fluent. Their use of slang was more advanced. Initially, they sounded like

they were superior to me and were very impolite. They often challenged my knowledge and skills ... This was a psychological game … I knew what they were doing. In this job, I used many of my techniques to prove myself. It did work! It took two to three months, and then they started to admire and respect me. In those two years, things were very interesting—with blood and tears. Because of this experience, I … worked very well with my students … Because they'd trusted me, this made me feel happy … I was so fortunate to be hired as a head chef instructor especially because I was Chinese. I was very happy imagining that I was like Bruce Lee teaching Caucasian kids how to cook. I had to teach them the culture in "Chin-english" rather than English. Nevertheless, it worked out fine, disregarding my clumsiness [said in a humble tone]. Simultaneously, I was teaching at the school board in the evening ... Because I had taught EI students to cook, I was able to write a new curriculum for the school board and helped them to start a new program for those who wanted to change careers. I helped school board and made good money. I was very fortunate that every class that I taught was full, so my boss really liked me as that made good profit ...

I did struggle in the first two to three years. I thought of it a lot. I'd taught at CORN, but had been laid off. Afterward, I taught at the school for the problem youth and young adults and was again laid off, once again

due to the shortage of government funding. Luckily, up to today, I am proud that I have never applied for any EI … so in the first two years, I indeed wanted to leave. As I said, initially, I really wanted to go back to teaching. However, I have two limitations. First, my English is not very good; I know I am still speaking in Chin-gish. Second, searching for full-time teaching work is very difficult. I need to make a living … I have two daughters and a family to take care of; plus my parents in Hong Kong. As I mentioned earlier, I really wanted to leave here and return back to Hong Kong … Only now I have real full-time work … In the past 10 years in this job, even though it was a lot of hard work, it's still good that I can earn a fixed income and other benefits are more stable. I did try very hard to go back to my own profession [as an instructor/lecturer], but it was extremely difficult ... In here, most colleges only trust Caucasians in the western style of culinary art ... If I sought work in a private school, teaching once or twice a week, there was no problem. They are very likely to hire me as they think I, as a Chinese, can offer some specialized courses. However, if I wanted a full-time or an ongoing part-time position, that was extremely difficult. That's it! So after I started here, I'd chosen a lower profile with the hope of a less stressful position. I am the only help for myself. I am an independent person. I can't rely on others …

Mike tried to reconcile these contradictory meanings in his sensemaking process. He tried to lower himself, filter his pride, and adjust his mentalities accordingly. His psychological state depended heavily on what he faced in the workplace. Constantly struggling in a condition of *I am but I am not* can have various psychological health costs (Simich et al., 2005). The cost of immigration is perhaps higher for some people than for others.

The Cost of Immigration

Mental distress is one of the common phenomena of immigration (Simich et al., 2005). Normalizing immigrants as defective people, in a way, may possibly resolve some mental issues, such as depression and suicidal tendencies. When the reality is very different from the expectation, this intensifies the sensemaking process. Immigrants thus engage in endless searching in their attempt to stabilize the shock of unrecognized credentials and work experience—a particularly challenging shock to the identity in Hong Kong culture, where identity is closely related to one's career (Stryker, 1980). In some cases, the deficient self is too far from their pre-existing self-identity. When the situation cannot be rationalized, the endless rounds of organizing may lead to the development of mental illness (see Sophie's narrative, p. 170). Therefore, one option is to accept the identity of a "deficient self" in order to detach from an unending analysis of identity; this provides some stability, although the price is that the subject must accept a

stigmatized identity. The process of accepting the notion of a deficient self can potentially remove the ambiguity of "who am I?"; thus reducing possible psychological issues that some immigrants experience.

The idea of lowering one's pride is closely related to getting out of the cycle of depression. If one doesn't conform, one could go through endless rounds of searching until the sensemaking shock is stabilized. When an answer can't be found, one of the ways out is to take on the stigmatized label—to begin to see oneself as defective. In this study, depression, frustrations, divorce, and suicidal intentions were reported in the quest for employment. Some informants experienced long term depression, and professional help had been sought. When there seems to be no other way out, immigrants have thought of and attempted suicide when sense can't be made (see Tom's narrative below). Immigration can become a harmful process that causes different forms of damage in people's lives. In order to protect informants' confidentiality, I have given new fictional names in the following quotes.

Recovering from a Suicide Attempt

Tom told me that he had attempted suicide when nothing made sense in his job search. He felt that he was a capable person but found it difficult to accept that he couldn't overcome the structural barriers. Now he is more aware of his

mental health and has formed his routine and developed strategies to deal with depression. He stressed his issues repeatedly in his narrative:

> *Tom*: ... the differences were huge. There were many things I thought I could manage, but in fact, I couldn't … I'd sent out hundreds of re-sume/letters but there was no response. I felt helpless and down. It was very miserable. I quarrelled with my wife a lot. Of course, nothing was working. I have thought about suicide, just driving around and ending my life ... I really can't sit at home and do nothing. Here, staying home too long could cause mental problems. People go crazy! It's true …

Making Sense of Clinical Depression

> *Sophia*: I couldn't lower myself yet, so that was very difficult emotionally … I felt really bad, so I went for a vacation. I went to meet my [maternal] family … I later learned that these emotional ups and downs were considered depression. I thought immigration had harmed me. It's very miserable and dreadful. Why did I choose to immigrate? I perhaps had too high a sense of my own importance. Many Hong Kong people are very arrogant, especially those who had economic and financial advantages. Asking someone like us to start from the beginning [at the entrance level]—it is easier to say than do. I really believe in my capability. I thought knowledge could change one's fate. I thought, with my own ability, I

> could achieve anything. When a life crisis comes and that is what you can't handle, you really need to believe [you are not good enough] ... Otherwise, why would I come to Canada? Why were there so many difficulties? Why were there few problems while in Hong Kong and life was smooth? I had money to spend, a house to live in, a maid to wait upon me, a car to be driven. Why have I chosen to suffer here? I had worked there three years and burnt out in 2005. I was exhausted … something triggered my anxiety …

Sophie, like other professional immigrants, used to belong to the dominant class in Hong Kong and had now become a member of a subordinate class in Canada. She couldn't make sense of her Canadian experience. Why were highly valued skills and capabilities not recognized in the Canadian workplace? By deciding that she was not good enough, she resolved her psychological issues. She had probably internalized CORN's institutional narrative of immigration. In the process of immigrating, Sophie lost her sense of pride and endurance after all her struggles.

Other Costs of Immigration

Besides five informants who reported substantial mental health issues, three reported divorce and many reported quarrels at home between couples:

> *Mary*: My ex-husband, his English is not good. So living in Canada was painful to him. This was also why we divorced. This is what I would say I had gained but I also had lost. He can't walk at the same pace as I do. He started to think differently. He thought my experience wasn't as difficult as his in the workplace, but I experienced the same hardship. He started to complain about me and thought that I didn't pay attention to his feelings. He thought I only focused on my career and my son. He was very unhappy ... He felt pain. His attitude to life was very critical. He kept changing jobs. Now we [my son and I] rely only on my income, and I can't make a living here. I haven't bought any property; we only rent. When we want to go out, even if we choose to eat somewhere inexpensive, it is not easy to afford. The pressure is not light. If I hadn't had any back-up [savings], it would be very difficult.

Mary has naturalized her divorce as part of life, one of those things "I have gained but I also have lost." However, her loss was described throughout her narrative while she was struggling with a low income and the associated shock to her identity.

Ignorance Is Strength: Inside the Boundaries of Acceptance

A few informants, like Alicia, made a different sense of the approach to their job search. When Alicia arrived, she didn't approach any job agencies or ethnic service organizations:

> *Alicia*: Since I was a new immigrant and didn't bring a lot of money, work is necessary to make a living ... The new [her third] job was also in the field of accounting because I had rich experience in this field. I had worked over 10 years in accounting in Hong Kong. I included all of these in my resume. This time, I worked in a sizable Caucasian organization

She thinks her overseas experience was one of the reasons that she was hired. She didn't think overseas experience was devalued by employers. Her experience implies that the micro-politics of employers also plays an important role in immigrant experience. However, this didn't mean that she didn't face any difficulties in the Canadian workplace. She had shared some of the office politics she faced because she is a Chinese person managing a Caucasian law firm. Her ability to make choices became clear after she had delivered her second child:

> *Alicia*: I wanted change. I was worried that my mind would slowly decline. Working in accounting, I had to memorize lots of things. In addition, there are many new accounting software programs that I had to learn. I

> won't be as competitive as the younger folk. I was already over the age of 40, in my midlife. My eyesight was weak. Working in front of a computer was getting harder and harder. This is why I think changing a career was necessary.

Alicia seemed to face fewer barriers in her quest for employment. She navigated her career based on her own sense of self.

Only a few informants spoke of different ways out of their situations. They thought following the governmental or multi-ethnic service organizational template is probably the best available choice, except returning to their point of origin. When I told some of them my own story (which makes a different sense), I received surprising responses from those who thought my experience was an exception (i.e., out of norm and/or lucky) and hard to believe. When I arrived, I was ignorant of the institutional rules and discourses. I was employed in a management position within 6 months. That position was similar to the one I had had in Hong Kong. Within two years, I had advanced my career to the position I desired. Now I realize that this ignorance became my strength. The different senses that I've made were the key to push against the set of constraints offered by immigration discourse. My turning point came from some colour-blind employers who measured my capability rather than a pre-packaged understanding of what constitutes an immigrant. This implies that micro-resistance takes two to be effective: the agent and the principal. Even though doors were opened for me, I

have realized that there are thousands of glass doors inside the boundaries of the so-called mainstream environment that remain shut. The situation and its solution are perhaps far more subtle and complex than has been thought.

This chapter provides a sense of what immigrants' identity feels like on the inside. In a sense, a person constructs an identity that reflects his/her qualities depending on the cues s/he draws upon in a particular time. This illustrates the potential for dynamic identity construction in which individuals may choose certain definitions and discourses to embrace or distance themselves from different times and in different situations (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). This chapter illustrates how informants resisted at the micro-level when sense could not be made out of their situations; various forms of resistance emerged. I have highlighted the compromised and confused feelings of being a working immigrant. I have identified a potential link between the idea of an in-between self and mental health issues among the immigrant community (Simich et al., 2005). In addition, I note that the cost of immigration could be far more subtle than people imagine. In the end, I propose that ignorance can become strength when employers and immigrants disengage from the social division of integration and a pre-packaged sense of immigrants' capabilities.

Understanding identity not only enhances an appreciation of what identity is, but demonstrates that identity is more grounded by the power of resistance. My contribution in this study lies within the empirical margins since we can only

observe power through resistances from inside the perspective of the first person. I shall tie together all elements of this study in unpacking workplace inequality, its implications, and some reflections in the final chapter.

Chapter 8: Unpacking Workplace Inequality

I began this thesis with a phenomenon that I cannot make sense of. Why do substantial numbers of Hong Kong Chinese immigrants leave Canada within their first year? How do they make sense of their workplace experiences, individually and collectively? I have discussed why studying the voice and reflections of immigrants can help reveal some of the hidden discourses at play, which realist surveys and interviews cannot approach. I contend that a critical sensemaking approach allows greater insight into immigration processes rather than a pre-packaged sense of the immigrant experience.

In this final chapter, I begin by tying all the critical sensemaking elements together so as to unpack the implications of workplace inequality in Canada. This is followed by some critical implications for theory and practice, a discussion of my contributions to the research, limitations, and potential future directions of this study. I end this thesis with a final reflection.

Making Critical Sense of Workplace Inequality

My investigation in this study reveals that Hong Kong Chinese professional immigrants are a group of adequate people. Many have engaged in the “western paradise” discourse, influenced by the shadow of British colonialism. This discourse suggests that life in a westernized country, like

Canada, the USA, or Australia, will be far better—their work, their life, and their living quality (e.g., better education for kids, fresher air, and a less troubled society). When reality doesn't match these expectations, in order to make sense of what they have experienced, some internalize the master discourse of integration in maintaining and sustaining their beliefs. Through the quest for integration, working immigrants are caught in a vicious trap in the immigration system.

Through the discussion in Chapter 6, it is clear that immigrants are framed and structured within institutional guidelines in the quest for employment:

1. Local work experience (Paid or unpaid)
2. Local recognized credentials and qualification
3. Good command of language skills

When immigrants are granted the status of right of abode, they have qualified according to rigorous immigration requirements that include good work experience, good education, and good language skills (part of the points system). Nevertheless, the points system, which lets immigrants into Canada, neither aligns with workplace requirements nor matches societal expectations (i.e., integration). This creates a gap between the promise of citizenship and the reality of exclusion. This sensemaking shock triggers an effort to make sense of the situation.

Even though many of the informants in this study had obtained the "required" criteria, they have often remained outside the "door" to the Canadian

workplace. This can be partially explained by the identity labels that they adopted over time and the societal discourse of integration that they were engaged with, where immigrants' struggles and resistances were evidenced. A hierarchical division within the discourse of identity classifies who is desirable and who is deviant. Power is expressed through knowledge, the normalizing process, and subtle institutional racism, rather than through the more direct oppression experienced by early Chinese settlers in Canada. Multi-ethnic service organizations provide formal instructions and guidelines that legitimize the government agenda. This agenda has provided a narrowly defined path in the quest for employment. By maintaining the discourse of integration and the boundary between those on the inside and those on the outside, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, p. 72, the Other can continuously be taken advantage of on a systematic basis. This perhaps tells us something about why a substantial number of immigrants leave in their first year of arrival.

One of the goals of this thesis, in light of ethnomethodological study, is to show how Hong Kong Chinese immigrants develop strategies of organization to produce order in their everyday lives. It is clear that some of them choose to resist workplace inequality by quitting the game (e.g., returning to their country of origin), rather than following the rules. The rest choose to stay and have developed various strategies (or rules) to produce order, but concurrently reaffirm a set of rules that stand over them, constraining their actions. Take CORN, as an

example: instead of combating or resisting workplace inequality practices, the dominant culture's rules of what constitutes so-called desirable workers have been reaffirmed. Through CORN's practices, the differences between Canadian workers and immigrant workers are reproduced and strengthen the hierarchical divisions.

The order created by CORN maintains the hierarchical divide between "mainstream" Canadians and immigrants, and in some ways repeats the history of racism in Canada. The process of lowering immigrants' self-worth is an essential step. However, the "new immigrants" who arrived after World War Two (Ong et al., 1994) are very different from the first Chinese settlers. The first settlers were primarily oppressed through the wages they received and the societal status (identity) they could obtain. The "new" immigrants had obtained a fairly positive self-identity and social status prior to coming to Canada, so getting them to conform to the identity label of deficient immigrant self requires different strategies. Constraining immigrants' incomes is insufficient. In order to effectively constrain immigrants' mobility, multiple strategies have been exercised over time: (1) restrict their social mobility to the boundaries of the so-called mainstream workplace (i.e., reinforce the institutional rules of entry to the mainstream workforce); (2) lower their self-concept and self-esteem through their identity work, societal discourses, and institutionalized practices, such as CORN; and (3) maintain the identity labels (the hierarchal division) between the

stigmatized defective immigrants and the normal “mainstream” Canadian. This normalizing process has to be perpetuated from the day of arrival through social norms, discourses, and instructional rules. The normative power is drawn from what constitutes good knowledge, and therefore positions the “deviant” subtly as belonging to a substandard category. The normative process of identity control is thus far more crucial than economic control in “managing” immigrants. The everyday text and talk of the discourse of immigration, such as the following, is one of the ways an inadequate identity is imposed upon immigrants:

> We know you don’t deserve a low paying or entry-level job, but this is the only job available because of your lack of … You can obtain a better job: if you do A, B, C, and D to improve yourself, you might have a better chance.

These empty signifiers seem to be the most effective in immigrants’ lives, even though in some cases, informants had achieved all that is required (A, B, C, and D). Some will continue to search further for more unspoken rules (E, F, G, and H) that they have not yet obtained. Over a period of time, some are exhausted in the quest for employment and the rounds of intensified sensemaking. Among some, mental illnesses develop as no sense can be made out of their situations.

The discourse of integration signifies the divide between inclusions versus exclusions. Integration is not so much about wealth as about whether (1) one

holds a “professional” position in an organization, (2) one has the ability to schmooze and articulate one’s thoughts, and/or (3) one is sufficiently involved with the new society and culture. New immigrants, even those with an abundance of wealth, can thus still be considered outsiders.

The discourse of exploitation illustrates life outside the boundaries of acceptance: the effects of being marginalized and the constant reminder to others to conform. Some professional immigrants in this study struggled with their self-identity as “at hand but not in hand” (Schuetz, 1994, p. 504). This implies that immigrants will always be at the margins. Their sense of self is often in the space between inside and outside, the in-between self.

Critical Implications

> A critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest … We must free ourselves from the sacrilization of the social as the only reality and stop regarding as superfluous something so essential in human life and in hum an relations as thought … It is something that is often hidden, but which always animates everyday behavior. (Foucault, 1988a, pp. 154–155)

The Canadian immigration system is a complex institutional field (Hardy & Phillips, 1999). To point out that racism is evident in the Canadian workplace is not the goal of this thesis. Neither I am trying to argue that recent immigrants have encountered more trouble than the first settlers. My goal is simply to show that some professional immigrants have accepted the unchallenged assumptions (1) that the government is providing help for them to "get in"; and (2) that ethnic service organizations are offering positive guidance for immigrants' workplace goals and opportunities. The dominant discourse of integration is powerful. Immigrants' identity and self-worth are measured against whether they "get in"—integrate—into so-called mainstream society. One of the measurements is based on whether one is employed in a so-called non-ethnic organization. Through this analysis, a discourse of inadequate or deficient immigrant selves is revealed in the narrative of immigration. The effect of this hidden discourse has been to marginalize some immigrants in relation to workplace opportunities. However, although the identity label of immigrant and the identity work of accepting the idea of a deficient self are powerful, these forces never fully determine identity.

Sennett and Cobb (1973) have uncovered a new form of class conflict in America—an internal conflict in the heart and mind of the person who measures his own worth in terms of occupational achievement and accumulated wealth. Many professional immigrants in this case study face similar internal identity conflicts. They define their failures as resulting from their own inadequacies

against the barriers identified by the federal government: (1) the need for local experience, (2) the need for local education, and (3) inadequate English. No matter how hard they try to overcome these so-called institutional barriers, these barriers act like a rubber band that stretches its length, not based on standard criteria, but on race and ethnicity (such as the surname on one's resume; see Dave's narrative, p. 162). When engaging in undesirable work, immigrants begin to see their labour as meaningless and irrelevant to their core identity and self-worth because this work is neither what they were trained for, nor does it genuinely utilize their capability and work skill/experience. Instead, they define their work and the choice of immigration as a noble act of sacrifice they make for their families, as in Mike's narrative:

> *Interviewer*: Have you ever regretted coming to Canada?
>
> *Mike*: I did regret coming in the first two years … but now I am used to it. My two daughters have become very successful. My efforts have never been wasted. They both have received many scholarships and awards for all these years including in the university. This has comforted my soul … This has paid off for what I have suffered.

Defining a job as a sacrifice resolves the problem of powerlessness: to counter workplace frustration, immigrant parents gain a position of power within their families and a positive sense of self among their peers. Framing the undesirable

job as sacrifice allows immigrants to slip the bond of the present and orient their lives toward the future that will be won through deferred gratification (e.g., if they can't "get in" now, they have laid the foundation for their children to "get in" in the future). The hope for a better future for children gives parents a sense of control. This does, of course, assume that the second-generation immigrant will "get in." Immigrants' workplace struggles give them no glory or pride unless defined as family-oriented or future-oriented sacrifice. However, in making this sacrifice, other painful wounds are opened up, including resentment, hostility, and shame.

The professional immigrants in this case study once belonged to a dominant class (in Hong Kong) that had ways to display their worth. Through analysis of their critical sensemaking and identity work, this study reveals that their identity is shifting and shifted. They have either adopted the identity of an inadequate immigrant self by themselves, or/and it has been imposed by the ethnic service organization through so-called assessment. Respondents' hidden injuries (the sense of an inadequate self) and the master discourse of integration in which they are engaged are surrounded by this stigma of being working immigrants (Goffman, 1963). Regardless of how hard they try, they will perhaps never be able to speak "flawless English" like native speakers (e.g., in Mike's and Maggie's narratives), because they are not and can never be. Even though after all these years, some have finally realized coming to Canada was not as such a good

thing as they thought. Admitting failure and returning to the country of origin also carries the stigma of failure, implying the inability to conquer a foreign land. The cost of immigration at times is beyond imagination.

This study does not aim to answer or predict immigrant retention in relationship to immigrants' job opportunities in Canada. My aim is to show how the sensemaking context around micro-politics power influences a person to stay or return to Hong Kong. This study was triggered by the question of why immigrants leave in their first year in Canada; however, a more interesting question this study raises is "Why do they stay?" For many, the immigrant workplace experience goes well beyond racism. In search of an acceptable work identity, they are caught in a vicious trap. They have brought their wealth and talents. Their wealth is cherished and is appreciated in the Canadian system. However, their talents are marginalized as they internalize the sense of inadequacy hidden within the discourse of integration. The deviant category of immigrant and the way this category confines immigrants' prospects, as publicized in Canadian immigration literature, is a way of regulating them, primarily for the dominant culture's economic and social purposes. On the surface, the employment equity practice is well regulated in Canada. Beneath the surface, the employment inequality practice is also well regulated by the government's literature and ethnic organizations. Through the master discourse of integration and the hidden discourse of deficient selves, immigrants can believe

they are not (yet) good enough to "get in," like the image portrayed in Figure 4.1, p. 72. Perhaps the history of what purposes are served by ethnic organizations should be rewritten and reconsidered.

In addition to the contribution to the equity and identity work literature discussed above, I highlight my significant contributions to the framework and its application of critical sensemaking, a rather new and underutilized approach (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This research opens a new path to study complex topics such as immigration discourse and workplace inequality. In this thesis, I have shown how the immigrant makes sense of his/her identity labels and how some are trapped in the notion of a deficient self (the hidden discourse) and the associated discourse of integration. Mills and Murgatroyd (1991, p. 8) argue that the major contribution of interpretive accounts is their focus upon the role of "understanding" and "meaning" in the comprehension of any given organizational situation. Discursive analysis focuses on the processes of how the meanings are produced and consumed. This study is about how the meanings of integration, exploitation, immigrant, and a defective self are produced, used, invoked, and maintained. It stresses the importance of understanding how one *becomes* an immigrant as opposed to how one *is* an immigrant. Most importantly this study is about how

social justice is challenged and realized in discursive practice. It is not simply an enhanced understanding of how immigrant identity works, but is also, through the empirical investigation of discursive activities and the voices of immigrants, a developmental exercise in empiricism (Tomkins & Eatough, 2012). Through this process, I have also examined the directions of discriminatory practices, in which power moves not simply from white towards non-white, but is also exercised as a form of intra-ethnic oppression.

Scholars such as Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo (2010, p. 12) have recently argued that “the predominance of social psychological approaches has also resulted in a narrow understanding of the processes leading to inequality, namely one that largely overlooks structural, context-specific elements.” They point out that there are three fundamental grounds on which to criticize the diversity literature: (1) the problem of the positivistic ontology of identity underlying diversity research (Litvin, 1997); (2) the tendency to downplay the role of organizational or societal contexts; (3) the lack of theorization of power. This study responds to this call for theorizing work. It bridges our understanding of how power emerges historically and reveals how micro–level analysis (the sensemaker) emerges and is subject to the macro-level elements (the structure and societal discourse) in a more critical sense.

Through the use of a critical sensemaking approach, I was able to provide a theory and a critique regarding the systemic need for a “deviant” to be outside

the boundaries of acceptable. This enhances our understandings of what makes discriminatory practices normal and effective. The critical sensemaking framework is a multi-layered approach that fuses the divide between structuralist and poststructuralist accounts of power, resistance, and agency (Mills & Helms Mills, 2004). It shows how power emerges through people's sensemaking in context. In this study, critical sensemaking has showed the power effects of both exercised and possessed, both productive and oppressive. Power relations can be understood from the process of victimization as well as the process of resistance.

This thesis also makes a significant contribution to the operational side of the critical sensemaking approach. The refined framework (Figure 4.1, p. 72) highlights the constraints, resistance, and interactions in and between multiple layers. It makes the strength of the resistance (micro-politics) more visible for analysis from layer to layer. Without a critical sensemaking framework, a deep and dynamic tool, it is impossible to envision the diverse and interconnected relationships of immigrants' situations. Critical sensemaking makes researchers look at complex issues radically, dig out the embedded historical or systemic context, and show the value of the micro-politics of agency in the process. Critical sensemaking does not simply describe the rise of workplace inequality or reiterate well-known ideological positions. It adds value by addressing the linkages among all elements, giving a perspective on the interconnected relationships. I seek to contribute to the ongoing refinement of the critical sensemaking framework as a

methodology for analyzing the contextual issues embedded within unequal systems of human relations.

Limitations

Besides some of the issues in using critical sensemaking that I have identified in the Chapter 4: Ethical Consideration and Reflexivity, this methodology does have some other complications and challenges, and thus deserves attention for further refinement. Critical sensemaking is a powerful but also an evasive approach. With less than a dozen empirical studies available for reference, it is extremely hard for novice researchers to master the wide range of elements and concepts in a short period of time. Hence, the depth and width of the approach are its strengths but also its weaknesses. Researchers also need to deal with epistemological and ontological issues, and to make sense of whether the various natures of the diverse elements of the methodology are compatible with the problem at hand. Without many ready-to-use tools available, researchers are likely required to develop their own (e.g., an analytical framework) at the risk of oversimplification. Depending on the problem at hand, pulling all elements together like a perfect storm can be far from easy. Owing to all these complexities and perhaps due to the small word limit prescribed by journals for publishing articles, critical sensemaking may be a less favourable methodological choice for researchers when compared to a single-layer analysis. Since critical sensemaking

in its current state has not yet become widely recognized as a research method (Helms Mills et al., 2010), future studies should continue to develop the application of this useful approach.

Future Directions

One of the future directions of critical sensemaking perhaps should focus on capturing other power dynamics in a social setting. When critical sensemaking is conducted in group settings or naturally occurring incidents, the social dynamics may be more visible for analysis than in an interview setting. Due to the nature of discursive strategies, an individual actor does not operate in vacuum (Helms Mills, 2003), but also within others' existence.

In addition, because the scope of this study is limited to marginalized voices (as the informants are job seekers), any future research on immigrant sensemaking should perhaps focus on a sample with more successful voices, so as to examine their discursive activities in a more critical sense.

This study's initial focus was on the development of a body of literature that deals with the "structure-agency" divide rather than "woman-centred" analysis. As discussed in Chapter 7, however, gendered analysis helps explain immigrant identity work. Quite interesting is that the vocal accusation of racism was only explicitly represented by the voices of three males of this study. Do female immigrants experience less racism, or did they make sense of those

experiences differently? Indeed immigrants' identity work should receive further attention in gender analysis.

Defining a job as a sacrifice resolves the issue of powerlessness for immigrants; when this happens, it assumes that the second-generation professional immigrant will "get in." Future research on generational sensemaking should be considered, to see how generational differences might result in a different sense of self and how second-generation immigrants deal with the power relations among their identities and structural discourses.

This study reveals a link between critical sensemaking processes and the mental health of immigrants in Canada. Further studies may consider exploring the gap between promising citizenship and the reality of exclusion, and how it impacts immigrants' mental health and other associated social issues (see Bapuji & Riaz, 2012).

A Final Reflection

Prior to the data collection stage, I had never imagined what immigrants have to go through in their quest for employment. The situation is far more subtle and complex than I had ever thought. Some of their voices have troubled my mind as an immigrant to Canada. One prominent voice I repeatedly heard was that of conformity. My own rather mild workplace struggles perhaps opened up new space and new hope for others to rethink what may be possible: an opportunity to

encourage them to disengage and to renew the sense (understanding) of their situations. I contend that the sense that immigrants make at the level of micro-politics is crucial to the opportunities they can find. Through their voices and their reflections, I have come to realize that this study may provide hope for a possible new beginning.

To me, it is sad to see some immigrants take advantage of other immigrants, rather than coming together in solidarity in a foreign land. It is equally sad that racism is still deeply embedded in our society, including in the minds of young children. My twins, six years old, have been insulted by peers of the same age simply because of their Chinese mother. They were told that because of their mother's ethnic background, they were uneducated and substandard people. This societal snap judgment by a six-year-old is a good example of how far we have come in combating racism and how much more work we have to do in Canada and the rest of the world. My location as a Hong Kong Chinese woman perhaps has enabled me to see issues embedded within unequal systems of human relations that would otherwise be missed in everyday life.

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Appendix A: Unstructured Interview Questions

Title: Making critical sense of immigrant experience in the Canadian workplace

Broad questions:

1. Please tell me briefly how long you have been in Canada and why you have chosen to come.
2. Please describe your experience with finding a job and/or working in Canada. Easy? Hard? What was it like?
3. What is it like for you, as an immigrant, in finding work/a job?

Follow-up questions:

1. Is the workplace experience any different than when you were working in Hong Kong? If so, in what sense?
2. Please tell me some of your survival tactics in the workplace. Any lessons learned? Where and who you have learned this from?
3. Who (individual or groups) or what has offered the most help to you in settling down in the workplace? Why are they important?
4. Have you thought about returning back to Hong Kong or moving elsewhere? Why or why not?
5. Please tell me any other workplace stories (experiences) that you think are particularly interesting / ridiculous.

Appendix B: Summary of Informants

Pseudo name / Number of children	Highest Education	Position /Profession previously held in Hong Kong	Past income[b]	Current position in Canada	Current income[b]	Years in Canada
Nancy / 2	Master's degree (Canada) in Legal Administration	Office manager in a UK legal firm	$$$$$	Casual clerical support at a Canadian university	$$	14
Kate / 2	Master's degree (Hong Kong) in Banking	Commercial Trust funds administrator in bank	$$$$	Unemployed, volunteer[a]	0	15
Ken / 2	Some post-secondary (Hong Kong) in Physical Education	University lifeguard supervisor	$$$	Furniture warehousing[a]	$	15
Mike / 2	2 master's degrees (Hong Kong, UK), in Education	Senior faculty member in community college	$$$$	Executive chef and kitchen manager[a]	$$	15
Barbara / 0	Bachelor degree (Hong Kong)	Senior executive assistant	$$$$	Salesperson in an US-owned firm	$$	15
Amanda / 2	Master's degree (unknown) in Human Resources	Personnel manager in a public organization	$$$$$	Administrative assistant[a]	$	16
Jack / 3	High school	Small business owner	$$$$	Coffee shop[a]	$	18
Jane / 3	High school	Small Business Owner	$$$$	Manufacturing[a]	$	18
Winnie / 2	Master's degree (UK) in Social work	Manager in the field of social work	$$$$$	Counsellor[a]	$$$	15
Wayne / 2	College diploma (Hong Kong) in trading	Merchandiser in trading firm	$$$	Program assistant[a]	$	15
Joyce / 2	Bachelor degree (Canada) in Business	Legal administration	$$$	Unemployed, volunteer[a]	0	4

Linda / 1	Bachelor degree (Hong Kong) in clothing	Clothing manufacturing entrepreneur	$$$$$	Unemployed, volunteer[a]	0	10
Edward / 1	Bachelor degree (Canada) in telecom	Senior marketing manager in telecom	$$$$$	Program coordinator[a]	$$	8
Susan / 1	Bachelor degree (Hong Kong), banking	IT project management in bank (business analyst)	$$$$	Program coordinator[a]	$$	15
Alicia / 2	College diploma (Canada)	Accountant	$$$	Health care provider	$$$	18
Mary / 1	College diploma (Canada)	Merchandising	$$	Retailing[a]	$	17
Teresa / 2	Bachelor degree (Hong Kong) social worker	Social worker	$$$$	Manager[a]	$$$	16
Dave / 2	Bachelor degree (Canada) in Engineering	Engineer	$$$$$	Unemployed, volunteer[a]	0	15
Maggie / 2	Bachelor (UK) and master's degree (HK) in Human Resources	Senior executive officer in public organization	$$$$$	Unemployed, causal work[a]	0	17

[a] Working at a Chinese-owned organization
[b] Estimation based on the author's understanding of the job responsibility in Hong Kong. Scale: $$$$$ = over 150,000; $$$$ = 90,000–150,000; $$$ = 50,000–90,000; $$ = 25,000–50,000; $ = below 25,000 (annually in CAD$).

Appendix C: Athabasca University Research Ethics Approval

MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 16, 2011
TO: Ms. Rosalie Hilde
COPY: Dr. Kay Devine (Supervisor)
Dr. Albert Mills (Supervisor)
Ms. Janice Green, Secretary, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
Dr. Simon Nutgens, Chair, Athabasca University Research Ethics Board
FROM: Dr. Janice Thomas, Faculty of Business Research Ethics Review Committee
SUBJECT: **Ethics Proposal #** FB-11-14H – *Making Critical Sense of Immigrant Experience in the Canadian Workplace*

I am pleased to advise that the above-noted project has now been awarded **APPROVAL** on ethical grounds. This approval of your application will be reported to the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) at their next monthly meeting.
The approval for the study "as presented" is valid for a period of one year from the date of this memo. If required, an extension must be sought in writing prior to the expiry of the existing approval. **A Final Report is to be submitted when the research project is completed.** The reporting form can be found online at http://www.athabascau.ca/research/ethics/ .

As implementation of the proposal progresses, if you need to make any significant changes or modifications, please forward this information immediately to the CIM Research Ethics Review Committee via janicet@athabascau.ca for further review. We wish you all the best with your research. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes for your timely completion of this very interesting research project
Janice Thomas, PhD,
Professor, Project Management
Phone: 403-949 4968
E-mail: janicet@athabascau.ca

Appendix D: Letter of Information and Consent form

Research Title: Making Critical Sense of Immigrant Experience in the Canadian Workplace

November 5, 2011

My name is Rosalie Hilde and I am a doctoral student in the Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) Program at Athabasca University, Alberta. As part of the program requirements, I am conducting research on "How do Hong Kong Chinese immigrants make sense of their workplace experiences, individually and collectively?" As part of this research, I am conducting interviews with economic skilled worker immigrants (principal applicants) who have been in Canada between 3–15 years, in order to understand their perspectives on their workplace experience. I would like to invite you to participate in this research. I will be interviewing approximately 10–14 people in total.

If you agree to participate in this study, my role as researcher is to learn from you about your overall experience in finding job(s) and working in Canada. I will be undertaking interviews in person starting in November 2011. The interview would last about an hour, and would be arranged for a time and place that is convenient for your schedule. The interview may be conducted in English and/or Cantonese.

Involvement in this interview is entirely voluntary and has no ties to any government agency. The data collected are solely for academic research purposes and are kept confidential and anonymous. The only persons having access to identifiable information will be me and my research supervisors, for the purpose of analyzing and verifying results. No participant names or identifiers will be used in the final research reports and I will use pseudonyms (false names) in my reports. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions or to terminate the interview at any time, without negative consequences.

With your permission, the interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder that will facilitate collection of information, and later transcribed (and translated, if necessary) for analysis. If you would prefer not to have the interview recorded, I will keep hand-written notes during the interview. If you decide to withdraw from the interview, I will stop the interview immediately, we will debrief, and the data will be destroyed immediately and will not be used in my study. In a very slight chance, the recounting of early workplace experience might stir up complex feelings. If you would like counselling service to deal with these memories, I can refer you to “Family Services of ABC.”[9]

All hard-copy data will be kept in locked cabinets in my home office. All electronic data will be kept in my password protected computer at my home office. After all of the data have been analyzed, the existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library’s Digital Thesis and Project Room (DTPR) and the final research paper will be publicly available at the DTPR. Upon request, participants will receive an executive summary of the research results. The research report may be presented in the form of written report, formal paper, possible future conference presentation or article in an academic or professional journal. When all the research marking requirements have been met by Athabasca University, all the identifiable data will be destroyed by confidential shredding; electronic records will be deleted and audio files will be erased by March, 2016. No identifying information will remain after that date.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more detailed information, please contact me at rosalie_hilde@dba.athabascau.ca or telephone # 250-561-2403. If you are ready to participate in the study, please complete and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to me. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please feel free to contact my research supervisors, (1) Dr.

[9] The name of the organization is removed in order to protect the location of the study, hence informants’ confidentially.

Albert Mills, Professor, Saint Mary's University (albert.mills@smu.ca or 902-420-5778) or (2) Dr. Kay Devine, Professor and Program Director of DBA, Faculty of Business, Athabasca University (kayd@athabascau.ca or 780-418-7534).

This study has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns resulting from your treatment as a participant in this study, please contact the Office of Research Ethics at 780-675-6718 or by e-mail to rebsec@athabascau.ca

Yours truly,
Rosalie Hilde

PARTICIPANT CONSENT:

I have read this Letter of Information and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction, and I will keep a copy of this letter for my records. My signature below is meant to confirm that:

- I understand the expectations and requirements of my participation in the research;
- I understand the provisions around confidentiality and anonymity;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time with no negative consequences; and
- I am aware that I may contact the researcher, or the research supervisors, if I have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research procedures.

Name: ________________ Signature: _________________ Date: ______________

By initialling this statement below,

____ I am granting permission for the researcher to use a digital voice recorder.

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