

The Role of Social Interaction in Career Development: The Ambassadors Program Experience

**by
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B.A. (Hons.), Kwantlen Polytechnic University, 2013

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
Counselling Psychology Program
Faculty of Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2022

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Abstract

This study sought to understand how social connection might play a role in the career development of those facing barriers to employment. The Ambassadors Program, which took place over one week at a university campus, was developed to provide opportunities for learning, work experience, and social connection to marginalized, unemployed individuals in the local community. The central question for this study asks, “What were the experiences of participants in the Ambassadors Program?” Additionally, the study explores changes in four domains of participants experience: Self-concept; Sense of connection; Sense of future; Knowledge and skills. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, involving semi-structured interviews with 12 participants of the Ambassadors Program. Key findings reveal that community-based approaches to employment programming such as the Ambassadors Program can foster a sense of connection, belonging, and community involvement, and improve conceptions of self. The results also reveal the diverse motives of those seeking employment support, and the multiple shortcomings of current service delivery models. The findings yield several recommendations for service delivery.

Keywords: career development; unemployment; social connection; social interaction; community-based research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking those who took part in the Ambassadors Program, especially those who shared their stories with me. I admire your willingness to engage wholeheartedly in a program that was both unfamiliar and unconventional. Through your experiences, I have learned an enormous amount about the power of social connection.

Next I would like to thank my senior supervisor, Dr. Kris Magnusson. During this long writing journey, you were the calm, steady support I needed. Your enthusiasm about my work and your confidence in me as a researcher empowered me during the most challenging parts of this research process. I am grateful not only for your supervision as an expert in the field, but for the sincerity you brought to the supervision process. I am also thankful to Dr. Cindy Xin. The questions that you asked during our conversations highlighted important areas for reflection. Your perceptiveness brought forward changes that resulted in greater clarity and authenticity in this paper.

I could not have undertaken this journey without the considerable growth I underwent during the first years of my academic journey. Dr. Wayne Podrouzek, Dr. Greg Jenion, and Dr. Sarah Hickinbottom, thank you for tolerating my inclination to debate during class, for the many long conversations outside of class, and for encouraging me to continue with graduate studies. Because of our time together, I discovered the value of critical thinking and asking difficult questions.

Finally, thank you to my beautiful family. To my very first teachers, my parents, I am forever grateful for you. Your patience and unconditional love are the reasons I grew to love learning. Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to support my ambitions. To my husband, Harminder, your level of belief in me is astounding. Thank you for your unyielding confidence in my ability to flourish in any direction I choose. Your ability to keep me grounded, while also encouraging me to fly is magical. My final thank you is to my daughter, Leena, who entered my life as I neared the end of this research project. Through your eyes, I have witnessed the innate human desire for connection. Thank you for being my newest teacher.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

“What do you do for work” is such a common question, that it is often uttered instinctively without thought. The answer to this question reveals a great deal, and some would argue it is synonymous to the question “who are you.” Although this comparison may seem far-reaching at first, considering the amount of time the average person spends pursuing their career provides insight into why society believes a job-title can be so telling.

1.1. The Importance of Work

Aside from the social value placed on careers, there are practical functions of a job. Of course, a career can provide the ability to meet one’s basic physiological needs such as food, shelter, and water; but it also has the potential to fulfill core psychological needs. Working provides access to the social world which promotes social connection and a sense of belonging. Employment can also be a source of esteem that allows one to feel a sense of value and accomplishment, which fosters a sense of contribution to society. Furthermore, some work environments have the potential to create meaningful experiences which foster autonomy and ongoing growth.

Although there are personal and social benefits to quality employment, there is considerable inequity when it comes to accessing employment opportunities which meet even the most basic needs. The unfortunate reality is that the year before this study was conducted, approximately 7% of all Canadians were unemployed, with the youth unemployment rate being higher at 15.5% (Statistics Canada, 2017). In BC, the diversity can conceal the injustice faced by Indigenous, minority, and immigrant populations – groups which disproportionately experience income poverty. So it follows, how can society support marginalized individuals to experience social connection, a sense of belonging, and feelings of value and autonomy, when some are simply struggling to acquire food and shelter?

1.2. Existing Supports in BC

Currently in British Columbia, WorkBC operates as a government-funded employment program to provide guidance to those who are unemployed. Employment Services help individuals explore employment options and improve their skills if they meet certain eligibility criteria: unemployed, legally allowed to work in British Columbia (BC), part-time worker, full-time student, youth, EI claimant, member of a marginalized population, or incarcerated. Once found eligible, individuals can receive in-person support with personal employment planning by accessing workshops, academic upgrading and training, self-employment services, and funding for expenses such as childcare, and transportation. Based on the services provided, it seems that the fundamental purpose of government-funded programs in BC is to help people find long-term employment. Yet, there are several potential issues with services focusing primarily on achieving employment.

Focusing on achieving long-term employment ignores the reality of the current labour market. Temporary, short-term employment is common in the current economy and has been on the rise for the past 20 years (Statistics Canada, 2019). Individuals are often seeking new employment for reasons other than personal choice, such as outsourcing of job function and layoffs. The increased use of technology and automation has also displaced, and will continue to displace, millions of jobs (Institution for Research on Public Policy, 2020). Furthermore, prioritizing employment attainment can cause tunnel vision, resulting in short-term employment services which are terminated prematurely without significant personal development or progress. Although the short-term goal of employment may be attained, individuals are not equipped to face future challenges. Consequently, they become caught in the revolving door of the employment agency, often requesting more support just shortly after leaving.

To improve existing supports, it is important to recognize the breadth of the concept of career development. Career development has been described as a “lifelong process of managing learning, work leisure, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future” (Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners, 2012). Provided that the goal of career development is personally determined and dynamic, the ability to manage transitions is key. From this perspective, focusing on long-term employment may not be an effective strategy to

supporting those facing unemployment. Instead, an approach that values personal development and managing change may better prepare individuals for the future.

1.3. The Missing Element

Social connection has long been considered vital to mental health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943). Not only does connectedness influence the beliefs and feelings humans hold about themselves, the feelings and beliefs humans hold about themselves then continue to impact social connections. Meaningful and constructive interactions can contribute to improved self-esteem and self-efficacy. One's experience of the world, including the world of work, is certainly influenced by their overall sense of worth and belief in themselves. Resiliency, persistence, and opportunity-seeking have all been linked to self-esteem and self-efficacy. Despite the positive implications, employment agencies generally do not focus on social connection beyond an individual's relationship with their career support worker (Redekopp & Huston, 2020).

1.4. Significance and Rationale for The Study

The approach to employment support in BC has remained relatively unchanged, although the world of work has changed drastically. Providing opportunities for individuals to improve their skills, while also supporting their psychological development through connection, may be a more well-rounded approach. Some theorists would agree that career is an implementation of self-concept, meaning that a modern service delivery method that provides opportunities for self-exploration and connection may be more effective (Amundson, Bowsbey, & Niles, 2009); Neault, 2014; Super, 1963). Regardless of the benefits, a comprehensive program is complex and requires the participation of several stakeholders; therefore, thorough exploration of this topic is required.

The researcher was presented with a unique opportunity to examine the effects of career development in a social setting during the C2U Expo at Simon Fraser University in 2017. The conference, which is hosted by a different Canadian university every two years, provides space for academics and communities to showcase community-campus partnerships which address local and global societal issues. With the intention of modelling the importance of community-campus connections, the organizing committee hired unemployed individuals from the community to work at the

conference. The program, referred to as the Community Ambassadors Program, was intended to provide opportunities for learning, participation, and social connection to those facing barriers to employment. In addition to the practical skills training delivered prior to the conference, individuals in the program were encouraged to connect with other participants and conference attendees during the conference. The assigned roles of each participant promoted self-reflection and social interaction, along with the implementation of learned skills.

1.5. Research Question

The research study was inspired by a curiosity about how social interaction might play a role in the career development of marginalized people. In this study, the term marginalized people refers to individuals belonging to groups that are disproportionately represented in the unemployment rate, including but not limited to, immigrants, refugees, people of colour, and those with Indigenous ancestry. The general question addressed in this research was, “What were the experiences of participants in the Ambassadors Program?” In addition to gaining a general understanding of the participants’ experience, the study sought to determine what, if any, impact participating in the Ambassadors Program had on four domains of participant experience: Self-concept; Sense of connection; Sense of future; Knowledge and skills. To better understand the nature of participants’ experience, the research employed a qualitative approach.

1.6. Researcher Positionality

As a woman of colour who works closely with individuals who face barriers to employment, the exploration of meaningful and accessible career interventions is significant to me. I have been employed by the Province of British Columbia as an Employment and Assistance Worker (EAW) since 2014. In this role, I regularly interact with individuals who are struggling to meet their basic needs due to inadequate income as a result of being unemployed. Furthermore, as a clinical counsellor in a community agency setting, I am aware of the emotional difficulties and trauma that can result from long-term unemployment and transgenerational poverty. These experiences have shaped my understanding of unemployment in British Columbia, and my hope for progress in the field of career development.

1.7. Overview of Thesis

In Chapter One, the context of the problem was introduced, along with the rationale for the study. Chapter Two provides a literature review related to social connection, career theory, and community engagement. In Chapter Three, the Ambassadors Program, methodology, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations are described in detail. Chapter Four begins with an examination of the researcher's role and biases, followed by the presentation of the themes that emerged, and the relationships between the themes. In Chapter Five, the results of the study are discussed in relation to the themes from the original review of the literature, as well as an exploration of additional literature that were suggested by the study results; finally, implications for practice and suggestions for future research are provided.

Chapter 2.

Review of the Literature Guiding the Research

This study sought to understand the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program. This chapter provides a review of the relevant theory and research that formed the foundation for the investigator's understanding of the phenomenon prior to the study being conducted. This pre-existing knowledge was derived from the investigator's academic background and experience in the field which undeniably impacted some aspects of the research study, such as the content of the interview questions. Essentially, the investigator began the process with a belief in the importance of three key topics: social connection and the self, career theories, and university-community engagement. Following the completion of data analysis, a more thorough review of research and theory linked to themes that emerged from the study was conducted, and is presented in Chapter Five.

2.1. Social Connection as a Basic Need

Social connection, or a feeling of belonging, has been described as a fundamental human need by psychologists for decades (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1963; Maslow 1943). A lack of social connection can lead to profound psychological and physical consequences, whereas meaningful social connection can help one thrive in both domains (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). In fact, one of the central tenets of Adlerian psychology, *gemeinschaftsgefühl* meaning social interest or community, is considered a measure of mental health in that when social interest develops, feelings of inferiority decrease (Watts, 2015).

There is an ongoing reciprocal relationship between social connectedness and the self. The feelings and beliefs individuals hold about themselves impact their social connections, and conversely social connections impact feelings and beliefs individuals hold about themselves. From infancy to adulthood, self-images are developed based on social interactions that occur in a variety of settings, suggesting that there is potential to nurture one's self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy, using meaningful connections

(Mead, 1967). The following section provides a review of definitions of the self constructs relevant to this study, the relationship between the self, career, and unemployment, and the potential for self-development through social connection.

2.1.1. Conceptions of Self

Although self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy are closely related, they are distinct constructs, all of which are active, dynamic, and malleable. Self-concept refers to an individual's knowledge of themselves (Baumeister, 1999). Self-esteem, a component of self-concept, is the value that we place on ourselves (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). Self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs in their ability to execute behaviours (Bandura, 1977). Each of these constructs have been well-substantiated in the field and are commonly cited as being influenced by social connection, as described below (Bandura, 1977; Baumeister, 1999).

Self-concept

The term self-concept refers to how one perceives themselves. Baumeister (1999) defines self-concept as an "individual's belief about himself or herself, including the person's attributes and who and what the self is." Although self-concept develops in childhood, human beings are on a pursuit of self-knowledge throughout their lifespan. Baumeister (1999) suggests this quest is driven by three motives: the desire to gain accurate information about oneself (self-assessment), the desire to confirm what one already believes about oneself (self-verification) and the desire to learn positive, and favourable things about oneself (self-enhancement). Baumeister (1999), goes on to suggest that there is compelling evidence that significant social interactions can bring light to different parts of one's self-concept, and in some circumstances even change it.

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is considered the evaluative component of self-concept, referring to a person's overall sense of value or worth, and can be understood as a measure of how much a person "values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself" (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). Self-esteem has been found to change with age. (Galambos, Barker, & Krahn, 2006; Orth et al., 2014; Worrell and Goodheart, 2006).

Meta-analytic research indicates that focused interventions involving social feedback can improve self-esteem (Zeiger-Hill, 2013).

Self-efficacy

While self-esteem is an assessment of being, self-efficacy refers to doing (Baumeister, 1999). Self-efficacy is a belief that one can accomplish tasks successfully (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura, there are four sources of self-efficacy information (enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states) described later in this chapter, all of which can be positively influenced by constructive social interactions (Bandura, 1997).

How individuals view themselves, the value they place on themselves, and the belief they have in their abilities impact the way in which they engage in the world. So it follows: How may conceptions of self relate specifically to employment?

2.1.2. The Relationship between The Self and Unemployment

Extensive research over several decades has revealed differences between individuals with high and low self-esteem (Brown, 1993). In relation to self-concept, those with low self-esteem are less likely to possess a thorough and consistent collection of self-knowledge than those with high self-esteem (Brown & Lent, 2012). Furthermore, individuals with high self-esteem are more resilient than those with low self-esteem, remaining persistent in response to perceived failures (Shrauger & Rosenberg, 1970). Although those with low self-esteem desire success and approval, they have low expectations of success and are often skeptical of it (Brown, 1993); therefore, these individuals invest more in self-protection than seeking out educational and vocational opportunities (Baumeister et al., 2003; Crocker, Karpinski, Quinn, and Chase, 2003), which directly effects job opportunities (Dooley & Prause, 1997). Gaytandjieva, Palvlova, and Joling (2014) suggest that due to the aforementioned factors of those with low self-esteem, they are more likely to involuntarily become unemployed, further damaging their self-esteem. This cycle then repeats itself resulting in continuous difficulty with aspects of self-esteem and unemployment. Considering the link between self-esteem and self-efficacy it is unsurprising that the impact one's level of

self-esteem has on personal growth and employment opportunities has also been observed in relation to one's level of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is key in understanding career development, as it can be predictive of choice and success in academic and vocational domains (Betz & Hackett, 1986; Lent et al., 1994; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991). While strong self-efficacy beliefs can be facilitative of career decision-making, weak self-efficacy beliefs can act as barriers and lead to career indecision (Betz & Hackett, 1997). In relation to goal setting and job searching, those with higher levels of self-efficacy tend to set goals that exceed previous levels of performance (i.e. discrepancy creation), which results in more effort being directed towards the goal (Bandura, 1997; Tolli & Schmidt, 2008). These individuals are also more likely to move forward after encountering a setback than those with lower levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2012). So those with low self-efficacy are not only impeded by career indecision, but continue to face challenges with goal-setting and achievement. These individuals also experience twice the length of unemployment compared to those with a medium or high level of self-efficacy, with one's level of self-efficacy predicting unemployment seven years later (Zenger, Berth, Brähler, & Stöbel-Richter, 2013). Thus, self-efficacy proves to be an important factor in career development and employment.

Self-esteem and self-efficacy are critical components of one's overall conception of self. As outlined above, empirical evidence has supported that these constructs are heavily impacted by social interactions. Research has also demonstrated that self-esteem and self-efficacy are important factors in career development. For this reason, career development programs may be improved by trying to cultivate self-esteem, self-efficacy, and self-concept using social connection.

2.1.3. Cultivating The Self through Social Connection

Provided that self-esteem and self-efficacy are factors that influence employment opportunities, cultivating these constructs may be valuable, especially for those seeking employment. There are several potential ways that different forms of social connection could be practically implemented within service delivery models to cultivate self-constructs.

The most influential source of efficacy information is enactive mastery in which a personal accomplishment or “win” serves as evidence of success (Bandura, 1977). Each personal achievement builds self-efficacy, whereas each failure lessens it, meaning it is useful to intentionally provide opportunities to succeed. Observing others perform successfully, referred to as vicarious experience, also helps individuals believe they too can perform favourably. The impact of this social comparison is especially effective when the individual views the model as similar to themselves in terms of ability. Additionally, self-efficacy beliefs are developed when people are led through verbal or social persuasion to believe that they can successfully complete a task. While this approach may appear to be the simplest method to create a sense self-efficacy, it can be ineffective when praise is provided loosely or used to drive unrealistic expectations. Lastly, emotions, mood, and physical state impact perceptions of ability. That is, one’s self-efficacy judgments may develop from the interpretation of their physiological state. This suggests that reflection, insight, and explicit discussion about different states of being may be beneficial.

Conceptions of self change over time and develop with experience (Super, 1963). A great deal of this change occurs through social connection, meaning there is potential for social experiences to be created with the intention of strengthening self-constructs. Multiple career theories have highlighted the impact of self-conceptions on career development; these theories are explored next.

2.2. Career Theories

Self-concept and self-efficacy are central concepts in life-span life-space theory and social cognitive career theory, while constructivist career theory and chaos theory focus on the importance of adaptability amongst ongoing change.

2.2.1. Lifespan Lifespace Theory

The lifespan lifespace theory views career as a continuous, life-long process which is grounded in the principles of differential psychology, developmental psychology, and self-concept theory (Super, 1963).

In the context of career, differential psychology suggests that everyone is unique, meaning that particular people are best suited to particular jobs. Holland (1997) used differential psychology to explain occupational choice as a match between one's current self and current situation. For example, a person's values at a particular time will guide the satisfactions he or she seeks in a career (e.g. intrinsic values such as responsibility, creativity), and the outcomes that can be obtained from work (e.g. extrinsic values such as job security and benefits) (Brown & Lent, 2012). Moreover, emphasis was placed on the here and now, to evaluate how one's current environment and personality type relate to career choices. Holland (1997) suggested that people who work in an environment that aligns with their personality type alongside others with shared values, tend to be more satisfied and successful in their careers.

While differential psychology approaches such as trait-and factor theory focus on matching individuals' present qualities to a job, developmental psychology focuses on how a career is fostered over time. Super's (1963) focus on how individuals move through a sequence of occupations and positions makes life-span life-space a developmentally focused theory of career. Differential psychology approaches tend to assume that once individuals are matched to suitable jobs, they never again need to make a vocational choice. In contrast, developmental approaches expand on the point-in-time decision assumptions and recognize career development as being a fluid, dynamic, and continuous process that carries on throughout life.

According to life-span life-space theory, the development of self-concept is a multidimensional process which is closely related to one's career trajectory. Self-concept is affected by physical and mental growth, observational learning, relationships with others, and one's general environment and experiences; and reflects both personal (e.g. values, interests) and situational (e.g. economic) factors (Brown & Lent, 2012). Fundamentally, individuals implement their self-concepts into careers as a means of expressing themselves and continuing to improve the match between self and situations. (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963). That is, work roles fit into an individual's life, not vice versa.

Life-span life-space focuses on five career development stages that individuals pass through during their lifespan referred to as maxicycles (Watson, 2019). The theory also asserts that individuals cycle in and out of each of these stages during career transitions. From birth until age 13, children develop self-concept attitudes, and an understanding of the general world of work. During the exploration phase (ages 15 to 24), young adults crystallize, specify, and implement occupational preferences by exploring through opportunities in school and extracurricular activities. Establishment (ages 25 to 44) refers to the stabilization, consolidation, and advancement in a chosen career, attained by entry-level skill building. The maintenance (ages 45 to 64) stage suggests that adults should continue to adjust to their work setting while being innovative in their career. The final stage of disengagement (age 65 and over) focuses on decelerating, and planning for retirement. Although each of these stages corresponds with a general age range, they are not necessarily linear, and may be repeated many times throughout a lifetime.

The lifespace aspect of the theory recognizes that individuals play different roles in their lives, meaning that work is only one life role. From a practical sense, this means working with individuals to understand how their current life roles interact with their current lifespan stage. The goals for this approach are to support individuals in creating and accepting a more holistic view of themselves and their roles, assess their self-understanding against reality factors, and reinforce career decisions that implement this self-concept (Watson, 2019).

Super (1963) was progressive in recognizing the developmental nature of career, the need for adaptability, and the influence of personal and environmental factors on career self-concept. However, he has been criticized for overemphasizing individual choice, as well as failing to acknowledge the barriers to career for marginalized individuals (Hackett & Kohlhart, 2012; Irving & Malik, 2005). The theory focuses largely on the independent choice of individuals, at the expense of recognizing that there are systemic barriers that exist for certain populations such as women, people of colour, and those with disabilities. Approaches such as constructivist career theory described later in this section have extended on Super's work to focus more on client experience, resulting in broader application across populations (Hackett & Kohlhart, 2012).

2.2.2. Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory which highlights the complexity of the relationship between people, behaviour, and environment. SCCT aims to explain how individuals develop career interests, make choices, and perform and persist in different vocational domains. Drawing from social cognitive theory, SCCT places the variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals at the center of its model, while acknowledging the importance of contextual factors and individual predispositions (Sheu & Wang, 2019).

Self-efficacy, as described in the previous section, refers to a set of beliefs specifically related to performance abilities, and can be shaped by enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977). While self-efficacy beliefs address the question "can I do this," outcome expectations focus on the consequences of actions, the question of "if I do this, what will happen" in social, physical and self-evaluative domains (Brown & Lent, 2012). The sources of outcome expectations regarding career can range from vicarious learning experiences to perceptions about different fields of work acquired from various sources. Together, self-efficacy and outcome expectations heavily influence human behaviour, including the activities individuals choose to pursue and those they decide to forego.

Personal goals refer to the intent to carry out a particular activity or to achieve a certain level of performance (Bandura, 1977). Personal goals allow individuals to exercise agency by guiding and maintaining purposeful behaviour without instant gratification. It is common for individuals to set goals that align with their self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Consequently, the result of one's attempt to pursue a goal will affect views about personal capabilities and consequences of related actions, meaning there is continuous interplay between the three variables that constitute the foundation of SCCT.

After decades of empirical inquiry, life-span life-space theory and SCCT continue to be dominant approaches in the field of career development. Though these theories have historically acquired empirical support, modern career development practitioners must reflect on how these seminal theories can provide the basis to explore the self in

the contemporary world of work which no longer follows a linear path, and requires one to consciously enhance social skills and adaptability.

2.2.3. Constructivist Career Theory

Savickas (2005), building on the work of Super, addressed the issue of career development in a complex society through a constructivist approach referred to as career construction theory (CCT). CCT draws from differential psychology, developmental psychology, and narrative theory to explain how individuals choose and use work across their lives. The objective of this approach is to support people in discovering significant themes in their lives while also considering the role and importance of work in their lives (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, & Niles, 2009).

From a differential perspective, CCT takes into account vocational personality types and what different people prefer to do. In other words, there is a focus on assessment to determine an optimal fit between people and their work environments. The developmental aspect of the theory acknowledges that career development is a lifelong process. Therefore, CCT is interested in how people adapt to change, handle occupational transitions, and cope with work-related traumas. Drawing from narrative psychology, CCT aims to be attentive to individuals' unique career-life stories to highlight life themes. By doing so, people can be supported in allowing favourable narratives to emerge. Fundamentally, CCT explores what different people prefer to do (differential psychology), how individuals express their personality in work and cope with different vocational tasks (developmental psychology), and why individuals fit work into their lives in unique ways (narrative psychology).

One of the central goals of this theory is to develop and improve an individual's career adaptability, as the rapid and complicated world of work requires flexibility. In career construction, life themes influence the expression of personality in work, while the expression itself is achieved through adaptability. The concept of adaptability refers to attitudes, beliefs, and competencies used by an individual to make the adjustments needed to implement vocational self-concept in work roles (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, & Niles, 2009).

One of the major strengths of this approach is its applicability to groups that have been historically overlooked in other career models, such as women, immigrants, people of colour, and otherwise marginalized individuals like those in the Ambassadors Program. The core principles of CCT such as the focus on individual strengths, adaptability, and favourable narratives, align closely with the values identified in the development of the Ambassadors Program. Through the lens of this approach, it is understandable why the Ambassadors have struggled to find and engage in a meaningful career, although they have been overloaded with career information: The service delivery models they were engaged in were highly structured and did not appreciate the value of meaning-making or reshaping narratives about the world of work. Furthermore, given the general focus on structure and stability in employment programs, it is unlikely that individuals were supported from a perspective that acknowledges the uncertainty and complexity of career.

2.2.4. Chaos Theory

Chaos theory is a modern approach which acknowledges that the world is much less predictable than once understood by previous career theories. The speed of communication, restructuring of organizations, demands for constant learning, globalization of work, decline of long-term employment, and speed at which technology is developing has transformed the world of work (Bright & Pryor, 2012). Consequently, there is a conflict between the human desire for control and predictability, and the realities of twenty-first-century work. Chaos theory argues that although the approaches to career development that rely on certainty, stability, and advice are attractive to clients, they are impractical in a world that is uncertain, unpredictable, and complex. Instead, the field must move from closed systems thinking (attempts to control reality) to open systems thinking (acceptance of limitations, change, and transformations).

Pryor and Bright (2019) emphasize that humans are incapable of predicting the future therefore, it is more important to understand and accept knowledge limitations in order to move past the notion of a certain future. Subsequently, instead of preparing individuals for particular circumstances for particular times in their lives, it is best to support them in developing skills such as opportunity awareness, adaptability, and resilience that will serve them in an unpredictable world (Pryor & Bright, 2019). Instead

of viewing change and chance as a direct force against stability, but rather recognizing them as realities of existence, individuals actually begin to broaden their prospects by using change to their advantage due to their openness to creativity, experimentation, exploration, and risk-taking (Pryor & Bright, 2019).

In 2018, the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) reported that more than one-fifth of Canadians working in a professional field (employed for work that required specialized credentials) were in positions that were unstable and lacking predictable income, sick pay, benefits, and pensions (Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 2018). It follows, that those without formal education or training, and those who face barriers to employment encounter an even bigger challenge to acquire stable employment. Labour trends in Canada continue to show a decrease in long-term, secure employment and increase in short-term, temporary positions (Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives, 2018). There remain calls for more innovative approaches to career development in an increasingly complex work climate. As Magnusson and Redekopp (2011) point out, there has been an extreme shift in the world of work which requires a shift in the way career development programs are delivered.

Moving away from individualistic, highly structured career development approaches and towards practices that emphasize social connection may be worthwhile. Research demonstrates that social connection is imperative for overall well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1963; Maslow 1943). Furthermore, conceptions of self are heavily impacted by social interactions, and have been shown to be linked to long-term career outcomes (Brown & Lent, 2012; Zenger, Berth, Brähler, & Stöbel-Richter, 2013). Well-established career theories (Bandura, 1977; Sheu & Wang, 2019; Super, 1963), support the notion that self-esteem and self-efficacy are critical factors in career development, and provide a solid foundation for advancement in the delivery of employment supports, though historically these theories have not been inclusive of marginalized populations. So, the integration of principles from modern career theories such as constructivist career theory and chaos theory may be warranted. An approach such as the Ambassadors Program addresses the need for change in program delivery, adaptability, and social connection.

In the development of the Ambassadors Program, the organizers maintained a primary focus on social connection and relationship-building by using a university-community engagement approach; and, from a career development perspective the program was in fact congruent with the foundational concepts of the aforementioned career theories. This presents the question of whether university-community engagement programming may be an effective contemporary approach to career exploration and development.

2.3. University-Community Engagement

University-community engagement is referred to in several ways in the literature: Community-campus partnerships, civic engagement, community engagement in higher education (Boser, 2006; Hall, 2009; Ostrander, 2004). The pillars of university-community engagement are partnership and reciprocity by which the university and community commit to collaboratively create relationships that are mutually beneficial. From this perspective, universities and communities are not independent entities, instead they are intrinsically linked, with each possessing assets and values that benefit the other; thus, having the capacity to mobilize resources to directly undertake societal challenges including unemployment.

2.3.1. Engagement through Programming

There is a growing interest in university-community partnerships across the globe. Extensive research and analysis have highlighted the way in which universities around the world have tackled issues such as poverty and accelerated economic development using models of civic engagement (Watson, Hollister, Stroud, & Babcock, 2011). Likewise, Canadian research supports the position that university-community engagement programs and community-based research contribute to economic and social development (Tremblay & Hall, 2014). The Ambassadors Program is an example of engagement through programming. By collaborating with local organizations, the university aimed to engage marginalized community members, while supporting their efforts to obtain employment by offering high-quality employment training and event experience.

2.3.2. Engagement through Community-Based Research

University-community partnerships create the opportunity for community-based research. The belief behind community-based research is that universities should be collaborating with the communities in which they exist to produce and carry out research that is relevant and practical, instead of delivering results that are independently attained within the confines of the university (Hall & Macpherson, 2011). The benefit of collaborative research is that it produces legitimate results that are valid for use in the communities where the research takes place (Hall & Macpherson, 2011). Such research offers potential to improve community issues, while also allowing partners to engage in iterative research leading to ongoing improvements. For the Ambassadors Program, there were multiple impact assessments conducted post-conference to help funders determine whether this was an effective use of funds. The aim of these assessments was to assess the impact of the participants' experiences, with the intent to improve future opportunities for university-community programming.

University-community partnerships have great potential to contribute to knowledge mobilization. In the case of the Ambassadors Program, there was an opportunity for collaboration between a university and local community organizations which could support marginalized, unemployed people. The researcher, who had some academic and working knowledge in the field, recognized an opportunity for community-based research investigating the relationship between social connection and career development given that the program was aligned well with conceptions of self and dominant career theories. With the lack of comparable research and the desire to capture the experience of the Ambassadors, the investigator used a qualitative research design to study how social interaction might play a role in the career development of marginalized people. Specifically, the research question posed was, "What was the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program?" The researcher also sought to determine what, if any, impact participation in the Ambassadors Program had on four domains of experience: Self-concept; Sense of connection; Sense of future; Knowledge and skills. The methodology for exploring these questions is described in Chapter Three.

Chapter 3.

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodology and research methods used for this study. The methods were selected based on the objective of the study which was to investigate the impact a community-based career program has on individuals with barriers to employment, and examine changes in confidence, sense of connection, sense of future, and knowledge and skills of participants. Contextual information is provided first, followed by a description of the methodology and methods.

3.1. The C2U Expo

It is important to understand the context in which the community-based career program was held in order to fully appreciate the results of this study. This section describes the conference at which the Ambassadors Program took place and provides details about the program.

The C2U Expo is a Canadian-led international conference hosted by a different Canadian university every two years and is designed to share, celebrate, and strengthen the relationships between universities and communities. Those in attendance usually include staff from local community agencies, and researchers and faculty members from universities around the world. It began in 2008 as a historic three-day exposition of community-based research, and was the largest gathering of community members and university groups in Canadian history at the time. Community-Based Research Canada, previously referred to as The Pan-Canadian Coalition for Community Based research, was founded at the CUExpo in 2008. Since 2008, the conference has continued to expand while showcasing the advancement of best practices in community-based research and community-university partnerships.

The 2017 C2U Expo was hosted by Simon Fraser University over five days making it the longest C2U Expo to date. The 2017 C2U Expo committee strived to ensure community involvement at the conference; therefore, they developed and met the goal of having equal representation of community members/agencies and academics at

the conference. The Expo began with the two-day long Community Jam which was designed to encourage collaboration and innovation around building smart and caring communities. The Community Jam consisted of roundtable discussions, large open space sessions, and tours of local neighbourhoods and organizations. The three remaining days of the conference entitled Walk the Talk consisted of research presentations showcasing university-community partnerships followed by question-and-answer periods, informal gatherings within and outside of the university, artwork, music, and an open house at the Vancouver campus.

3.2. The Ambassadors Program

The organizing committee took a novel approach to modelling community connections and inclusivity by developing the Community Ambassadors Program. Individuals were hired from nearby communities to gain work experience at the conference, in an effort to provide opportunities for capacity building, participation, self-reflection, and social connection among individuals or groups in the community facing barriers to employment. The following program goals were developed by the committee:

- To model an inclusive approach by actively recruiting people facing a variety of barriers to employment.
- To offer a high-quality employment training and event experience that builds capacity for community members.
- To offer an honorarium for service during the conference.
- To fill essential and important roles for the success of the C2UExpo with capable and competent individuals.

Details about the program and application process were sent to organizations, referred to as recruitment partners, in Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey. The recruitment document (see Appendix A) included information such as a general overview of the conference, program goals, and time requirements. More detailed information such as a formal statement of responsibilities for all parties involved was provided in an information package. The requirements for participation in the program were stated as follows:

- Basic working knowledge of the English Language (i.e. must be able to follow the training sessions delivered in English).

- Comfortable working and communicating with a variety of people from different backgrounds (and/or will come with a support worker to assist where needed).
- Able to travel to the SFU Surrey and/or Vancouver campuses (transit passes provided).
- Available for specified training dates.
- Available for at least two shifts during the conference.
- Ability to be flexible if roles change slightly, and a willingness to help where needed.

Recruitment partners were instructed to recruit, screen and select candidates, and send completed and signed application packages to the committee before the specified due date.

At the time of application, candidates agreed to attend two training sessions and work at least 10 hours during the five day conference, but had the option of working up to a maximum of 40 hours. They were also informed that the honorarium would be approximately 100 dollars per day, up to a maximum of 800 dollars for the entire conference. Participation in the Ambassadors Program was not categorized as formal employment, as the monetary compensation was not classified as employment income for tax purposes, but rather an honorarium.

3.2.1. Roles

Ambassadors were assigned to specific work roles at the C2U Expo, and in preparation for those roles they received skills training. There were seven pre-determined roles: volunteer coordinators, team leaders, logistic generalists, conference witnesses, cohort hosts, table facilitators, and media, documentation and communications (see Appendix B for role descriptions and competency requirements).

Logistics Roles

Three of the predetermined roles - volunteer coordinators, team leaders, and logistics generalists – fell within a general category of “logistics” roles; their main function was to ensure that the event ran smoothly. Volunteer coordinators were responsible for overseeing and coordinating Ambassadors and student volunteers during the

conference and performed duties such as staffing the volunteer room, greeting and signing in volunteers, being a point person for volunteers, troubleshooting any issues that arose, and collaborating with conference organizers. Team leaders were responsible for managing and coordinating a team of volunteers in specific support areas. Some examples of specific support areas were facilities set up and take down, audiovisual support, and transportation. Therefore, team leaders were required to understand the needs of their designated areas. Their responsibilities included assigning roles and tasks to volunteers, ensuring volunteers stayed on tasks, keeping track of volunteer attendance, re-assigning volunteers to tasks as needed, and collaborating with volunteer coordinators for any escalating issues. Logistics generalists were asked to be familiar with the roles of volunteer coordinators and team leaders in order to fill in for absentees if required, otherwise they acted as floaters providing extra support whenever necessary.

Facilitation and Documentation Roles

The second broad category of roles were those associated with facilitation and documentation, which included conference witnesses, cohort hosts, table facilitators, and media and communications. Ambassadors in these roles engaged in learning, sharing of ideas, and conversations. Conference witnesses were asked to attend conference sessions, be present and engaged during the sessions, record the messages in heart and mind, carry and share the message with friends, neighbours and community members, and document reflections from the conference. The role of witnesses was inspired by Indigenous tradition of witnessing, and was meant to provide a connection of participants' experience to the land on which the event took place. Documenting reflections could be done verbally, through photos, video, poetry, art, or any other creative medium that Ambassadors preferred. Cohort hosts were assigned to a group of conference delegates to help them through the conference and facilitate dialogue. Hosts were expected to be available when support was needed, answer questions, facilitate short dialogue sessions, and debrief and uncover key reflections and thoughts from the sessions. Table facilitators were present at conference dinners where they sat with delegates and facilitated conversations.

When applying for the program, Ambassadors were asked to identify the roles they were most interested in, and then after training they were given the opportunity to make changes to their preferences.

3.2.2. Training

The two-day training sessions provided in Surrey and Vancouver were identical. Training began with a brief overview of the C2U Expo and Ambassadors Program, followed by ice breaker activities, and collaborative development of group norms. There were eight key training modules delivered by university staff, university students, and local agencies such as the YMCA and Knack Works, a local charity and social enterprise that provides supporting training programs to individual with barriers to traditional employment. Although all of the training sessions were related to Ambassador roles at the Expo, the skills were meant to be transferrable to future opportunities.

During professionalism training, individuals were introduced to the concept of professionalism in the workplace. They learned strategies for creating a professional image and good first impression for potential employers. Appropriate and inappropriate workplace communication was explained, along with the characteristics of professional worth ethic. Ambassadors were invited to reflect on their own level of professionalism and areas for improvement.

Dialogue training emphasized the foundations of dialogue facilitation. Trainers introduced strategies for creating safe spaces for open and respectful communication and sharing of ideas, as well as tools for enriching the flow of conversation. Strategies for specific components of conversation such as starting conversations, deepening the level of conversation, authenticity in communication, and ending conversations were also discussed. Ambassadors then had the opportunity to practice dialogue facilitation.

Personal storytelling, reflection, and sharing one's own experience were the foci of the storytelling training session. Ambassadors also gained knowledge about active listening and identifying key themes from others' stories and experiences in one-on-one conversations, as well as group conversations and public lectures. This training session was intended to help Ambassadors effectively communicate their own stories, while also

providing the skills to connect conversations from the conference to the overall purpose of the Expo as required for some Ambassador roles.

During workplace communication training individuals received instruction on the skills needed to actively listen to others and articulate ideas in a respectful manner so that the other party is heard, and progress is made toward shared objectives. Ambassadors learned how identify and evaluate four communication styles. Trainers also discussed the connection between self-esteem and one's ability to communicate assertively. Individuals were taught effective communication strategies such as using "I" statements to address problems or make requests in the workplace.

Ambassadors also received training from a business professional that specializes in appreciative inquiry in the workplace. Appreciative inquiry is a model which values approaching people and situations from an asset and strength-based perspective, as opposed to a negative or deficit-based perspective. It assumes that the questions we ask will direct a conversation. From this perspective, there is an importance in focusing on one's strengths and assets, because individuals and organizations will evolve in the direction of the questions they most persistently and passionately ask. After learning about the concept, Ambassadors were given the opportunity to practice reframing using realistic scenarios.

YMCA staff delivered customer relations training. The content was similar to the customer service training an employee would receive for jobs that involve interacting with the public. The training covered greeting individuals, understanding one's needs or problems, communicating with individuals who are upset, using positive language, and the importance of appearance, body language, tone, and attitude. This training was certainly pertinent to the Ambassadors who would be amongst hundreds of delegates, volunteers, and fellow Ambassadors.

Social media training, and photo and video training were delivered by staff and students of SFU. Basic information about Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram was explained, along with a few demonstrations, followed by the opportunity to practice using these platforms. There was a Facebook page for all Ambassadors where they were invited to share media, information about themselves, and review important information.

For this reason, social media training was valuable to all Ambassadors and not only those in media roles. Photo and video training was carried out in a similar manner. Experts explained the basic functions of the cameras provided to Ambassadors, and then they were invited to experiment and ask questions.

The Ambassadors Program provided focused training related to building and fostering empowering relationships using effective communication. It would be reasonable to assume this training, together with the experiences they had using the training during the conference, may have had some impact on the participants. However, due to the innovative nature of the program, not much is known about the potential impact of either the training or the participation experience. Therefore, a reasonable starting point would be to better understand the participants' experiences. The methodology for doing so is described next.

3.3. Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used to understand how social interaction may play a role in the career development of marginalized people; and more specifically to explore the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program, while exploring changes in four domains: self concept, sense of connection, sense of future, and knowledge and skills. Qualitative research encompasses a variety of approaches which emphasize inductive, interpretive methods applied to the everyday world which is seen as subjective and socially created (Anderson, 1987). When participating in a qualitative study, individuals have the ability to define what is central and important in their experience. Consequently, qualitative researchers are able to obtain a deeper understanding of participants than would be possible using statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

3.3.1. Rationale

There were three primary reasons that a qualitative approach was selected. Firstly, the approach aligns well with researcher's own philosophical orientation, which the researcher believed was crucial to the integrity of the study. Specifically, the qualitative methods used for this study reflect a postmodern epistemology and social constructivist ontology which is compatible with the researcher's beliefs about

knowledge and the nature of reality. Secondly, qualitative inquiry aims to examine social processes and further describe individuals' experience, which speaks directly to the research question being investigated in this study. Lastly, the subject of community-based career interventions for individuals with barriers to employment has not yet been researched; therefore, a pragmatic approach using a combination of top-down and bottom-up analysis was suitable.

3.3.2. Recruitment and Selection

Individuals for the Ambassadors Program were recruited from local community agencies by the C2U Expo committee as explained above. During the first training session the researcher introduced herself as a graduate student and researcher at SFU, and summarized the purpose and method of the study. A consent form which was developed to obtain permission for future contact was read aloud and the Ambassadors were invited to ask questions about the content. They were made aware that their decision regarding future contact had no impact on their role as an Ambassador in the C2U Expo. Each Ambassador received an unsigned form, and were asked to submit it face down at the end of the training session.

Participants for this study were required to meet two criteria. The first and most obvious criterion was participation in the Ambassadors Program. The second criterion was a completed consent form, authorizing the researcher to contact the individual for research purposes by either telephone or email. Although telephone is often the preferred method of contact for research due to privacy reasons, some Ambassadors did not have access to a phone either by choice or due to financial hardship; therefore, the option of contact by email was offered. The researcher ranked Ambassadors based on the number of hours worked at the conference, from highest to lowest. Ambassadors were contacted by their preferred method contact in the order of most to least hours worked at the conference. Individuals were reminded of the consent form they had signed, and were invited to participate in the study which consisted of two in-person interviews. When an individual communicated an inability (e.g. moved out of the province), or lack of desire to participate in the study, the researcher contacted the next person on the ranked list until 12 people were scheduled for the first interview. All

individuals contacted were informed that there was a 20 dollar honorarium for participation in each interview.

The decision to begin by contacting Ambassadors that worked the most hours at the Expo was informed by the research question, while also attempting to maintain some basic consistency amongst those being interviewed in terms of involvement in the program. For example, some Ambassadors worked every single day during the conference, while others were only worked one day. By interviewing those that had a similar amount of exposure to the program, the researcher would be able to capture both the nuances of each individual's experience and the similarities they may have shared, while knowing that the time they spent in the program was approximately the same.

Despite there being many Ambassadors available for the study, the researcher chose to include only 12 participants due to convenience and consistency. Although interviews could have been conducted and coded with all the Ambassadors there were a lack of resources and time available to the researcher. Furthermore, only one-third of Ambassadors (20 people) worked close to full-time hours at the conference. In the interest of consistency, the researcher targeted this group in specific. The researcher chose to aim for 12 participants based on a conservative response rate estimate of the 20 Ambassadors who worked a significant number of hours.

When preparing for the second interview, approximately four to five months after the first interview, the researcher attempted to contact each participant a maximum of two times. If there was no response after the second attempt, no further contact was made. 10 out of the 12 participants from the first interview were available for the second interview. Of the two individuals who did not participate in the second interview, one indicated that she was unavailable due to her work schedule, and the other did not respond. Second interviews were scheduled on the basis of participant availability, meaning the order of participant interview was not the same from the first interview to the second.

All participants were over the age of 19, and represented a wide-range of cultural, racial, academic, and educational backgrounds. While some participants

indicated that English was not their first language, all were able to verbally communicate in, and read English. Participant profiles are presented in Chapter Four.

3.3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews as part of a two-stage process. Semi-structured interviews use pre-determined questions as a foundation, while still allowing participants the latitude to share experiences and opinions that are meaningful to them. The approach ensures that key topics are discussed, but leaves space for new foci to arise organically.

The first stage of data collection took place over a one-week period, approximately two months after the C2U Expo ended. For the first interview, a priori categories from the researcher's knowledge of psychology, counselling, and career theory provided the foundation for open-ended questions pertaining to the participant's general experience of the program, as well as changes in self-concept, sense of connection, hope for the future, and skill development (see Appendix C). The interviews always began with general questions about the Ambassador Program experience, and the researcher often used follow-up questions as appropriate. The researcher then progressed to more specific questions about the four domains relevant to the research study. The following are some examples of questions from the interview guide:

- How would you describe your experience as an Ambassador at the C2U Expo?
- I'm interested in understanding how you might have changed as a result of being a part of the Ambassador's Program. What changes, if any, have you noticed?
- How would you describe your level of belief in yourself before the Ambassadors Program, and now?
- What changes, if any, have you noticed about how you think about your community?
- What does your future look like to you now? Has it changed at all since you were an Ambassador? If so, how?

All questions from the interview guide were asked in each interview; however, given the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews, the researcher followed topical trajectories using follow-up questions and probes that were unique to each interview. For example, in an interview with Demar, the researcher followed the interview guide when asking “What if anything would you have liked to have gone better or differently during the Expo,” to which he replied

Uh ... I'm not too sure. I just kind of, I put out 100 percent every day when I came in. yeah I think I would [pause] if anything different it's to listen. At the beginning I wasn't really focused on it. I was focusing more on getting to know people, trying to fit in, trying to be a part of it, but once it began that kind of happened natural but if anything I was just like ... I think I would have took more time and listened and instead of trying to meet a hundred people, I would just focus on a few people and get to know them that way. I think that's what I would have done different. I would have slowed myself down and took my time with getting to know people, listening to people and listening to their stories because every story is important and to me one of the things, I been looking at myself as a leader, I'm an Ambassador so that means I'm a leader. I think I would look at, I would have looked at that differently and focus on the communication skills which is the listening part of it. That's where I would focus on if I were to do it again. Yeah instead of trying to be a leader and just focus, cause I think part of great leadership, having a good leader, is the ability to listen to people and I think I probably lacked that a bit in the first part. So if I was to do anything differently I would be a little more relaxed and listen to people.

In order to gain a better understanding of how this change may have affected Demar, the researcher asked “If you were able to go back and do that, how do you think it would have changed what you took away from the Ambassadors Program?” This led to a conversation about how he would have liked to connect with people on a deeper level. In contrast, when the researcher asked another participant the same question about what he would have liked to have gone differently, he replied with the following statement:

I'm not sure. Um think I'm, I think I'm a little disappointed at how others didn't get quite the experience that I got um with going to The Fairmont and having wonderful meals and stuff. I think that that, I think if it could be, things could be balanced out so that everybody gets a fair share of the pieces of pie so to speak you know what I ... I mean I know it's hard because you want to, you have to think seriously about what kind of you know delegates are coming and what kind of people are going to be dealing with these delegates but I think it would have been good for some of them to have the experience, same experience that I did.

I mean I was like, I was really lucky to get to meet a lot of people over three days right.

Of course, this response elicited a different reply from the researcher than did the first example:

I'm hearing some disappointment that others may have missed out on some great experiences. Do you think that other people may have had some experiences that you might have liked to have?

The participant went on to share that there were experiences that he felt he missed out on, while also acknowledging how difficult it can be for organizers to balance the desire participants have for new experiences with practical considerations. As with the above examples, all of the interviews followed the flow of a natural conversation, while still including all of the questions from the interview guide.

During the second interview approximately four to five months after the Expo, participants were asked to validate the data, concepts, and themes from the first interview, and were invited to share new information (see Appendix D). The second interview not only served the purposes of validation and collecting new information, but also allowed for what Strauss and Corbin (2008) refer to as “debunking of assumptions” made by the researcher.

Audio-taped interviews took place in a private room at the Surrey and Vancouver SFU campuses, at an agreed upon date and time. Interviews ranged from 25 minutes to 65 minutes, excluding the informed consent process and debriefing.

3.3.4. Data Analysis

Qualitative methods are flexible, allowing for spontaneity and adaptation to the participant; yet, there is still great benefit in adopting a rigorous approach to recording, interpreting, and coding data as was done in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Data analysis began with transcription, followed by open coding and axial coding.

Transcription

Verbatim transcription commenced after all participants completed the first interview. The practical realities of trying to schedule interviews with at-risk community members for confidential interviews at a university campus precluded transcription and

initial analysis to occur immediately after each interview; therefore, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed after all initial interviews were completed. While this may be viewed as a limitation to the research design, the interview scheduling process took into consideration the unique needs and situations of the study population, which was of utmost importance to the researcher.

Coding

The process through which categories are identified is referred to as coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Matt and Huberman (1994) describe the relationship between coding and analysis as follows:

To review a set of fieldnotes, transcribed or synthesized and to dissect them meaningfully while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis. This part of analysis involves how you differentiate and combine the data you have retrieved and the reflections you make about this information. (p. 56)

Coding usually begins as descriptive and becomes increasingly analytic as the process progresses. Lower levels of abstraction are usually limited to descriptions and surface-level information, whereas higher levels of abstraction referred to as categories, are analytic providing interpretation rather than descriptors (Willig, 2013). This study began with open coding and progressed to axial coding.

Open Coding

The researcher reviewed the first set of transcripts after the second set of interviews were scheduled. Prior to every follow-up interview, the researcher reviewed the participant's transcript from interview one and completed line by line open coding. These findings provided the foundation for the participant's second interview where the general concepts could be confirmed, clarified, corrected, or elaborated on.

After the second set of interviews was completed, the researcher began the coding process again. Interviews one to 20 were reviewed using open coding to discover concepts. During this process, the researcher closely examined each interview line by line, and labelled sections using conceptual codes directly onto each transcript. To ensure that the diversity of that data was captured, the researcher used constant comparison, as described below.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Constant comparative analysis refers to the process whereby each finding is compared with existing findings. That is, when an incident is being reviewed and coded, it should be compared against other incidents for similarities and differences. In the case that there is a difference or a new discovery is made, previously reviewed data should be thoroughly reviewed. This approach also helps the researcher identify differences within categories, resulting in the emergence of subcategories. One of the major benefits of constant comparison is that it helps counteract any homogenizing impulse by ensuring that the researcher not only builds up categories but also breaks them down again (Willig, 2013).

Axial Coding

When all of the interviews were reviewed once, codes were compared in order to group similar codes together. Once similar data was grouped together, it was reviewed to determine whether it represented a single concept. This process continued to higher levels of abstraction resulting in categories and subcategories.

Throughout open and axial coding the researcher used memos to track the development of definitions for each category. This allowed the researcher to ensure that the categories, and the definition of the categories, followed a sound trajectory informed by the data.

Theoretical Saturation

Theoretical saturation refers to the point when despite ongoing sampling and analysis, no new categories are emerging. At this stage, the new data being collected is captured by already existing categories and sub-categories. In the context of this study, the investigator did not necessarily set out to reach data saturation. Due to the detailed nature of qualitative research and the limited resources available, the researcher chose to interview 12 participants. Despite the limit on participants, the researcher noticed little variation in the data by the eighth interview.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

3.4.1. Approval

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from Simon Fraser University's Research Ethics Board (REB) prior to data collection. All participants were made aware that the research was approved by the REB.

3.4.2. Consent

The content of in-depth interviews often include personal feelings, opinions, and experiences making it essential that participants understand consent, including the right to withdraw. All participants received a consent form prior to participation, to ensure voluntary and informed consent. Participants were first given the opportunity to read the consent form independently, and then the researcher explained each section of the form aloud in an effort to promote discussion about the content. The researcher then thoroughly explained ongoing consent and the right to withdraw from the study at any time, which was particularly important in this study given that there were two interviews. Participants were also informed that in the event that they chose to withdraw from the study, the 20 dollar honorarium would still be paid. Following the completion of the first interview, the researcher asked for verbal consent to contact participants for the second interview in approximately two to three months. At the beginning of the second interview, the researcher verbally reviewed consent with participants again.

3.4.3. Confidentiality

The relationships that were created and cultivated during the Ambassador's Program made full assurance of confidentiality complex. The group of Ambassadors became quite familiar with each other over the course of training and working at the conference, with some continuing their friendships outside of the Program. The researcher used several strategies in an effort to ensure confidentiality throughout the entire study.

Confidentiality was discussed with all participants when reviewing the consent form. The limits of confidentiality were explained in detail. Participants were also made

aware of the potential dissemination of the results beyond being presented as a master's thesis, such as publications or conference presentations.

Private room bookings were made in rooms without large windows, away from main corridors, to reduce the likelihood that the participants would be seen by someone they knew during the interview process. Additionally, the researcher left ample time between interviews to avoid participants seeing each other. Participants often referred to other Ambassadors as research participants during the interview, either because a friend had informed them that they were in fact participating in the study, or because the participant was seeking confirmation from the researcher. In these cases, the researcher did not reply with confirmation or denial, but instead reminded the participant of confidentiality.

Participants' phone numbers and names were listed on a spreadsheet available only to the researcher. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and each interview was assigned a number; therefore, participants' names were never connected to the collected data. In the results section, individuals are sometimes referred to by their pseudonym, and sometimes referred to simply as "participant." The researcher employed this strategy in order to reduce the likelihood that other Ambassadors or C2U Expo committee members would be able to identify a participant based on a combination of information from the results.

This qualitative study sought to investigate the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program. Using qualitative methodology, the researcher interviewed the participants to examine changes in the domains of self-concept, sense of connection, sense of future, and knowledge and skills. The results of the data analysis are presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter 4.

Results

This study investigated the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program, with particular attention paid to changes in self-concept, sense of connection to the community, sense of future, and knowledge and skills. The study employed a qualitative research design. Interviews with 12 participants of the program, followed by transcription and analysis of the interview data revealed seven themes and 10 subthemes of participant experience which are described in this chapter.

This chapter begins with an examination of my role as a researcher and possible biases. Then, a summary of the participant population is presented, along with a concise description of each participant. Finally, each theme and subtheme is presented in detail, and supported by direct quotations from participants.

4.1. Researcher Role and Biases

In qualitative research, the data analysis process is inductive, driven by the researcher's understanding of what is relevant; and the understanding of what is relevant is often influenced by factors outside of the research. This subjectivity is addressed through the ongoing awareness that "all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded in both the social location and social biography of the observer and the observed" (Mann & Kelley, 1997, p. 32). Using reflexivity, the research process itself becomes the focus of inquiry in which the researcher must examine beliefs, judgements, and practices that may influence the data.

I am currently an employment and assistance worker (EAW) for the Government of British Columbia and a counsellor at a local non-profit agency. I was also a delegate at the C2U Expo. My job as an EAW places me in a unique position for this study, as the majority of the clients receiving income assistance are unemployed. Furthermore, in my work as a counsellor, I am privileged to be trusted with the personal stories of clients including those who are unemployed, which further influences my understanding of unemployment. Below, I discuss my experience in the above-mentioned roles in detail,

while bringing attention to how my experience has shaped my understanding of unemployment in BC. I subsequently describe my role in the C2U Expo.

4.1.1. A Service Provider's Perspective

In my role as an EAW with the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction (MSDPR) in the Lower Mainland, I regularly communicate with unemployed individuals who face multiple barriers to obtaining employment and are either currently receiving, or applying to receive, Income Assistance or Disability Assistance. As a family counsellor at a local non-profit agency I provide counselling services to many individuals who are also currently receiving Income Assistance or Disability Assistance. Working for the government and a non-profit agency simultaneously places me in a unique situation in which I provide two distinct services, on behalf of two different service providers, to a similar population. Based on my experience in the field, I have identified two fundamental shortcomings of current service delivery to those who are unemployed: The weak relationship between government agencies and community agencies, and the lack of continuity of care.

The steps required to access various forms of public support can be complex and the lack of coordination between agencies mandated to serve the public further complicates the process. Individuals who already face multiple barriers to employment are often confused and overwhelmed by the processes required to receive services, and once they successfully apply for one service, they are often not supported in finding further support which often results in only a partial solution. For example, an individual who applies for Income Assistance may face barriers to employment (e.g. mental health issues, immigrant, non-English speaker, health concerns), but is still required to actively seek employment with WorkBC support. While the client continues to fulfill the requirements of an employment plan created by the MSDPR, underlying issues are left unaddressed because the MSDPR does not provide support beyond financial assistance. Of course, this lack of social support seriously impacts the likelihood that an individual will obtain employment, resulting in continued unemployment and long-term dependence on Income Assistance, but more importantly contributing to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and decreased self-confidence. A similar struggle exists for individuals who are receiving mental health or counselling support, but still require help applying for financial assistance. Those in “helping” professions often do not feel

equipped with the knowledge required to support clients who are struggling through the Income Assistance application process. Moreover, professionals are sometimes as oblivious to the special services and supplements that are available to clients through the MSDPR as their clients are, which often leads to incomplete care of those in need.

Contemporary service delivery emphasizes efficiency, while overlooking effectiveness. Previously, individuals receiving Income Assistance were assigned a case worker whom they could contact during times of crisis, or with any questions and concerns. This provided consistency and comfort amidst times of instability. Now, clients of the MSDPR are asked to manage their own cases online or contact a provincial call center. Furthermore, those requiring personal support such as counselling services through community agencies are placed on a waitlist and eventually receive three to six months of support before they are discharged and no longer eligible for services. The unfortunate reality is that navigating the system and receiving critical support is extremely difficult for those who are unemployed; and due to the nature of contemporary service delivery with increased online supports and long waitlists for face to face services, individuals often feel disconnected in a time when they require the most support.

As someone who strives to provide effective services to those in need of employment, the issues with current service delivery can be exasperating. Ultimately, I believe a weak relationship between government agencies and community agencies negatively impacts the quality of services for individuals facing barriers to employment, while the lack of continuity of care further hinders service delivery. Not only do gaps in service negatively affect community members, but they also adversely affect service providers such as myself who wish to provide meaningful and effective services. However, as a researcher I realize that these views have developed from my lived experience as a service provider, and those participating in this study hold their own opinions shaped by their lived experiences which may be profoundly different than my own. My experience of the C2U Expo was also different as it placed me in the position of a conference delegate, an Ambassadors Program observer, and a researcher.

4.1.2. A Delegate and a Researcher

I learned about the Ambassador's Program three weeks before Ambassador training was scheduled to begin. After deciding to research the experience of Ambassadors, I carefully considered my level of involvement in both the development of the program, as well as the C2U Expo conference which the program was designed for. My participation in the events related to the Ambassadors Program was mostly limited to observation.

Prior to the conference, I attended Ambassadors Program committee meetings where I listened and took notes but did not contribute my ideas. My reason for attending these meetings was to understand the main goals of the program and how the program would be carried out. I also attended the first day of Ambassador training where I introduced myself as a researcher independent of the Ambassadors Program organizing committee, explained my interest in the program, and asked for consent for further contact from the Ambassadors. Besides witnessing preparation for the program and obtaining consent, attending the training allowed me to differentiate myself from the organizers, and become a familiar face to the participants.

I also attended the conference as a delegate, as opposed to an organizer or volunteer. While I did attend a few roundtable discussions and lectures, most of my time was spent actively observing the Ambassadors in their various roles. During this time, I had the opportunity to hear some of them share their ideas in large groups, facilitate group conversations, participate in First Nations ceremonies, create artwork with delegates, and perform in many of the other roles described in Chapter Three.

Although I chose to remain an observer in the interest of impartiality, I acknowledge that it is impossible to observe without developing thoughts and ideas about the events being witnessed. During the conference, I used photography to capture my observations, which was then used for reflection post-conference. Using this medium was effective as it kept me engaged during the event, but also allowed me to reflect on my own biases after the event was over. For example, when reviewing the photos, I constantly reflected on why I had captured a particular image (e.g., why I chose to capture that moment, why that moment was significant to me) and how I felt in those moments. Understanding the "why" and "how" allowed me to deeply reflect on my own

experience. I believe bringing the depth of this reflection into my conscious awareness allowed me to approach participant interviews with more balance.

My experience as an EAW and a counsellor contributes to the beliefs I hold about unemployment in British Columbia. Furthermore, my observations in the C2U Expo undoubtedly contribute to my judgments about the program. Being aware of my beliefs and judgements and reflecting on their influence using reflexive strategies such as memo writing has helped to minimize the influence they may have on the data shared by participants who also entered this study with their own unique experiences. A brief description of the participants is provided in the next section.

4.2. Participants

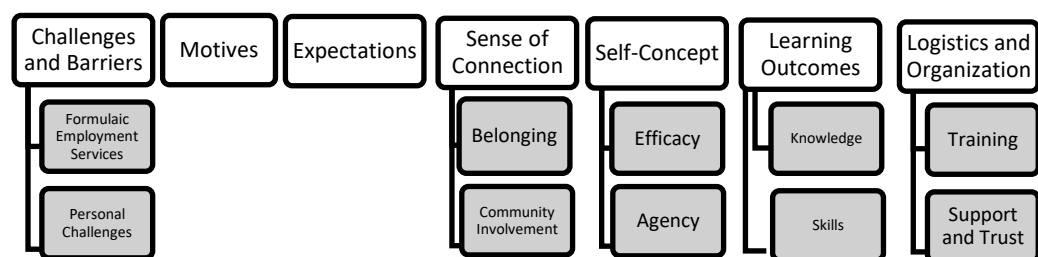
There were 12 participants in this study, of which four identified as male and eight identified as female. Eight of the participants were visible minorities. All participants indicated that they were unemployed and seeking employment. Additionally, they were all connected with at least one community resource specializing in employment support. While some were attending employment programs, others were connected to more holistic community programs that included employment support amongst other supports (e.g. housing, mental health support) most of which were located in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. The following table provides a brief description of each participant.

Pseudonym	Gender	Description
Avery	Female	Completed post-secondary degree, but unable to find opportunities relevant to her education.
Brody	Male	History of erratic contract employment, followed by long periods of unemployment. In search of more meaningful experiences.
Cleo	Female	Full-time post-secondary student currently volunteering but wants to find paid employment.
Demar	Male	Looking to gain experience for his resume, while making a connection with community members.
Elias	Male	Possesses a specific skill set which he hopes facilitates networking at the conference.
Frieda	Female	A new immigrant with extensive education and experience in her field, but unable to attain employment in Canada.

Gaho	Female	Extensive education and experience in her field, but unable to attain employment after being out of the country for many years (lack of recent Canadian experience).
Halia	Female	Parent of young children who is unable to commit to full-time work and finding it difficult to find flexible employment opportunities.
Ida	Female	Interested in gaining experience in specific roles in the Ambassadors Program.
Julie	Female	Actively volunteering in multiple roles and hoping to network at the conference.
Karina	Female	Has previous experience in event management and interested in enhancing training and experience.
Larry	Male	Disappointed with recent employment experiences, looking to experience something new and make friends in the community.

4.3. Themes

This research using in-depth interviews began with one central research question: What was the experience of participants in the Ambassadors Program? The secondary objective was to explore changes in four domains: Self-concept; Sense of connection; Sense of future; Knowledge and skills. Although the interview questions were developed with attention to the previously mentioned domains, participants' answers were often much broader than expected, resulting in conversations that stretched well beyond the interview questions. To honour the stories that were shared with me, analysis was conducted on all the interview data collected from participants, regardless of whether the information being disclosed was directly related to the interview questions. Analysis revealed seven themes and 10 subthemes. Of these seven themes, three themes (challenges and barriers, motives, and expectations) described past experiences and what led participants to the Ambassadors Program, another three themes (sense of connection, self-concept, learning outcomes) were directly related to the domains being investigated by the secondary research question, and one theme focused on logistics and organization of the program. The next section describes the themes and subthemes that emerged from the data, leading into a discussion of how these themes appear to be connected.



Ambassadors spoke extensively about the experiences that led them to the Ambassadors Program. The researcher began each interview by asking “what led you to the Ambassadors Program” to gain a general understanding of referral sources and current employment supports; however, the depth of the responses to this question was unexpected. Participants talked about the challenges they faced finding employment support, the motivations for participating in the Ambassadors Program, and the expectations they carried into the program. Although this study did not seek to understand the historical experiences of the participants, the researcher believed these conversations carried significance for two reasons: First, the participants spoke about the experiences with great emotion; and second, these accounts provide a lens through which to understand the participant population and their experience of the Ambassador’s Program.

4.3.1. Challenges and Barriers

Ambassadors described multiple challenges and barriers to finding employment in the past. Their difficulties included negative experiences with service providers, as well as personal struggles in various domains.

Formulaic Employment Services

Multiple participants spoke about feelings of frustration and hopelessness with services received from WorkBC which is a government-funded employment service program available to all British Columbians. Brody candidly stated, “I have a WorkBC

case manager, he's no help at all." Although the program's mandate is to help people find jobs, explore career options, improve their skills, and successfully navigate the labour market, many Ambassadors shared that they felt overlooked while receiving highly structured services from WorkBC.

Gaho spoke about her diverse work history and desire to highlight the extent of her abilities to potential employers. However, she shared that the resume writing experience with WorkBC actually minimized the variety of her work experience rather endorsing it, which left her in disarray: "WorkBC's resume writing and the whole process is like you can't say this, you can't say that, this is too dysfunctional like I couldn't present it and I thought you don't understand, this is who I am." Her experience left her feeling like her case manager had symbolically erased a part of her identity by removing meaningful work experiences from her resume. Yet like Gaho, many Ambassadors shared that regardless of their disagreement with some of the WorkBC procedures, they complied with the suggestions of their case managers in hopes of success.

Participants also agreed with the notion that "a lot of government agencies are directed to slot people," rather than work from a client-centered approach. For example, Halia shared that she is regularly sent job postings from her case manager that are outside of her area of interest or sometimes even beyond her ability, and although she provides feedback, she continues to receive referrals for similar irrelevant postings. Brody suggested that perhaps "slotting" is due to a lack of funding or training programs provided by the agency, as he has requested support for further training on several occasions but has been denied. Ambassadors struggled with the helplessness experienced by not finding employment with the help of a government-funded employment agency whose fundamental purpose is to find people jobs, as it sometimes felt they were flawed in some way.

Personal Challenges

Participants shared a variety of personal challenges. From mental health issues and addictions to self-identified egotism, there were many factors that prevented individuals from securing a job or continuing to search for work.

There were participants whose familial responsibilities affected their ability to present favourably to prospective employers. For example, Halia was honest in disclosing that her availability was inflexible due to parental responsibilities while her husband is in medical school, which was another setback in addition to her degree being earned outside of Canada. Another participant who was the main caregiver for her aging parents travelled often due to family crises which created gaps in her resume as she was changing employers frequently. She then made the decision to move back to Surrey to provide ongoing care for her parents and faced Canadian employers questioning the relevance of the experience she gained in the United States and Asia.

Other Ambassadors did not feel limited by their familial situation as much as the community they were living in. Despite taking initiative and making positive changes in their own lives, some participants felt that those around them were impeding their growth. Demar, who described himself as a positive, active resident of the Downtown Eastside questioned his ability to continue to flourish in this community:

There's been a lot of major changes in my life and trying to engage... but the question is how long can I stay strong because down here it's downright depressing...there's a lot of people who are not willing to change but I'm not willing to give, I'm willing to move ahead, I'm willing to help in any capacity I can because sometimes it's so sad. I walk on Hastings here towards Main and Hastings and it's just like so filthy, so much garbage on the ground, it's like how do you teach these people...

A fellow Ambassador and resident of the Downtown Eastside expressed similar feelings of frustration and exhaustion, especially with those living in his building. He shared how draining it is to be surrounded by individuals who are “stuck in their ways” and unable to respect the positive steps he is taking in his life. Therefore, when he has extra money he “sneaks away” from his community to more affluent areas, which also takes him away from important activities like work-searching.

There were also very specific challenges individuals faced. For example, Brody struggled greatly with the idea of “working beneath someone,” to the point where he questioned if it was even possible for him. One Ambassadors had trouble finding work in her field of choice and was uncomfortable meeting and networking with significant contacts in her field as she viewed it as “schmoozing” and ingenuine. Another individual shared that “there’s a perpetual feeling that there’s always somebody that has more experience, more education, more something, that is going to get picked over [her].”

Additionally, several Ambassadors, such as Ida, shared that anxiety and mental health issues were a critical barrier to finding employment:

...I did have a lot of mental health issues that I was working through for a few years and then at the same time I wasn't able to find work and that also kind of just hit worse because I was just feeling like I can't do anything, I'm not worth anything.

As a result of these barriers many participants had been unsuccessful in finding employment which led to another difficulty: the fear of rejection. As Avery explained “when you’ve been told no so many times it builds up this wall of fear” and it takes courage to keep believing in yourself. Cleo related closely to the feeling of despair: I had zero belief in myself mainly because I’ve been shot down interview after interview. Yet, all of these Ambassadors did find the courage and motivation to apply for the Ambassador’s Program, and for some, this program marked the start of positive change in their career trajectory by means of job opportunities and new interests.

4.3.2. Motives

All the participants discussed at least one important reason that they applied for the program, which suggests that there were many things about the program that were appealing to this diverse population. While some applied for reasons related to employment, others were motivated by factors such as a desire for change and connection.

There were Ambassadors who participated in the program for practical, employment-related reasons, yet within this subset of individuals there were still a variety of motives. For example, Cleo, an undergraduate student in her third year of post-secondary education viewed the program as an opportunity to begin developing her resume before she graduates. On the other hand, Gaho, who returned to Canada after 30 years of employment abroad was seeking Canadian work experience after being rejected by several employers due to a lack of Canadian references. She also looked forward to networking and meeting potential employers at the conference, as did most of the other Ambassadors. Aside from enhancing their resumes and networking, Ambassadors considered this a chance to gain applied skills. As someone with some training in social media, Ida shared that this was an opportunity to learn new skills while also using her existing skills in an applied setting. Perhaps one of the most appealing

qualities of this paid work experience though, was that participants' schedules were flexible. Being an immigrant mother of two young children and the wife of a medical student, Halia explained that "working full-time is not even possible," so this type of temporary, part-time work was exactly what she needed in order to get experience while still making money.

There were several individuals who chose to be Ambassadors for reasons that were unrelated to finding employment. A valued characteristic of the Ambassador's Program was that a university, often viewed as being especially inaccessible to marginalized citizens, was reaching out to some of the most vulnerable populations in the Lower Mainland. Elias spoke about his desire for change in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as being a driving factor in his application to the Ambassador's Program:

This was something I wanted to do because I love the Eastside and the people down here. I like finally seeing a corporate entity that SFU is really, finally working with people on the Eastside. I was surprised. I thought wow the people that they've invited to be Ambassadors are many people from the Eastside who are struggling with life's problems visibly, this is really cool. That's what I like to see.

Similarly, Demar, a middle-aged resident of the Downtown Eastside, spoke about the excitement and anxiety he felt when applying to the program:

It was big for me because I never really dealt with universities. I just thought you know, I have no experience except in my younger days ... and when I applied it was exciting. I thought you know, are they going to accept me, you know there's all these thoughts and emotions that went through my mind and then when I got that email to say where the training workshops were it was just a big thrill for me. It was rewarding, just to be accepted.

Others were recent university graduates, but chose to be part of this program due to the objectives of both the conference and the Ambassador's Program. Ida was interested in "breaking barriers" between the university and community, while Karina wanted to be part of an initiative that she viewed as "very ambitious." Possibly two of the simplest, yet powerful intentions that Ambassadors shared were to "find a way to belong," and "to simply have a human experience."

4.3.3. Expectations

Ambassadors had both employment related and non-employment related expectations of the program. Participants ranged from having no expectations at all, to anticipating job offers at the conference.

A few Ambassadors expressed their lack of expectations in two distinct ways. There were those who consciously chose to enter the program without any particular hopes in order to embrace the new experience for all it may have to offer. However, there were others who shared that they did not know enough about the program in advance, so they were unable to develop expectations. For example, Halia shared her experience of uncertainty when she was trying to learn more about the program:

I mean I studied the website and everything, but I was still confused....I mean I saw the website, it was clear for anybody who knows the program but for somebody who has no knowledge of all this like you know, the culture, the combination of university and life outside, yeah....

Although there were some individuals who did not feel well-informed about the program, most participants shared that they did feel knowledgeable and had developed expectations for their experience.

There were a number of Ambassadors who approached the program with minimal, yet specific expectations. For example, Demar shared that his desire was “to connect with people and keep busy,” whereas Avery was looking to meet those who could relate to her. She shared that her hope was to “just kind of hang out with other people and kind of get the experience and see that [she’s] not the only one struggling with work or trying to find a job.” Certainly two of the most common expectations were to get some valuable work experience and network with delegates who were attending the conference.

Greater expectations were also present for some Ambassadors. Although Larry was excited to meet people from around the world, his primary hope was to leave an impression on delegates by talking about his own experiences and sharing his opinions about the nature of homelessness and drug use in the Downtown Eastside. In return, he hoped that stories being shared with him would provide insights that could be used to the benefit of those in his community. Moreover, Julie’s reference had informed her that

this experience may “lead to a permanent job or even a temporary contact,” so she attended the conference with the hope of new employment.

The variety of motives and expectations amongst the Ambassadors made it very clear that although all these individuals shared the one factor of being unemployed, the group carried a multitude of hopes for this program.

Individuals participated in the Ambassadors Program after having already faced challenges with community supports. For many, personal challenges further impeded their ability to find employment. Most participants saw the Ambassadors Program as a novel and inclusive opportunity, and were motivated to participate for a number of reasons. They carried a variety of expectations for the program ranging from job opportunities to creating friendships; and the results revealed that one of the most main outcomes from the program was a sense of connection.

4.3.4. Sense of Connection

Every Ambassador who was interviewed spoke about the program as being a positive experience, attributing much of that positivity to kindness, support, and new friendships. The Ambassador’s Program undoubtedly created a feeling of community. Individuals felt a sense of belonging and connection, as well as engagement.

Belonging

The sense of belonging and connection that developed within a short amount of time was remarkable. All of the Ambassadors shared that they formed at least one new friendship, and most of these friendships were still continuing six months after the conference. A distinct quality of all these relationships was that they grew from one simple message: You are not alone. Whether it was the common experience of being an immigrant, a resident of the Downtown Eastside, unemployed, or someone with mental health concerns, there was a meaningful connection that stemmed from being understood.

Demar, who made several friends during the conference spoke about how pivotal it is for him to be connected while in recovery:

... in recovery if you're not sharing with people there's a lot of things that happen in your mind and it's usually negative stuff if you're spending time alone with yourself and you're going to start believing that bullshit and yeah you're going to be hard on yourself. I think everybody is hard on themselves but for a recovering alcoholic, it's even harder... it's so important to be with people and to communicate and without people I couldn't function you know.

Meanwhile, another resident of the Downtown Eastside appreciated the level of inclusion and respect shown by the organizers:

Well I was happy to see SFU use everybody that went to the orientation pretty well. I thought okay this is great. They didn't discriminate against anybody, they weren't biased or anything, it was good. I thought this is really good. It helped a lot of people on the Eastside feel really good about themselves.

The majority of Ambassadors interviewed shared that the best part of this program was meeting new people and making new friends. Karina, a Vancouver resident, was keen to point out that although Vancouver is such a diverse city, it is rare that strangers genuinely connect, and the Ambassador's Program finally provided a space to do so. Moreover, one participant who experience a sense of belonging and connection shared how it was difficult when the program came to an end: "This was a beautiful experience ... When it was over I experienced sadness and grief, and was thinking they should have made this longer."

Community Involvement/Engagement

Community engagement was the focal point of the entire conference, which may have inspired the Ambassadors. Not only were Ambassadors reconsidering their beliefs about community, they were also thinking about how they could get involved and make a difference. Demar shared how the learning about the concept of community engagement was the highlight of his experience:

My favourite word since the conference has been engage, that's stuck in my head. I've used it a lot in my vocabulary and not only that but I participate fully in the community at large and it's just like I love that word, it's such a powerful word for me engage, engage. It touches me, it talks to me, it speaks to me. That's probably the biggest thing I got out of the conference

The Ambassador experience also resulted in some individuals re-examining their definition of community and recognizing a significant improvement in their understanding of the concept. Cleo spoke about her broadened understanding of community, and the realization that she is part of multiple communities:

Well to be honest, I never really thought much about my community, like it was kind of like a background thought or if it ever occurred at all, but kind of like seeing all these different initiatives and all these different research studies I was like damn community is actually a big deal ... Like I knew about refugees, I knew about how integration is important. I knew that stuff was important but I didn't know there was even a broader scope beyond that too ... What our daily lives consists of happens because of what people do within their community. I now feel like community has a lot of, it requires a lot of trust to be built on ... it's better to be together as opposed to individualized or disengaged ... I now realize I'm actually part of multiple communities.

Similarly, Brody shared that he better understands the reciprocal relationships between members of a community: "my health, my mental and physical health is tied to the mental and physical health of the people in my neighbourhood." Meanwhile, a fellow participant realized for the first time that community is a choice, meaning that "community is who one chooses to be with" rather than "something that happens to you." Realizing the importance of community and the choices involved led Ambassadors to reflect further on the significance of community engagement.

New insights resulted in several participants making small, yet meaningful changes to their lifestyle. For instance, Halia's six-year old daughter who used to complain that her mother was oblivious to others outside of the family, as well as the community and environment, commended Halia for the positive changes she made after the Expo: My daughter is kind of happy that I went into the program ... she was like wow thank god you started to look out for other things other than yourself. Brody and Demar talked about how they have become ambassadors for health and reconciliation in the Downtown Eastside by being more patient, attentive, and caring towards other residents, but also providing practical support such as connecting community members with valuable resources.

Additionally there were those who made modifications to their lifestyle, while also devoting themselves to create substantial changes in the community. Julie shared that

herself and two other women from the program had remained in touch with the purpose of creating a “collective to get older women employed” as they believe that this is an underserved population. Furthermore, through the new relationships built at the conference, Brody was employed to conduct community-based research that was meaningful to him. He met an SFU representative at the conference who “kept him in mind” and hired him to interview residents of the Downtown Eastside for a project that strived to gain a better understanding of resource navigation in the community, so that more effective approaches could be implemented. Gaho, who shared that this experience gave her clarity and direction began taking initiative to contact the organizers as well as stakeholders after the Expo was over. As she explains it, she was in the midst of using the new relationships she built at the conference to connect herself, SFU, and a local community agency to make profound change. She has previously spent many hours engaging in expressive arts at a local refugee shelter, and her Ambassador experience ignited several ideas for how SFU could collaborate with this shelter to provide more effective services. Within only a few weeks, she was meeting with SFU Expo organizers and stakeholders to advocate for support to improve the current expressive arts program at the shelter and to introduce relevant employability interventions at the shelter through the use of university and community resources and programs.

The data clearly indicated that belonging, connection, and a sense of community were the most cherished outcomes of the Ambassadors Program. The participants spoke with enthusiasm about the friendships they created, along with the confidence that stemmed from their newfound comfort in the local community. Likewise, some participants spoke about self-improvement and personal changes that arose from their experience.

4.3.5. Self-Concept

The sense of empowerment generated from this experience was evident in the Ambassadors’ stories. They spoke of heightened self-efficacy and self-agency because of their roles even six months after the conference was over.

Self-efficacy

There were several ways in which individuals' efficacy was affected by being an Ambassador. Some were affected by simply being accepted to be part of the program, while others flourished due to self-exploration and interaction with others.

Many participants disclosed that being accepted to a program organized by a university, especially a well-known university, was the first source of self-assurance. One participant spoke of the excitement and pride he felt being accepted to university program given that he is not a "young person:"

Well for me it was just like when I heard it was university that surprised me.
I just thought, you know, I've been away from school for a long, long time
... I was thinking at that time I was just thinking young people, young people
... I didn't even know what to expect, it was a shock, it was good.

He went on to explain how his role in the conference left him feeling confident and at times he believed he could "work at the university, no problem." Frieda and Cleo had a slightly different experience. Although they also felt pride in being accepted to the Ambassador's Program, their belief in relation to receiving future job opportunities increased due to having an ongoing relationship and experience with SFU. Several participants shared that being employed by SFU, and doing an overall good job at their tasks heavily influenced their beliefs about success with future opportunities. A few participants candidly expressed that this experience affected them differently than volunteering at a local community agency because of the prestige associated with universities. They believed that if they could perform well in a university setting, that they could certainly perform well in other work settings. One participant shared that the "feeling that [he] can do anything or do what [he] sets out to do was stronger than ever before in [his] life"

Additionally, some participants had increased self-efficacy as a result of challenging themselves throughout their Ambassador experience. For example, one individual explained how her serious and sometimes debilitating anxiety was a barrier to socializing and trying new things. However, given the encouragement she received from her fellow Ambassadors she felt comfortable stepping outside of her comfort zone:

I remember I would get like really caught up in like taking pictures and sending them like I don't know what I should write and then like the people with me are just like 'write whatever and if they don't accept it then they don't accept it, but if they do then they'll post it.

She continued to explain how having this support allowed her to “take more chances” at the conference than she usually would, and taking these chances allowed her to continue to be bolder in her personal life as well. Similarly, another Ambassador accepted a new role part way through the conference, a role with which she had no previous experience. She shared how she was both flattered and nervous about the organizers viewing her as someone capable of taking on a new task:

...one thing I was actually kind of like a little bit on the shocked side, but also like a pleasant shocking side was more that I was made a coordinator for like the volunteers and the Ambassadors in Vancouver. Mainly because I like I didn't expect that to happen at all ... being given like a bigger role than that is like not only a confidence boost, but having that feedback on top of that was kind of like 'okay so I actually do have an important role in this.' It kind of gave me like a sense of responsibility and um, a sense of encouragement too...

Six months later she shared that she carried this “confidence boost” with her into her interviews after the Expo and to her new job, and more specifically it broadened her belief in herself beyond academia, into social situations. Both individuals experienced a positive shift partly due to performing well in their roles; however, one Ambassador reflected on how performing unsatisfactorily was a factor in his increased his belief in his abilities. The ability to try different things allowed him to recognize his strengths and his weaknesses through lived experience. In turn, this gave him the self-knowledge required to make informed future decisions, being more aware of which tasks he can execute well and which ones he needs to improve on.

A substantial number of participants attributed the positive change to meeting new people. For example, Gaho disclosed that hearing the diversity in others' stories helped her bring value and meaning to her own story, leading her to be more accepting about where she is in her life and confident that she is capable of taking steps in the direction she chooses. Another Ambassador shared that his confidence increased due to the relationships that he created and sustained once the conference was over. For him, having new, deep connections with others was a significant part of feeling good both

socially and mentally because it was not something he was able to do in the past. This experience assured him that he is able to create and maintain meaningful connections.

Agency

Several participants recognized their ability to take action, be effective, influence their own lives, and assume responsibility through their experience at the Expo. Ambassadors exercised their agency both during the conference and after.

Arriving to the conference each day on time and ready to work was not something that Larry was used to. He shared that the responsibility and accountability required to complete those two tasks every day for seven days increased his confidence, given that it was something he previously struggled with. Other Ambassadors who have not worked full time in a long time had similar feelings.

For some individuals it was the ability to help others that allowed them to recognize their own abilities. One participant explained how she believed a fellow Ambassador was not being supported and encouraged by the program organizers, so she took action to effectively support him:

.. I could see that he was somebody who needed the extra encouragement, he did really good during the conference like a wonderful guy ... I decide to try to lift him up, not because the Ambassador's Program lift me up ... it was my personal choice and other people I could see that they were doing that too because they feel that that was something that if the conference didn't deliver, we would deliver.

Although she was not acting in her own interest, she was exercising her ability to make a "personal choice" and influence the life of another, which is a profound way to both realize and exercise one's ability to take action and be effective, or in other words exercise her will and make her own choices. In fact, several Ambassadors shared that their view of helping others changed as a result of the conference. For example, one participant shared how he evolved in this respect:

... before the conference started out I was just kind of like meh, you know what's happening is happening, somebody else will help them, somebody else will do something and I'm not at that point anymore. I've evolved...

Another individual echoed similar thoughts, while sharing that his new beliefs led him to new experiences in the community:

I never really participated, my thinking before any of the programs it was just like 'you take care of it, if it's your problem take care of it, it's your shit not mine, I'm not going to worry about it,' but now after this conference it was like this is my community. If I want to make changes I have to be part of it so overall there's been a lot of major changes in my life in terms of uh, joining um certain organizations and trying to engage.

Participation in the Ambassadors Program led to an improved conception of self for most participants. Not only did some individuals experience an increase in their perception to deal with future tasks and situations, some did execute on these beliefs following the conference.

4.3.6. Learning Outcomes

Participant feedback confirmed that the Ambassador experience led to a great deal of learning. Individuals gained knowledge as well as applied skills that they considered valuable to their professional and personal lives.

Knowledge

Most Ambassadors shared that they gained functional knowledge because of their experience. Some found the pre-conference training to be beneficial, while others learned through their encounters with others. Participants' reflections revealed that all the knowledge gained was considered useful for future employment or personal relationships.

Participants valued some aspects of the pre-conference training that was provided. Affirmative inquiry was considered one of the greatest aspects of the Ambassador experience by most participants because it was engaging, can be useful in the work setting, and is beneficial in everyday life. One Ambassador disclosed that he even took the approach to the manager at a non-profit agency where he was volunteering because it had a "major impact" on how he viewed the world. Another participant shared that he used the approach effectively with his significant other. Cleo found communication training to also be useful. She described an altercation between two coworkers at her new job that she was able to diffuse using the training:

...they were kind of like having a disagreement about how things are supposed to run ... and I've been kind of like hearing it from one of the summer students like week after week after week and she wanted to address it and she kind of was like, and I was kind of like listening in how she wanted to like address the issue and the way she was addressing was kind of like um, in a way that was more along the aggressive side ... I was helping her out trying to say like 'okay you can't necessarily do it like that because you're going to come off as too harsh and it's not necessarily going to help you get your point across like there are these different types of communication styles that you can use ... try to think of something that seems like you can get your point across without sounding like you're trying to overpower or demean or bully...

In addition to the training, some Ambassadors felt that their lived experience at the conference left them enlightened. Brody shared that indigenous culture was rarely discussed when he was growing up and the Expo gave him the opportunity to learn more about Native culture and the obstacles that are faced indigenous persons. He reflected on how this new knowledge took him from a place of apathy to a place of empathy:

...that opening ceremony to promote reconciliation and to try to um kind of create a scenario where we're trying to help Indigenous youth, I just kind of thought to myself 'yeah if we're not helping the most vulnerable youth in our country, the most vulnerable youth in our area um then what are we doing,' so I really went from a place where I was, I had elements of apathy to 'I need to help the most vulnerable.' I would say like we talk about reconciliation and we talk about native youth but 'what about my people?' I'm half black, half East-Indian, so my parents are from the Carribean and they came here in the sixties and so I was born in 1970, so 'what about my people?' but then I thought just recognize that helping the most vulnerable people is a start, but awareness is not enough. Everyone needs to take an initiative...

One Ambassador who recently immigrated to Canada disclosed that her interactions at the Expo helped her learn about different groups that she previously did not have experience with. For example, she shared that she had never interacted with individuals who have overt mental health issues because in her native country, individuals with mental health issues are segregated from the rest of society by means of hospitalization or institutionalization. This experience gave her insight and understanding through honest and meaningful exchanges. Additionally, some Ambassadors shared that it was both comforting and informative to hear stories from fellow Ambassadors who were also immigrants, as well as exchange strategies and advice for transitioning. Even

those who were born and raised in Canada felt that the knowledge they gained about different cultures was significant.

Although the focus of the conference was university-community relationships, many of the Ambassadors were unaware that these partnerships even exist. Several participants shared that the knowledge they gained about what happens “behind the scenes” gave them new found respect for the effort it requires to sustain or create change in local communities.

Skills

From improved organization skills to new photography skills, the participants acquired practical competencies for the future. While some of the developed skills had obvious relevance to future work settings, some were helpful in just getting through conversations and interviews with potential employers.

One Ambassador explained how the ability to socialize with a wide range of people during the conference gave her the social experience she needed to feel comfortable around others. She went on to share that she felt much more relaxed in interviews than she did before the Expo:

... I had like two interviews right after the conference and they said ‘okay when can you start,’ and I was kind of on the surprised side... I felt like I was able to talk a lot more easily, I wasn’t very nervous ... it helped me market myself a little bit better... I’m kind of going into interviews, a little bit more relaxed ...

Similarly, another Ambassador had the opportunity to facilitate group discussions, a skill he had used in the past but had not employed recently. He spoke about his feelings of anxiety and fear, but also the excitement in overcoming those feelings and improving a skill he had learned so long ago. Following the conference, he joined a few committees in the community where he believed that his skills were put to good use.

Ida, who applied to be an Ambassador with the desire to learn more about videography and photography, was pleased that she was able to expand her skillset. Through the support of staff and students in the School of Interactive Arts and Technology at SFU, she was able to learn how to use editing and social media programs that she was previously unfamiliar with.

One learning experience reached beyond the conference, as an Ambassador was hired to do a community-based research project by an SFU staff member. He spoke enthusiastically about the depth of his learning: I learned a lot about communication, time management um human rights protocols um ... community-based research protocols...I learned a lot this summer.

Other skills that several participants shared that they acquired were communication skills, social skills, organization skills, and time management, all of which were important additions to their resumes.

Skills Acquired
Photography/videography skills
Public speaking
Facilitating group discussions
Basic social skills
Time management
Organization
Communication
Conflict resolution
Social media tools

4.3.7. Logistics and Organization

Each Ambassador commented on the organization and coordination of the program. Almost all of the Ambassadors focused their feedback exclusively on the training process and the characteristics of the organizers.

Training

Participants shared that there were both positive and negative aspects to their training experience. Cleo spoke for many when she shared that “some of the training was superficial but others were very beneficial.” Participants freely provided suggestions for how the training process could be improved for future programs.

All Ambassadors agreed that the interactive learning sessions were more enjoyable making information easier to retain than sessions where information was delivered by a lecturer. For example, Ambassadors were required to complete a scavenger hunt at the SFU Surrey campus in order to become familiar with the space. Furthermore, an aspect of the storytelling learning session involved participants sharing their own stories as a means of experiential learning. This type of learning was consistently identified as the most effective, enjoyable, and memorable by Ambassadors.

The length and content of the training sessions were identified as areas for improvement by some participants, whereas others were pleased with the existing model. A few Ambassadors mentioned that the training days were too long, especially when they were having to listen to a lecturer. One participant provided two suggestions to address this issue: Either decrease the amount of content and maintain the number of days and hours designated for training, or maintain the amount of content and increase the number of days and hours designated for training. Ambassadors also disclosed that exhaustion affected the amount of information they were able to retain.

Although some Ambassadors were satisfied with the content of the training, others felt that there were areas for improvement. A few individuals shared that they did not receive adequate training for the essential knowledge they required to effectively carry out their duties. For example, Ambassadors did not know the layout of the Vancouver campus, so they were unable to direct delegates to the correct rooms. Consequently, some participants felt anxious and unprepared. Furthermore, Ambassadors were working closely with university student volunteers, and suggested that in the future volunteers and Ambassadors be introduced so they are familiar with each other and can collaborate more effectively.

Support and Trust

Most of the Ambassadors emphasized that the respect and kindness displayed by the organizers provided a foundation for support and trust. They also suggested ways in which the relationship between Ambassadors and organizers could be further enhanced.

The organizers' positive demeanour was mentioned often in interviews with Ambassadors. They shared appreciation for the sense of equality that was established right from the beginning of the program. For example, the organizers emphasized reciprocal learning between organizers and Ambassadors. Halia shared how her positive experience of one organizer contributed to her overall feeling of comfort in the program:

I mean it's funny because we always have this idea that you know, the directors of the universities in our country there's no way that they can be so cool and funny... We used to like literally get on the side whenever they used to cross a corridor so coming from that sort of atmosphere ... I think it's a kind of positive influence on everybody who's around him [Ambassador Program organizer] so that way you're not like intimidated about like oh he's someone to be scared of, no he was just an average person right so I really liked that.

Participants also appreciated that the organizers acknowledged the significance of the Ambassador role in the overall success of the conference. Many participants pointed out that these gestures were meaningful only because they were authentic. In other words, if the organizers were perceived as being insincere, it would have negatively affected their working relationship.

Several participants shared that the organizers were easily accessible for help during the conference, which was reassuring, but a more individualized approach would have been even better. One Ambassador disclosed that positive reinforcement during the conference would have been encouraging. Although organizers were available in a designated room for Ambassadors, there was no one actually witnessing the hard work being done by the participants, which was important for some individuals. A few participants even shared that they believed some fellow Ambassadors would have benefitted from support and guidance throughout the entire conference, so it was unfortunate that no one was observing.

There was a wide range of feedback about how the program ended. During training Ambassadors were told that there would be an effort to "keep in touch" and "keep the program going." Unfortunately, six months post-conference many of the participants had not heard from the organizers. While some took initiative to contact the organizers themselves, others did not. One participant shared the following:

I was very sad for the conference because I saw people that was very much excited, there was a lot of promises made during the conference, 'oh we will follow up' and here and there and I was thinking wow you are saying a lot of things that for many people here it can make a big difference, I mean it could change their lives...but nothing of that I saw.

When asked why she assumed that no one had been in touch with the organizers she replied "... when you make a promise to a full room, if I'm in the room, I'm involved." Essentially, she was articulating that the organizers should not make a promise to an entire group unless they intend to keep that promise to everyone present. There was similar feedback from others in terms of transparency in regard to intention for the future. Most Ambassadors even shared that they would be okay with the short-term program as it was delivered, however the unclear and misleading information provided about ongoing communication was upsetting. While reflecting on such areas for improvement, one participant suggested that post-program focus groups would be an effective strategy to provide feedback to organizers and closure for participants.

Strengths	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal opportunity for all; no discrimination • Interactive training • Training relevant to work • Training relevant to personal life • Matched to preferred role • Lots of preparation before the conference • Ambassadors' interests were considered • Organizers treated everyone as equals • Reference letters provided • Organizers were calm and kind • Ongoing support offered • Organizers were authentic and respectful • Organizers placed trust in Ambassadors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less non-interactive training • Less intense training (i.e. more time/days) • Define Ambassador roles clearly • Provide training for essential information required for roles (e.g. location of rooms) • Facilitate networking between Ambassadors and delegates • Follow through on promises to re-connect/keep program running • Offer more positive reinforcement during the program • Provide closure (e.g. a focus group for feedback)

4.4. Connecting Themes

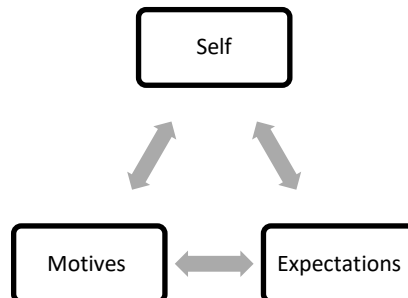
One's experience is always impacted by a number of factors; therefore, none of the above-mentioned themes are truly dependent of one another. However, there are some themes that appear to be more interconnected than others in this study.

4.4.1. Motives and Expectations



The most obvious relationship exists between the motives and expectations of Ambassadors. One's reason for applying to the program (motive) was always closely related to beliefs about what would happen in the program (expectations). For example, those who participated in the program in order to meet potential employers, expected that there would be networking opportunities available to them during the conference. There was a clear reciprocal relationship between both themes in every interview conducted.

4.4.2. Motives, Expectations, and Self



Motives, expectations, and self-efficacy and agency also appear to be interconnected. Specifically, those with motives and expectations that were not met, did not report an increase in self-efficacy or agency. On the other hand, those whose motives and expectations were met generally reported an increase in efficacy and agency. For instance, individuals who participated in the program to get a job and

expected to meet potential employers but did not network or receive a job offer reported no change in efficacy or agency, and in some cases reported a decrease in both. Conversely, individuals who applied for the program hoping to meet new people and make long-term friends, and accomplished both reported an increase in confidence and agency. Consequently, those who entered the program with lower motives and expectations reported an increase in efficacy and agency more frequently.

4.5. Summary

This chapter began with a reflection on the researcher's roles and biases, followed by a description of the participants. Then, the results of the study were described in detail. The findings provided insight into the experience of participants of the Ambassadors Program. Individuals generally felt dissatisfaction with the employment supports in the community and entered the program with a variety of hopes. All Ambassadors experienced a deep sense of belonging and connection, and some experienced a change in their self-identities because of their involvement. Furthermore, they left the program with new knowledge and skills in part due to effective training. The results also highlighted the most valued qualities of program leaders. In the following chapter, the findings described in this chapter are discussed in relation to the relevant literature, in addition to implications, strengths, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of unemployed individuals who took part in the Ambassadors Program, and determine what, if any, impact participating in the program had on four domains of participant experience: Self-concept; Sense of connection; Sense of future; Knowledge and skills. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using questions that inquired about participants' overall experience of the program, along with questions focusing on the four domains of interest. The chapter begins with a discussion of each of the key findings, followed by implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

5.1. Key Findings

The data analysis process yielded several key findings:

1. Individuals seeking employment faced many challenges and barriers, and expressed difficulty finding effective, positive employment supports that address the needs of marginalized groups.
2. An accessible community-based approach to employment programming such as the Ambassadors Program can foster a sense of connection, belonging, and community involvement.
3. A community-based approach to employment programming such as the Ambassadors Program can improve conceptions of self such as self-efficacy and self-agency.
4. Individuals seeking employment have both employment (e.g., finding employment, gaining skills) and non-employment related (e.g., social connection) motives and expectations.
5. Suitable program staff contributes to positive participant experience.

Interpretation of the significant findings is provided in the following sections, which leads into a discussion of implications for practice.

5.1.1. Challenges and Barriers to Employment

Participants described a range of challenges to accessing valuable employment support. WorkBC is a government-funded program which helps individuals explore career options and improve their skills by offering services such as workshops, academic upgrading and training courses, and self-employment planning. Although most of the participants had already accessed WorkBC services, they talked about not being satisfied with their experiences. Participants often noted that their case workers appeared so busy that their interactions seemed rushed and impersonal; this led to feelings of frustration and disappointment. In fact, none of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with WorkBC about still being unemployed; however, many were upset that they were not treated as individuals during their time there. It seems that the service agencies did not employ a client-centered approach in the delivery of their services. Current career theories suggest when working in a client-practitioner setting, it is crucial that the career practitioner steps away from a position of authority and moves towards a collaborative approach (Bright & Pryor, 2012; Brown & Lent, 2012; Brown & Lent, 2019; Savickas, 2005). Creating a genuine, collaborative relationship with one's career practitioner can be a source of meaningful social connection which has been linked to improved overall wellbeing (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bowlby, 1969; Erikson, 1963; Maslow 1943). Moreover, conceptions of self are heavily impacted by positive social interactions, and positive conceptions of self have been linked to long-term career outcomes (Brown & Lent, 2012; Zenger, Berth, Brähler, & Stöbel-Richter, 2013). Essentially, the client-practitioner relationship can serve as a quite basic, yet heavily influential source of social connection. However, feedback from service providers confirms that WorkBC operates on a "business-model" philosophy that favours a structured, centralized approach to employment services that is not conducive to a person-centered approach; this may explain the feelings of disconnection and disappointment described by the participants in this study (Hole & Stainton, 2016).

Conversely, what made the Ambassador's Program unique was the goal to form meaningful connections, while still providing knowledge and skills training. In other words, the organizers incorporated social experiences into the program to provide participants with a more holistic experience. Participants repeatedly shared that social connection and feelings of belonging were the most valuable outcomes of the program. This confirms that despite wanting to find employment, connection and belonging were

truly important to these individuals – a component that participants expressed was missing from their previous experiences in employment programs. It may be that social connection is a necessary component, and perhaps even a precursor to employment, especially for marginalized groups. It also suggests that the Ambassadors Program was created and delivered in an environment that effectively facilitated social connection for the participants.

5.1.2. Sense of Connection and Community Involvement

Most participants shared that the Ambassadors Program was their first large-scale volunteer experience that involved significant social interaction. Ironically, community activities that promote social connection are often most accessible to those who are already well-connected (Bekkers, 2005). Given that social connection may be a significant factor in career development, the issue of accessibility deserves particular focus. The Ambassadors Program was intentionally designed to be accessible to marginalized groups and connections-based, which may have contributed to feelings of safety necessary for personal growth.

In general, volunteering is linked to various positive outcomes; however, it is often associated with dispositions such as extraversion and agreeableness (Bekkers, 2005; Omoto, Snyder, & Hackett, 2010), suggesting that those who are introverted or have chronic social anxiety are less likely to participate (Handy & Cnaan, 2007). Other barriers to participation affecting marginalized groups are lack of appropriate support, lack of skills and qualifications, financial costs (e.g., travel, supplies), physical limitations, and stigmatizing settings (Southby, South, & Bagnall, 2019). All these difficulties were identified by program participants as barriers to finding employment and valuable unpaid work experience. In spite of these barriers, unemployed members of marginalized groups can break away from statuses that they identify as limiting, when they are able to participate in volunteer work (Baines & Hardill, 2008). For all groups, volunteering is associated with improved mental and physical health (Alspach, 2014; Fegan & Cook, 2014; Yeung et al., 2017), as well as increased personal efficacy and personal empowerment (Pilavin & Siegl, 2015). So, although it may be difficult to begin, participation is ultimately a valuable experience. There are a number of steps that the organizers took to make the Ambassadors Program accessible to marginalized groups.

Instead of passive advertisement, the Ambassadors Program organizers reached out to local organizations with extensive details about the program, encouraging them to refer clients even if they did not meet all the skills requirements because they could be paired up with another Ambassador. To apply, partner organizations completed the application form with their clients and emailed it back to the program organizers. The program organizers fully relied on the judgment of the referring partners and did not screen out any referrals. An approach such as this may improve accessibility for multiple reasons. First, the onus is taken off individuals to seek out and then apply for volunteer opportunities which may be difficult for several reasons (e.g., no access to phone/computer, limited information, lack of confidence, anxiety, etc.). Second, there is an opportunity to openly discuss any questions, concerns, or fears with a familiar support person (the referring agent) before taking part in the program. Finally, encouraging people to apply to the program even if they do not meet all the skills criteria communicates that the program is inclusive and designed to provide ongoing support, and may alleviate concerns about performance and judgment. The non-judgmental approach taken to recruitment may have increased participation amongst those with barriers, while possibly making individuals feel more welcome than they have in their previous experiences.

Once they were registered, individuals had the opportunity to get to know each other and the organizers before the conference began. While it is common to provide knowledge and skills training in employment programs, what differentiated the Ambassadors Program was that the training was presented in a social context that encouraged interaction. For example, to practice public-speaking there were story-telling sessions, to practice photographing there were group scavenger hunts, and for social media training participants created a Facebook group together which they all joined to stay connected. Although everyone entered the program with their own unique lived experience, they all shared two common traits – they were unemployed and seeking employment. The socializing during training served two important functions: people realized that they are not alone in their unemployment struggles and began to form a sense of “we-ness.” In fact, a feeling of belonging has been found to be a primary motivator for volunteering (Gray & Stevenson, 2019). The results of this study confirm that participants were seeking connection, as several individuals stated they were

motivated to be part of the program to experience a sense of community and belonging, while others already formed strong expectations of connectedness and community before the program began. Moreover, once formed, a shared social identity encourages helping between group members (Dovidio et al., 1997). This is especially important given that most participants shared that they had never worked at such a large event and were grateful for the positivity amongst the volunteers. Enabling participants to begin forming a shared identity before the conference began was perhaps the distinguishing characteristic that led to a growing sense of community, belonging, and connection throughout the program. After all, one must feel connected and safe before they are able engage in self-development (Maslow, 1943).

5.1.3. Self-Efficacy and Self-Agency

Many participants shared that they experienced personal change due to their involvement in the program. The interview question that explored personal change was broad: “I am interested in understanding how you might have changed as a result of being a part of the Ambassadors Program. What changes, if any, have you noticed?” Feedback from participants uncovered improvements in self-efficacy and self-agency. There were several characteristics of the program that could account for these changes.

Albert Bandura (1986) suggested that consistency in human behaviour can be explained by what he termed a self-system – cognitive structures that involve perception, evaluation, and regulation of behaviour. The self-system consists of three components: self-observations, judgemental processes, and self-response. Self-observation refers to the process by which individuals regulate their behaviour by monitoring their performance and adjusting accordingly. Judgement refers to the subjective evaluation of the consequences of behaviour, which can include comparison to others, and are affected by the value one places on a task. Individuals then have a self-response in which they self-reinforce or self-punish depending on their standards. Essentially, the self-system enables individuals to evaluate their own behaviour in terms of previous experience and anticipated future consequences, which in turn allows them to exercise control over their behaviour (i.e. self-regulation). Therefore, individuals are both products and producers of their own environments and social systems, and the beliefs that individuals hold about themselves are crucial in exercising control and personal agency (Bandura, 1986). That is, knowledge, skills, and previous accomplishments are not

always accurate predictors of future attainments because the beliefs that individuals hold about their abilities significantly influence behaviour. In fact, beliefs about capabilities often provide a more reliable prediction of behaviour than previous performances. However, one does not accomplish something simply by believing that they can; there must be congruence between beliefs, skills/knowledge, and action. In other words, self-beliefs help determine what individuals do with the knowledge and skills they already possess; and initial knowledge and skill acquisition are heavily determined by self-efficacy beliefs. Given that self-beliefs mediate knowledge and skill acquisition, and future performance, strengthening of self-beliefs is an important component of effective interventions.

Individuals regularly make assessments about whether or not they possess the skills to complete a task, and determine if they can successfully complete that task within the given environment. Simply knowing or possessing the skills or ability (efficacy expectancy) is not enough, one must also hold the belief that the task can be successfully executed in the given environment (outcome expectancy). The connection between knowledge and action has been said to be mediated by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). For example, individuals are likely to avoid tasks which they perceive as beyond their ability and engage in tasks that they perceive to be manageable (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, the impact of self-efficacy stretches beyond one's decision to partake in a task. Self-efficacy judgements have been shown to influence behaviour such as effort and persistency, and effect emotional arousal (Brown & Inouye, 1978). For instance, those with low self-efficacy may generate high emotional arousal, dwell on personal deficiencies, and perceive adversities to be larger than they actually are (Beck, 1976; Lazarus & Launier, 1978; Sarason, 1975). Essentially, there is an inverse relationship between perceived efficacy and distress (Bandura, Adams, Hardy, & Howells, 1980). Misjudgments such as these undermine effective use of competencies that one may possess, limiting successful functioning and further opportunities. The question then arises: What increases self-efficacy and why did most Ambassadors report an increase in self-efficacy?

The challenge of strengthening self-efficacy beliefs is that improvement is largely intuitive. It takes active engagement to enhance self-efficacy beliefs, which requires individuals partaking in genuine experiences, a challenging endeavour in the conventional career counselling setting. The four principal sources of self-efficacy beliefs

that mediate improvement include enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states. The most reliable sources of efficacy information and beliefs are mastery experiences. These direct experiences provide the most authentic evidence of one's abilities. Simply put, successes contribute to a strong sense of efficacy, whereas failures undermine it, especially if the failures occur before a sense of efficacy is firmly established (Bandura, 1997). To build a resilient sense of efficacy, one must overcome obstacles through persistent effort. Of course, there are other variables that effect the degree to which one's efficacy is altered through mastery experiences such as the perception of task difficulty, the effort employed to complete the task, the amount of external help received, and the external and internal circumstances in which the task is completed. The role-specific training and support provided to Ambassadors may have been beneficial in ensuring success during mastery experiences.

Prior to the conference, Ambassadors were given training relevant to the tasks that they would be completing as part of their assigned roles. Aside from presentations and written material, individuals were given mock scenarios to help them further prepare for situations that might occur during the conference. Although some individuals struggled during parts of the practical training, both trainers and the Ambassador Program organizers were participating (vicarious experience) and providing constructive and positive feedback (verbal persuasion). These training experiences could have helped alter preconceptions of capability, task difficulty, and the effort required when individuals were faced with completing tasks at the actual event because they had already encountered similar situations. The preparation also may have made it less likely that they would need external support during the event. However, when individuals did require support or encountered challenges during the conference, the organizers did not intervene. In fact, the organizers stayed in one room where they were available for advice and guidance before allowing Ambassadors to readdress challenges independently, further contributing to resiliency. The environment for mastery experiences and resiliency was ideal, as all conference attendees were aware of the goals of the Ambassadors Program, and the participants confirmed that all attendees were patient during setbacks.

In addition to practical preparation and an ideal setting, Ambassadors benefitted from encouragement based on their performance. For example, those who seemed to

excel or display leadership qualities were reassigned to roles that required more responsibility. Participants shared that this confirmed that they were successful in their assigned roles and served as encouragement for their newly assigned roles. Experiences such as these are novel for two reasons: They confirm to an individual that they are capable in their self-chosen roles and begin to instill the belief that they are also capable of taking on new challenges, which can improve self-efficacy through both experience and verbal persuasion.

This program also provided a unique setting for vicarious experiences. It seemed that Ambassadors related to each other on a personal level based on things like culture, children of similar ages, interests and hobbies, and nationality. In other words, participants saw other Ambassadors as similar to themselves, which could contribute to a shared understanding. This suggests that viewing other Ambassadors excel in their roles (e.g. receiving job offers, continuing to work with the university, being asked to take on larger roles), which many did, may have had positive effects on the larger group (Bandura, 1977).

All Ambassadors who reported changes in self-efficacy, also reported changes in agency. This finding supports the idea that self-efficacy and self-agency are closely linked, specifically that individuals exercise agency through self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1989):

Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs function as an important set of proximal determinants of human motivation, affect, and action. They operate on action through motivational, cognitive, and affective intervening processes (1175)."

Although the Ambassadors Program was not designed with particular attention to social cognitive theory, self-reports indicate that there were improvements both self-esteem and self-agency, which may in part be attributed to improved self-efficacy beliefs.

5.1.4. Motives and Expectations

Participants shared a range of motivations and expectations for the Ambassadors Program. Even though all participants were unemployed, most Ambassadors did not attend the program expecting to leave the conference with new employment opportunities. Instead, they entered with quite attainable goals such as wanting to acquire new knowledge and skills, gain work experience, connect with community members, feel a sense of belonging, and help mobilize knowledge pertaining to community-university connections.

Research suggests that a match between motivations and volunteer settings leads to more positive benefits for participants (Clary et al, 1998; Stukas et al., 2009). For this reason, clarity and communication are essential when recruiting volunteers. In the case of the Ambassadors Program, community partners were provided with details pertaining to the purpose of the program, including program goals, to share with prospective Ambassadors. The reasonable scope of the Ambassadors' motivations and expectations may be explained by the clarity provided by organizers. In fact, the only Ambassador to share dissatisfaction with the program was informed by a community partner that she would likely receive a job offer at the conference. Although this was not a communication made by program organizers, it highlights the need to ensure that community partners provide accurate and realistic information to potential participants. This is especially important to maintaining community volunteering given that fulfillment of motives, rather than their perceived importance, leads to ongoing involvement (Davis, Hall, & Meyer, 2003)

5.1.5. Building Effective Working Relationships

Every participant in the study made comments about the organizers, who were clearly viewed as leaders by the Ambassadors. The qualities of these leaders proved to be a significant factor in participants' overall experience in the program. While there was a great deal of positive feedback, there were also suggestions for improvement.

Participants repeatedly emphasized that they valued the support, recognition and equality displayed by the program leaders. All of these qualities have been considered closely aligned constructs which constitute respect in leadership (Clarke & Mahadi, 2017; Grover, 2013; Judge, Piccolo, & Illies, 2004). Participants were avid to point out that the reason these leadership qualities were valued was because they came across

as genuine. In other words, they felt that the organizers truly embodied respect for others. Additionally, the staff who created and carried out the Ambassadors Program held roles at the university that are meant to strengthen community engagement; therefore, they were well-informed on the topics of university-community partnerships and were skilled in organizing and facilitating groups while encouraging participation. This knowledge certainly impacted the way in which they communicated and connected with Ambassadors. While the Ambassadors Program organizers were experienced in interpersonal communications, group facilitation and event planning, this level of experience is not common; so, it is especially important to be mindful that leadership roles are assigned to individuals who have displayed the ability to engage in reciprocal learning, while still providing practical support to clients in diverse settings, or are provided with training opportunities to develop these skills.

5.1.6. Sense of Future

Although this study sought to understand changes in Ambassadors' sense of future by asking direct questions during participant interviews, the data analysis did not reveal significant findings in this area. This may be because participant responses were closely related to other constructs. For example, when asked about sense of future, participants often referred to their increased self-esteem, the transferable skills they gained, or their newfound interest in community engagement. Because these responses corresponded to other domains of interest, they were coded as such. These findings once again support the idea that self-concept, sense of connection, and attaining knowledge and skills are very closely related to an individual's overall sense of future.

The Ambassadors Program provided a unique opportunity to better understand the possible effects of a community-based approach to career development. The key findings demonstrate that such programs are accessible, contribute to feelings of connection and belonging, may improve conceptions of self, and can meet employment and non-employment related motives and expectations. Yet, the research design does consist of some limitations that should be taken into consideration along with the study results.

5.2. Limitations

This research focused on the nature of the experiences that unemployed volunteers had in the Ambassadors Program, and qualitative methods of investigation were deemed to be the most appropriate way to address this focus. Although there are several strengths to this approach, qualitative methods are also known to have limitations. The first limitation of the present study is the sample size of the Ambassadors who were interviewed. In order to better understand the experiences of those who volunteered, the researcher aimed to recruit the Ambassadors who worked the most hours at the conference. Ultimately, 12 Ambassadors met the threshold for both being available to participate, and for having worked a significant number of hours at the conference. Because of the small number of participants and the use of qualitative methods, the results are not generalizable beyond the populations and circumstances being studied. The researcher did not carry out this study to acquire generalizable results, but rather to seek in-depth explanations and meanings of participants' experiences.

Although they are not limitations of the current study itself, certain unique features of the Ambassadors Program may have greatly impacted the outcomes of the program. As previously mentioned, the Ambassadors Program was carried out in an almost ideal setting. The conference that the Ambassadors Program was created for was specifically focused on university-community partnerships. This speaks to the atmosphere of the conference, the individuals attending the conference, and the moral support that was present for the Program. Additionally, the staff who created and organized the Ambassadors Program are university employees who specialize in community partnerships and research, which undoubtedly informed their approach throughout the entirety of the program.

5.3. Implications for Practice

The results of the study provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of unemployed individuals facing multiple barriers to employment who took part in the Ambassadors Program. The present study highlights the potential value of social connection and community involvement in career development practices. Participant feedback suggests fostering a sense of belonging and connection through community-

based programs may positively affect overall self-concept, while still developing practical skills and gaining knowledge which are currently the focus of most vocational training programs.

The findings also suggest that approaches which are not client-centered may contribute to marginalization, perpetuating feelings of disconnection. Participant feedback indicated that the support individuals received previous to the Ambassadors Program was not collaborative and focused specifically on obtaining employment. As a result, individuals left feeling dissatisfied with their service and disconnected from their employment worker. This is especially problematic given that many of these individuals were already suffering from feelings of isolation and disconnection prior to reaching out for support. The results of the study suggest that highly structured employment services are not serving the needs of unemployed individuals, and an approach that is considerate of clients' social wellbeing is in order.

Drawing from the findings of this study, the following are key recommendations for career-related interventions and support:

1. Improve accessibility to employment supports.
2. Be aware of clients' motives and expectations for accessing support.
3. Provide opportunities for social connection or use community settings which will naturally promote social interaction.
4. Reduce the emphasis on traditional employability skills and focus on general knowledge acquisition and skill development.
5. Be mindful of client needs when selecting and training program delivery staff.

The recommendations below are considerate of the current service delivery model in British Columbia. Changes to program delivery are usually gradual, requiring integration of new approaches over several phases. For this reason, the following recommendations, although informed by the results of the study, are general enough that they could be readily adopted by any service provider including community and government agencies.

Improve accessibility

Offering support that is truly accessible to all individuals enhances feelings of inclusion, trust, and safety required for self-development. Using the Ambassadors Program as an example, the organizers connected with community organizations to recruit participants from marginalized groups because they recognized that the likelihood of these groups independently learning about the program was low. Furthermore, keeping the target population in mind, the requirements for participation in the program were developed accordingly. In other words, the organizers of the program aligned their actions extremely well with the goals of the program and the target population.

A key recommendation drawing from the example of the Ambassadors Program is that unemployment supports should be easily accessible to those who are unemployed. While this suggestion may seem obvious, it is not as straightforward in practice. To begin with, simply making a resource available to all British Columbians does not constitute accessibility. Accessible support goes beyond availability, and should be easily understood and accessible to those its meant to serve. One of the most significant barriers of government-funded programs is that those who are struggling the most are least likely to independently discover resources or self-initiate involvement. A suggestion for a proactive method of inclusion is to reach out to barriered groups, instead of expecting them to navigate a complex system. Examples of this include extending information to community organizations that serve marginalized groups such as new immigrants or homeless individuals, or employing outreach workers to interact with community members directly and create relationships with members of target groups. Provided that an approach such as this results in an increase of diverse clientele, it is vital that programming aligns with the needs of the clients being served. For example, opportunities for work or volunteer experience that have extensive requirements are not useful for people who have no education or training; in fact it may have the opposite effect and lead to feelings of inadequacy. Instead, opportunities for self and skill development regardless of existing abilities can lead to a multitude of positive outcomes, as illustrated by the Ambassadors Program.

Identify client motives and expectations

A second recommendation for practice is inviting individuals to be explicit about their motives and expectations for accessing support. Communicating openly about the

goals of a program and asking participants about their hopes helps to ensure alignment between the participant and service provider, and increases the likelihood of participant satisfaction. Most importantly, it can help limit assumptions made by service providers about what individuals are seeking. For example, participants in this study shared an array of motives and expectations for enrolling in the Ambassadors Program, many of which were not directly related to employment opportunities. Although someone who is unemployed may be seeking practical experience and employment opportunities, he or she may also be seeking connection and personal growth. Understanding the factors that drive individuals to get support can inform changes to services provided to the community, resulting in cycle of ongoing feedback and improvements.

Emphasize social connection

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study was the extraordinary role that social connection played in the overall experience of Ambassadors. Each of the key findings was closely linked to the idea that social connection is fundamental to personal development, which is in turn imperative for career development. For this reason, it is crucial that approaches to career development move away from isolated, structured programming and towards an approach that emphasizes social connection. While it may take time to implement programs such as the Ambassadors Program, there are straightforward ways to incorporate social connection into career-related interventions that are already being offered. The participants of this study pointed out that they felt disconnected from their previous employment workers. It follows that the most basic starting point for social connection would be with an individual's service provider. Moving toward a client-centered approach that encourages openness and honesty is a valuable way to foster connection. Furthermore, supporting individuals in finding opportunities that both connect them with the community and provide space for skill and knowledge acquisition can result in self-growth not necessarily attained from the job-placement model often adopted by agencies.

Broaden the focus on knowledge and skills

Participants shared that much of their previous career-related support centered on areas such as job searching and interview skills or involved job-specific training. Such opportunities can present as attractive to both service providers and clients because they capitalize on the human desire for control and predictability by focusing on

career as being certain and stable; however, they are impractical in a world that is uncertain and complex (Bright & Pryor, 2012). Feedback from participants highlighted the importance of general skills such as communication, time management, conflict resolution, and basic social skills used in personal interactions. Gaining and using these skills seems to be what contributed to individuals improved self-efficacy and self-agency. For this reason, it may be important to create a more balanced approach to service delivery which also places value on general transferable skills. By doing so, individuals develop skills that better serve them in a labour market that requires adaptability and resilience (Pryor & Bright, 2019).

Select and train suitable program delivery staff

Service providers are vital to the success of any program. Without staff who are knowledgeable and well-equipped to meet the goals of service delivery, clients can not be well-supported. The success of the Ambassadors Program could be at least in part attributed to the knowledge and experience of the organizers and support staff. The individuals involved in leadership roles and supporting roles were all experienced in university-community partnerships, providing guidance, and coordinating large community events, and demonstrated clear communication, authenticity, and respect. While these were the skills required for success in this setting, each program warrants an evaluation of what characteristics are most important for its leaders. It is important for service providers to match the skillset of staff to the needs of clients. For example, although interpersonal skills are essential for all career-related support, a higher level of specific skills may be required to provide support to certain populations (e.g. experience communicating with new immigrants). Two effective ways of evaluating the most important characteristics of service providers is by asking clients for feedback on their experience, as was done in the Ambassadors Program, and by asking individuals before they receive any services. Both methods can contribute to the ongoing improvement of service delivery.

After identifying the skills and qualifications required for a position, it may be necessary to train staff. For example, according to the participants of this study, client-centered services, social-emotional awareness, and respectful leadership all contributed to a favourable perception of the program staff and overall positive social experience. In many cases, employees are assumed to have these types of skills if they work in a

helping profession; however, training and education can vary greatly and be affected by years of personal experience in the field. Therefore, centralized training is not only a useful approach to program delivery but is likely feasible in most settings.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

While there is a great deal of career literature focusing on the importance of social connection, there is very little practical research that explores the effects of social connection in career-related program delivery. While this research aimed to provide some insight on this topic, there is abundant room for progress.

The most obvious recommendation for research results from an unexpected finding of this study – assessing the shortcomings of current career-development programs in British Columbia. Much of the research conducted by the provincial government assesses the current programming using quantitative factors such as employment attainment rates, rather than asking questions about what is missing for clients. Research investigating the expectations of those accessing career-related services would provide insight into how to meet the needs of unemployed individuals, and ultimately how to improve service delivery in the province.

As participants shared that a heightened sense of connection, belonging, and community involvement were key to their overall positive experience in the Ambassadors Program, it could be beneficial to pay particular attention when evaluating career-development supports. The researcher is not aware of any studies that examine how current programs contribute to social wellbeing. Based on the feedback received from the Ambassadors who attended WorkBC, the researcher would hypothesize that individuals' needs for social connection are not currently being met in such settings. This presents two paths for future research: Determine whether clients in employment transition programs such as WorkBC have an interest in attending programs that are connections-based and evaluate the experience of individuals who are provided the opportunity to gain experience in community programs that adopt a similar model to the Ambassadors Program.

Provided the beneficial outcomes for both the participants in this study and the university who benefitted from the Ambassadors' service, it is hard to ignore the potential

for such opportunities to be readily available in university settings. Although it is not realistic for universities to be the sole setting for community-based approaches to career-development, the findings suggest that they may be an incredibly useful place to start. First, universities often hold events that require volunteers which provides a setting for regular, ongoing program delivery. Furthermore, as pointed out by the Ambassadors, volunteering at a university felt like an esteemed experience, and presents well on resumes for prospective employers. Additionally, universities have the resources required to carry out effective programming such as knowledgeable staff and community relations. Most importantly, universities have the capacity to carry out community-based research to assess whether a program is effective. Consequently, a university presents as the ideal place for inception of innovative approaches such as the Ambassadors Program, which can then be expanded to other settings based on data and evidence attained from participant experience.

5.5. Conclusion

This study began with a curiosity about how social connection might play a role in the career development of marginalized people. The research aimed to understand the experience of individuals participating in the Ambassadors Program, with a particular focus on self-concept, sense of connection, sense of future, and knowledge and skills. Although there are limitations to the current study, the findings contribute valuable knowledge to the field of career development and provide directions for further inquiry. In particular, the findings confirm that those who are unemployed are seeking social connection which is not being satisfied by the current programming available to them. Moreover, the results displayed how an increased focus on social connection can lead to several benefits such as improved self-efficacy, self-agency, and feelings of belonging, while still attaining knowledge and skills. With these outcomes in mind, both policymakers and counsellors have reason to consider how they may improve services to individuals seeking employment support.

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Appendix A.

Recruitment Partner Information



C²U EXPO 2017
FOR THE COMMON GOOD

Hosted by:
SFU
& its community partners

 **AMBASSADORS PROGRAM**

CONFERENCE DESCRIPTION

C²U Expo is a bi-annual conference that looks at how universities, colleges and communities work together for the common good. This will be an amazing conference experience that will celebrate community/ campus partnerships while also exploring challenges and opportunities as we move past Canada's 150th birthday. C²U Expo will also foster networking within and between divergent communities, post-secondary institutions, philanthropists, foundations and government partners. The event will take place in Surrey and Vancouver between May 1-5th 2017, and is expected to attract 500 delegates from Canada, the US and around the world.

Pre-Conference - Community Jam	Main Conference – Walk the Talk
May 1st -2nd, 2017 SFU's Surrey Campus	May 3rd – 5th, 2017 SFU's Vancouver Campus
This fun, interactive two-day learning exchange is focused on creating a lasting legacy among communities and campuses building smart and caring communities that respect our 10,000 years of traditions. The Community Jam is the pre-conference portion of C ² U Expo 2017	When you join us at C ² U Expo you will get a chance to move around and explore various SFU buildings, and engage in local site visits! Each day will start with a mingling breakfast followed by a morning keynote or plenary. You will "pick your path" and choose from a variety of workshops, presentations, and site visits as you move through SFU's downtown campus.

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AMBASSADORS PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

To authentically walk the talk of community engagement, C²UExpo 2017 has built community capacity building into the design of the conference through the Community Ambassadors (CAs) program. About 10% of the overall budget has been earmarked for this program.

Approximately 50 CA's will be recruited to provide support in a variety of roles during the conference. Community Ambassadors will be individuals who experience barriers to employment. Examples of barriers to employment may include (but are not limited to):

- Age
- Disabilities
- Disadvantaged background
- Aboriginal Peoples
- Newcomers to Canada
- Individuals on Employment Insurance or who are Underemployed
- Physical or mental health challenges
- History of drug/alcohol abuse
- Housing issues or homelessness
- Lack of education
- Lack of skills/training
- Illiteracy
- Little or no work history

PROGRAM GOALS

- To model an inclusive hiring approach by actively recruiting people facing a variety of barriers to employment
- To offer a high quality employment training and event experience that builds capacity for community members
- To offer a fair and living wage honorarium based on hours of service
- To fill essential and important roles for the success of C²UExpo with capable and competent individuals
- To re-connect with the Ambassadors post-conference to assess the impact of their experience

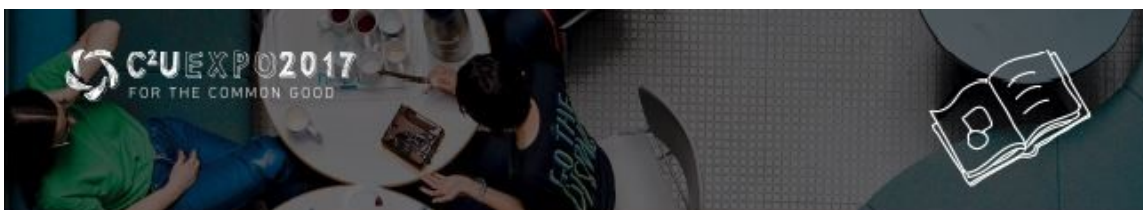
DETAILS

Community Ambassadors will fill a variety of roles such as volunteer coordination, logistical support, media, communication, documentation, facilitation and more. Please see attached Job Description with further details on roles and duties.

Preference will be given to Surrey residents for shifts at the pre-conference in Surrey, and preference will be given to Burnaby and Vancouver residents at the main conference in Vancouver.

***NOTE: We welcome support workers to be on site with ambassadors during the conference.**





Time Requirements

Ambassadors will be required to commit to at least two 5-hour shifts (ie. minimum 10 hours) but may commit to up to 40 hours throughout the conference. Timing of shifts can be found on the Job Description. Ambassadors must also commit to up to two full days of training which will also be paid.

Benefits

- Experience, networking and skill building
- Ambassadors will be compensated with an honorarium based on a living wage of \$20.64 per hour
- A daily meal per diem will be provided for those working a full day
- Public Transit fare will be available to compensate for transportation costs
- Ambassadors may have the chance to attend conference sessions before or after their shifts on the days they are working (subject to availability and capacity of sessions)

RECRUITMENT PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITY

As a non-profit organization offering employment programs in your community, we look forward to working with you to recruit Ambassadors for the program! As a Recruitment Partner, we ask for help with the following:

- Identify a pre-determined number of individuals whom you think would be a good fit for the Ambassadors program (we will let you know how many we are looking for)
- Connect with those individuals to gauge their interest and capacity to take on a role as an Ambassador
- Work with those individuals to determine which role(s) they would be a good fit for
- Determine the availability of the individuals and fill out the shift availability schedule and referral form for each candidate
- Send us your list of candidates and we will follow up with them individually for next steps

DETAILS

Part 1

- Read the contents of this package and let us know if you are interested in coming on board as a Recruitment Partner by January 20th, 2017.

Part 2

- We will send you the collaboration details, interview and selection criteria, referral and schedule forms and let you know how many ambassadors you can recruit by January 27th, 2017.
- We ask that you recruit, select and send us your list of candidates by February 24th, 2017.
- If more candidates are needed to fill certain roles, we may connect back with you in early March with these specific opportunities.



Part 3

- We will finalize the schedule of candidates by April 7th, 2017 and connect with them about training and orientation, and next steps in the employment process.
 - Training and Orientation will take place in both Surrey and Vancouver (details TBD)
 - Training and Orientation will take place between April 18th – 28th (details TBD)
 - Ambassadors will be paid to take part in the training which will be approximately 2 days in length

***PLEASE NOTE:** We have limited positions available for ambassadors, therefore we will work with organizations for recruitment on a first come, first serve basis.

Ambassadors recruited by your organization will be guaranteed a paid work opportunity to participate in the training (approximately 2 days). The committee will schedule people in for shifts based on needs of the conference and the availability and interests of ambassadors.

RISK MANAGEMENT




While we welcome candidates who may have a criminal record, we will need to limit our search to candidates who are not considered a risk to vulnerable populations, as ambassadors may be working with minors or other individuals considered to be vulnerable. If you have any concerns with any of the candidates that are recommended, we ask that you disclose the information immediately.

THANK YOU!

We appreciate your collaboration with us on this exciting opportunity!

Appendix B.

Ambassador Role Descriptions



ROLES

Logistical Roles

Logistical roles relate to the “nuts and bolts” of running the event. These roles make sure that the event is organized and running smoothly.

Volunteer Coordinators

Volunteer Coordinators will be responsible for overseeing and coordinating volunteers during the conference. Duties may include (but are not limited to):

- staffing the volunteer room to greet and sign in volunteers,
- dispatch volunteers,
- give direction and be a point person for volunteer questions,
- oversee the team leaders (description below),
- troubleshoot any issues that come up,
- and connect with the conference organizers to ensure all issues are addressed appropriately.

Volunteer coordinators may also be asked to greet exhibitors and important guests (such as Elders and dignitaries) and provide them with any assistance that they might need.

Team Leaders

Team Leaders will be responsible for managing and coordinating a team of volunteers in specific conference support areas. The team leaders will be required to understand the needs of their designated area and ensure there are enough volunteers. They will be required to greet the volunteers and assign roles and tasks accordingly. Duties may include (but are not limited to):

- keep track of volunteer attendance,
- ensure volunteers stay on task, troubleshoot as issues come up,
- help the volunteers with tasks as needed,
- re-assign volunteers as needed and
- connect with the Volunteer Coordinators for escalated issues that may arise.

Team leaders will be needed to support a variety of conference areas. Areas may include (but are not limited to):

• Set-up and take-down	• Audio Visual
• Welcome Centre (registration and greeting)	• Conference and Media Hub
• Exhibitor Centre	• Community Dinner & Gala
• Transportation	
• Session Assistants	
• Ushers	



Logistics Generalist

Logistics Generalists will be asked to be familiar with and knowledgeable about all of the above roles to provide support where needed during the conference. These ambassadors will be given high level training in each role to allow them to step in where needed throughout the conference. Duties may include (but are not limited to):

- Filling the role of a team leader (above)
- Filling the role of a volunteer coordinator (above)
- Floating between team leader areas and volunteer central to provide extra support

*The positions in this role will be filled after we have met capacity for volunteer and team leader roles.

Facilitation and Documentation Roles

Facilitation and Documentation Roles support the learning, sharing of ideas, and conversations that are an important outcome of the event.

Conference Witnesses

Conference Witnesses will be asked to attend conference sessions, be present and engaged during the sessions, record the messages in heart and mind, carry and share the message with friends, neighbours and community members, and document reflections from the conference. Reflections can be verbal, or they can be recorded through photos, video, poetry, art – be creative! Think of it like a wedding – you are there to witness, participate and share in the joy by making a speech, taking pictures or video or sharing your thoughts and feelings in other ways. Duties may include (but are not limited to):

- Attending conference sessions and recording thoughts and feelings
- Providing a verbal testimony of your experience
- Taking photos or video and sharing them through your social networks
- Using other creative methods like poetry or art to express your experience at the conference

Cohort Host

Cohort Hosts will be assigned to a group of conference delegates to help guide them through the conference, and facilitate dialogue.

Duties may include (but are not limited to):

- Being available to your group of delegates throughout the conference to provide support where needed.
- Answering a range of questions from your group of delegates and direct them appropriately.
- Facilitating short dialogue sessions with your group of delegates at different points throughout the conference to debrief and uncover key reflections and thoughts from the sessions.

Media, Communications and Documentation

Media, Communications and Documentation ambassadors will get to be creative! These ambassadors will help with taking photos and creating video content, posting on social media, interviewing delegates and documenting reflections of delegates from the sessions. Videos, photos and interviews may be shared on the C2UExpo 2017 website.



Table Facilitator (for Salon Dinners)

Table Facilitators will be asked to facilitate a dialogue during the "Salon Dinner" on Thursday May 4th (details to come).

Other Roles

Do you have skills or interests that you would like to develop or focus on that you don't see on the above list? Let us know, and we will work with you to try and find a role that will be of most benefit to you.

LOCATION

C²UExpo 2017 will be held from May 1-5th 2017 in Surrey and Vancouver. The Community Jam (May 1st-2nd) will be held at the SFU Surrey Campus (13450 102 Avenue, Surrey), and the rest of main conference (May 3rd-5th) will be held in Vancouver, predominantly at the SFU Vancouver Campus in Harbour Centre (515 West Hastings, Vancouver). Some activities and events in Vancouver will be held off-campus, details on locations to come.

REQUIREMENTS

Ambassadors will need to bring the following competencies:

Logistical Roles

We are looking for people who are natural organizers and problem solvers! If you love to work with others, are interested in volunteer management, are detail oriented and have the ability to stay calm in a high energy and fast paced environment, a logistical role may be for you!

- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Excellent organizational skills
- High degree of professionalism
- Ability to problem solve and be resourceful in a fast-paced environment
- Positive attitude and ability to motivate others
- Ability to work well in a team environment
- Punctual and dependable
- Respectful, friendly, motivated and compassionate

Facilitation and Documentation Roles

We are looking for people who are naturally inquisitive, creative and curious! If you enjoy listening, asking questions, creating space for deep conversation, sharing your thoughts with others and/or are interested in digital media and journalism, a facilitation and documentation role may be for you!

- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills
- Strong writing skills
- Ability to work independently and in a team environment
- Ability to facilitate discussions (or willingness to learn)
- Experience using Social Media outlets an asset

- Some experience or high interest in photography or videography an asset (for Media and Communications Role)
- Positive attitude and ability to interact comfortably with unfamiliar people
- Punctual and dependable
- Respectful, friendly, motivated and compassionate

BENEFITS

C²UExpo is a fantastic opportunity to develop your skills in a variety of areas including logistics, volunteer management, dialogue facilitation, communication, digital media, photography, journalism, videography, and much more!

- Develop your employability skills
- Gain experience and learn new skills
- Meet new people from a variety of organizations and backgrounds
- Networking opportunities to further your own personal and professional development
- Be an integral part of an international conference hosted at a large and reputable post-secondary institution
- Great experience for your resume!
- Reference letter provided upon request

TIME REQUIREMENTS

Ambassadors will be required to commit to at least two 5-hour shifts (ie. minimum 10 hours) but may commit to up to 40 hours throughout the conference. The available shifts are as follows:

Monday (May 1 st)	Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday (May 2 nd , 3 rd and 4 th)	Friday (May 5 th)
7:30am-12:30pm	7:30am-12:30pm	7:30am – 12:30pm
12:00pm-5:00pm	12:00pm-5:30pm	12:00pm-3:00pm
	5:00pm-9:30pm	

IMPORTANT DATES

Ambassadors will be required to attend one or more training sessions before the conference. Details on training will be provided closer to the date.

HONORARIUM

Ambassadors will receive an honorarium of approximately \$100 per day and up to a maximum of \$800 for participation in the full conference.

MEALS

A daily meal per diem will be provided for those working a full day.

Appendix C.

Stage One Interview Questions

Stage One Interview Guide

Part I: General Framing of the Experience

1. How would you describe your experience as an Ambassador in the C2U Expo?
2. What have you been doing since the C2U Expo finished?
3. What, for you, was the best thing about being an Ambassador?
4. What, if anything, would you have liked to have gone better or differently?

Part II: Self-Concept and Self-Identity

5. I am interested in understanding how you might have changed as a result of being a part of the Ambassador Program. What changes, if any, have you noticed?

Possible follow-up questions:

- 5.1. How would you describe your confidence before the Ambassadors program, and now?
- 5.2. How would you describe your level of belief in yourself before the Ambassadors program, and now?

Part III: Sense of Connection

6. What changes, if any, have you noticed about how you think about your community?

Possible follow-up questions:

- 6.1. Do you feel like you are a part of your community? Why or why not? Has that changed for you since being a part of the Ambassador program?

Part IV: Sense of Future

7. What does your future look like to you now? Has that changed at all since you were an Ambassador? If so, how?
8. What is an example of something you learned from your Ambassador experience that you either have used already or can see yourself using? Are there other examples?
9. Is there anything else that would be meaningful for you to share or discuss in regards your experience before, after, or during your Ambassador experience?

It is expected that through discussion of the questions above, the discussion of knowledge, skills, and abilities developed, if any, will arise.

Appendix D.

Stage Two Interview Questions

Stage Two Interview Guide

Part I: Additional Information

Participants will be invited to share any thoughts or developments that occurred since the last interview:

1. It has been about three months since we last met, I'm wondering how the first interview experience was for you? Did you find yourself reflecting on the content of our conversation after our interview? Do you have any additional thoughts or developments that you would like to share?
2. Were there any significant changes in your life since we last met, that you believe may be related to your Ambassadors experience?

Part II: Validation

Participants will be asked to validate the data, concepts, and themes from the first interview.

3. After all participants were interviewed for the first interview, I transcribed all of the audio recordings. I am going to go over a summary of our conversation and then share some themes I found from your responses. Please feel free to stop me at any time to expand, clarify, or correct the information. Also, how you answered in our first interview, may be different than how you would answer now. If there are any differences, please let me know.

Part III: Sharing General Themes

Participants will be asked to comment on themes which emerged from other interviews. After sharing each theme and a brief description I will ask the following question:

4. Do you have any thoughts relating to these themes?