

A report prepared for the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA)

Career Pathways of Canadian Sociology Graduates

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Executive Summary

This report presents the results of an online survey conducted in Fall 2020 to capture the education and labour market experiences of graduates from Sociology MA and PhD graduates in Canada over the last ten years. The survey yielded a nonprobability sample of 225 respondents, all of whom graduated from a Sociology PhD or MA program at a Canadian post-secondary institution between 2009-2020. The survey, commissioned by the Canadian Sociological Association and conducted by Dr. Karen Foster and PhD research assistant Alyssa Gerhardt, collected a combination of both quantitative and qualitative responses related to career aspirations, current employment, and perceptions of Sociology graduate programs and the graduate experience in preparing graduates for the labour market.

The context for the survey is an academic labour market characterized by a diminishing proportion of tenure track jobs relative to contract positions, an entire economy rattled by the COVID19 pandemic, and a widely-shared but questionable perception that universities are minting too many MAs and PhDs. Extant research supports the assumption that most PhD graduates will not end up in tenure track jobs, but also shows that people who seek MA and PhD degrees do not necessarily aspire to teach at universities and end up in a range of fulfilling careers. Little is known about how the specific characteristics of graduate programs (quality of supervision, courses offered) and graduate students themselves (publishing, employment during graduate school) actually help or hinder graduates on the labour market, particularly in Canadian Sociology. This survey sheds some light on such questions. Its main findings are summarized next.

PhD aspirations: 70% of PhD graduates had strongly *aspired* to work in academia at the time of program enrollment, but only 36% believed it was likely to happen.

MA aspirations: 35% of MA graduates had a strong aspiration to work in academia when they first enrolled, but just 18% felt strongly that they would find such a career.

Perceptions of academia: At the time of the survey, less than one-quarter of all respondents aspired to a tenure track job. In open-ended responses, respondents who stopped wanting a tenure-track job explained that their chances on the academic job market simply were not high enough, and/or that they perceived academia to be a 'toxic' career environment. A smaller but still substantial proportion indicated they had developed new interests and become aware of attractive non-academic paths.

Methods specialization: PhD and MA graduates were more likely to specialize in qualitative or mixed methods; just less than one in five specialized in quantitative methods. Interestingly, those who specialized in quantitative methods tended to explain in open-ended questions that they believed they were better prepared for the labour market, and many who specialized in qualitative methods perceived quantitative methods skills to be more in-demand by employers.

Publishing: Almost all PhD graduates (94%) had some type of peer reviewed publication upon completion of their program, compared to one third of MA graduates.

Labour market preparation: Most PhD graduates said their program prepared them well for the labour market (61%), but a minority (37%) of MA graduates said the same.

Value of degree: Over half of respondents believed Canadian programs were producing too many graduates, but a large majority believed *their* degree helped them get a job, found it personally fulfilling, and would do it over again if they could.

Good programs: Positive experiences in and after graduate school centre on supportive supervisors and strong mentorship from other faculty, and access to skills training (e.g. research assistantships, workshops).

Inclusion and diversity: Gender and race come to the foreground in both quantitative and qualitative data as affecting respondents' experiences, perceptions and career outcomes. Women and racial minorities were less likely to be in tenure-track positions, racialized people were less likely to have found employment at all, women reported more conflicts between the demands of work and school and family responsibilities, and racialized respondents described experiences of marginalization and racism in their education and careers.

Labour market experiences: Most respondents limited themselves to a specific region or several places in Canada when looking for a job, and most found a satisfactory job within two years of graduating.

Career outcomes: One quarter of respondents held a tenure-track university job at the time of the survey, and a further one-fifth worked in the post-secondary education sector in another type of position (e.g. administrative, non-tenure track). Most respondents held full-time, salaried jobs by the time of the survey, and—predictably—PhD graduates were more likely than MA graduates to be full-time, salaried, high-income earners.

Good jobs: Over half of the employed respondents viewed their current job as a life-long career, and most were satisfied with most aspects of their jobs.

Sociology skills: 71% saw their current job as related to their degree(s), and almost half (49%) of respondents reported they used the skills from their graduate education every day, and a further quarter said they used them often.

The findings from this nonprobability sample *suggest* directions for future research: first, there is good reason to look into the experiences of racialized people and women (especially mothers) in and after Sociology graduate programs, as their experiences and career outcomes appear to be different. Second, the apparent link between research methods specialization and labour market preparation, experiences and outcomes should be investigated further, with students as well as employers. Relatedly, work should be done to further unpack, test, and address the perception that there are 'too many graduates', as these results suggest MA and PhD graduates tend to find fulfilling, decent jobs that use their skills after graduation. Third, there is some evidence here of a shared understanding of what makes supervision and mentorship *good*, and further research and consultation could yield a set of best practices to ensure a diversity of students are supported in their programs and prepared for what comes next.

Introduction

For decades, there has been pressure to increase graduate enrolments in Canadian Sociology programs. At the same time, there is a diminishing proportion of tenure track university faculty positions in the discipline. Therefore, there is a perception that there are too many graduate students being minted in Sociology—and many other programs, particularly in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences—who will face increasingly limited job prospects and increasingly precarious employment in non-tenure track positions. By now, most people are familiar with the stereotype of the PhD-holding barista.

The evidence to support such perceptions is mixed. On the one hand, two recent reports confirmed the increasing reliance on contract academic staff (CAS) across Canada (Shaker and Pasma, 2018), and warned of the “discouraging, demoralizing precarity” experienced by many CAS (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018: 4). Contract positions account for over half of all university appointments in the country (Shaker and Pasma, 2018: 5) and, as both reports noted, are disproportionately filled by racialized people and women, who furthermore reported more precarious and negative working conditions than others (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018). Most CAS are in jobs “characterized by income insecurity, exclusion from career development, and unrecognized and unremunerated contributions” (Foster and Birdsell Bauer 2018: 5). In this regard,

the academic labour market that awaits new graduates of Sociology PhD and MA programs is bad, and getting worse.

But the pathway from graduate education to tenure track jobs has never been universal, nor is it the only one available or appealing to graduate students in Sociology (or any other graduate degree under similar scrutiny). Statistics Canada data on career outcomes shows that those with PhDs in particular do well in terms of income and employment. Their comparatively modest incomes two years after graduation grow faster, and by five years after graduation they tend to make more than people with lower levels of education.¹ Indeed, most Canadian evidence suggests that PhD graduates have strong employment outcomes (Edge and Munro 2015; Ferguson and Wang 2014), as do graduates internationally, for example, in Australia (Neuman and Tan 2011), the United Kingdom (Purcell et al. 2005), Italy (Passaretta, Trivellato and Triventi 2019), and the United States (Nerard et al. 2012). In addition to the racial differences noted above, there are important gender differences too, with women, unsurprisingly, disadvantaged in most ways. Although women have been found to be more likely to work in academia after earning a PhD (Jonker, 2016) they are less likely to be tenured professors and more likely to make career sacrifices for their families (Nerard et al., 2012:13-14; Oleschuk, 2020).

¹ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2019031-eng.htm>. Cf. Nerard et al. (2012:12).

In any case, it is commonly assumed that people do PhDs with the objective of becoming professors. In Canada and the United States, a large proportion of PhD students in all fields do aspire to obtain full-time academic employment upon completion of their degree, with the majority aspiring to work in a full-time professor position (Etmanski, Walters and Zarifa 2017: 161-162; Etmanski 2019: 347; Nerard et al. 2012: 12). Drawing on Statistics Canada's National Graduate Survey (NGS) 2013, Etmanski et al. (2017) found that aspirations for full-time professor employment were highest for students in the fine arts and humanities (72%), followed by the social sciences (70%), and lower for students in hard science and health disciplines (Etmanski, Walters and Zarifa 2017: 161-162). Yet less than 20% end up in these types of positions (Etmanski et al. 2017; Edge and Munro 2015: 8).

Etmanski (2019) and Nerard et al. (2012) note that PhD students tend to have changing career aspirations over the course of their studies, with many (but not the majority) being "cooled out", deciding by the end of their degrees, or shortly thereafter, they want something different (Etmanski 2019: 354-356). Nerard et al.'s study suggested aspirations change in response to perceptions of, and experiences in, the labour market shortly after graduation; they adjust to reality rather than shifting interests or passions (2012:13). While there is some evidence that institutional prestige affects employment outcomes in Canadian sociology (Nevin, 2019), the connection between prestige and career aspirations is not clear, with some studies finding no link and others finding one (Etmanski, 2017).

Beyond the research above, there is not much linking the experiences in grad school to experiences and outcomes after graduation. The original research presented below was conducted to examine the career pathways and outcomes for graduates of Sociology MA and PhD graduates in Canada, with the objective of informing Canadian sociology programs and the Canadian Sociology Association about graduates' experiences in and after grad school in order to highlight areas of success and areas for improvement. Knowing where graduates go after completing their degrees is important to faculty who supervise graduate students, who should try to offer realistic career advice and help prepare their students for where they might go. It is important to university administrators at all levels, who help determine the courses and resources available to graduate students and faculty. It could help identify industries and employers where advanced Sociological knowledge and methods are in demand, where in some cases neither the employers nor the skill-holders realize the potential.

There is a risk in focusing on career outcomes that university graduate programs might be perceived as factories, churning out people with commodified skills, and narrowing the graduate education experience to one of training. That is not the intent of this report. The graduate experience should be difficult and uncomfortable at times; the pursuit and expansion of knowledge, the identification of inequalities, oppressions, and misconceptions, and the refinement of challenges to orthodox thinking, remain the goals of a Sociology graduate education. Graduate students are not just workers-in-training,

but citizens honing their critical thinking skills and learning how to act with agency in the world, often on behalf of others who do not have access to the same resources. But there is no disputing the fact that graduates eventually have to find employment, and our programs do them a great disservice if they operate as if all students can, and want to, land on the tenure track—or worse, if they do not think about employment at all. We live in a world where, for most adults, employment is survival.

Through a survey conducted in Fall 2020, in the midst of the COVID19 pandemic, we find that respondents' career aspirations at the beginning of and during their programs, as well as the career outcomes for those who are in the labour market, reflect the variety of career options open to Sociology graduates beyond academia. However, we also find some negative patterns in experiences to which Sociology graduate programs should pay attention, which will be detailed further in the report below. For example, many respondents wished there had been more labour market preparation, career advice, and skills training (particularly in research methods) *as part of their programs*. These are elements that may increasingly be left up to generic university bodies rather than delivered within the discipline, and this appears to be a mistake. Many respondents also perceived academia to be a toxic work environment and felt pushed out of it rather than drawn to other career options. Those who were dissatisfied perceived the university to be an ivory tower, disconnected from the real needs of the world, and sought careers in more applied fields for that reason. There are marked gender and race differences in aspirations, experiences and

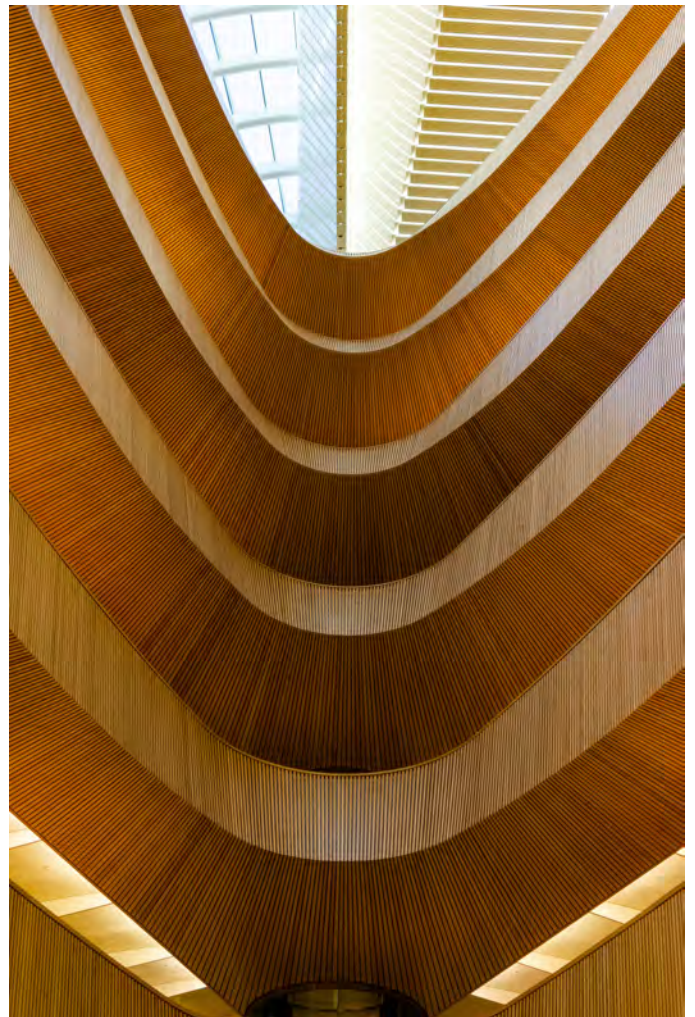
outcomes (albeit not all are statistically significant), and qualitative evidence to suggest that sociology graduate programs are not safe havens from racism and other forms of discrimination and oppression. There are additional intriguing (but not statistically significant) differences between students who specialized in quantitative or mixed methods and those who specialized in qualitative, with the latter facing more labour market challenges and the former feeling better prepared by their programs. There are also differences between MA and PhD experiences, with MA graduates feeling less prepared for the labour market upon graduation. It also appears that the quality of one's supervisor can make or break the program experience, and eventual outcomes. PhD graduates also had better career outcomes overall related to job security and earnings than MA graduates.

Notwithstanding these areas of concern and the need for more research they imply, a slim majority of respondents were satisfied with their programs, believed doing a PhD in Sociology was worth it, and would choose the same degree again if given a chance to start over. Thus, it appears that there is great promise in our discipline and demand for the skills we teach, but there is also work to be done within sociology graduate programs to meet the needs of a diversity of students, to provide more deliberate preparation for work and life experiences outside academia, to connect our research, teaching and training to the "real world" and to ensure that supervisors and programs are supporting their students adequately.

Methodology

This study surveyed people who graduated from Sociology PhD and MA programs at Canadian postsecondary institutions between the years of 2009 and 2020. Respondents were recruited in Fall 2020 through a number of methods including participating institutions' alumni offices and/or sociology departments; communication networks of the Canadian Sociological Association (i.e., email lists, website, and social media); and informal networks at Canadian universities (e.g., graduate student and alumni social media groups). In order to be eligible for the survey, respondents had to have graduated from a Sociology PhD or MA program at a Canadian post-secondary institution between 2009-2020. The survey was in the field for just over six weeks, and at the end, 225 people had completed it (220 in English, 5 in French). The response rate is not known, as we do not know exactly how many graduates were minted from Canadian Sociology MA and PhD programs from 2009-2020, nor do we know how many were on their institutions' mailing lists. The survey collected a combination of both quantitative and qualitative responses related to career aspirations, current employment, and perceptions of Sociology graduate programs and the graduate experience in preparing graduates for the labour market.

There are a number of limitations of this research. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly compromised recruitment and the response rate; we got just under half of the responses we hoped for. It delayed the launch of the survey and slowed down



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Knowing where graduates go after completing their degrees is important to faculty who supervise graduate students, who should try to offer realistic career advice and help prepare their students for where they might go.

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the response from universities who helped distribute the survey link.

There is a glut of surveys, especially online surveys, demanding Canadians' attention and participation as in-person research moves online. Because the main recruitment method was via alumni offices and Sociology departments, the completeness of the sampling frame varies by institution depending on the completeness of their contact lists. Sharing on social media was a way to reach those who may not have been receiving communications from their alma mater, but it meant a loss of control over distribution. One bias both of these methods introduced was a skew toward more recent graduates, who are more likely to be on social media and more likely to still be receiving a newsletter from their school or department (i.e., less likely to have a new email address). While most departments and alumni offices were supportive, some had policies against external email that needed to be negotiated. This highlights the importance of departments maintaining lists of graduates. Any department could take the survey and adapt it to their own programs, and use it to survey their graduates in future if they keep good lists.

The research ethics process was also one of the most labour-intensive aspects of this work, for what is most certainly a minimal risk study. Some REBs had streamlined processes for anonymous online surveys approved at other institutions, but others put the study through a delegated review and requested institution-specific changes that do not

work for a nationwide survey, such as putting recruitment material on their university letterhead. The fact that some of the intriguing correlations in the data below are strong but not significant, mostly due to the sample size, suggests a need for future research—ideally a project that begins with the development of a robust sampling frame of current graduate students in the near future, with a survey set for five or more years later to follow their pathways after graduation.

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Graduate students are not just workers-in-training, but citizens honing their critical thinking skills and learning how to act with agency in the world, often on behalf of others who do not have access to the same resources. But there is no disputing the fact that graduates eventually have to find employment, and our programs do them a great disservice if they operate as if all students can, and want to, land on the tenure track—or worse, if they do not think about employment at all. We live in a world where, for most adults, employment is survival.

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Findings

Profile of Respondents

The majority of respondents (60%) who completed the survey graduated with an MA in Sociology, 16% graduated with a PhD in Sociology, and 24% graduated with both an MA and PhD in Sociology (Table 1). Of those who reported an MA only, just over one quarter were currently in a PhD program, and most of them were studying sociology in a Canadian post-secondary institution.

Table 1

Degrees Completed at Canadian University	
Both MA & PhD	24%
PhD Sociology	16%
MA Sociology	60%
n=225	

There were graduates represented in every year between 2009 and 2020, with some variation. Tables showing these results are included in Appendices A and B. Survey respondents reported graduating from a number of institutions across the country, and most Canadian post-secondary institutions were represented in the survey (see Appendix C). However, there were sizeable concentrations of survey respondents who graduated with their PhDs from the University of Toronto (18%), Carleton University (11%) and the University of Alberta (10%). Again, this could be a result of the methods of recruitment, as some institutions took on a more active role in recruiting their graduates. It also somewhat reflects the size of those departments. Similarly, while many postsecondary institutions were represented by

survey respondents who graduated with an MA in Sociology (see Appendix D), there were larger concentrations of graduates from Western University (12%) and Carleton University (10%). Of the Sociology PhD graduates, 70% reported that they had graduated from a U15 Research University in Canada. Given the size and variation in the sample, it is not possible to generate meaningful, reliable institutional comparisons.

Academic Pathways

As mentioned above, of the respondents who graduated with an MA in Sociology, just over a quarter indicated they were currently enrolled in a PhD program at the time of the survey— with most currently studying at a Canadian institution. The majority of respondents currently enrolled (80%) indicated they were in a Sociology PhD program. If these results are representative of all graduate students, it suggests people who begin in Sociology MAs tend to stay in Sociology for their PhDs. Almost half of the PhD Sociology graduates (48%) in the sample said they had held a postdoctoral fellowship after their degree, whether it was completed at the time of the survey or ongoing.

Aspirations

Respondents were asked about their aspirations to work in academia at the time of enrollment—that is, the beginning of their degrees—in their PhD or MA program (Table 2). The majority of PhD graduates had strongly aspired to work in academia when they first enrolled (70%); less than five percent (4%) had no such aspirations. The responses of MA Sociology

graduates showed greater variation across categories than those of the PhD graduates. Only 35% had a strong aspiration to work in academia, while 11% did not aspire to work in academia at all.

Table 2

Aspired to Work in Academia at Enrollment - PhD/MA		
	PhD	MA
Not at all	4%	11%
Not very much	9%	19%
Yes, a little	17%	36%
Yes, strongly	70%	35%
n=225		

Academic aspirations aside, the survey also asked respondents to assess their perceived likelihood of finding a job in academia (Table 3) when they first started their programs. While 70% of PhD graduates had strongly aspired to work in academia, only 36% indicated they felt strongly they would find a position in academia when they first enrolled. Only 18% of MA graduates felt strongly that they would find a career in academia, with one third reporting they didn't think it was very likely. The data were analysed to see if the respondent's parents' education levels had an impact on their aspirations and outcomes. Results suggest that those with at least one parent who went to university were more likely to aspire to careers in academia, and to believe they would attain them, but none of the cross-tabulations yielded results that are statistically significant.

Table 3

Think Likely to Find Career in Academia at Enrollment- PhD/MA		
	PhD	MA
Not at all	8%	16%
Not very much	17%	33%
Yes, a little	38%	29%
Yes, strongly	36%	18%
Not applicable	2%	4%
n=225		

To explore whether and how aspirations change over time, respondents were also asked whether they *currently* (i.e., at the time of the survey) aspired to an academic tenure-track appointment. Less than one quarter of all respondents aspired for this type of position (23%). Women in the sample tended to be less likely to aspire to a career in academia, during or after their studies, but these results were not statistically significant.

To gain a deeper understanding, and inspired by the research on changing aspirations mentioned earlier, respondents were asked in open-ended questions about whether their career aspirations had changed during the course of their graduate studies, and why. More often, if respondents had changing career aspirations, it was because they did not think working in academia was feasible due to challenges of the academic job market: most commonly, precarity, competition, lack of opportunity, and toxic work culture. Those who shifted their career aspirations to positions outside of academia typically mentioned wanting to work in research or government positions (also noted were administrative jobs, NGOs and starting a business). Some respondents saw a disconnect between academia and the community and said this drove them toward a different career path. This was noted by both PhD graduates and MA graduates. The following quotations exemplify stories of those who felt pushed from a toxic, impossible career path.

“Of course, [my aspirations changed]. I was fed a lie by Faculty that with strong publications, teaching experience, and a good attitude I could achieve the tenure track dream. That dream has vanished. So, I’m moving onto to applying to public service positions which I know I’ll hate, or admin positions in other institutions.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“Yes, I kept hearing how a career as a professor was very unlikely given the oversaturation of the market. Stories from colleagues about the lack of jobs available and the fact that most positions were contract/sessional made me feel terrified. I started to reassess what I loved about the PhD and realized that I could be happy in a research position that did not involve teaching. I slowly stopped thinking about becoming a professor.” (PhD, woman, 30s)

“I felt dissuaded and dejected because the prospects seemed so out of reach, despite successfully publishing articles and being an active scholar. To be frank, it seemed so cutthroat and non-meritocratic that I didn’t want to be associated with it anymore.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“Yes. I’ve become quite cynical about academia as I see a huge gap between academia and reality and how neoliberal academic institutions are. It seems to me that the main purpose that a lot of researchers do and publish research is to make themselves more ‘competitive’ and ‘desirable’ in this neoliberal academia but not to transfer their research outcomes into problem-solving, policy changing and community building. Plus, many sociology professors and students are not interested in social activism, which strays from sociological research’s fundamental value.” (MA, man, 20s)

These stories contrast with those of respondents who started their programs without aspirations to stay on an academic career path but decided to pursue academia during their studies. This was much more common in the MA programs than PhDs. Two examples:

“Yes, [my aspirations changed] as I moved through the program and presented at conferences and published with peers, I became even more confident in pursuing a career in academia.” (PhD graduate, man, 40s)

“They changed from completing an MA as an ‘edge’ on my resume to me wanting to pursue a PhD and eventually become a professor” (MA, woman, 20s)

Less common, but still notable responses for changing career aspirations were relational reasons—having children, having a spouse’s career to balance—geographical limitations, difficulty publishing, a change in interest, and discrimination or lack of diversity in academia. Some respondents also noted how universities operating under neoliberal policies and norms resembled businesses and lacked diversity in both thought and representation. The quotations below encapsulate these kinds of responses:

“As a woman of colour who does work on race, I found it difficult to see myself in an academic role due to the lack of women of colour in academic roles as well as not being made to feel welcome in the academy.” (PhD, woman, 30s)

“It was an aspiration that I was aware was unrealistic. I have children and therefore limited geographic mobility, which is a requirement for a career in academia.” (PhD, woman, 40s)

“Yes, my career aspirations changed for a number of reasons. Growing student debt, the responsibilities of motherhood as well as full time, stable career opportunities shifted my career choices.” (MA, woman, 20s)

For those whose aspirations did not change, they were either steadily focused on a specific career in or outside of academia or open to both opportunities during their PhD.

“No. I was determined, hell bent, on becoming a tenured professor. The more time I spent in academia, the more I felt connected to the academic community and drew from it a sense of identity. It was faculty or bust, and, unfortunately, I was a bust.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“I entered my MA largely because I love the learning process. Because I have always loved school, an MA seemed the natural next step for me after my undergrad. My MA just naturally flowed into a PhD and since I love the academic environment, I would ideally like to remain in academia when I am done. I do think I would want to end up in a more teaching-focused institution, as much as I love research, I have found my love of teaching and working with students is strong.” (MA, woman, 20s)

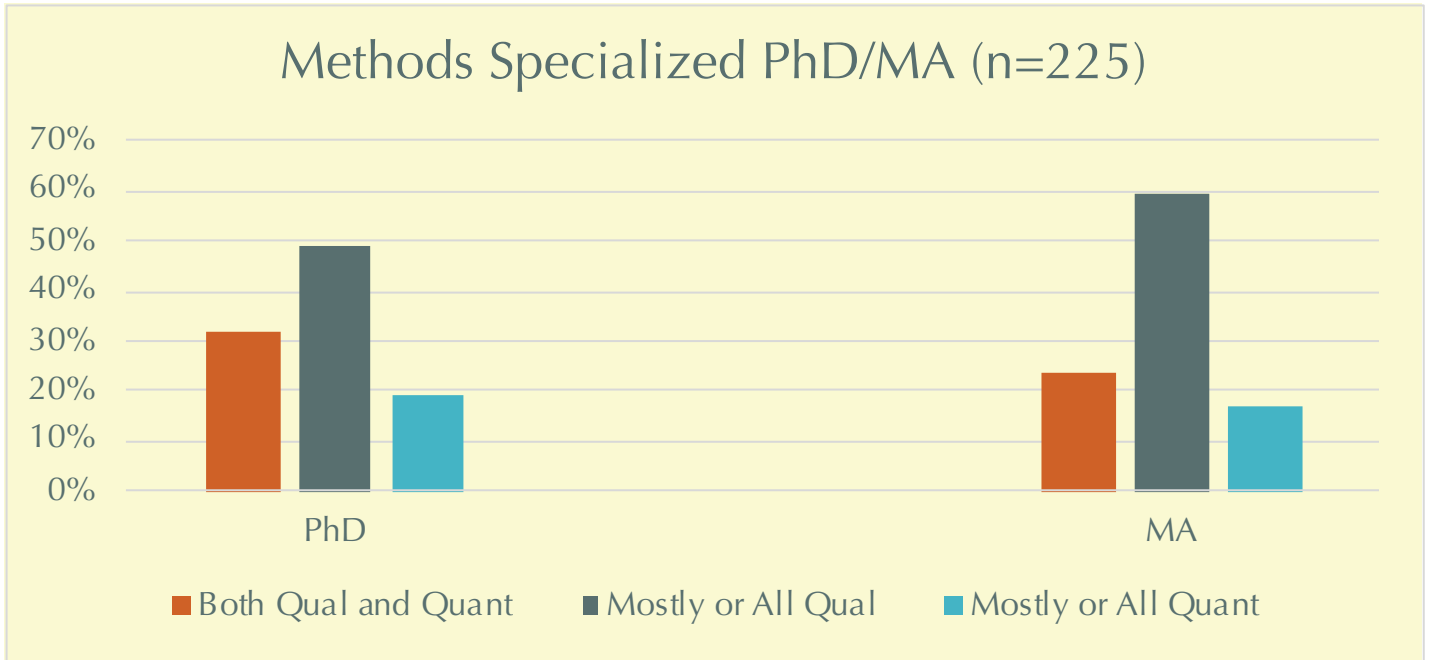
An assumption from the outset of this survey was that experiences during the PhD and MA would be related to career pathways and perceptions. We turn to those experiences now.

Experiences

Anecdotally, there is a perception that certain aspects of Sociology graduate degrees, such as whether or not a conventional thesis is written, or which research methodologies a student specializes in, affect graduates' outcomes on the labour market. When Sociology departments debate introducing an alternative to a conventional thesis (e.g., a 'portfolio' of research papers instead of a single monograph, or a Master's Research Paper), some of the discussion revolves around how these options are valued on the labour market and how they might affect graduates' chances of being accepted into further degree programs. Students often have the perception that quantitative methods training is valued by employers and therefore a strategic option to pursue.

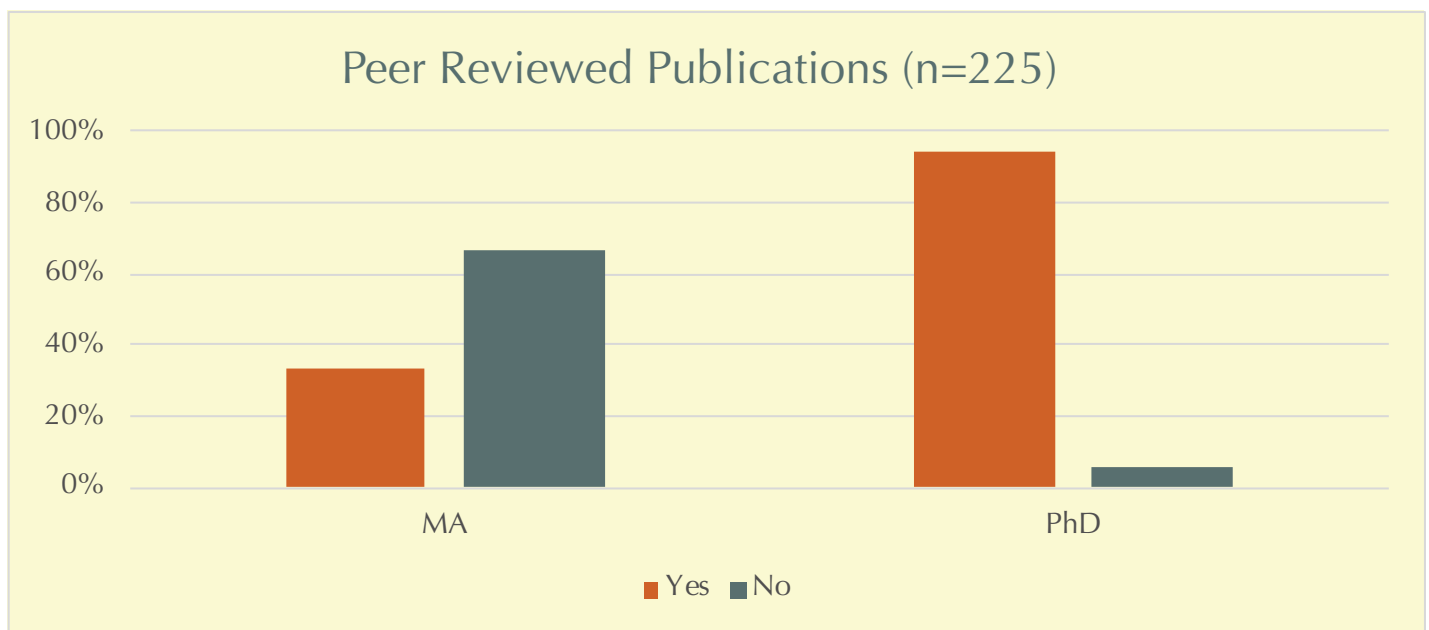
All of the surveyed PhD graduates indicated they wrote a thesis or dissertation as part of the requirement for their PhD program, compared to 68% of MA graduates. Almost half (49%) of PhD graduates reported that they had specialized in qualitative methods during their PhD program, while 19% specialized in quantitative methods and 32% specialized in both qualitative and quantitative. Almost 60% of MA graduates reported they specialized in qualitative methods, with 24% specializing in both methods, and only 17% specialized in quantitative methods (Table 4).

Table 4



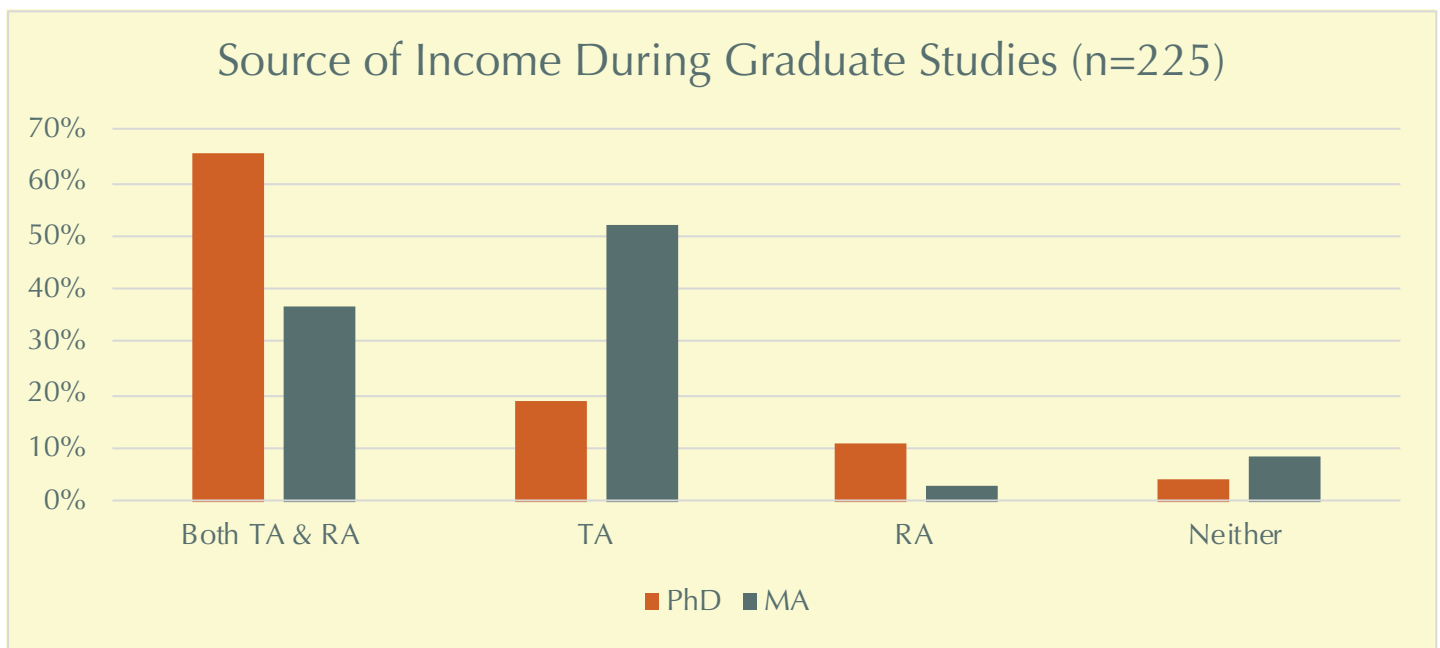
Graduates were also asked about publishing during their graduate programs, as graduates with publications on their CVs are believed to fare better on the academic job market. Almost all PhD graduates (94%) had some type of peer reviewed publication, either as sole author or co-author, upon completion of their program, compared to one third of MA graduates (Table 5).

Table 5



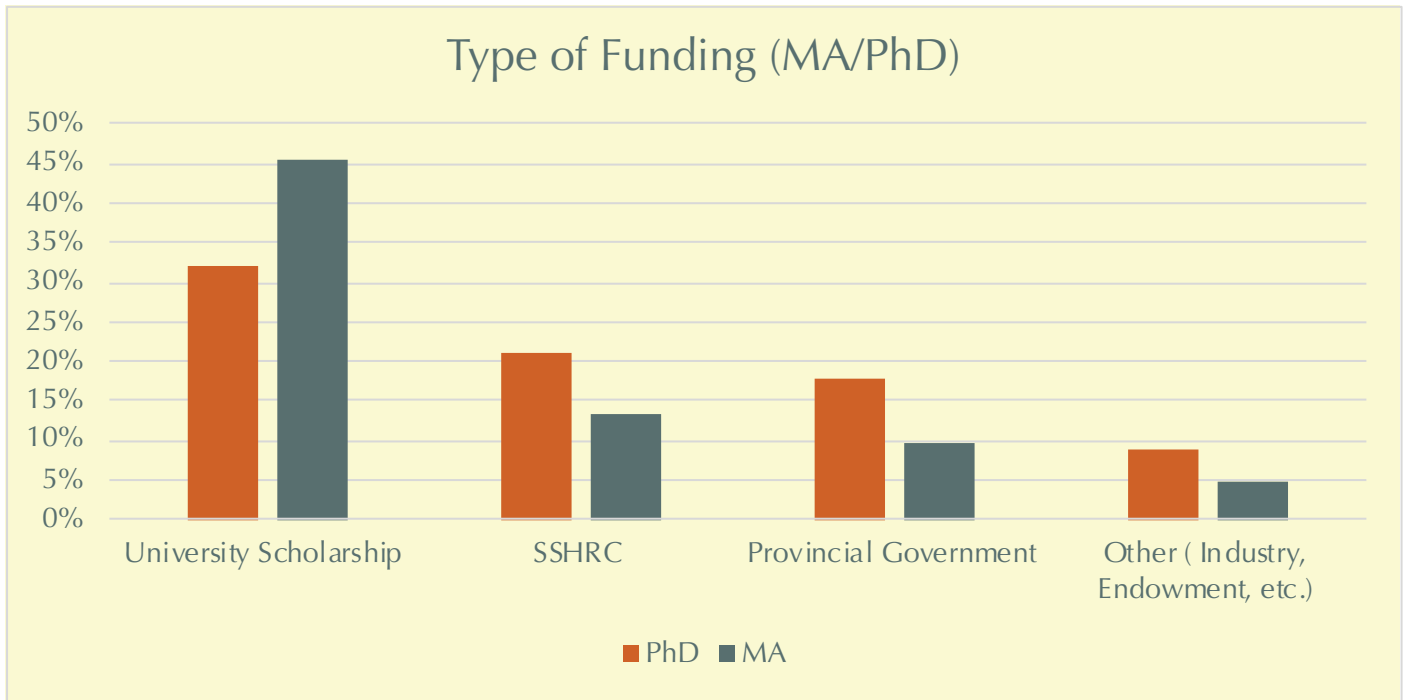
In addition to questions on program requirements, methods specialized, and publications, respondents were asked how they funded their graduate programs. Two thirds of PhD graduates indicated they worked in *both* TA and RA positions during their PhD program (66%), while over half of MA graduates worked in a TA position alone (52%). Small proportions had neither type of job (Table 6). Almost three-quarters of PhD graduates (71%) reported working as a course instructor during their program compared to 3% of MA graduates. Over half of MA graduates also reported working in “other employment” outside of their academic program during their studies (56%) compared to 40% of PhD students.

Table 6



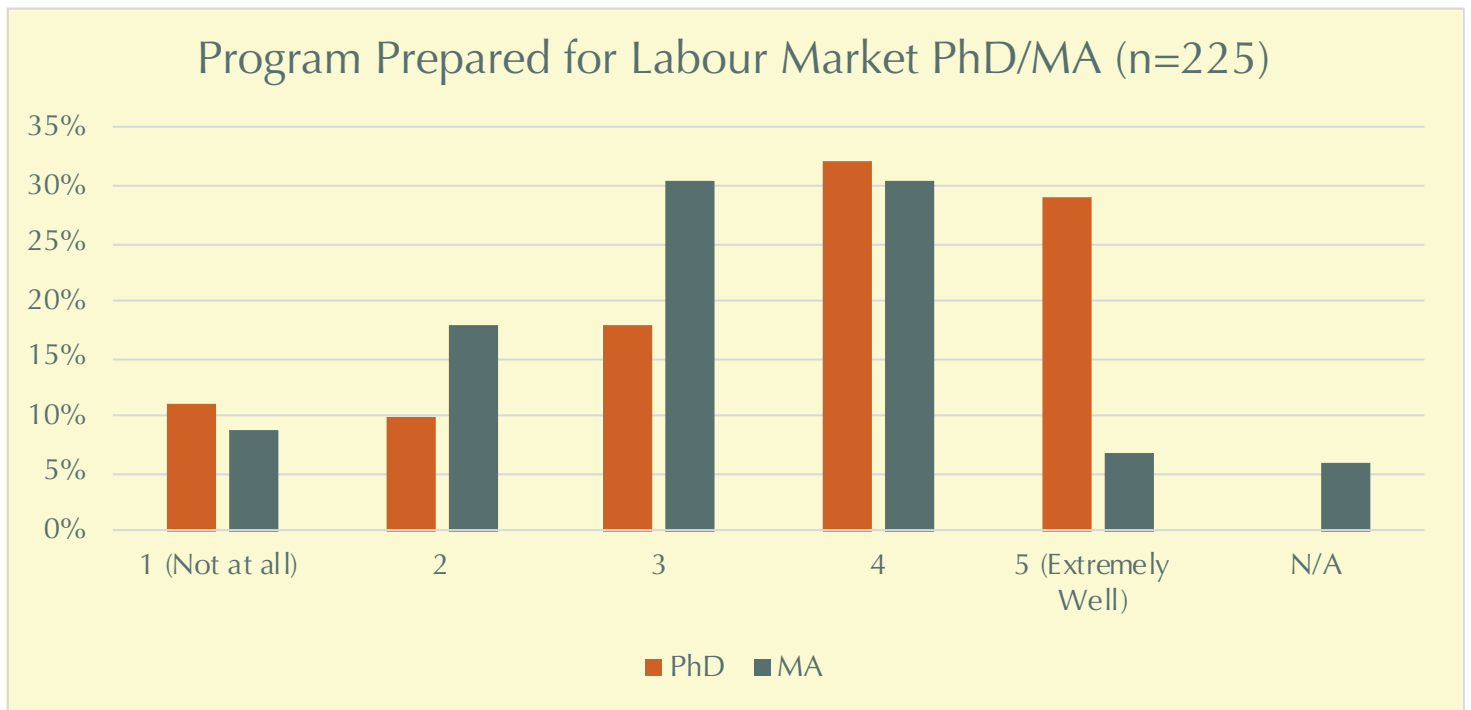
Aside from employment during their studies, graduates were asked about funding for their programs in the form of, for example, scholarships (Table 7). MAs were more likely than PhDs to report a university scholarship, and PhDs were more likely than MAs to report a SSHRC or Provincial Government scholarship (OGS, NSGS, e.g). Still, the largest proportion of both PhD (32%) and MA (45%) were provided funding from the university itself, while the lowest proportion reported funding in the “other” category including for example, endowments or industry funding (9% of PhD graduates and 5% of MA graduates). It is possible a graduate could have had more than one source of funding.

Table 7



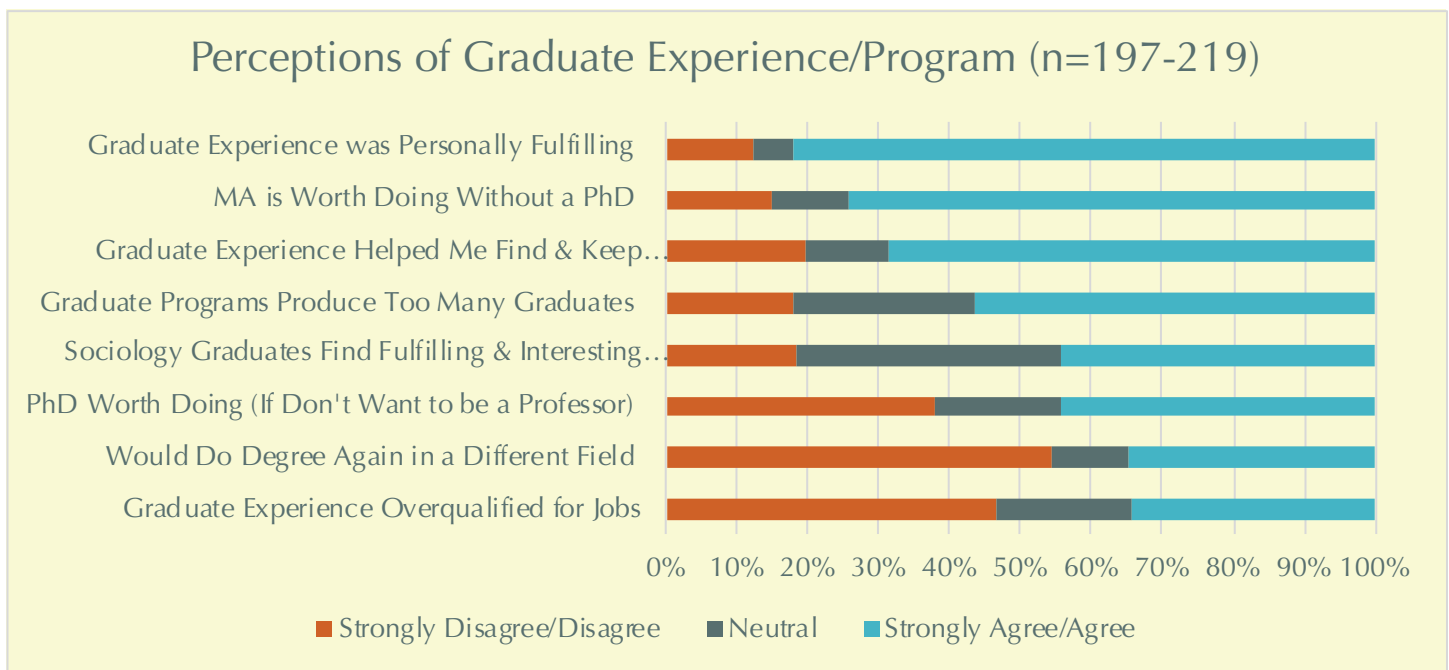
Respondents were asked a series of open-ended and Likert scale questions about their perceptions on how well their graduate degree(s) in sociology prepared them for the labour market. A larger proportion of PhD graduates perceived their program to have prepared them well for the labour market (61%), compared to only 37% of MA graduates (Table 8).

Table 8



Over half of respondents sampled either agreed or strongly agreed that sociology graduate programs were producing too many graduates for jobs (57%), yet 68% either agreed or strongly agreed that *their* graduate experience helped them find and keep employment, and 82% agreed or strongly agreed that their graduate experience was personally fulfilling. When asked if they would do their graduate degree again but in a different field, over half of graduates (54%) reported they would *not* do their degree in a different field, but 35% reported they would choose a different field (Table 9).

Table 9



2

Over half of the PhD graduates said their supervisor played a significant role in preparing them well for the labour market (58%), whereas just over one-third of MA graduates said the same (34%). When asked in an open-ended question about how their program prepared them or failed to prepare them for the labour market, the role of supervisors and faculty mentorship were frequently mentioned. There was striking inequality between students who felt supported and those who felt abandoned or alone. Examples of the latter:

2 N value varies because results from a battery of likert-scale survey questions were compiled in one table.

“As soon as it became clear that I wasn't going to land an academic job, a slow realization, my network basically evaporated. I had no contacts. All my work experience was academic, and it didn't seem to count for employers. I was too old for entry positions, but woefully inexperienced (on paper) to be considered for more senior roles with more autonomy. My interests weren't marketable and frankly moving from a highly engaged community of thinkers to a very different environment left me very lonely and adrift. In short, I lacked the necessary experience, had a very hard time convincing anyone my skills were transferable (they weren't, really), and had to cope with a significant blow to a sense of self.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“While it has gotten me to where I am today, my SOC grad experience was one of the worst of my life. I would not recommend the university I went to and in particular the supervisor I was provided as it was extremely harmful to my mental health. If I could go back, I would have followed a different path.” (MA, woman, 30s)

“The Soc Department at [name of institution omitted] is filled with Professor infighting and a disregard for sustained mentorship for students. They train us to get jobs at RI institutions while at the same time hiring grad students as RA's without offering them authorship on the projects they contribute significantly to. I've written ethics protocols, successful grant applications, I've run entire research surveys, and more for professors who took this work and published it without me as an author. I find this exploitive and extremely harmful to our ability to get jobs. [Name of institution omitted] treats grad students like a business, they don't offer mentorship you figure it out on your own.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“Once I graduated, I felt as though [name of institution omitted] did not care about my future and whether or not I was successful. I also did not find any ‘mentors’ while doing my MA and really wish someone could mentor me as I looked for jobs. I personally found the MA program to be a way for the school to profit off students rather than ensure that students were successful.” (MA, woman, 20s)

These negative experiences can be compared to those who felt that they were well-prepared:

“While I have yet to enter the labour market given that I am still a PhD student, my MA helped me identify transferable skills and taught me a bit about marketing those skills and my knowledge to potential employers. This was largely thanks to my supervisor and other faculty members that I worked with”. (MA, woman, 20s)

“[I was supported by] a culture of research collaboration between students and supervisors. I had several first-authored papers with my supervisor when I went on the job market. I believe that this helped me secure an interview for a tenure-track job. Support from other faculty members in the department. Faculty members in my area of research were frequently available to offer advice on research methods when I faced challenges. During my last year, faculty members gave me concrete tips as I prepared for my interview and created a space for me to present and receive feedback on my job talk several times. Teaching opportunities. Most upper-year PhD students in the department will have the opportunity to teach as a course instructor. The department also offered a seminar or pedagogy that helped students

students develop a teaching philosophy statement and teaching dossier for job applications.” (PhD, man, 30s)

“While doing my PhD it gave me the flexibility to explore careers and take on part time employment in areas I was interested in at the university. Those opportunities led to fulfilling full time work!” (PhD, woman, 30s)

“It gave me a realistic sense of the demands involved in securing an academic job and gave me the skills necessary to undertake and publish research, which allowed me to be competitive in the academic job market.” (PhD, man, 30s)

Besides supportive supervisors and strong mentorship, graduates noted other aspects of their program that helped them in the labour market, particularly developing certain skills and gaining research experience. Several skills stand out as being important in the labour market and employment, according to respondents: research methods skills (and in particular, quantitative methods), critical thinking, and writing skills. Quantitative methods were mentioned both by respondents who had quantitative training and considered it an asset, and those who did not have it, but entered a labour market where it was valued:

“The skills I acquired in writing/editing, goal-setting, time management, critical thinking, improved social skills via interviewing/qual methods, networking skills and connections made at conferences and symposia, enhanced confidence and self-esteem in my skills and abilities.” (MA, woman, 30s)

“Developing a mixed methods skillset along with broader data skills was essential for my career entry and progression. [In my opinion] many sociology grads do not have sufficient data skills and methodology training to meet non-academic employer hiring requirements. I’ve hired several sociology MAs in part-time research analyst roles but only 1 had data skill and aptitude to retain to full-time role.” (PhD, man, 60s)

We assessed whether sampled graduates who had specialized in qualitative, quantitative or both methods had different career aspirations and outcomes. While results suggested there were differences in the aspirations, career outcomes and income for those specializing in different methods, none of the relationships were statistically significant. The non-significant findings included that graduates with quantitative training (alone or alongside qualitative) were more likely to find work outside academia and have higher incomes. Future research should explore the link between specific skillsets and career pathways among Sociology graduates.

“

[I was supported by] a culture of research collaboration between students and supervisors. I had several first-authored papers with my supervisor when I went on the job market. I believe that this helped me secure an interview for a tenure-track job.

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Respondents who felt their graduate degree failed to prepare them for the labour market tended to say they had not developed skills employers wanted and did not receive any instruction on how to prepare for the job market. Some said sociology was not a “practical” degree. Some said they had to search for supports themselves because they were not offered as a standard part of their graduate studies. Their responses are distressing, but they point to an opportunity for sociology graduate programs to intentionally discuss career options in and outside academia, through departmental workshops or referrals to other bodies on campus that prepare students for the labour market.

“So much of the focus during my PhD was on finding academic employment. I would have benefitted from more training and awareness on what jobs exist outside academia and how to market myself for those jobs. I feel like I know how to search and marketing myself for an academic job, but not a non-academic job.” (PhD, woman, 30s)

“My advisor and my working experiences during the degree prepared me for the role I hold now in academia in a tangential area to sociology. The program wasn’t focused on hard skills that improved employability. This is really a problem with university programs as a whole in this era of PSE but being a researcher in the education space I knew I had to develop my employability with working experiences while in the degree, rather than relying on the program to do it. Certainly, there are skills that are developed in sociology (teamworking, communication, etc.) but to what extent are these sheepskin effects or signals of individuals already skilled in these areas?” (PhD, man, 30s)

“There was very little training or information on how to adapt or apply to non-academic work. It is basically setting you up for an academic career path while simultaneously telling you that you won't get a job in that area because of the job market. That is disappointing considering how well sociology can apply outside academia.” (MA, woman, 20s)

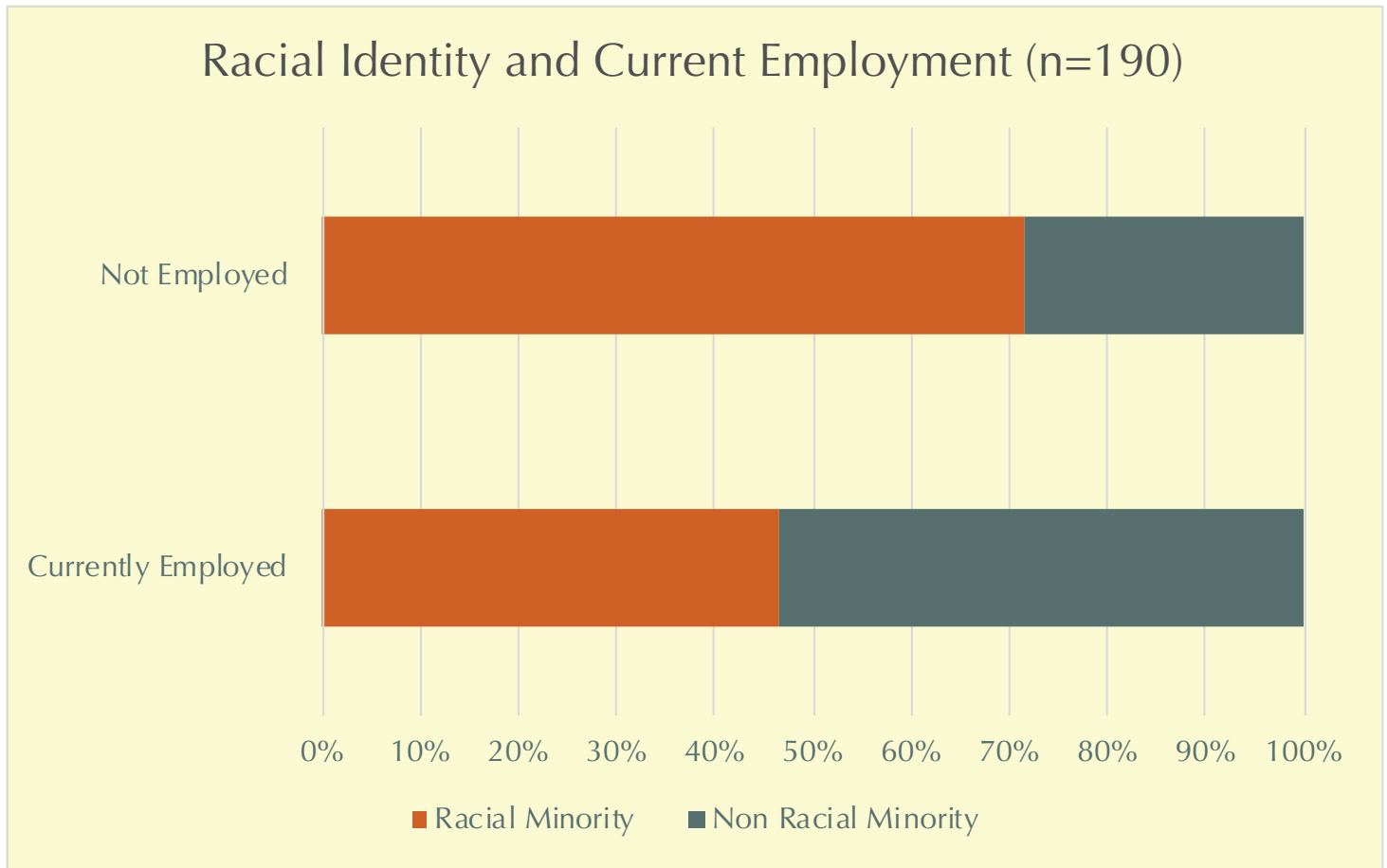
These findings on the skills graduates benefited from, and those they wish they had gained, align with previous research with almost identical findings (Nerard et al. 2012: 21; Purcell et al. 2005: 4). We also assessed whether those who felt well-prepared for the labour market by their graduate programs had different career outcomes than those who did not feel prepared. 100% of PhD graduates who felt their program had prepared them either extremely well or well for the labour market were currently employed at the time of the survey, compared to 93.75% who were neutral and just over three-quarters of graduates (78.95%) who indicated they did not feel their PhD program prepared them for the labour market. This relationship was statistically significant. However, it is likely that people who are currently employed are simply more likely to retrospectively see their degree as helpful.

Outcomes

A large majority of sampled graduates (88%) were currently employed at the time of the survey. Thirty-seven of these employed respondents were simultaneously full-time PhD students. In order to focus the analysis on career outcomes, and compare apples to apples, we opted to remove current students from the employment-focused data tables in this section. With this change, the percentage of respondents who were employed (and not in school) increases to 89%.

Respondents who identified as racial minorities were less likely to be employed; 80% of these respondents were employed compared to 92% of others (Table 10). This relationship was statistically significant.

Table 10



Of all respondents who were currently employed and not in school, almost three-quarters (74%) reported they worked in a full-time, permanent position (Table 11), and 82% reported their pay was from an annual salary.

Table 11

Type of Current Employment	
Full-time, permanent	74%
Full-time, non-permanent	12%
Part-time, permanent	2%
Part-time, non-permanent	8%
Self-employed	4%
n=170	

Of all respondents who were currently employed and not in school, almost three-quarters (74%) reported they worked in a full-time, permanent position (Table 11), and 82% reported their pay was from an annual salary.

Table 12

Current Job Description	
Non-Tenure Track Academic	4%
Tenure-Track Academic	26%
Teaching Assistant	1%
Research Assistant	2%
Postdoc	3%
University Administration	12%
Non-Academic	41%
Other	12%
n=198	

For the respondents who indicated they were working in a university, 82% currently worked in a Canadian University. Of the 45 respondents who reported currently working in professor positions, 62% were in the rank of assistant professor, 36% in the rank of associate professor, and 2.22% in full professor positions (Table 13). Over one-third (38%) reported they currently had tenure. However, breaking down these results by gender, a much lower proportion of women (18%) indicated they currently had a tenured professor position compared to over half of men (57%) and this result was statistically significant (Table 14). Respondents who identified as racial minorities were also less likely to have tenure, but these results were not statistically significant.

Table 13

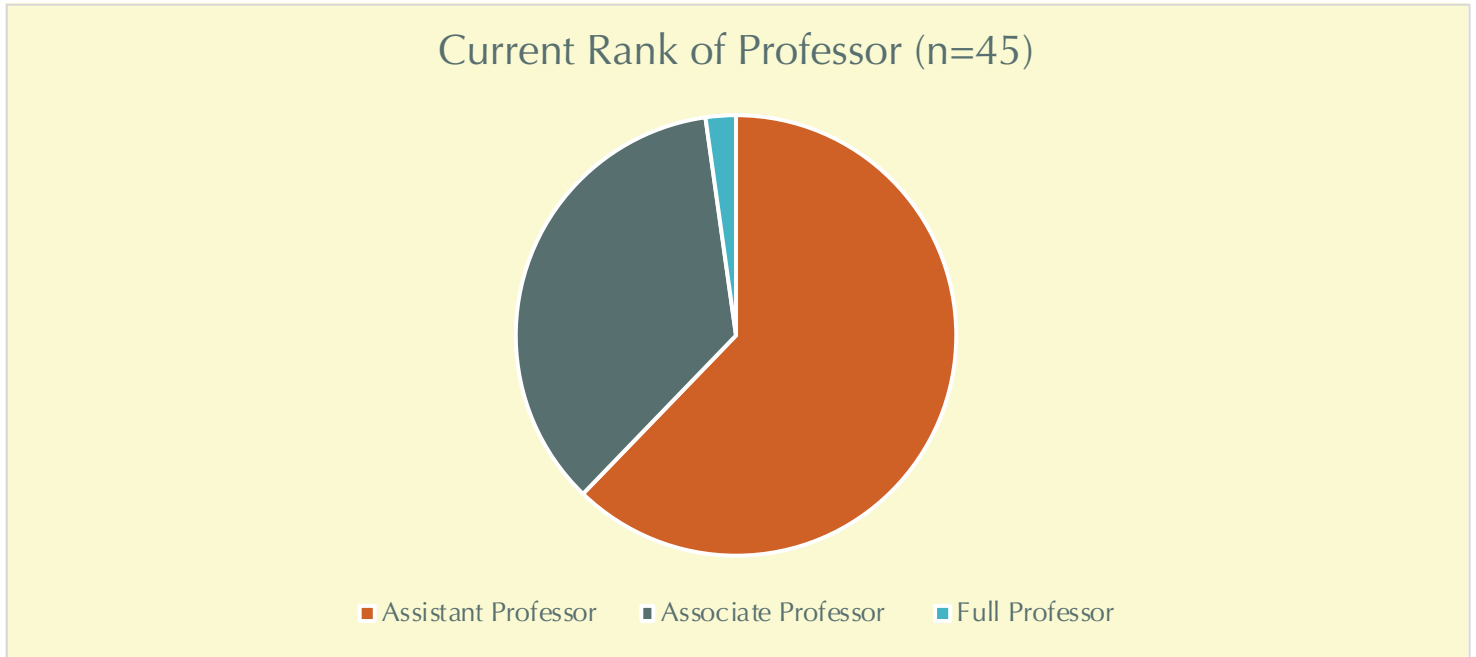
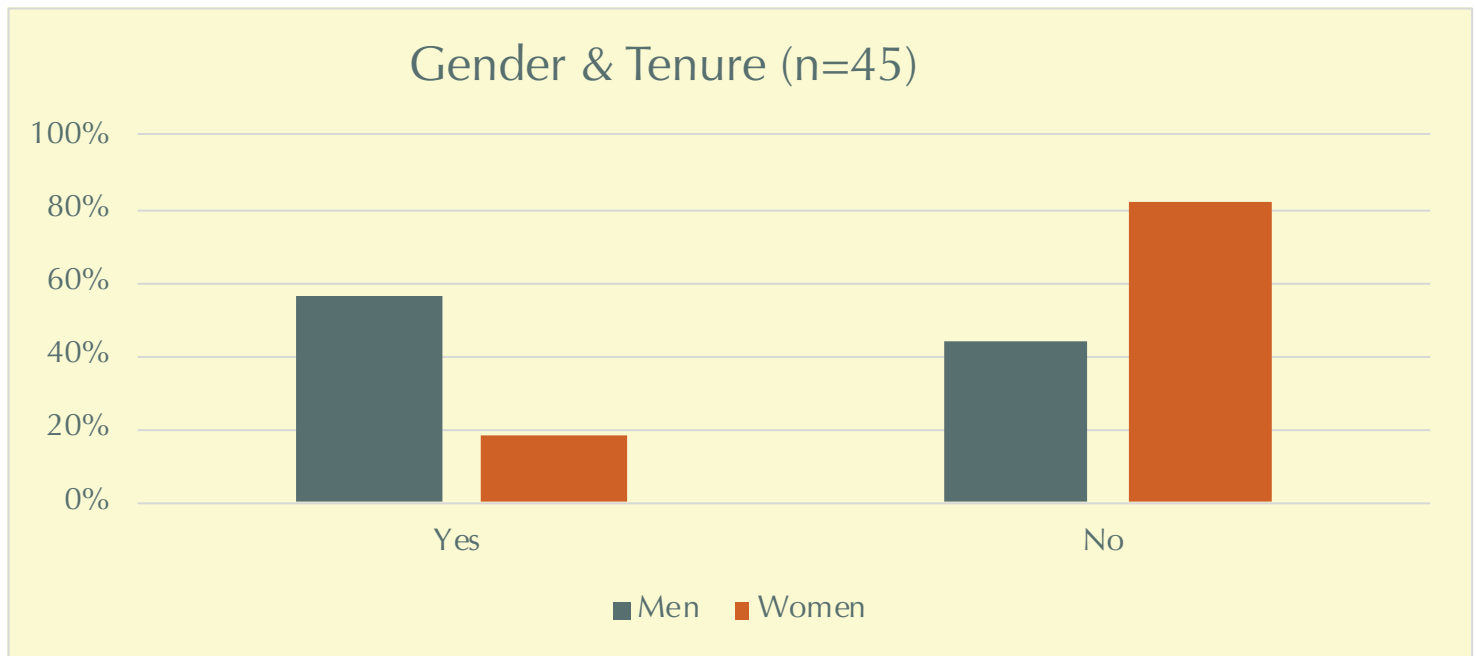


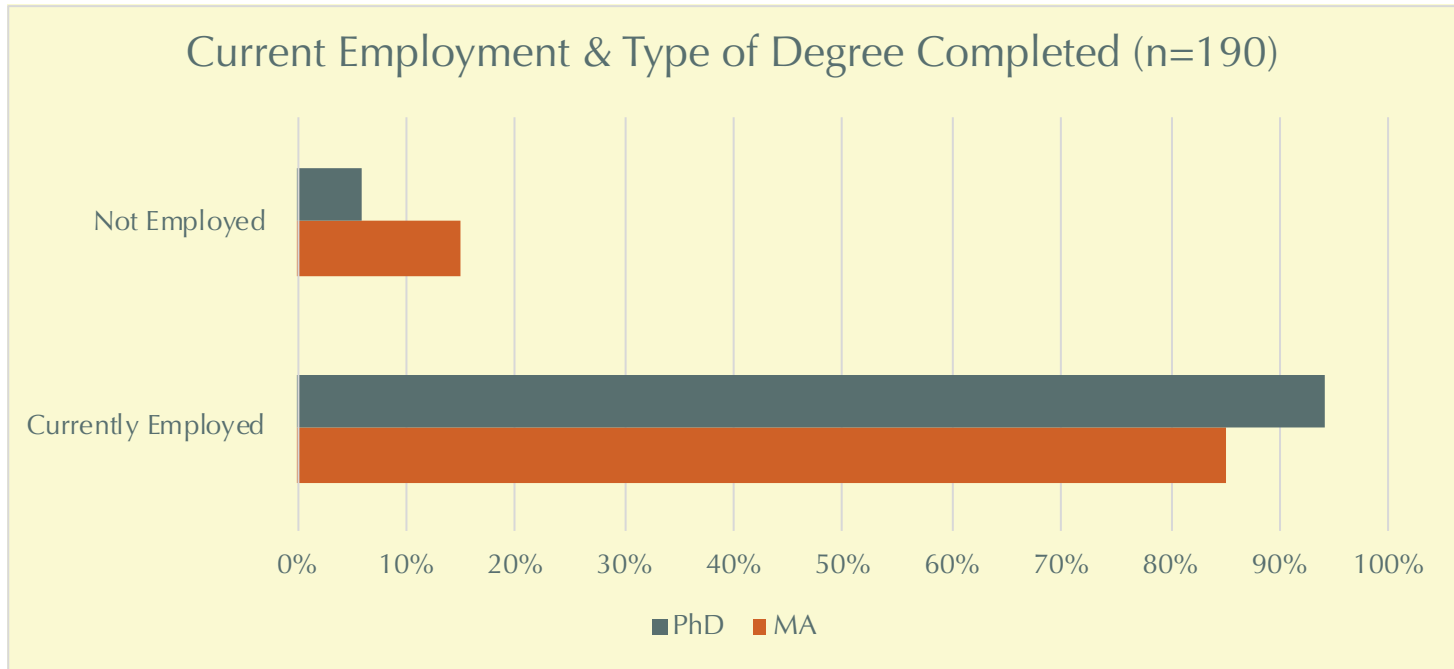
Table 14



We looked at the breakdown of employment outcomes between MA and PhD Sociology graduates. Almost all PhD graduates reported being currently employed at the time of the survey (94%) compared to 85% of MA graduates (Table 15). These results were statistically significant. More MA graduates held full-time positions than PhD graduates, however, these results were not statistically significant. We examined whether women and racial minorities were overrepresented in precarious, part-time positions in the sample compared to men and non-racial minorities. More women in the sample worked part-time,

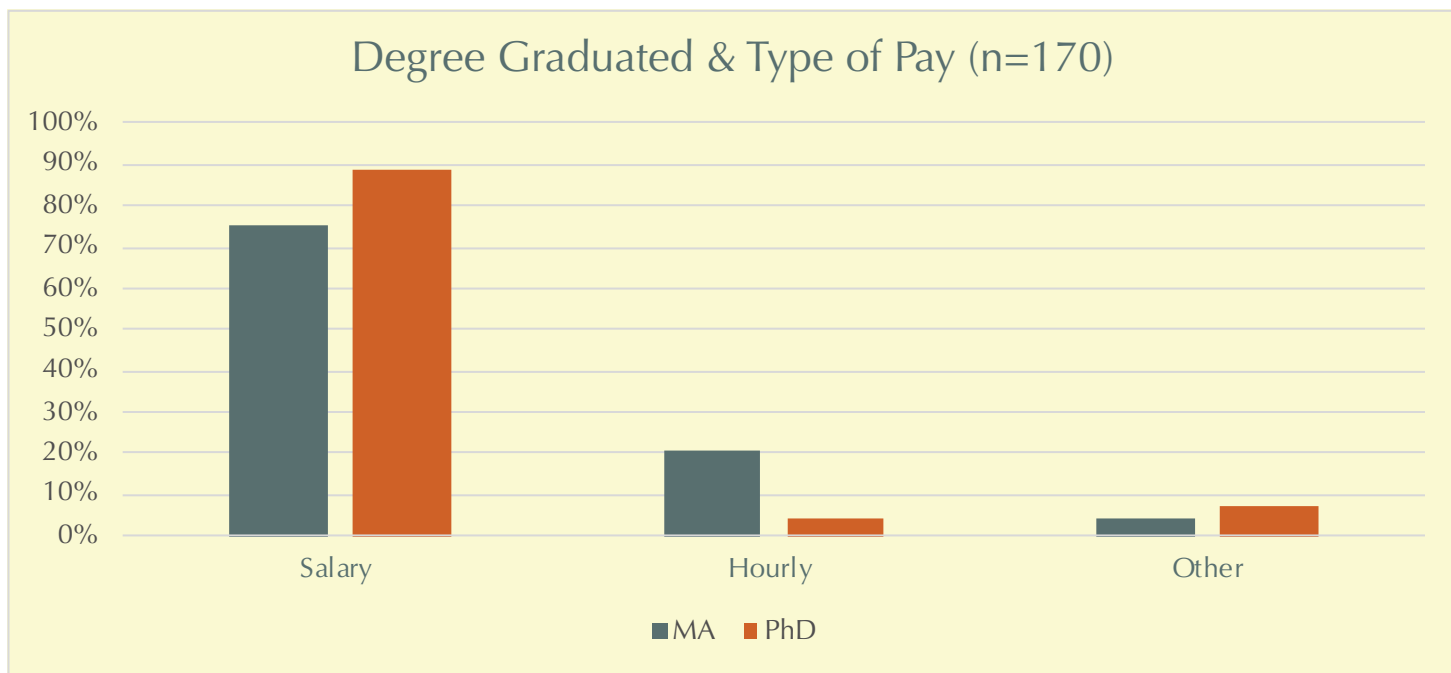
compared to men but this relationship was not statistically significant. There were little differences between racial minorities compared to non-racial minorities in the different employment categories (e.g., full-time, permanent) and no statistically significant relationship.

Table 15



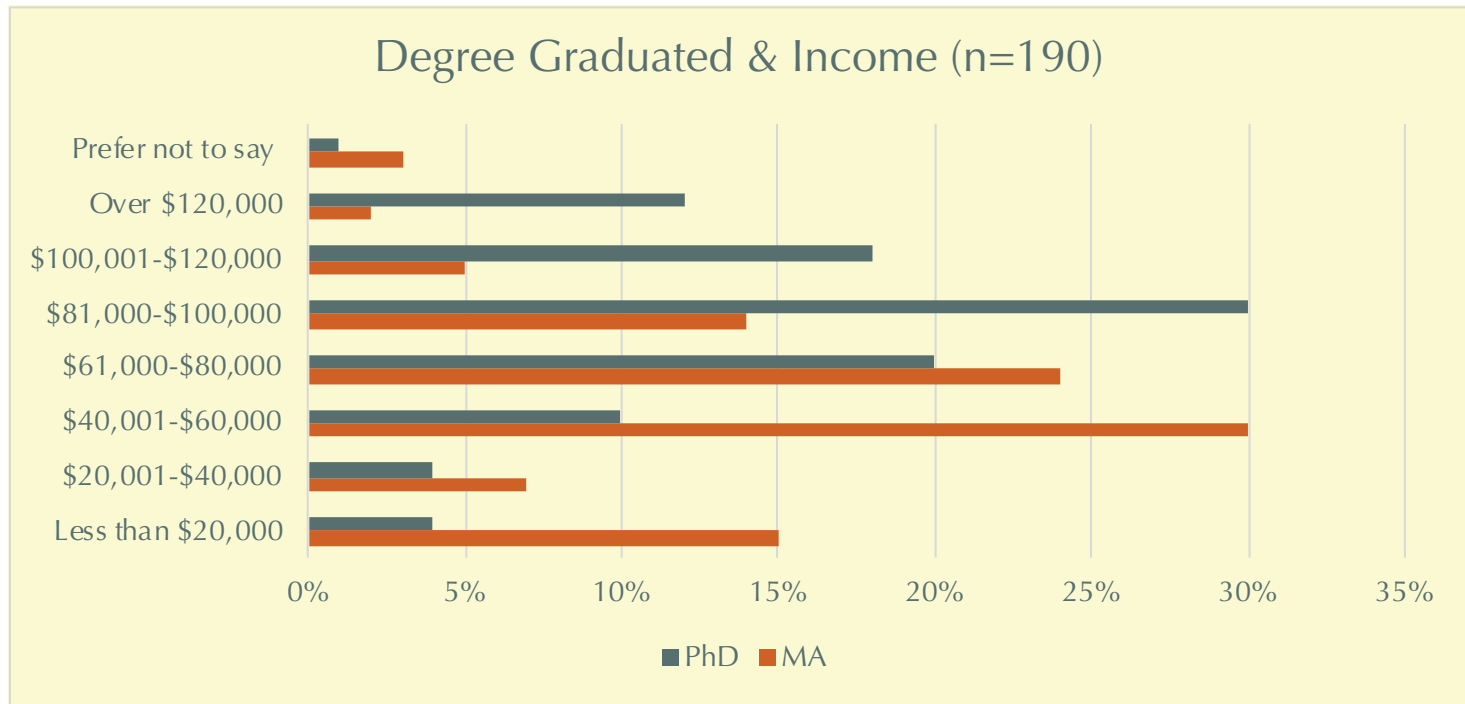
Larger proportions of PhD graduates reported receiving pay from a salary in their current job (89%), than MA graduates (75%). These results were statistically significant (Table 16).

Table 16



A larger proportion of PhD graduates were represented in the higher income categories compared to MA graduates who were overrepresented in the three lowest income categories. For example, 18% of PhD graduates reported an income of \$100,001-\$120,000 compared to only 5% of MA graduates. Conversely, 15% of MA graduates reported an income in the lowest category of “Less than \$20,000” compared to only 4% of PhD graduates. These results were statistically significant (Table 17).

Table 17



Respondents (including current students) were asked about their willingness to move to a different geographical location either to accept or look for a job (Table 18). ³ More respondents were only willing to move to a specific region in Canada for a job (49%), but 17% were willing to move to several places in Canada and 10% were willing to move almost anywhere in the world. The last figure is low compared to Statistics Canada data, which shows that over 20% of doctoral students plan to leave Canada upon graduation (Conference Board of Canada 2014), and similar findings by King (2008) who reported that 23% of the 2004/2005 PhD cohort intended to leave Canada, 46% of who were born in Canada (21). It is likely that our recruitment did not reach enough PhD and MA graduates who had already left Canada, and who likely would have answered this question differently.

³ Those who were currently employed were asked to look back at when they were on the job market; those who said they were unemployed and looking for work were asked if they were currently willing to move. Both groups’ answers are combined here as they were not very different.

Table 18

Willing to Move to Look for or Accept Job (Geographic Location)	
Specific Region in Canada	49%
Several Places in Canada	17%
Anywhere in Canada	9%
Specific Places in or Outside Canada	10%
(Almost) Anywhere in the World	10%
Other	4%
N=225	

Respondents who indicated they were currently employed outside academia were asked to select their industry of employment. Larger proportions reported working in the educational services sector (28%); public administration (19%); professional, scientific and technical services (18%); and health care and social assistance (12%) (Table 19).

Table 19

Industry-Current Employment	
Accommodation & Food Service	1%
Arts, entertainment & recreation	1%
Construction	1%
Educational Services	28%
Finance & Insurance	3%
Health Care & Social Assistance	12%
Information & Culture	3%
Management	1%
Manufacturing	1%
Other Services (except public admin)	10%
Professional, scientific & technical services	18%
Public Administration	19%
Retail Trade	2%
Transportation & Warehousing	1%
n= 113	

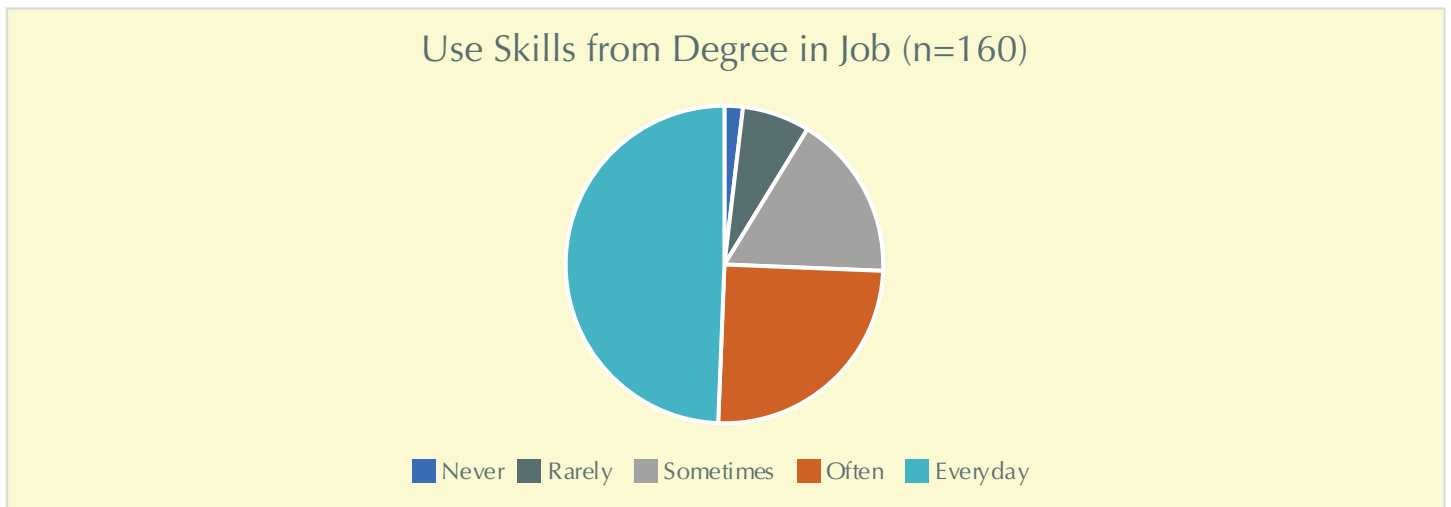
Respondents who were employed (and not currently in school) were asked how long it took them to secure a job following the completion of their highest degree. A little less than half (48%) reported they secured their job in less than a year, 19% within 3-4 years, and 17% in 1-2 years after completing their highest degree (Table 20). We examined the relationship between gender and time it took to secure position after graduation. Higher proportions of women reported that it took them longer to find a job than men, however the results were not statistically significant. Almost three-quarters of racial minorities reported they secured a position less than a year after graduating, compared to 43% of non-racial minorities, but again, these results were not statistically significant.

Table 20

How Long After Highest Degree to Secure Job	
Less than a year	48%
1-2 Years	17%
3-4 Years	19%
5-6 Years	10%
7-8 Years	4%
9-10 Years	1%
10+ Years	1%
N=155	

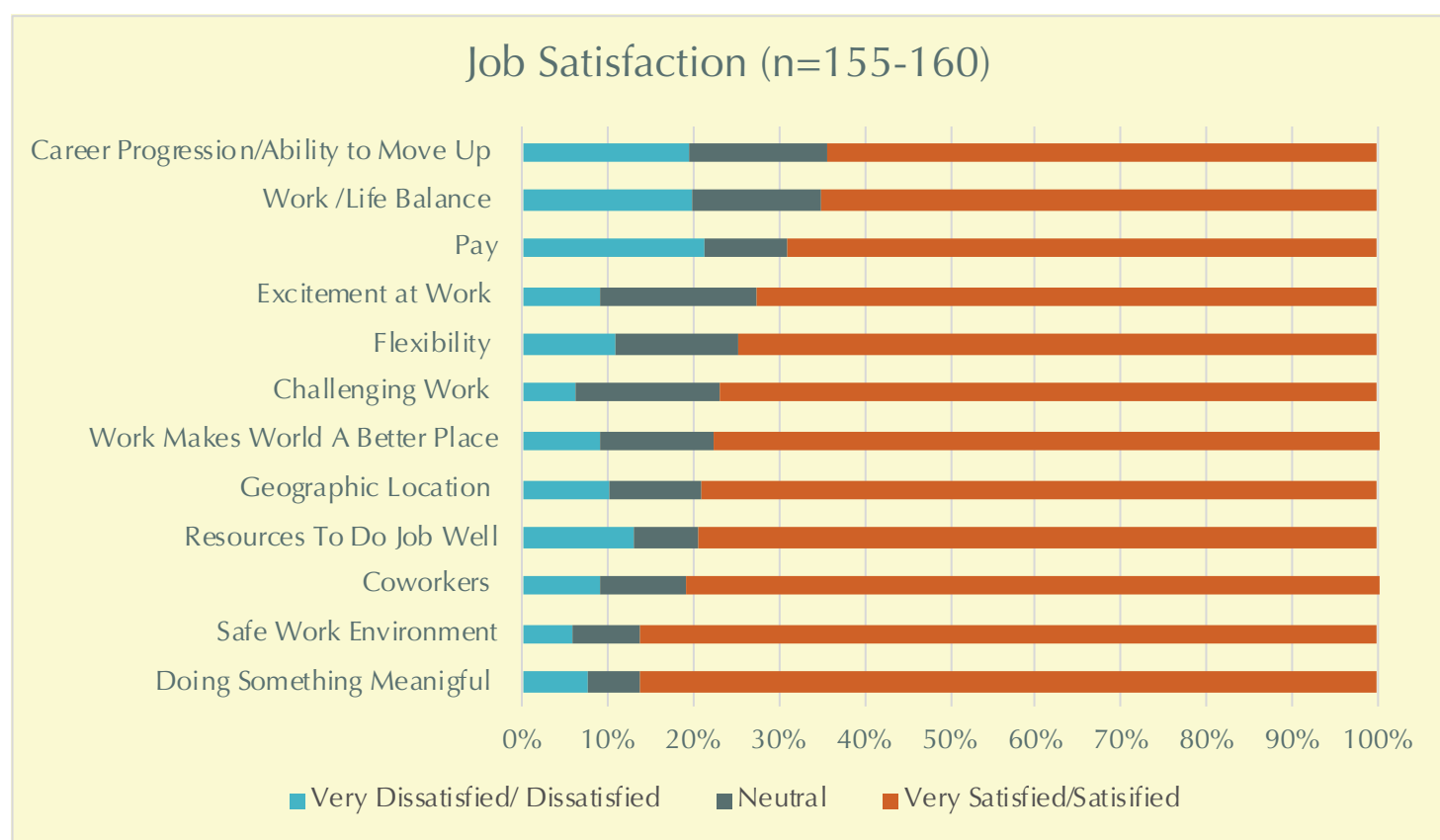
Of the respondents who were employed during the survey and not currently in school, 56% viewed their current job as a life-long career, and 71% saw their current job as related to their degree(s). When asked how often they used the skills learned during their Sociology degree(s) in their jobs, almost half (49%) of respondents reported they used them every day, and a further quarter said they used them often, while only 2% reported they never used them (Table 21).

Table 21



Respondents who were currently employed and not in school were asked a number of questions assessing their level of satisfaction with different factors of their job (Table 22). Overall, the majority of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with all aspects of their work, with the highest levels of satisfaction reported for doing something meaningful (86%), safe work environment (86%), and their coworkers (81%). The job aspects that saw higher percentages of respondent *dissatisfaction* were pay (21% dissatisfied), work/life balance (20%) and opportunity for career progression (19%). These results are in line with previous research on graduates' career satisfaction (Nerard et al. 2012: 11; Purcell et al., 2005).

Table 22



When looking at the breakdown of the different aspects of job satisfaction by both gender and racial minority identity, we found that for almost all of the job satisfaction measures (with few exceptions), larger proportions of both women and racial minorities were dissatisfied than men or non-racial minorities. Only one relationship was statistically significant: women's dissatisfaction with the opportunity for career progression/ability to move up in their jobs.

COVID19's Impact on Sociology Graduates' Experiences

After this, respondents were asked in an open-ended question whether the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted any aspects of their job satisfaction (e.g., coworkers, resources, work-life balance, or safety). Most respondents indicated the biggest change for them was the shift to working from home. For some, this *increased* satisfaction with their employment. Although they were a minority compared to those whose satisfaction had decreased, their responses are interesting: the majority of the more satisfied respondents mentioned improved flexibility and/or work-life balance. For some, the improvement in work-life balance was a result of not losing time commuting to work. The flexibility of working from home was also mentioned as improving the ability to care for children.

"I am working from home for the foreseeable future and I absolutely love it. I hope to continue working from home on a permanent basis. I find I have better work life balance without the stresses of commuting, getting ready in the morning, etc." (MA, woman, 30s)

"Yes. Work life balance and safety improved. Before I was restricted to office work in standard hours. When COVID hit, I became work from home with flexibility. I have a lot of freedom now with when and where I work. I feel my employer valued and supported my safety." (MA, woman, 30s)

For those who reported that COVID-19 negatively impacted their job satisfaction, common reasons were the resulting lack of social interaction, a poor

work-life balance (because work crept into every hour), higher employer expectations, and lack of resources to work from home or, more specifically, teach online.

"Working remotely has eroded the typical start and end time of the workday, and work-life balance suffered as a result. More specifically, people are working longer hours without compensation." (MA, woman, 30s)

"Teaching online has taken away the joy of interacting with students and colleagues face to face. The energy on teaching online is very different. There is also more blurring between work and home since I work from home exclusively." (PhD, woman, 30s)

"COVID-19 has greatly increased stress related to work-life balance. It has also negatively affected the general sense of meaningfulness and excitement associated with work, since there has been very little time to pursue research and I feel that the quality of my teaching has declined." (PhD, man, 30s)

"So many more meetings, now that we are all working from home. It's like people feel they can schedule more, because of the lack of travel time/commuting." (PhD, 40s, woman)

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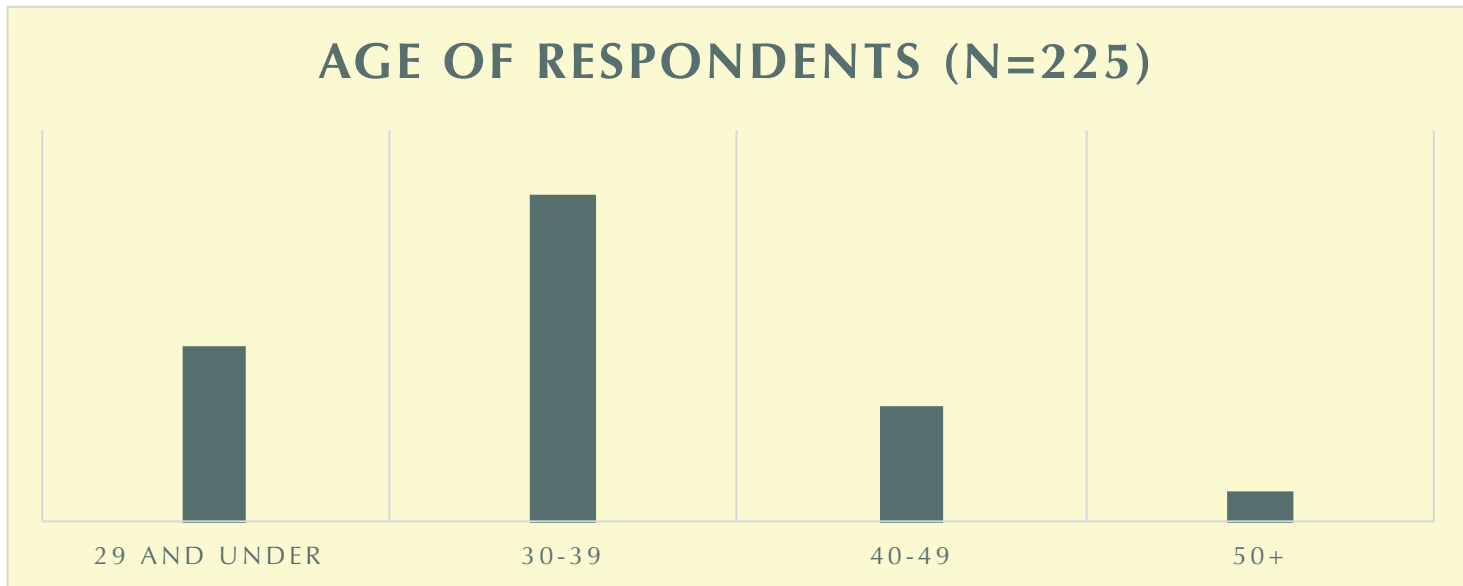
So much of the focus during my PhD was on finding academic employment. I would have benefitted from more training and awareness on what jobs exist outside academia and how to market myself for those jobs.

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Demographics

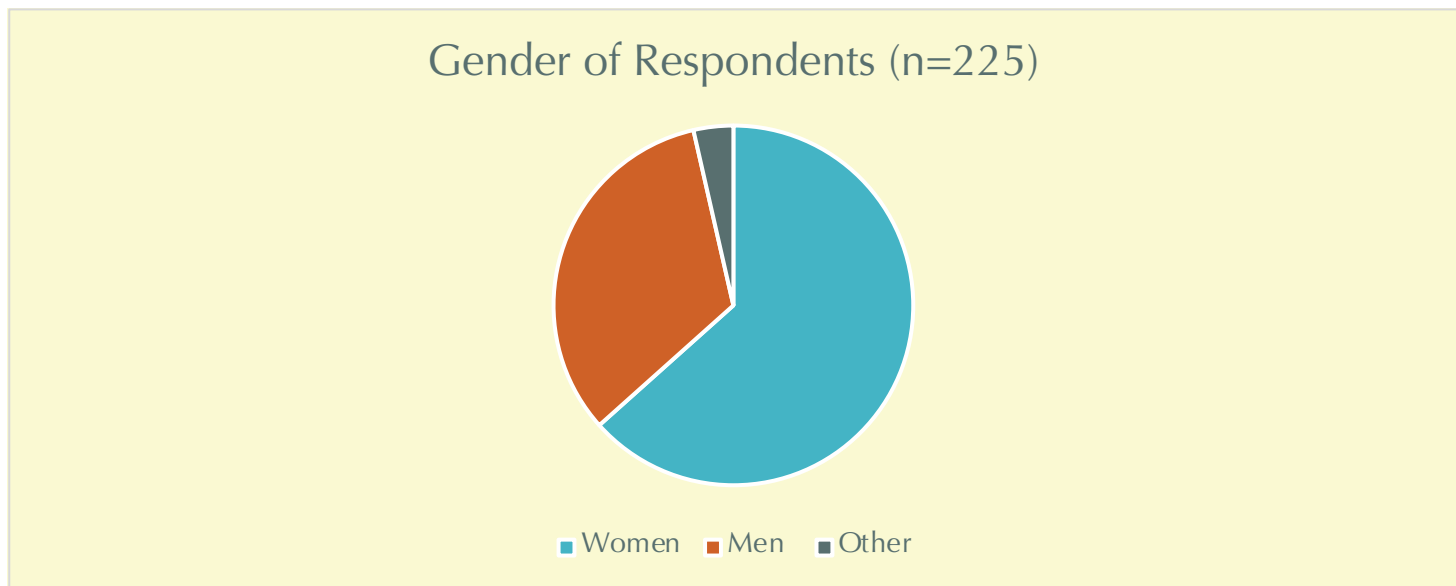
Half of respondents were aged 30-39, followed by 27% who were 29 years old or younger. Small proportions were in their forties, fifties and older (Table 23).

Table 23



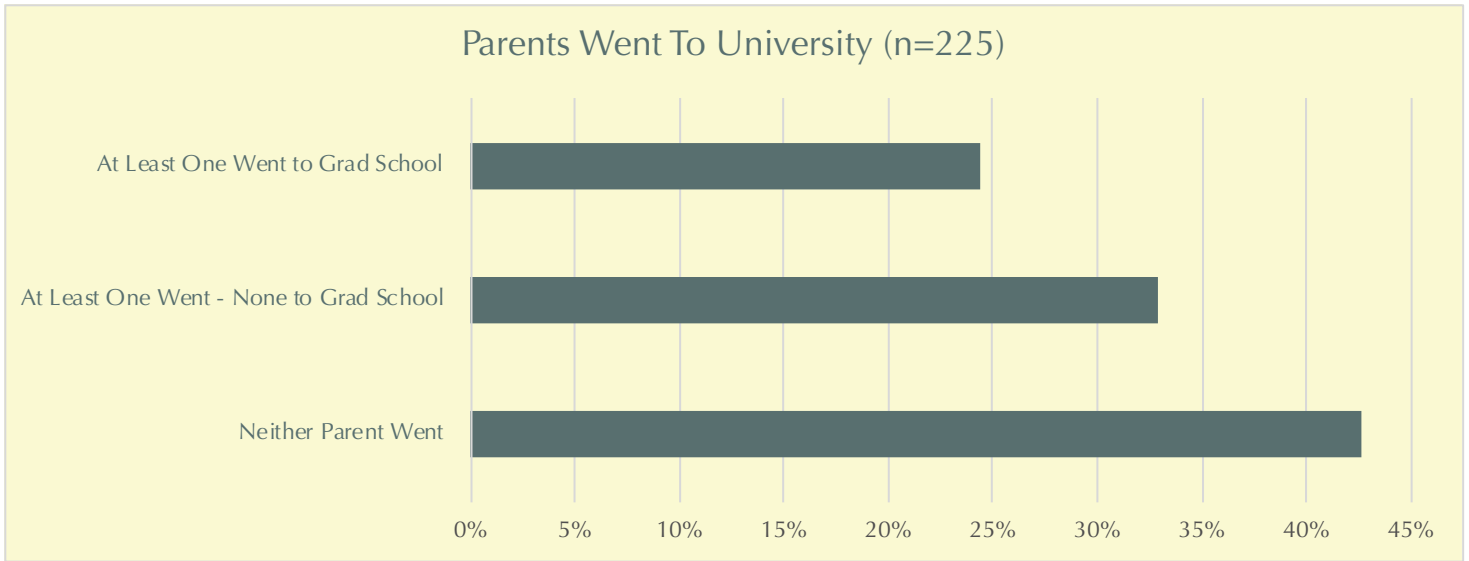
The majority of respondents identified as women (63%), while 33% identified as men and a small proportion (4%) identified as gender-neutral or trans (Table 24). Nearly one fifth (19%) of respondents identified as racial minorities, and 2% as Indigenous. 11% reported that they were affected by a disability.

Table 24



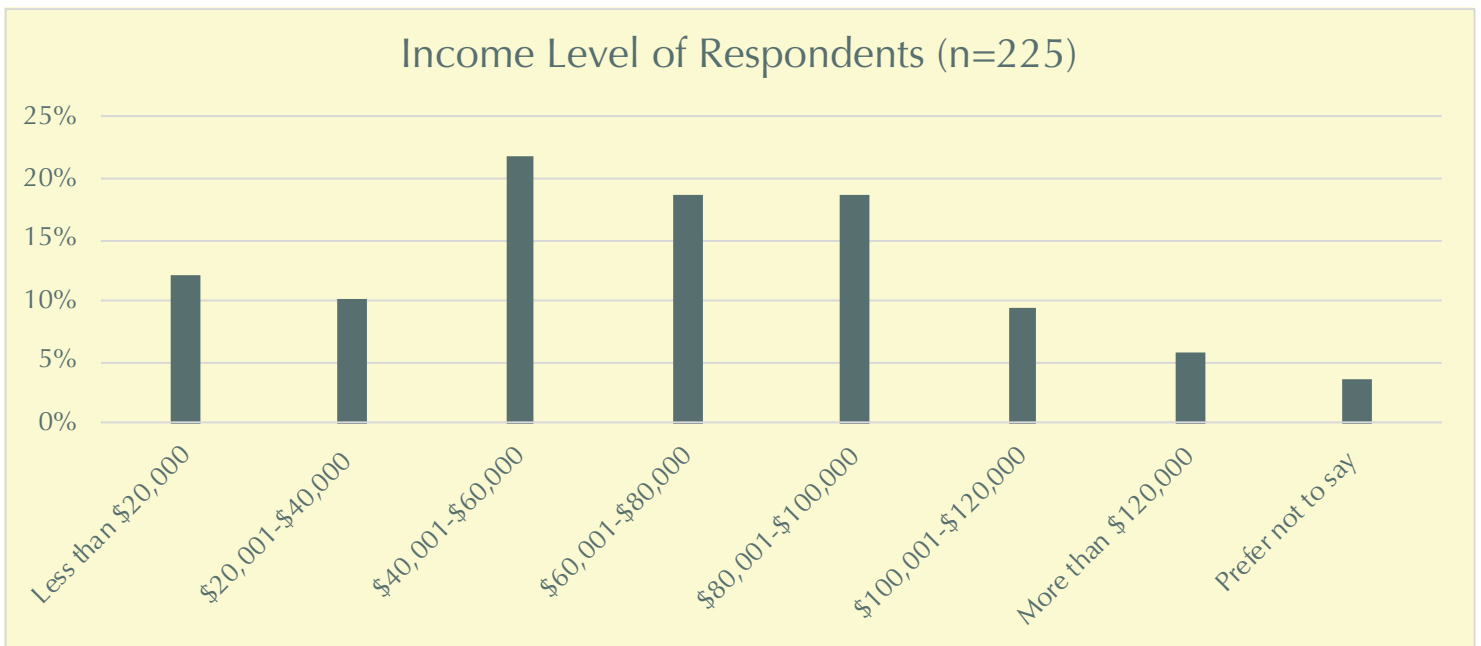
The highest proportion of respondents (43%) reported that neither of their parents had attended university, while 33% had at least one parent attend university (but not grad school) and close to a quarter (24%) had at least one parent who attended graduate school (Table 25).

Table 25



Income levels of respondents were concentrated between \$40,000 and \$100,000. Twelve percent of participants reported an income in the lowest income category of “Less than \$20,000”, while approximately 6% had an income in the highest income category of “more than \$120,000” (Table 26). We examine gendered differences of income levels in the sample, and women were overrepresented in the lower income categories (with the exception of “less than \$20,000”) and underrepresented in the highest. Men’s incomes also appear to be more polarized compared to the women in the sample. However, none of these gender differences in income were statistically significant.

Table 26



Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on sociology graduate programs and the graduate experience in Canada should consider interviewing or surveying professors about their supervision and mentorship styles and habits, for example, how they support their graduate students and how they decide what kind of support to provide. In addition, research on discrimination in sociology graduate programs, for example, examining sexist or racist barriers affecting student success both in completing their degrees and their career outcomes would provide further insight into the sociology graduate and labour market experiences.

As mentioned above, there are non-significant correlations that could be explored in a larger, representative sample of graduates, including the link between methodological training and career outcomes, as well as gender and racial differences in program experiences and career outcomes. It is likely that, despite Sociology's strength in understanding intersectional inequalities, departments are not always spaces of racial and gender equality or justice.

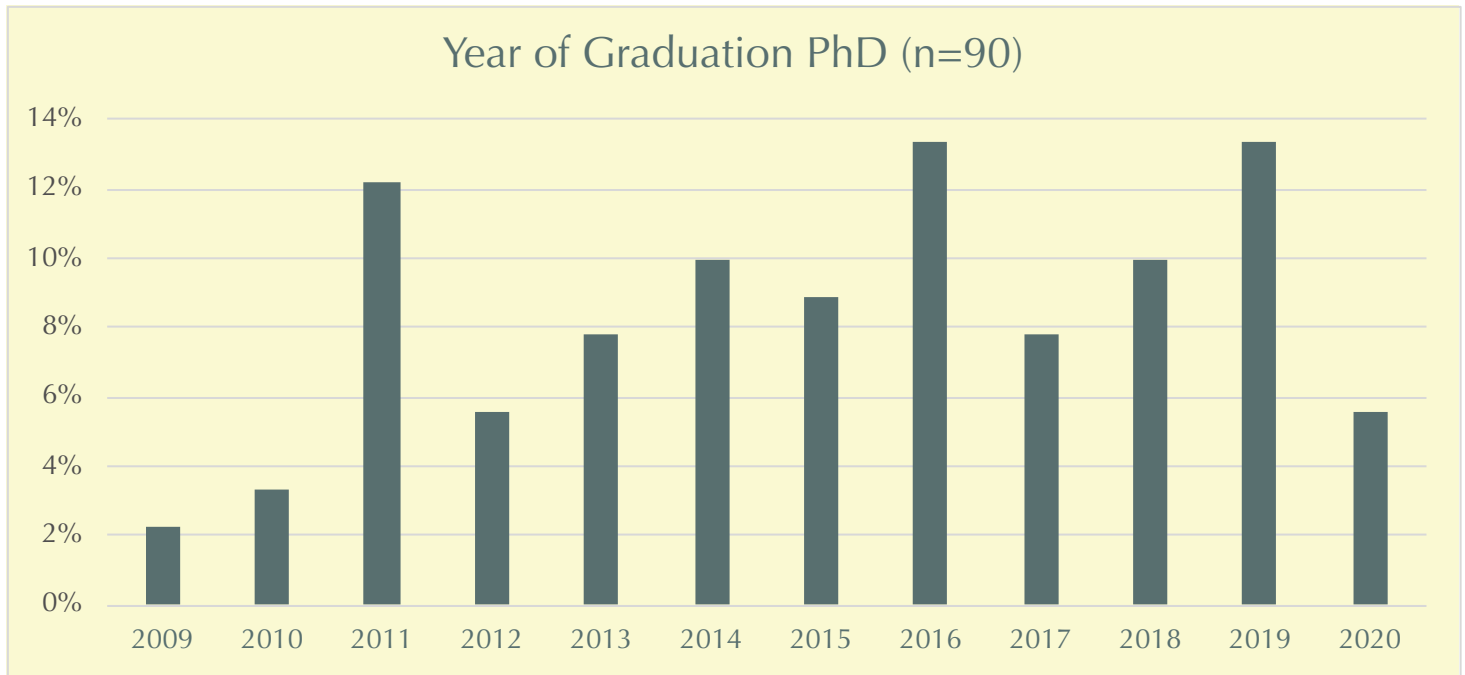
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There is great promise in our discipline and demand for the skills we teach, but there is also work to be done within sociology graduate programs to meet the needs of a diversity of students, to provide more deliberate preparation for work and life experiences outside academia, to connect our research, teaching and training to the “real world” and to ensure that supervisors and programs are supporting their students adequately.

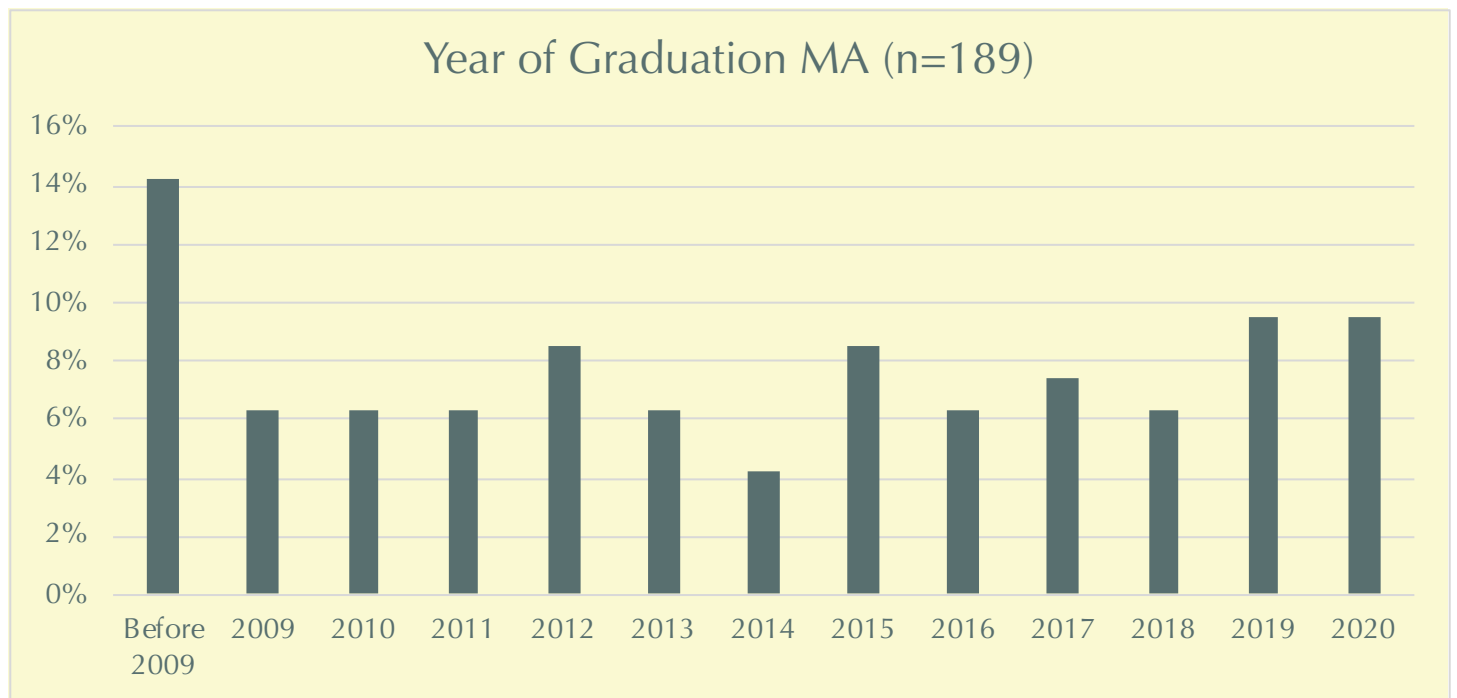
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Appendices

Appendix A



Appendix B



Appendix C

University Graduated PhD	
Carleton University	11%
Dalhousie University	1%
McGill University	2%
McMaster University	9%
Queen's University	6%
University of Alberta	10%
University of Calgary	3%
University of Guelph	2%
University of Manitoba	1%
University of Ottawa	2%
University of Saskatchewan	4%
University of Toronto	18%
University of Victoria	4%
University of Waterloo	7%
University of Windsor	2%
University of Victoria	1%
University of British Columbia	1%
Université du Quebec A Montreal	2%
Western University	6%
York University	6%
Other	1%
N=90	

Appendix D

Institution Earned MA	
Acadia University	2%
Brock University	3%
Carleton University	10%
Concordia University	1%
Dalhousie University	6%
Lakehead University	2%
Laurentian University	1%
McGill University	2%
McMaster University	5%
Memorial University	2%
Queen's University	5%
Simon Fraser University	2%
University of Alberta	7%
University of Guelph	7%
University of Lethbridge	1%
University of Manitoba	1%
University of Ottawa	1%
University of Regina	1%
University of Saskatchewan	4%
University of Toronto	6%
University of Victoria	7%
University of Waterloo	3%
University of Windsor	6%
Université du Québec à Montréal	1%
Western University	12%
Wilfred Laurier University	1%
York University	1%
Other	1%
N=189	

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