FINDING A PATH AMONG THE CONCRETE: WORK-LIFE NARRATIVES OF URBAN ABORIGINAL YOUNG ADULTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008). Over half of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 24 and, according to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2008), Aboriginal young adults are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Although well defined statistically, little is known about the career-related experiences of Aboriginal young adults. The study addresses the question: “What are the career-related experiences of Aboriginal young adults living in an urban setting?” The study employed a narrative inquiry method to explore the work-life narratives of five Aboriginal young women living in Toronto. The results of this study identified three metathemes that were evident across participant interviews: carer journey, community and importance of education. This study describes implications of the results on employment supports, education and government policy while identifying areas for future research.
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# Table of Contents

Abstract....................................................................................................................ii

Acknowledgements....................................................................................................iii

Table of Contents......................................................................................................iv

List of Figures..........................................................................................................viii

**Chapter One: Introduction**..................................................................................1

  Rationale................................................................................................................5

  Sites.........................................................................................................................7

  Definitions............................................................................................................8

    Aboriginal...........................................................................................................8

    Career...............................................................................................................9

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**........................................................................10

  Historical Influences............................................................................................10

  Current Career Context for Aboriginal Peoples in North America.....................14

  Career Counselling Theories and Aboriginal Peoples...........................................20

  Summary............................................................................................................25

**Chapter Three: Methodology**............................................................................26

  Social Constructionism.......................................................................................26

  Qualitative Research............................................................................................27

  Narrative Inquiry................................................................................................28

  Recruitment and Participants.............................................................................30

  Study Protocol....................................................................................................32

    Preliminary Phase.............................................................................................32

    Phase 1: In Depth Individual Interviews.........................................................33

    Phase 2: Preliminary Analysis/ Interview #2..................................................34
Phase 3: Final Analysis and Writing.................................................................38
Phase 4: Final Results/Dissemination............................................................38
Summary............................................................................................................39

Chapter Four: Within Participant Results......................................................41

Participant One Hundred One..........................................................................41
Core Messages and Themes..............................................................................43
  Cultural Connections......................................................................................43
  Empowerment...............................................................................................44
  Importance of Education...............................................................................46
  Sustainable Employment...............................................................................47

Participant One Hundred Two...........................................................................48
Core Messages and Themes..............................................................................49
  Multiple Aspects of Identity........................................................................49
  Cultural Connections......................................................................................54
  Career Journey..............................................................................................56
  Empowerment...............................................................................................57

Participant One Hundred Three.......................................................................59
Core Messages and Themes..............................................................................62
  Creating Opportunities................................................................................62
  Supporters...................................................................................................64
  Self Esteem....................................................................................................67
  Culture infused work...................................................................................68

Participant One Hundred Four..........................................................................70
Core Messages and Themes..............................................................................70
  Finding Direction..........................................................................................70
Importance of Education..........................................................74
Preserving Culture.................................................................76
Cultural Identity.......................................................................78
Participant One Hundred Five....................................................79
Core Messages and Themes......................................................81
  Adaptability............................................................................81
  Connecting with culture.......................................................83
  Guidance...............................................................................85
  Education..............................................................................87
Summary..................................................................................89

Chapter Five: Across Participant Results...................................90
  Identifying Metathemes..........................................................90
  Metathemes..........................................................................91
    Career Journey.....................................................................91
    Community..........................................................................100
    Importance of Education....................................................104
Summary..................................................................................113

Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusions................................114
  Thesis Summary......................................................................114
  Limitations.............................................................................115
    Generalizability...................................................................115
    Validity...............................................................................116
    Bias....................................................................................117
  Implications...........................................................................119
    Employment Supports.........................................................119
Education..................................................................................................................120
Policy.......................................................................................................................120
Future Research........................................................................................................121
Research Reflections.................................................................................................122
Conclusion.................................................................................................................124

References.................................................................................................................125

Appendix A: Ethics Approval....................................................................................133
Appendix B: Letter to community agency.................................................................134
Appendix C: Community Consent Letter.................................................................135
Appendix D: Participant Consent Form.......................................................................138
Appendix E: Interview Guides....................................................................................141
List of Figures

Figure 1: Story Map Outline Adapted from Richmond.................................37
Figure 2: Procedure.....................................................................................39
Figure 3: P101 Initial Story Map.................................................................42
Figure 4: P102 Initial Story Map.................................................................50
Figure 5: P102 Final Story Map.................................................................51
Figure 6: P103 Initial Story Map.................................................................60
Figure 7: P103 Final Story Map.................................................................61
Figure 8: P104 Initial Story Map.................................................................71
Figure 9: P105 Initial Story Map.................................................................80
Figure 10: Metathemes.............................................................................91
Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis explores the career related experiences of Canadian Aboriginal young adults living in an urban center. Aboriginal peoples are recognized as the first inhabitants of Canada and Aboriginal peoples reside in every province and territory (Offet-Gartner, 2008). Historically, and in the present, Aboriginal peoples have varying ways of living which include different spiritual practices, protocols and etiquette for interacting, ways of dressing and ways of obtaining sustenance (Wilson & Urion, 1995). Currently, in Canada there is more than 596 bands on 2284 reserves with 11 major language groups and over 58 corresponding dialects among Aboriginal peoples (Kirmayer et al, 2000). The diversity among Canadian Aboriginal peoples suggests a need to exercise caution when discussing generalizations about Aboriginal peoples; it is inaccurate to imply that a value or tradition that applies to one group of Aboriginal people will apply to all groups of Aboriginal peoples. However, authors such as Steinhauer (2002), suggest that there are cultural commonalities which are shared by many Aboriginal peoples.

In the 2006 census, over one million respondents self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent; this constitutes approximates 3.5% of the Canadian populations as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2008). Among these respondents, approximately 500,000 were living off reserve in urban areas (Statistics Canada). This data suggests that research with Aboriginal people living in urban areas has the potential to be highly valuable. The most recent census data indicates that the Aboriginal population is the fastest growing group in Canada (Statistics Canada). The voices of Aboriginal young adults are barely a whisper in the career counselling literature, yet the majority of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada). This in turn, suggests that the voices of Aboriginal
young people are essential in investigating the needs of Aboriginal communities in the context of career counselling.

Traditionally, Aboriginal peoples in Canada occupied different positions within their tribal groups and survived with a subsistence based lifestyle (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; Roué, 2006; Wilson & Rosenberg, 2002). Presently, there is an increasingly diversified labour market which extends well beyond subsistence activities and is engaging Aboriginal people in many diverse non-traditional roles. Nonetheless, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People in Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, INAC, 1996) notes shortages of trained Aboriginal people in the fields of economics, medicine, engineering, community planning, forestry, wildlife management, geology and agriculture. Despite the burgeoning opportunities there appears to be a disconnect for Aboriginal peoples in terms of obtaining employment.

According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2008) the national rate of unemployment for Aboriginal peoples in Canada is 14.8%, whereas the rate of unemployment for the Canadian population as a whole is 6.1%. Regarding Aboriginal young adults between the ages of 15 and 24, 2006 census data indicates that provincial rates of unemployment range from 12% to over 20% while the average unemployment rate for non-Aboriginal people is 6%; this leaves Aboriginal young adults two to three times more likely to be unemployed than non-Aboriginal young adults. Employment of Aboriginal peoples is of such a concern in Canada that equity policies have been enacted to help address the issue (Dwyer, 2003). Aboriginal people are identified among the four groups addressed in the employment equity provisions in Canada (Dwyer, 2003).
A similar situation is seen in the United States where unemployment and underemployment are rampant among groups of American Indian people (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Juntunen et al., 2001; Hoffmann, Jackson & Smith, 2005). As Juntunen and colleagues outline, approximately 50% of American Indians living on or near a reserve are unemployed, while 30% of those who are employed earn wages below the poverty line.

The rates of unemployment among Canadian Aboriginal peoples, though well defined statistically, are not well explained or well addressed in the literature. Although the study of unemployment has been pursued for years, the research tends to focus on the macro-level through statistical analysis that overlooks the rich narratives of the individuals who struggle with unemployment (Blustein, 2006). Blustein suggests that these narratives, when heard and interpreted, would provide “new insights into the experience of being without work, looking for work and working in a job that does not provide the basic needs to survive” (p. 213). Juntunen and colleagues (2001) made progress in exploring the barriers to employment among American Indians; however, a similar investigation has yet to be conducted in Canada.

Betz (2006) states that the education and employment are directly related: as the amount of education a person has increases, so too do their opportunities for employment. Given this relationship, the statistics regarding educational attainment for Aboriginal people in Canada paint a dismal picture of the prospects for careers for Aboriginal people. Statistics from the 2006 census (Statistics Canada, 2008) indicate that 38% of Aboriginal people in Canada will not complete high school and that number is even higher (50%) for Aboriginal young adults living on reserves. The 2006 census
figures also note the differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in post-secondary educational attainment: while 23% of non-Aboriginal people have obtained university degrees only 8% of Aboriginal people have university degrees. Furthermore, when looking at any post-secondary certifications (i.e. trade certificates, college and university degrees) 44% of Aboriginal people have attained these certifications while 61% of non-Aboriginal people have done the same. These statistics are reflective of the limited access to education that is experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada which, in turn, impacts career prospects. Battiste (1998) suggests that, for many Aboriginal people, the experience of education has been tainted by historical trauma and the impact of colonization. Offet-Gartner (2008) explains that these negative perceptions are related to high rates of unemployment and low rates of high school completion; these trends were also noted by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (INAC, 1996).

Although there have been studies investigating career related issues with Aboriginal people, the majority of these use quantitative methods based on surveys rather than qualitative methods that utilize interviews (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005; Jackson & Smith, 2001). In addition, there are studies that have explored issues related to career with Aboriginal people in the United States and specifically with Aboriginal people who are living on reservations in the United States (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Jackson & Smith; Juntunen et al., 2001; Hoffmann, Jackson & Smith, 2005); however, there is a lack of information about the experiences of Aboriginal young adults living in urban areas in Canada. As such, research investigating the experiences of young Aboriginal people in urban areas is highly relevant.
This study aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring the career related experiences of Canadian Aboriginal young adults in an urban center. This thesis includes a review of the literature relevant to Aboriginal career development in both Canada and the United States. Subsequent to the review of the literature is the methodology, individual participant results, across participant results and the conclusion of the thesis. Throughout this thesis, the use of the term “I” will refer to the author’s roles as a researcher throughout the entire process.

Rationale

The primary reason for this study is to explore the career related experiences of Aboriginal young adults in order to gain insight into the challenges faced by Aboriginal people in finding and keeping employment. As the majority of the Aboriginal population in Canada is under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada, 2008) there is a need to seek out their input on issues related to employment. This study aims to expand the discussion beyond the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people, to include the supports they experience and their stories of success.

Literature in career counselling has started to recognize that Canadian Aboriginal peoples are in not adequately addressed by the predominant theories in the field (Darou, 1998; Herring, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000; Poonwassie, 1995). There has been investigation of career development in rural and small coastal communities in British Columbia for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal secondary students and young adults (Marshall, 2002; Shepard & Marshall, 2000). The voices of urban Aboriginal young adults is absent from career counselling literature. Moreover, this study is part of a multi-site project entitled Walking in
Multiple Worlds: Aboriginal Young Adults Work-Life Narratives that is working to explore and understand the career related experiences of Aboriginal young adults in both Victoria, British Columbia and Toronto, Ontario. This project is funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the principle investigators for this project are Dr. Suzanne Stewart in Toronto and Dr. Anne Marshall in Victoria. This project is three years in duration and will be completed in 2012. The full project will include focus groups in both cities, in addition to the individual interviews. The initial interviews conducted for this thesis will provide guidance in developing the format for the subsequent focus group interviews. This larger project provided the foundation for the research question and methodology for this thesis.

This thesis aimed to explore the career related experiences of urban Aboriginal young adults in a way that was culturally appropriate and to provide information that can be used by urban Aboriginal communities in Canada. The research question used to guide this thesis is “what are the career related experiences of Aboriginal young adults living in an urban setting?” A focus was placed on the supports, barriers and challenges faced by Aboriginal young adults and the thesis explored participants’ past and present experiences of employment and anticipations for the future.

This thesis was intended to add breadth to the existing literature that addresses career development for Aboriginal people by looking specifically at the experiences of Aboriginal young adults in an urban center. The data was collected in order to enhance the current understanding of career related issues for Aboriginal young adults. The results were intended to inform the practices of career counsellors and provide insights into the development of policies and strategies to reduce rates of unemployment among
Aboriginal people. Finally, this thesis was intended to highlight the success of Aboriginal young adults. The data collected is part of the larger project being undertaken in Toronto and Victoria and will be used to develop materials for communities, career counsellors and other professionals who are supporting Aboriginal peoples in career development.

**Sites**

The two sites for recruitment of participants for this project are within the city of Toronto, Ontario, which is the largest urban center in Canada. Toronto is often described as the most culturally diverse city in the world with a population of approximately 2.48 million, with 5.5 million in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA; City of Toronto, 2010). In addition, 2006 census data suggests there is approximately 32,000 people who identify as Aboriginal in the Greater Toronto Area while Aboriginal agencies in the city of Toronto have a significantly higher estimate of 70,000 (City of Toronto). There is a significant number of Aboriginal people living in Toronto yet the information about the lived experiences of Aboriginal people in Toronto is absent in the literature and is a significant gap when looking at the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The first site is First Nations House at the University of Toronto. First Nations House is, according to their website, “a dynamic place where Aboriginal students from many Nations across Canada can seek culturally appropriate services” (First Nations House, 2010). First Nations House provides culturally appropriate services to students of Aboriginal ancestry. First Nations House also provides an opportunity for Aboriginal students to connect with the Aboriginal community in Toronto and the surrounding areas.

The second site is the Native Canadian Center of Toronto which is “an urban Aboriginal community cultural center” that is community based and non-profit. The
Native Canadian Center provides services of a cultural, recreational, social and spiritual nature to the urban Aboriginal community in Toronto. According to the website, the Native Canadian Center of Toronto’s Vision statement envisions “building a healthy, urban Aboriginal community by living, learning and celebrating Aboriginal culture” (Native Canadian Center of Toronto, 2010)

**Definitions**

The following definition of terms is designed to clarify meaning of the terms used in this research. The terms defined include Aboriginal and career.

**Aboriginal.**

According to the Assembly of First Nations (2002), the term Indigenous defines three distinct Aboriginal cultural groups in Canada which are the First Nations, Métis and Inuit. There are many terms used interchangeably when referring to Aboriginal peoples in Canada such as Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, and First Nations (Offet-Gartner, 2008). Aboriginal is an inclusive term used globally and is also included in legislative language (Offet-Gartner). The Canadian government, through legislation outlined in the *Indian Act* of 1876, has defined what it is to be an Aboriginal person in Canada: Aboriginal people are the only group in Canada to be legally defined (Gibbins, 1997 as cited in Offet-Gartner, 2008; Wilson & Urion, 1995). This legislation uses the legal categories of Status, Non-Status, Registered, Inuit and Métis (Offet-Gartner). Offet-Gartner explains that the legal terminology and categories are rarely used by Aboriginal people themselves. In this thesis the term Aboriginal will be used inclusively to refer to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Canada; however, other terms will be applied as used by the authors of the literature being discussed.
Career.

Career is defined by *The Canadian Oxford Dictionary* (2004) as “one's advancement through life, especially in a profession.” This broad definition of career is reflective of the general understanding of the term; however, there are also discipline specific definitions of career.

One of the most eminent figures in vocational psychology, Donald Super, defined career as “a sequence of positions held during the course of a lifetime” (Super, 1980 as cited in Blustein, 2006, p. 11). Blustein suggests that Super’s efforts to replace the notion of work with the notion of career allowed for a shift in perspective through which work became integrated into a broader set of assumptions about human development. The definition of career has gone through various incarnations, the majority of which were informed by the experiences of White, male, middle-class populations (Axelson, 1993; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; Blustein, 2001; Blustein, McWhirter & Perry, 2005). Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck and colleagues (2001) developed a definition of career based on interviews with American Indian participants which states that career as “being a long-term commitment, requiring planning for the future, having a relationship to personal and family goals, and being part of one’s identity” (p. 282). Given that this term was developed by Aboriginal people it seems to be the most relevant definition for this thesis.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review of the literature will address the historical influences, specifically the colonial influence, on Aboriginal peoples’ experience of career. This section will also provide an exploration of the current context for Aboriginal peoples as it relates to employment and career. This review will outline the barriers and supports for Aboriginal people which are described within the literature, as well as acknowledging the gaps which are to be addressed by this study. Finally, there will be a discussion of the literature in vocational psychology and its applicability to Aboriginal peoples; there will be a focus on the applicability of Blustein’s (2006) theory of the psychology of working for Aboriginal peoples.

Historical Influences

To better understand the current context for Aboriginal peoples in Canada the historical influences need to be understood. In Canada, a Eurocentric worldview has dominated and continues to prevail in the formal institutions of the society (Arthur & Collins, 2005; Battiste, 1998; Wilson & Urion, 1995). Colonization is both the process and results of these Eurocentric attitudes and policies; policies which have had a significant impact on the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

There is evidence of the impact of colonization on multiple facets of Aboriginal ways of life and this can be outlined using a Medicine Wheel teaching. One of the most well known Aboriginal teachings is that of the Medicine Wheel (Bopp & Bopp, 2001). Bopp and Bopp describe the Medicine Wheel as a circle with four components that can represent many things from the components of a person (the physical, the emotional, the spiritual and the intellectual) to the four cardinal directions (North, East, South and
West), to the components of a community (the political and administrative aspects; the
 cultural and spiritual aspects; the social aspects; and the economic and environmental
 aspects). The impacts of colonization are evidences in each of the four components when
 the Medicine Wheel is applied to the community.

The political and administrative aspects of a community, as described by Bopp
 and Bopp (2001) are composed of the decision making processes, the arrangement of
 power and overall governance of the community. Kirmayer, Brass and Tait (2000)
 describe how the creation of reserves was completed in the colonial government’s best
 interest which resulted in people from different tribes living together and disrupted
 traditional social and governance structures. Kirmayer and colleagues also indicate that
 the government’s continued involvement with Aboriginal governance has had deleterious
 impacts on Aboriginal culture. Lee (1992) describes how the legislation initially put in
 place by the Canadian government distorted, if not removed, traditional Indigenous
 “to distinguish between matriarchal and patriarchal governance systems” (p. 149). The
 lack of understanding and Eurocentric views and values increased the efforts to “civilize”
 Aboriginal peoples and did not cease with Confederation (Kirmayer et al., 2000). There
 are longstanding impacts of colonization on Aboriginal governance systems; however,
 Lee (1992) describes a recent movement as Aboriginal communities reaffirm their rights
 to self-determination to return traditional forms of governance.

The predominant beliefs, values, morals and goals of a community are integral to
 the cultural and spiritual component of the community in the Medicine Wheel teaching
 (Bopp & Bopp, 2001). Traditional practices, such as the Sundance and Potlatch and
other spiritual beliefs and practices, were outlawed in the Indian Act (Dumbrill & Green, 2007; Kirmayer et al., 2003; Lee, 1992). The traditional beliefs, values, morals and goals of Aboriginal communities were further decimated by the residential school system that attempted to assimilate Aboriginal children to “[pass] on ‘proper’ European values” (Kirmayer et al., 2000, p. 608). Kirmayer and colleagues (2003) also note that:

The Euro–American notion of the person has been characterised as egocentric or individualistic, many Aboriginal peoples retain notions of the person as defined by a web of relationships that includes not only extended family, kin and clan but, for hunters and other people living off the land, animals, elements of the natural world, spirits and ancestors. (p. 18).

This conflict in value systems removed emphasis from community wellbeing and was destructive to Aboriginal communities.

Within the Medicine Wheel teaching that is described by Bopp and Bopp (2001) “the patterns of human relations, and including such related areas as kinship patterns, social protocol, conflict resolution and communication patterns” are the facets of the social component. Both kinship patterns and communication patterns have been detrimentally impacted by colonization. Aboriginal children were removed involuntarily from their family homes through forced attendance at residential schools and prejudiced child welfare laws, which resulted in massive numbers of Aboriginal children being removed from their families and it came to be known as the “Sixties Scoop” (Kirmayer et al., 2000; Schissel and Wotherspoon, 2003). Residential schools forbid the use of Aboriginal languages and the resulting decimation of Aboriginal language use is, according to Hallet, Chandler and Lalonde (2007), one of the most devastating
consequences of residential school. However, there are current language immersion programs that are designed to increase the use of Aboriginal languages as well as enhancing the connection to Aboriginal culture (Kirmayer et al., 2003). The legacy of the trauma experienced in residential schools is prevalent among survivors and is impacting current generations (Kirmayer et al., 2003; Roué, 2006; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). In 2008, the Canadian Prime Minister issued an apology on behalf of the government for the assimilationist policies imposed in the residential school systems (Offet-Gartner, 2008).

The final component of the community – the economic and environmental component – is a reflection of reciprocal relationship between the community and the environment, in addition to the sustainability of the community (Bopp & Bopp, 2001). Aboriginal people were removed from their traditional territories and forced on to reserves comprised of land that was unwanted and out of the way (Kirmayer et al., 2000; Richmond & Ross, 2009). Traditional lifestyles revolved around subsistence activities which, in many cases, were untenable on these new reserves; the inability to engage in subsistence activities is thought to contribute to the economic disadvantages faced by Aboriginal communities (Richmond & Ross). In addition, many Aboriginal people have experienced a change in diet because of limited access to traditional foods that have been associated with diseases such as diabetes and diminished physical health overall (Lee, 1992; Richmond & Ross, 2009; Wilson & Rosenberg, 2002).

As is made obvious by the preceding description, colonization has a substantial and systemic impact on many facets of the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and continues to influence the current context for Aboriginal peoples in Canada.
Current Career Context for Aboriginal Peoples in North America

This section will explore the current literature on the definition and experience of career for American Indians (Juntunen et al., 2001), the barriers faced in career development (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005) and an investigation of a particular career path of Aboriginal people in the Canadian Federal Public Service (Dwyer, 2003). These studies provide information that will serve as a foundation for the current study and also allow for the identification of gaps in the literature.

Juntunen and colleagues (2001) conducted a study to “explore the meaning of career and related concepts with American Indians” (p. 274). The authors suggest that current literature does not adequately meet the needs of American Indians and that, contrary to Darou’s (1987; as cited in Juntunen) suggestion, career choice is relevant to American Indians.

The study authored by Juntunen et al. (2001) study consisted of 18 participants ranging in age from 21 to 59 with a mean age of 46.3 years. There were 11 females (61%) and 7 males (39%). The participants were geographically dispersed across three states and were from six different tribes.

Juntunen et al. (2001) used a qualitative semi-structured interview to ask clients about their conceptions of career. They developed a series of six questions: “What does the word ‘career’ mean to you?”, “Do you see that as the same as ‘job’ or ‘work’?”, “What type of career do (did) you have (or plan to have)?”, “What do (or did) you need to do to have that career?”, “Do you know anyone who has that kind of career, and if so, who?”, “Where do you plan to work in the future?” (p. 276).
When participants in Juntunen and colleagues’ (2001) study were asked “What does career mean to you?” (p. 278) they identified career a lifelong endeavor in pursuit of goals and requiring both planning and commitment. It was suggested that career was related to or integrated in individuals’ self-identity. It was also notable that of the 18 participants, “4 participants directly linked career to promoting traditional ways... [and] that the meaningfulness of the work was related to sharing a tradition with the next generation” (p. 278).

The barriers to career identified in the study by Juntunen et al. (2001) were: discrimination, stigma around education – in addition to limited access to education, and a lack of support from significant others. Juntunen and colleagues noted that lack of support from significant others can occur passively, when others do not take an interest in career opportunities, or actively, when participants were discouraged from pursuing careers by their partners. Participants in the study by Juntunen and colleagues experienced discrimination in both work and educational settings which they linked with their experience of career. Juntunen and colleagues describe the experience of an American Indian woman and state “discrimination may not have prevented her from obtaining a position, but it may have limited her ability to thrive in that environment” (p. 280).

Juntunen and colleagues (2001) also investigated the supports in the career paths of the participants. Among participants with high school education, the importance of education, especially post-secondary education, was emphasized. Among participants with post-secondary education, the two supportive factors identified were family
influences, which include family emphasizing the importance of education, and sobriety (Juntunen et al.).

Juntunen and colleagues’ (2001) study provided a culturally relevant and informed definition of career for American Indians and this definition is potentially applicable to Canadian Aboriginal peoples as well. Moreover, they were able to identify both the obstacles and supports for participants while noting the differences between the groups of participants with higher education and those without.

The study by Juntunen et al. (2001), although conducted in the United States, has potential relevance to Canadian Aboriginal peoples and provides a foundation for investigating the supports and barriers to employment for Aboriginal peoples in the current study. The authors also provide a culturally relevant definition of career that was used to inform this study. The current study builds on the work by Juntunen and colleagues by decreasing the age range and geographic dispersion, by focusing on an urban context. Furthermore, this study explores these concepts with Canadian Aboriginal peoples rather than American Indians.

Hoffman, Jackson and Smith (2005) investigate the barriers to career development faced by Native American students. There were 29 participants in this study, 14 females and 15 males; all participants were from that Navajo Nation. The participants ages were not listed; however, they ranged from grade 7 to grade 12. The study was novel because it aimed to address this question through qualitative, rather than quantitative means. The authors utilized a semi-structured interview with a basic list of questions and the interviews ranged from 15 to 30 minutes in length.
In their results, Hoffman, Jackson and Smith (2005) noted the importance of family support, which included both emotional and financial support of students. In this study, students suggested that financial assistance would effectively eliminate barriers to schooling. Hoffmann et al. made the observation that many of the participants in their study had “seemingly simplistic methods for overcoming these barriers” (p. 42) and there were students who did not identify barriers at all. For example, students suggested that working harder in school would enable them to overcome barriers to career. The authors also noted a lack of concern and/or knowledge of barriers among the participants.

Hoffman, Jackson and Smith (2001) identified a number of barriers to career development which included difficulties in school as a barrier to career. Students perceived their experienced difficulties in math, science and English as inhibiting their future career options. Hoffman and colleagues (2005) also noted that financial barriers were perceived by students. Hoffmann, Jackson and Smith (2005) also suggested that the career options identified by their participants, Native American students living on reserves, were limited in range and “sex-typical careers” (p. 36). The authors suggested that this is a barrier to students’ career development. Hoffman and colleagues also noted that pressure from family and peers can be detrimental to career development for these students. The study suggests that the identified barriers are particularly detrimental to students living on reserves.

The study by Hoffman et al. (2001) was focused on students who are not identified as having entered the workforce. The study allowed for the exploration of perceptions but neglected to explore the actual experiences of young Native Americans in the workforce.
Hoffman and colleagues (2005) suggested that the barriers identified in their study are particularly challenging for Native American students living on reserves which, in turn, suggests a difference in experiences for Aboriginal peoples living in urban and rural areas. Attention has been given to the rural experience by focusing on the reserves; however, the current study will draw attention to the experience of Aboriginal peoples living in an urban area in Canada.

Dwyer (2003) conducted a study to investigate the career progression factors of Aboriginal executives in the Canadian Federal Public Service (CFPS). The specific factors Dwyer explored were: development opportunities, job assignments, education levels, mentoring, leadership experience and networking. Dwyer completed this investigation using multiple sources of evidence. Dwyer conducted a literature review, used a mailed survey to obtain a biographical analysis, conducted personal interviews, reviewed recruitment and competition notices, reviewed career development and advancement materials, and “other reports to gather information from a geographically dispersed populations of Aboriginal executives in the CFPS” (p. 883).

Dwyer (2003) discussed the challenges faced by Aboriginal people who “enter the non-traditional occupation of management and are encountering difficulty moving into executive positions” (p. 881). Dwyer explained that Aboriginal individuals may experience conflict when their culturally based values are incongruent with an organization where Western values are predominant. There was also a discussion of the glass-ceiling effect that is present in both Canada and the US, where Aboriginal people may enter the work force “in a favorable position but gradually find themselves in a second-class career track” (p. 886). Dwyer’s study indicated that Aboriginal executives
within the Canadian federal public service believe that leadership experience, education, job experience and training were all important to career development. However, in this study mentors were not ranked as an important factor. Initially this is surprising, given that many authors (Battiste, 1998; Darou, 1998; Friesen & Orr, 1998; McCormick, 1997; Pepper & Henry, 1991) describe the importance of role modeling for Aboriginal people in general and specifically in the context of career development. Dwyer provided the explanation that although mentors and role models are of importance, the lack of Aboriginal role models within the Canadian federal public service means that the participants may not have had the opportunity to benefit from having a role model and consequently did not note it as important. Furthermore, Dwyer suggested that this lack of role models within the federal public service is detrimental to the career advancement of Aboriginal employees. Role models themselves are supports for Aboriginal people when present and despite the many barriers to career identified, there are also supports and supportive factors for Aboriginal people identified in the literature.

Dwyer (2003) identified discrimination as a barrier for Aboriginal people in the workplace. Dwyer described the experience of an Aboriginal woman who was treated as less competent than her coworkers because of her Aboriginal ancestry. The participant stated “They told me that my work was being checked because I grew up on a reserve where nobody learned to add properly” (p. 883). Participants experienced discrimination when they felt as if they were hired because of their backgrounds rather than their qualifications as a result of affirmative action policies.

In his conclusions, Dwyer (2003) suggested that broader, employee-centered, collaborative approaches are key to enhancing career advancement policies and programs
for Aboriginal people in the Canadian Federal Public Sector. These approaches need reflect and respect the differences in values for Aboriginal peoples in comparison to the predominant Western values. Dwyer also emphasized the need for more role models for Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian workforce, especially those who are pursuing careers in management.

Dwyer (2003) provided an in depth assessment of one specific career trajectory for Aboriginal peoples in Canada; however, the barriers he identified and the suggestions he made are likely applicable to other career paths pursued by Aboriginal people. Dwyer neglected to provide information on the ages of the participants in the study and also used a wide geographical range. The current study builds on his findings by focusing on broader range of career experiences while becoming narrower in age and location of participants.

As the studies above suggest, the much of the research on career development with Aboriginal peoples in North America is conducted in the United States. Furthermore, the studies typically involve participants that are geographically dispersed, the studies do not differentiate between the urban and rural locations, and the studies encompass a wide age range. The current study addresses these gaps by focusing on a specific, urban area with a limited age range.

**Career Counselling Theories and Aboriginal Peoples.**

Vocational psychology and career counselling has a long history, which according to Offet-Gartner (2008), among others, originated with Frank Parson’s *Choosing a Vocation*. Parson’s theory later became known as *Trait and Factor Theory* (Sharf, 2002). Although the scope of this document does not allow for a full description
of the history of vocational psychology, some other notable and prominent theories and theorists are: Holland’s (1993) Typology; the developmental life-span theory of Donald Super (1990); Gottfredson’s (1996) *Theory of Circumscription and Compromise*; *Social Learning Theory* developed by Krumboltz, Mitchell & Jones (1976); and Roe’s (1957) *Need Theory*.

A number of authors suggest that current theories in vocational psychology do not adequately address the needs of Indigenous people (Darou, 1998; Herring, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000; Poonwassie, 1995). Career theories and career counselling practices, when they fail to incorporate culture, are unlikely to be relevant to significant portions of the population (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Betz, 1992; Martin, 1995; McCormick and France, 1995; Russell & Eby, 1993). Many of the existing theories in vocational psychology have been developed for White, male, middle-class populations by White, male, middle-class scholars (Axelson, 1993; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1993; Blustein, 2001; Blustein, McWhirter & Perry, 2005). As a result, Aboriginal people, among other marginalized groups, have been overlooked by career development theorists and researchers (Johnson et al., 1996 as cited in Dwyer 2003). A review of the multicultural career development literature conducted by Koegel, Donin, Ponterotto and Spitz (1995) found only two articles of sixty-eight identified that included American Indians in the populations studied. Below two prominent theories that are considered to be applicable for Aboriginal peoples in Canada are outlined.

The majority of theories in vocational psychology were developed based the assumption that individuals experience a degree of personal volition in choosing careers;
however, Blustein and colleagues suggest is not the case for the majority of the world’s population. Blustein (2006), in his psychology of working, wants to address the needs of poor, working class and otherwise marginalized people that have been neglected by the discipline of vocational psychology. Blustein aims to create an expansive and inclusive framework. He distinguishes the psychology of working from other theories in vocational psychology because it focuses on an “experience-near” connection with workers. Consequently a qualitative approach which draws out the narratives of workers is integral to the development of the psychology of working.

The definition of working provided by Blustein (2006) has four primary components where the psychological meaning attached to working is emphasized. The first component suggests that working provides a way for people to establish part of their identity in the world. Blustein also suggests that working has a unique meaning to individuals that is informed by the individuals’ interactions with others and with specific cultural contexts. He also indicates that effort, activity and human energy are involved in working and that working, may or may not be paid employment, yet it always contributes to the social and economic welfare of a community. In this, Blustein creates a more expansive and inclusive definition of working that encompasses roles within the community such as caring for loved ones. Finally, Blustein states that working is “one of the constants in our lives; the experience of working unifies human beings across time frames and cultures” (p. 3).

The psychology of working outlines three primary functions of working: working as a means for survival and power; working as a means of social connection; working as a means of self-determination (Blustein, 2006). As Blustein explains, working as a means
for survival and power refers to a fundamental function of working which is obtaining the resources necessary for survival. Working, for many adults, is the means to an end: sustaining their life and that of their families. However, the by product of working is often power which is obtained through the status or prestige of a particular job, education, knowledge, and financial resources. Working as a means of social connection refers to the opportunity to develop social relationships and broaden the spectrum of social contact with others (Blustein, 2006). Working, according to Blustein, provides a venue for developing meaningful relationships and is “one of the most social activities we can engage in” (p.113). The final function of working is to provide a means for self-determination which suggests that “extrinsically motivated activities may become internalized and part of a broader set of values, behaviours, and over-all life goals” (p. 22). Blustein goes on to explain that people who work in jobs that they find intrinsically interesting often experience self-determination at work; however, he suggests that by enhancing work contexts to include opportunities for autonomy, relatedness and competence that people who do not find their jobs intrinsically interesting may experience a sense of enhanced self-determination.

Blustein’s (2006) psychology of working is well-suited to an exploration of career with Aboriginal people for a number of reasons. First of all, Blustein emphasizes the need to investigate the experiences of less advantaged workers whose work environments are not necessarily determined by personal choice and are instead influenced by the needs of the community, as is the case with some Aboriginal people. Traditional values that emphasize community above the individual imply that an individual would pursue a job that fits the community’s needs rather than one that is best
suited to the individual’s interests (Wintrob, 1969 as cited in Darou 1998). Blustein’s theory also accounts for the collectivist orientation of Aboriginal people while traditional vocational theories are biased towards an individualist orientation. Furthermore, Blustein’s recognition that working need not be defined as paid employment and can include roles that contribute to the wellbeing of the community is congruent with Aboriginal values. Blustein suggests that the “distinctions between work and nonwork roles... are increasingly fading” (p. 24) and Darou (1998) cautions counsellors not to treat clients without paid jobs as if they are unemployed because they may have roles in the community that, although unpaid, are important. Blustein’s framework is culturally responsive and is well-suited to exploring career with Aboriginal people.

The framework developed by McCormick and Amundson (1997) was developed specifically for Aboriginal peoples in Canada in response to the need for culturally appropriate career counselling models. McCormick and Amundson developed the model to integrate traditional Aboriginal values such as connectedness and balance. McCormick and Amundson suggest that to define career and life roles eight integral components clients need to address eight integral components: connectedness, balance, roles and responsibilities, sharing of gifts, storytelling, interests, level of education and labour market information. McCormick and Amundson also emphasize the role of community which is both unique and foundational to this model.

The First Nations Career-Life Planning Model, originally developed by McCormick and Amundson (1997), was demonstrated as a culturally relevant means by which Aboriginal young people can develop and set career goals (Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000). Neumann and colleagues suggest that the
likelihood that young Aboriginal people will pursue a career, rather than simply finding a job, is increased when they are assisted in developing and setting career goals. The First Nations Career-Life Planning Model is considered to be culturally relevant because it reflects a collectivist orientation, involves community and family members in the process, and respects Aboriginal values (Neumann et al.). The authors had thirteen Aboriginal young people as participants and found that the First Nations Career-Life Planning model was a positive experience for those involved. They found that the model was successful in increasing the self-awareness of participants, involving family and community members, and respecting cultural practices. The First Nations Career-Life Planning Model is a culturally relevant application of career counselling.

**Summary**

The Aboriginal population in Canada is rapidly expanding with more than 50% of the population under the age of 24 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Many Aboriginal people experience difficulties with employment, as reflected in the unemployment rates which are higher than those of the non-Aboriginal populations (Statistics Canada). There have been many identified barriers to employment for Aboriginal people, as well as supports (Dwyer, 2003; Hoffman, et al., 2005; Hoover & Jacobs, 1992; Hossain et al., 2008; Jackson & Smith, 2001 Juntunen et al., 2001). However, these studies were either conducted in the United States, through quantitative surveys, with adult Aboriginal people, or with Aboriginal people living on reserves; all of which are factors that neglect to consider the needs of urban Aboriginal young adults, who comprise over half of the Canadian Aboriginal population. This study attempts to find the voice of urban Aboriginal young adults to add depth the current body of literature.
Chapter 3: Methods

This chapter contains a description of the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis and more specifically the theoretical foundations of the methodology that was used. Subsequent to the theoretical description is an account of the methods employed, including a breakdown of the different phases of the study, an outline of the interview process and a summary of the process of analysis.

Social Constructionism

Social constructionism places emphasis the role of social processes and action in constructing knowledge (Young & Collin, 2004). Guba and Lincoln (1990) suggest that while the natural and physical world are conducive to methodologies that search for the truth, the social and human world is distinct and is better suited to methodologies that respect the possibility of multiple truths (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). This idea is congruent with traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing that suggest there are multiple truths and no single reality (Steinhauer, 2002).

Burr (1995) suggests there are four key assumptions underpinning social constructionism. The first underpinning tenet is that taken-for-granted knowledge should be approached with a critical lens to challenge conventional knowledge. Secondly, social constructionist theory suggests that knowledge is shaped by language and bound by time and culture. Another assertion is that knowledge is a product of daily interactions with the world which results in multiple truths and ways of being. Finally, the products of knowledge which are negotiated understandings, or “social constructions,” have a variety of different forms. Burr (1995) explains that the social constructionist perspective veers
away from the focus on individual knowledge and objective proof and instead emphasizes the process and dynamics of social interaction.

Blustein et al., (2004) suggest that a social constructionist approach is “well-suited as a foundation for movement from the traditional study of middle-class careers to a more broadly inclusive study of working across cultures and social classes” (p. 428). Blustein (2006) notes that the social constructionist perspective is ideal to inform the development of the psychology of working.

Merriam (2002) suggests that “The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3); this, in turn, implies that a social constructivist approach is both necessary and appropriate when conducting qualitative research. Social constructionism serves as the theoretical framework which is the foundation for this research. Social constructivism emphasizes the individually constructing meaning of knowledge and qualitative research parallels this emphasis by focussing on the unique lived experiences of the individual participants. Thus there is an essential relationship between social constructivism and qualitative research.

**Qualitative Research**

The purpose of this study is finding and making known the voices of Aboriginal young adults which have been absent in the vocational literature. Qualitative methodologies are designed to enhance the understanding of the lived experience of an individual from the perspective of the individual (Schwandt, 1994). This provides both the researcher and participant opportunities to engage in meaning making and to co-construct the research (Ponterotto, 2002). It is suggested that by suspending one’s own
worldview to learn about the culture of others, that a researcher becomes a cultural learner and, in doing so, distributes power and reduces the possibility of marginalizing participants (Ponterotto).

In their description of qualitative research, Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that qualitative data “are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts.” In addition Ponterotto explains that, “qualitative methods describe the lived experiences of participants in their own words rather than attempting to categorize and quantify experiences on pre-established quantitative scales” (p. 398). Patton (2002) describes qualitative research as pursuing the understanding of experience rather than attempting to prove a hypothesis. Moreover, it is suggested that quantitative methods employing surveys, models and instruments may confine findings to a particular paradigm (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005; Jackson & Smith, 2001) while qualitative methods allow for more flexibility and exploration which “is not defined by researchers’ a priori assumptions” (p.41). The flexibility and lack of a priori assumptions was essential to this study because relatively little is known about the experiences of Aboriginal young adults living in an urban setting and a qualitative method is conducive to exploring the depth of these experiences. There are varied qualitative approaches to research (Thompson, 2008); however, the narrative inquiry approach was deemed most appropriate for addressing the research question in this study.

**Narrative Inquiry Method**

Narrative inquiry is, according to Chase (2005), “characterized as an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as
narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). As Chase’s definition suggests, narrative inquiry is not a static, standard set of principles that is applied to research; rather it is an approach that continues to grow and evolve. This approach is centered on the experiences of people and the approach can be as varied as the experiences of these people.

Thompson (2008) suggests that the narrative method of has become increasingly popular while Chase (2005) describes it as a “field in the making” (p. 651) and explains that the narrative methodology has its foundations in the fields of sociology and anthropology.

Chase (2005) explores five analytic lenses that are combined uniquely to form narrative inquiry and that characterize narrative methods as distinct from other qualitative research methods. The first lens presented by Chase is that the narrative method presents the narrator’s perspective in a retrospective manner. Narrative moves beyond a chronology of events in time to include the narrator’s emotions, thoughts and interpretations and, in so doing, provides a way of understanding connections and seeing consequences over time. This emphasis on the interpretation of and meaning made by the narrator is, according to Chase, another unique feature of narrative inquiry. The second lens is the recognition for the narrator’s voice by the researcher as having the capacity for “verbal action” (p. 657) which suggests that narratives are constructed by narrators to communicate their experience of reality; this deemphasizes the factual aspect of the story and instead focuses on the narrator’s experiences of reality. The narrative method also recognizes the need for a narrative to exist within a social context; this social context has the potential to facilitate the narrative, yet also has the potential to inhibit the narrative because the narrator’s “possibilities for self and reality construction [are limited to those] that are intelligible within the narrator’s community, local setting, organizational and
social memberships, and cultural and historical location” (p. 657). The next lens described by Chase emphasizes that a narrative is constructed to address a particular audience and with a particular purpose. The final distinguishing characteristic of the narrative method as outlined by Chase is that authors using narrative methods, by interpreting and presenting their studies, are themselves narrators. This suggests that the narrative method involves both the participants and the researchers in meaning making and storytelling.

Storytelling and the oral history tradition are common among Aboriginal peoples (Lightening, 1992; Medicine-Eagle, 1989); as such, the congruency between the narrative methodology and the storytelling tradition suggest that the narrative methodology is an appropriate choice in working with Aboriginal people. Barton (2004) details the congruence between narrative inquiry and Aboriginal epistemology and suggests that narrative inquiry is both culturally appropriate and conducive to exploring the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, this study was meant to address the missing voices through the stories of Aboriginal young adults that are not heard through the quantitative survey methods. Consequently, the narrative method was used, specifically the narrative method outlined by Suzanne Stewart (2008), in order to draw out and make heard the voices of Aboriginal young adults.

**Recruitment and Participants**

The recruitment of participants was conducted as part of a larger Social Sciences and Humanities Resources Council of Canada funded project entitled “Walking in multiple worlds: Aboriginal young adults’ work-life narratives.” Although I was involved in the process I was not solely responsible. The process began with the
formation of community partnerships with local Aboriginal agencies. The term partnership is used because the community agencies were invited to provide feedback on the study and were encouraged to be actively involved throughout the research process. This was consistent with the Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP) principles that are designed to respect Aboriginal communities so that research is conducted with these communities rather than for or on the communities (Schnarch, 2004). The agencies were contacted with a recruitment letter (Appendix A) which was followed by a personal meeting between the Executive Director of the agency and Dr. Stewart, the study’s co-Principal Investigator, where a consent form (Appendix B) was presented, reviewed and signed. The agencies who participated were the First Nations House at the University of Toronto and the Native Canadian Center of Toronto. For further information on these agencies refer to the sites. Once consent was obtained from the community partners recruitment posters (Appendix C) were posted and distributed through email list serves. Recruitment also occurred through word of mouth at social gatherings at the Native Canadian Center. When an interested person made contact via phone or email, they were screened and then invited for an individual interview via phone or email. Five participants were recruited for the study.

The research participants for this study were between the ages of 27 and 30, resided in the Greater Toronto Area and self-identified as Aboriginal (First Nations, Métis or Inuit). The participants recruited for this study were all women.
Study Protocol.

Preliminary Phase.

The preliminary phase began with the preparation of the application to the University of Toronto’s Office of Research Ethics for ethical approval for the Toronto-based portion of the Social Science and Health Research Council of Canada funded Walking in multiple worlds: Aboriginal young adults’ work life narratives (WIMW) project for which Dr. Suzanne Stewart was the Principle Investigator. I was involved in the ethics application; however, I was not solely responsible for it. The research completed for this thesis was subsumed by the larger research project which is described earlier. As such, approval from the University of Toronto’s Office of research ethics was sought and obtained (see Appendix A).

Once ethical approval was obtained, initial contact was made with the community partners in writing on behalf of the WIMW project (see Appendix B). Next, an in person meeting was arranged between Dr. Stewart and the Director of First Nations House and another meeting with Dr. Stewart and the Executive Director of the Native Canadian Center of Toronto. The in person meetings were used to discuss the project and to review the community consent letters (see Appendix C). Also, feedback and input from the community partners was invited. Once consent was obtained, it was agreed that recruitment may occur at community events and First Nations House agreed to place the recruitment information on their list serve. When the information was sent out via email, those who responded were screened and then invited for an interview. Recruitment also occurred by word of mouth and when interested people made contact they were screened
and then invited for an interview. Consequently, attendance at community events was essential in the recruitment process.

In accordance with the narrative method, a field journal was used to record observation, reflections and insights throughout the duration of the study. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) suggest that the journal records the subjective experience and allows the author to become more aware of her own relationship to the study. They also suggest that journal provides an opportunity to record these processes in an ongoing way and may be used as a tool to generate awareness, insight and understanding; all of which are essential in the qualitative methodology being applied in this study.

*Phase 1: In-depth individual interviews.*

When participants arrived for the interview they were presented with a consent form (Appendix D) to read and sign while the interviewer reviewed the consent process verbally.

The individual interviews were conducted in a semi-structured interview format and ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length. The interviews were audio recorded. In addition to the audio-recording, I made field notes after each interview. I also found opportunities to make field journal entries with my immediate impressions and reactions to the interviews, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2006). Once informed consent was established, participants were invited to share their stories. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with an interview guide that was developed as part of the larger Walking in Multiple Worlds study being conducted by Dr. Stewart and Dr. Marshall.

Interview #1:
When participants were asked to share their stories, the following statements and questions were used as a guide: (Appendix E):

1. I would like to hear your story or stories of how you have come to be part of the work force.

2. I am particularly interested in how you understand work and for Indigenous youth.

3. Has this understanding changed from past to present, and how do you see it into the future?

4. How, in your past, present, and future experiences, does culture inform your story of Indigenous work and career life and your story of career development?

Once the interview was complete, the participants were given an honorarium consisting of a small gift certificate to a local bookstore. The participants were also asked to return for a second interview to review the story map (Appendix E) that was composed based on their first interview.

The next step in the process was the verbatim transcription of the interview. The subsequent analysis and development of story maps is described fully in the section on narrative methods of analysis included below.

**Phase 2: Preliminary analysis/interview #2.**

**Narrative method of analysis.**

As the definition of narrative inquiry implies, there are many approaches to narrative inquiry available in the literature. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) outline a general approach to data analysis which is modified by Stewart (2008) to fit within the narrative framework and to be used with Canadian Aboriginal peoples.
The narrative method of analysis outlined by Stewart (2008) consists of five stages. The first stage is the verbatim transcription of the interview and Riessman (1993) suggests that analysis begins at the stage of transcription, as such I completed all interview transcription. Verbatim transcription, in this instance, includes personal inflections (e.g. ummm, hmm, pauses, laughter, crying) to allow for the nuances of meaning to be captured (Riessman, 1993). Furthermore, verbatim transcription allows for the transformation of an oral interview into a transcript which, in turn, allows for its preservation for future interpretation and analysis (Stewart, 2007).

The second stage of the narrative analysis method outlined by Stewart (2008) is the reading and rereading of the transcript. Bogdan and Biklen (2006) suggest that the author should read the data at least twice and should do so uninterrupted. While reading and rereading the interviews I made notes in the field notes book. Previous journal entries and field notes were also reviewed at this time in order to integrate the information gathered at the time of the interview and the data being generated by the review of the transcripts. Bogdan and Biklen also recommend that the author note any potential coding categories; as such, I had a separate section where I made note of these potential categories.

The latter three stages of Stewart’s (2008) method are what Bogdan and Biklen (2006) term data analysis which they define as “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them and searching for patterns” (p. 159). Chunking the transcript into thematic statements is the third stage in the narrative analysis method developed by Stewart (2008). Bogdan and Biklen refer to the chunking of the transcript as creating “units of data” (p.185) that vary in length from
sentences, to paragraphs, to a sequence of paragraphs. Thematic statements are meant to go beyond summarizing words and composed to reflect the essence of the meaning of the words (Stewart); once the thematic statements are developed, each unit in the transcript can be placed under a thematic statement. The thematic statements described by Stewart do not appear to have an analogue in Bogdan and Biklen’s description of the process.

The fourth stage in the narrative analysis was the assignment of a descriptive code (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Stewart, 2008). Stewart suggests that the thematic statements can be condensed into one word descriptive codes that reflect the essence of the statement in general terms. Bogdan and Biklen describe the assignment of descriptive codes as searching for topics and patterns within the data and then developing words or phrases to represent them.

The final stage of the initial analysis was the mapping of the descriptive codes into a story map. Richmond (1999) took the core structures of narratives outlined by Mishler (1986) and developed a tool (i.e. the story map) to display these in a coherent and easily understood manner.

Mishler’s (1986) structure of core narratives has four components. The first is Orientation which describes the setting and the character. The second is the Abstract which serves to summarize the incidents of which the story is comprised. The third is the Complicating Action that allows events, conflicts and themes to be evaluated or commented on by the author. The final component is the Resolution which presents the outcome of the story. Mishler goes on to explain that a narrative analysis serves to continually condense the narrative until the following question is answered: "what is the point of this story?" (p. 236).
Richmond’s (2002) story map serves to provide a structured answer to the following question which is useful in providing meaningful cross-case comparisons. The story map provides a visual schematic which presents the participants’ recounting of past, present and future experiences. The structure for the story map is outlined below (see Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The World of_________</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Past Experiences</strong></td>
<td>• Background • Self-identity • Roles</td>
<td>• Roots • Personal history • Events</td>
<td>• Setting the context • Past connections</td>
<td>• Incidents • Sites</td>
<td>• Past work experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Present Experiences</strong></td>
<td>• Current status • Level of awareness</td>
<td>• Current support</td>
<td>• Current connections</td>
<td>• Current experience</td>
<td>• Current work experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Future Intentions</strong></td>
<td>• Outcomes • Personal development • Self-identity</td>
<td>• Future support</td>
<td>• Future connections</td>
<td>• Plans for future schooling</td>
<td>• Future work expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Story Map Outline Adapted from Richmond (2002)

When the participants arrived for the second interview, informed consent was reviewed by the interviewer. Participants were then presented with the preliminary results from the initial interview in the format of a story map. The initial interview questions were reviewed and participants were asked to further reflect on these questions and to provide feedback to the interviewer on the initial themes identified in the
preliminary analysis process. The feedback was used to revise the initial themes and to enhance the final analysis.

Interview #2:

For the second interview the following questions were used as a guide (see Appendix E):

1. From your narratives in your interview I have constructed a story map…how does this map illustrate your views?
2. What is missing from your story map? What would you like to add?
3. Do you have anything else to say about your story map?

As in the initial interview, I made use of prompts such as “tell me more about that” in order to facilitate the narratives of the participants. Furthermore, I made field notes for the duration of the interview. As expected, I continued with entries in the field journal which helped to inform the final analysis of the results.

**Phase 3: Final analysis & writing.**

This phase consisted of refining the story maps and constructing narrative profiles as described in the data analysis section below. The final analysis provided the material for the final three chapters of this thesis which was then presented to the thesis committee members.

**Phase 4: Final Results/Dissemination.**

The final phase of the study will be the distribution and dissemination of the results. Once the thesis is approved by the committee members, the results of the study will be shared with participants. They will be offered an electronic copy of the thesis if desired. Furthermore, a community newsletter that explains the study and its findings
will be distributed to and by the community partners. Once dissemination within the community is complete, results and recommendations will be written in scholarly articles and submitted to conferences and peer reviewed publications. Furthermore, the results will be shared with the research team at the University of Victoria. It is anticipated that this will provide an opportunity to illuminate a unique comparison between the two sites.

**Procedure**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Specific Procedures</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preliminary Phase</td>
<td>-Proposal to Masters Thesis committee</td>
<td>- Provide written proposal to committee members; receive feedback and complete revisions; receive approval&lt;br&gt;- Initial contact with participants&lt;br&gt;- Introduce participants to research process in person</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attendance at community events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>In-depth Interviews #1 (audio taped)</td>
<td>- Conduct and audio record individual interviews&lt;br&gt;- Complete verbatim transcription of interviews</td>
<td>1 hour&lt;br&gt;1 month Each</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Preliminary Analysis / Interview #2 (audio taped)</td>
<td>- Initial narrative analysis by researcher to develop story maps - Review story maps and ask for feedback or clarification from participants</td>
<td>1 – 2 hours Each&lt;br&gt;2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Final Analysis &amp; Writing</td>
<td>- Write final analysis which will complete the Results, Discussion and Conclusion of thesis&lt;br&gt;- Present completed thesis to committee</td>
<td>4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Dissemination</td>
<td>- Distribute final results to participants, community partners, and with research team on-site at the University of Victoria&lt;br&gt;- Write scholarly articles &amp; conduct presentations</td>
<td>Continual dissemination over 3 - 6 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. Procedure**

**Summary**

The current study is a small part of a larger study by my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Stewart. For the purpose of this thesis, a narrative inquiry methodology was used because
it is both culturally relevant and appropriate. Moreover, the narrative inquiry allowed for a thorough investigation of the research question and was able to evoke the career related stories of Aboriginal young adults living in Toronto. It allowed the participants in the study to identify the supports, barriers and challenges they have faced while addressing their past and present experiences of work, as well as discussing their future anticipations for work.
Chapter Four: Within Participant Results

This chapter provides a summary of the individual participant results and the within participant analysis based on those results. The participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. For each participant there is a brief introduction, an initial story map, a revised story map, a core message and subsequent themes. Revisions to the initial story map are highlighted by underlining the text. Themes were developed using the methods of analysis previously described. The core message is the predominant theme which stood out throughout the interview, while themes are the other prominent ideas in the interview.

Participant One Hundred One

Participant one hundred one (P101) is a twenty-nine year old female currently completing a Bachelors Degree at the University of Toronto. She is also currently searching for work in her field. P101 was talkative during the interview and needed very little prompting. Her answers were thorough and well thought out. The results of our first interview were outlined in the initial story map (Figure 3), and consisted of the core message of cultural connections and several themes. These themes are: empowerment, importance of education, and sustainable employment.

In our second interview, P101 was provided with a copy of the story map (Figure 3) and asked to review it. P101 appeared pleased with the story map and did not request any revisions. As such, the initial story map remained unchanged.
### The World of Participant 101

<table>
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<th>Past Experiences</th>
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<th>Community</th>
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<th>Work Experience</th>
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<td>Jobs related to culture were more enjoyable</td>
<td>Community support for work opportunities and education, Peer influence, Work opportunities accessed through community based agencies</td>
<td>Lack of education is a barrier, Education causes financial strain</td>
<td>Job/money oriented work, Lack of job satisfaction, Varied work experiences, Financial struggles, Job stereotypes</td>
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<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Aboriginal culture is not wholly accepted, Myth that Aboriginal culture is in the past</td>
<td>Family support and role models, Community based agencies help in job search</td>
<td>Financial burden of further schooling a barrier, Increased quality of jobs with education, Empowerment through education</td>
<td>Search for full time work, Difficulty finding quality jobs, Finances impact job selection</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Future Intentions</th>
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<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment, Improve self-confidence, Finding and maintaining balance</td>
<td>Production of culture, Cultural values inform work choices</td>
<td>Continue to work in community, Desire for strong connection with community</td>
<td>Pursue masters degree when financially feasible, Further education increases</td>
<td>Desire for sustainable employment, Increased job satisfaction, Broadening opportunities, Need for networking, Job choices informed by values</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Core Message and Themes.

Cultural Connections.

P101 spoke at length of the importance of Aboriginal culture and connected it with her past, present and anticipated employment, as such it was deemed the core message of her interview. P101 emphasized the need for Aboriginal young adults to reconnect with culture. She stated, “I try to avoid the lost narrative ... that our culture has been lost.... contemporary Aboriginal people are very much here and now and still alive.” She spoke about the need to know the history of Aboriginal people and the impact of colonization. She mentioned some of the political strife in her home community and said:

It is so upsetting... the people didn’t really want the community that badly. They hadn’t had one for so long, people got used to living in the cities. You know, some people wanted to be involved up there and some people wanted it to be more like a club, not a Nation.

P101 noted her connection to her culture, and in turn, to her community, has allowed her access to jobs that she may not have obtained otherwise. She spoke about “a summer student program where you could work anywhere and they [the band] would pay you a base wage and the employer could add on to that.” She stated that she has “been really lucky to get a lot of really great opportunities, like summer student positions and internships. Especially from being an Aboriginal person.” P101 believed that she was lucky to have been given the opportunities she has had; however, she also emphasized the importance of being open and searching for these opportunities. She also had success in finding jobs through Aboriginal agencies. “_______ (Aboriginal agency) has been
really helpful, actually. I’ve just gone there again and they’re helping me again. I’ve sort of come full cycle.”

Beyond receiving opportunities through her cultural connections, P101 also enjoyed working in the community in a variety of positions. She noted that she enjoys these positions in the community more than other jobs because:

Cultural understanding has translated into beliefs that have allowed me to work for less money, or to work longer, or to take more satisfaction for my work than something that disagrees with that.

In the future P101 hopes to obtain jobs that are congruent with her traditional values. She believes she will be able to do that because “I think that I’ve had the opportunity to see where my cultural beliefs intersect with other areas of knowledge and ways of thinking.” P101 explained that, for her, finding a job where she feels balanced is essential. “I think if you can find a good balance that works for you at the time – that fits – it can actually give you cultural growth.” P101 suggested that culture and employment need not be separate, in fact by combining the two one is provided with more meaningful opportunities.

Empowerment.

One of the themes in the interview with P101 was empowerment. She discussed empowering young adults through work, through providing choices and through education and understanding of power dynamics. In her words, “I think it [work] can be a really important vehicle for building self confidence and empowerment... being able to earn what you need and have money.” P101 expressed the belief that the intrinsic value increases when something is earned. She said, “Any of the resources that they need, that
they get it themselves is so much more valuable than having someone else having given
that to them.”

P101 also suggested that providing choices is essential to empowering youth.
“Giving Indigenous youth, not giving them, letting them, find their own ways to create...
I think that’s key.” She felt that it is important to provide youth with options and not
limit them to stereotypical career choices. “Also, not just to limit youth to art. Because
Native people tend to get pigeon holed as artists and that’s it. But there’s also a lot of
medicinal and technical skills.” P101 indicated that she was pleased with the broadening
of her own career opportunities and the empowerment that was provided through her
education to pursue different opportunities.

Education was also linked to empowerment by enhancing the understanding of
power relationships and dynamics. P101 suggested that the power dynamics of
workplaces may be a deterrent because:

I think that’s a lot of power relations, relationships, because if you come into
something entry level there is always this hierarchy I find in workplaces...

Indigenous youth might be more sensitive to racially, depending on their
experiences, they might connect it to their ago or their color whereas other people
might not.

P101 also believed that through education one can understand power dynamics
and “if you can understand it you feel empowered. At least if you can voice it then it’s
not such a big scary thing anymore.”
Importance of Education.

Another significant theme in the interview with P101 was education. She described education as an important part of her life which allowed her to better understand her cultural history. She emphasized that education can be the key to finding good jobs for Aboriginal young adults. She spoke of education as broadening career opportunities and increasing the likelihood of finding a sustainable and enjoyable job. She commented:

I think the more education you have, the more likely you are to be able to find that healthy balance of a job that you love that also gives you some good money [and where] you can also be healthy yourself.

P101 discussed some of the challenges and supports in getting an education, such as lack of family or peer support and the financial barriers. “I think having a social network, having family and friends that are supportive is – can – be a big support or barrier.” She spoke of how a peer culture can inspire or hinder progress in terms of education and career. She also commented that having family support and role models like her mother while in school made life much easier. “What’s made us able to get through this period of student/artist (referring to her partner) – it’s that family support.” Financial barriers were a prominent concern for P101. In her words, “I’m considered working there for a minimum wage because I’m going to need to be working full time in a professional position and part time to be able to recover financially from school.” She acknowledged that her band funding has been helpful in covering her tuition but there are additional expenses that she is unable to afford. “Even though I’m lucky enough to have funding it’s like, I won’t have phone or internet... and you kind of need that to do grad
school. “P101 expressed a desire to pursue graduate education; however, she said her financial situation is not conducive to doing that at this time.

**Sustainable employment.**

P101 used a very poignant phrase, sustainable employment, which summarized a theme present throughout her interview. She discussed qualities that make employment sustainable and those that make employment unsustainable in her experience. She described sustainable employment where one enjoys the job while being able to maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle, in addition to meeting financial needs. P101 emphasized the importance of finding a holistic balance in her life, which includes her working life.

P101 discussed the type of work she found valuable and enjoyable; she noted that the work she most enjoyed was related to community and allowed her to connect with her values. P101 aspires to find a job that allows her to help other people and take care of herself at the same time. In the past, she enjoyed jobs that utilized her skill set and allowed her to express her creativity. She enjoyed jobs that were:

More project focussed instead of just being a warm body, or a smile or a pair of hands. You’re not valued as a person you’re replaceable. But if you’re working on a creative project of something more professional that’s a lot more fair. And that’s more rewarding to me.

P101 suggested that sustainability is not always a choice people are afforded, financial burdens often dictate that one takes a job even if it is not sustainable. P101’s comments like, “If you’re desperate and you need a job, you take it” and “I was working two full time jobs for a while and it was not sustainable... I couldn’t be human and still do that” suggest that jobs are not always a means for self development, but rather are a
means to make ends meet. However, she also noted that there are times when one needs a job to make ends meet and it can be challenging when one is over qualified. “I didn’t want them to not hire me because I was over qualified because I really need a job.” It is challenging to find a job that is enjoyable, pays well and is suited to a particular skill level.

Scheduling demands were also connected to sustainable employment for P101. She spoke about a job as a counsellor at a transition house which involved shift work and said “on that schedule I wasn’t able to balance well enough to be healthy in that place.” She noted the importance of being healthy herself, especially in the role as a helper. She also related scheduling to traditional practices. “The nine to five and Monday to Friday type schedule – that’s not how all Aboriginal cultures operated traditionally, it was more seasonal based on access to resources.” P101 emphasized the need for flexibility in scheduling and in the workplace in general. “Flexibility for Indigenous youth, I think that would be very helpful.” She noted the tendency towards transient employment among Aboriginal young adults and suggested that employers need to be aware of the barriers they face. Also, that transiency may be related to lack of interest in the job, lack of opportunity for growth, power dynamics in the workplace or a combination of the three.

**Participant One Hundred Two**

Participant One Hundred Two (P102) is a 28 year old woman who is currently working full time in a secure position. She has completed a Bachelors degree and is working on obtaining a Masters degree through distance education. She presented as pleasant and well spoken during the interview and needed very little prompting, while providing detailed and thorough answers to all questions posed. Throughout her
interview the multiple aspects of her identity were the most prominent message conveyed by P102. In addition, the themes of cultural connection, career journey and empowerment were visible in the responses given by P102. P102’s initial story map (Figure 4) is a summary of these themes and other information presented in the interview.

When presented with the initial story map (Figure 4) P102 indicated that the content of the story map was accurate and representative of her story. However, in two places she wanted additional information included. The additions made by P102 are denoted by the use of underline in the final story map for P102 (Figure 5). P102 added responsibility to the Self category of present experiences because making responsible and conscientious choices is important to her. In the Education category, P102 added that in the past finances were not perceived as a barrier to education. She emphasized the work perceived because she noted two things, the first is that the reality of the financial burdens of education is daunting and the second is that not everyone has access to financial support for education. As such, in her case finances were not a barrier; however, she recognizes that for many people finances present a substantial barrier.

Core Message and Themes.

Multiple Aspects of Identity.

The core message in the interview with P102 focuses on the multiple aspects of identity. P102 discussed the interaction between her identity as an Aboriginal person, as a youth, and as a professional. As an Aboriginal person, P102 commented that “there are so many measures and so many ideas of what being an Aboriginal person is.” She went on to explain that when she was growing up:
The World of Participant 102

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<th>Work Experience</th>
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<td>• Family support to overcome stereotypes</td>
<td>• Family support</td>
<td>• Job/money oriented</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty speaking up</td>
<td>• Negative stereotypes</td>
<td>• Community support</td>
<td>• Completed undergraduate degree</td>
<td>• Enjoyable jobs related to community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Feeling disconnected when unemployed</td>
<td>• Present in all facets of life</td>
<td>• Continuing impact of colonization</td>
<td>• Aboriginal identity not acknowledged in primary school</td>
<td>• Difficulties faced by employers</td>
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<td>• Evolving practice of culturally informed beliefs</td>
<td>• Community acknowledges whole person, not just occupation</td>
<td>• Education increases opportunities for quality jobs</td>
<td>• Career oriented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Disconnect between identity as a youth and as a professional</td>
<td>• Diversity among Aboriginal peoples</td>
<td>• Strong community connections</td>
<td>• Pursuing graduate education</td>
<td>• Community oriented work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sharing information</td>
<td>• Culture informs work choices</td>
<td>• Community resources compartmental -ized</td>
<td>• Education increased desire to work in community</td>
<td>• Long term employment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Culture informs all aspects of self</td>
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<td>• Culture infused work</td>
<td>• Evolving roles in the community</td>
<td>• Education is valuable</td>
<td>• Narrowing career focus</td>
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<td>• Inviting culture in to work environments</td>
<td>• Youth role models</td>
<td>• Need for flexibility from employers</td>
<td>• Normalizing success</td>
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<td>• Prioritizing</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Impact of family roles increasing</td>
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Figure 4. P102 Initial Story Map
## The World of Participant P102

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<td>Short term employment</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring identity</td>
<td>Evolving practice of culturally informed beliefs</td>
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<td>Diversity among Aboriginal peoples</td>
<td>Strong community connections</td>
<td>Pursuing graduate education</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing information</td>
<td>Culture informs work choices</td>
<td>Community resources compartmentalized</td>
<td>Education increased desire to work in community</td>
<td>Long term employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture informs all aspects of self</td>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>Youth are capable</td>
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<td>Work as a means of connection</td>
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<td>Choosing between career and community</td>
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<td>Impact of family roles increasing</td>
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Figure 5.P102 Final Story Map
I went to school in a moderately small town... It was where Aboriginal identity was a non issue – like it didn’t even exist... which is, I guess, like anything else a gift and a curse all at once because it meant that I didn’t have to deal with too much of the negative attention from kids because of it and I didn’t feel like I was blocked from academics.

P102 observed that in the community there are negative stereotypes about success academically and in employment. P102 emphasized the importance of helping to “to normalize the idea that you can be an Aboriginal and do something that you love and you can get paid for it and you can be appositive role model.” P102 noted that her mother was a strong influence in promoting the idea that she would be successful at whatever she chose to do. At present, P102 stated that she felt strongly about her identity as a successful young Aboriginal person. “Your life is enacting your values and so the jobs I take have – for the most part – been based on living in a good way.” However, she noted that people in the community may perceive her identity in different ways depending on things like her job or her community involvement.

“Your identity is questions if you do well in school or your identity is questioned if you take a job at the mall instead of at, umm, a Native organization and things like that... There’s all sorts of ways your identity is measured but I’d say it’s measured as much in career as anywhere else in your life.”

P102 explained that she has multiple enmeshed identities and that “you’re choosing this identity and [you need to consider] how does it fit with your other identities and how [do] people perceive them?” P102 discussed how, as she has aged, she has become increasingly aware of where her identities intersect and interact. However, she
also noted the assumptions that others make about her identity based on her age or her role as a professional. She noted that people seem to place her identities in a binary position where she is either a youth or a professional and people seem unable to acknowledge both of her roles.

It’s kind of that idea that in the community you are either a youth or you have a job. There’s not, you know... which I think is interesting because I get, you know, I get things like that in the community where, you know, people will assume I’m a lot older but then in the professional world I’m kind of viewed as this less than professional because I’m a youth.

In the interview, P102 remarked that although career is a significant part of identity both within and outside the Aboriginal community, outside the Aboriginal community when one does not have a job “people sort of give you a look, like, ‘how do I define you?’” She suggested that the Aboriginal community reminds you that you are more than your job title which “is definitely helpful through the process of developing a career.” P102 discussed her evolving understanding of the link between her employment and her identity.

Before I was like ‘that’s my job, that’s who I am.’ And I’m starting to realize more and more that my job, that what I do is who I am and that whichever parts of it I get paid for are maybe no more less important because of that.

P102 connected her identity and career with her culture which was one of the salient themes in her interview.
Cultural connections.

The first theme present in the interview was a cultural connection; P102 described herself as connected with her culture and her community through her involvement in community events, cultural activities and social activities. P102 indicated that culture has informed all parts of her life. She stated:

Culture plays a big part in my life in general. I would definitely challenge people who try to separate it out… even when I wasn’t working in the community – my culture is who I am. It gives me the skills that I have. It gives me the personality that I have. You can’t discount any of those parts of culture.

Throughout the interview P102 commented that her culture and values have informed many of her choices in both obvious and subtle ways. In her words “My teachings can only inform what I do… I think that’s the same with career. It’s the way I’ve internalized those teachings and the way my life has been effected by them.” She noted the ways in which her culture was infused in jobs which, at first glance, appear unrelated. P102 indicated that she had not always planned on working in the community directly and pursuing her education allowed her to move in that direction. She said:

I think it wasn’t until I was done school, or almost done school, that I really felt compelled to work specifically in the community. I always sort of felt like I could work and do things and be a part of the community to whatever extent fit my life.

P102 emphasized the importance of her connections with the community in developing her career path. She stated that she “started to reframe how [she] thought of work and community as being connected in some ways.” She noted how her involvement in the community while she was in school allowed her to network, which in
turn helped her when it came time to apply for jobs. “Being involved... with different Aboriginal organizations... helped a lot for when I graduated. [It helped] to know people and to have people to vouch for me.” She also commented on the different views on work within her community when she said:

I think there’s a real diversity in how the community views work. There’s huge numbers of people who are sort of, you know, ‘that’s what I do to feed my family.’ And that’s sort of where the story of work ends. There is also a lot, a lot of people who, umm, the goal is more about creating safe spaces. Umm, so they’re doing work which isn’t as well paid but allows them to be involved in the community and to help, you know, create change.

Involvement in the community and the opportunities to interact with others was an important support for P102. Both personally and professionally it was important for her to stay connected with the community. She stated:

The hardest time for me was when I was sort of cut off from those involvements [in the community]. I broke my leg... and couldn’t get around... I really struggled with that period of time because I was so disconnected from anything that was going on.

P102 went on to suggest that oftentimes people are placed in a position where they feel they have to choose between being involved in the community and work outside the community. She attributed this to the schedule of many Aboriginal organizations which are similar to business hours; as such, people are often at work during the times where they may otherwise have contributed to and connected with the community. She
remarked that when you are not working in the community it requires more effort to stay connected and with the demands on people’s time, it can be very difficult.

**Career journey.**

P102, throughout the interview, talked about career in terms of a lifelong journey. In her words “A career is a long time, we work for like forty-five, fifty years.” She also acknowledged the role of Elders in the community and the need to recognize their work. She commented, “The Elders in our community are just so amazing... I just think that there’s an importance to acknowledging that role. And look at that – it’s not what we call quote unquote a career but it’s your lifelong work.”

She described her career journey as starting at a young age where anything seemed possible. “I opened a time capsule I made when I was in grade three and it was like by the time I am 23 I am going to be a veterinarian, and a teacher and a mother.” Her perceptions of career continued to develop as she aged. She stated “My ideas around the types of work I would do changed a lot when I started going to school. It went from being sort of money focussed to being more career focussed.” Pursuing post secondary education also influenced her career journey, in her words: “it helped me learn what I was interested in. The luckiest things I had was that I actually started to think about... what I was interested in before I graduated.” She emphasized the importance of finding work that connects with the studies, which in turn provides both work experience and an opportunity to explore interests. “I was able to work on campus and do things that were... more connected to things I was studying.”

P102 remarked that her career journey has not always been smooth. There were times when P102 was struggling to find work and it impacted her self-esteem. She stated:
I hadn’t been working for a couple of months. So that was really hard because it sort of snowballed... I hadn’t seen anyone in a couple months, I didn’t have a job... I felt afraid, or down on myself.

P102 commented that one of the challenges that contributed to her struggle to find work was the delay between when she would have an interview with an agency and when they would call her back with a job offer. She believes that this results in “missed connections... where people and agencies who might have worked well together don’t have the opportunity because of the delays and the finances of living in this city.” She indicated that she had been unable to accept job offers for positions she was really interested in because she had already accepted another position. She commented, “Unfortunately a lot of Aboriginal students don’t have – I didn’t have – the funds to go two or three or six months or whatever it is, to hold out for the dream job.”

She remarked that as she continues on her journey, she continues to narrow her career path and become more focussed in her efforts and more deliberate in her choices. She has moved from short-term contract work to a stable position. In the future, P102 hopes to obtain “a job that I want to stay in for the long run.” P102 anticipates that her career path will be significantly impacted by starting a family of her own. “The big change I can see for myself is because... I don’t have children now, I’m not married. I think that the weight my career has will change as those things change.”

**Empowerment.**

The theme of empowerment was woven through the interview with P102. She spoke about empowering youth through sharing information and by trusting them to make the right decisions. She stated:
I feel like we’re really failing to remind our youth that they’re awesome. And that they’re smart. And that they can do all of these things. We sort of have these areas that are, you know, set out and we’re like ‘everyone go that way. Or everyone do this now.’ And I think that looking at what youth want for themselves and making that the goal, umm, is missing a little bit.

In P102’s story, when she was younger she struggled to ask the questions that she needed to ask in order to find job opportunities. In her words, “I was really afraid of asking questions... because you don’t want people to know that you don’t know.” She commented that her lack of knowledge about the language and jargon used in job postings limited her job search unnecessarily. P102 emphasized the importance of asking questions and questioning the advice you are given. She suggested that youth need to avoid thinking that others are better qualified to make their decisions. She noted: “The idea that we know best for ourselves is probably the hardest lesson to learn when you’re going in to work... We really need to remind ourselves that we know best. We know ourselves.”

P102 went on to say that she now tries to help share information and answer the questions that are difficult to answer. “It took me a long time to be able to speak up and say anything. And now I’ve become loud, so I can use that to help.” P102 observed that “the community is divided up by the organizations where it should be that they’re all coming together to support youth.”

The need to normalize success for Aboriginal young adults was highlighted by P102. She suggested that the narrative present in the community is not one of success. In her own story, her mother was essential in debunking this myth. She stated “My mother
is just very supportive.” She asserted the importance of having positive people who are supportive of career goals. She also commented on the importance of role models when she said:

We need role models for those youth who aren’t going through those huge traumas so they don’t feel like they have to. So they don’t feel like they have to give up on themselves to come back and be a success. You can be a success just by going and doing things.

**Participant One Hundred Three**

Participant One Hundred Three (P103) is a First Nations woman, thirty years of age, residing within the downtown core of the city. She has completed an undergraduate degree and reports that she has completed all the coursework for a Masters degree; she needs to complete the thesis portion in order to have the degree conferred. P103 was an animated and engaging storyteller and was able to share many of her stories throughout the interview. The core message identified in the interview with P103 was creating opportunities. Other themes present in the interview were supporters, self-esteem and culture infused work.

An initial story map (Figure 6) was composed to reflect the issues discussed in the interview with P103. P103 was presented with the initial story map in the second interview and given an opportunity to revise it to better represent her story. Upon review of the initial story map P103 requested three additions which are noted in P103’s Final Story Map (Figure 7) by the use of underlining. She revised the “education is valuable” to state “education is invaluable, especially for Aboriginal women.” She also wanted to emphasize that the financial barriers to the completion of her Masters degree are the
### The World of Participant 103

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<th>Past Experiences</th>
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<td>Education increases opportunities for quality jobs</td>
<td>Making opportunities</td>
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<th>Community</th>
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<th>Work Experience</th>
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<td>Culture infused work</td>
<td>Native mentors</td>
<td>Financial barriers to pursuing masters</td>
<td>Work inspired by child</td>
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<td>Inviting culture in to work environments</td>
<td>Youth involvement</td>
<td>Financial barriers to pursuing masters</td>
<td>Need for flexibility from employers</td>
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Figure 6. P103 Initial Story Map
### The World of Participant 103

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<td>Financial incentive to pursue education</td>
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<td>Passion for writing</td>
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<td>Incongruence with traditional values in Western work places</td>
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<td>Education increases opportunities for quality jobs</td>
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<td>Recognizing privilege</td>
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<td>Entrepreneurship</td>
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<td>More job options in urban areas</td>
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<td>Difficult to live in a traditional way while working</td>
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result of broken treaty promises. The final addition noted the challenges in maintaining a traditional lifestyle, particularly traditional parenting, while working.

**Core Message and Themes**

*Creating opportunities.*

The core message present in the narrative created by P103 throughout the interview was the idea that opportunities can be created. She suggested that opportunities are available and they need to be found or recognized; when an opportunity is not readily available then one can be created through persistence and open communication. In her words “I think if people want to go work in the community or don’t see an opportunity, they need to make that opportunity themselves.”

In P103’s own story she noted the importance of a strong work ethic and finding passion in one’s work in order to create opportunities. P103 explained that she learned to have a strong work ethic from her parents who she described as “workaholics.” She went on to suggest that work ethic can develop for different reasons. “My mom is a Native person and she grew up in extreme poverty... and so I think, you know, her hard word comes from a very different place – which is survival.” When she described her history of work, she noted that she started to work at a very young age at a grocery store. While working there she realized that she was not in a position with the potential for growth and development. She recalled thinking “I have to get my education so that I can actually work in a professional job using my mind.” P103 went on to pursue a job that connected with her passion for music. She commented:

I started really early... interviewing bands. That’s what I used to do. I was really into music because music was my, sort of, my addiction. So I started doing it all –
lots of music interviewing and I did develop my writing skills that way and my interview skills.

P103 identified herself as an entrepreneur from an early age. She emphasized the importance of entrepreneurship in the Aboriginal community and she suggested that the rates of entrepreneurship among Aboriginal people in Canada were higher than many other groups. She explained that entrepreneurship is one example of Aboriginal people who create unique opportunities for themselves.

P103 also emphasized that “Aboriginal people with a university degree have a whole different access to jobs.” In P103’s experience, she noted that initially she was reluctant to pursue her education because of the associated costs and then once she had obtained her degree, she found that she had many different and well paying job opportunities available to her. She suggested that in the community people may not know about the opportunities available to them. She stated:

They don’t know, like, yeah, you can go get a Masters. It’s not a problem. It’s not that hard. You can get a B.A. It’s actually going to be a really good experience for you. Like you don’t have to go into these universities, like, you can actually go and become a chef if you enjoy cooking. People need to know that they can pursue their passion.

P103 also discussed the role people in positions of power have in creating opportunities. At present she is a “health promotion consultant which, [she thinks] is a fancy word for activist.” P103 described herself as someone who has always tried to empower others through her work. She also stated, “I think that the adults who are in positions of power for funding or developing programs need to look to the youth and see
‘what is working for you already?’ One of the more recent opportunities she noted was through electronic mediums such as Facebook, which is an internet social networking website, and using these mediums to communicate with youth and to expose them to young role models in the community. P103 discussed the importance of role models and supporters, which was one of the themes in her interview.

**Supporters.**

The presence and absence of supporters in P103’s life was a theme interlaced throughout the interview. For P103, supporters were people who pushed her to do more, introduced her to new opportunities or encouraged her throughout her journey.

P103 noted that many of the supporters she encountered were in educational institutions. She spoke specifically about a guidance counsellor in her high school, without whom she may not have attended university. She said:

I feel like there’s one person who really made a huge difference. A guidance counsellor saw me and was like, ‘you’re Native, are you Status?’... And so she found out that indeed I was entitled to be Status and to have my tuition covered by my First Nation. And so I went to university because of this woman pushing me.

P103 also spoke about professors she encountered in university who pushed her to participate and who inspired her to better connect with her culture. In describing the first professor, she stated “I had a young Jewish professor who really pushed me a lot. He would make me sit at the front of the class... and he would be like ‘I can see your mind is working, like, talk.’” In this way, P103 was encouraged to access her full potential and succeed in class. When speaking about the second professor, P103 said:
I had another professor... and I guess he saw something in me and he really pushed me... he would take me to different Native events... and he was the first person who really helped expose me to Elders and stuff.

As she spoke about the supporters in her life, P103 reflected: “You know, it’s really interesting when I look back on it because I realize that most of my supports were non-Native people.” She went on to say that in the past she did not feel as if she received support from the Aboriginal community to pursue her work; however, she said that this has changed and she feels supported by the Aboriginal community in her current role.

She went on to say:

I have a lot of older women who support me... and most of these women have Ph D beside their names... I think that’s a real testimony to strong Native women who are getting educated. And who are, like, you know, we need to – have to – all work together to make the changes that we need to see.

P103 indicated that she would like to see more Aboriginal role models and mentors in the community that are accessible to young people. She felt that mentors need to be better recognized for their roles in the community and that recognition could take the form of an honorarium because their services are invaluable. P103 pointed out some of the young people she felt were having a positive impact on her community and lauded the good work they were doing. P103 mentioned that she had been recruited for mentoring programs because she was a young Aboriginal woman business owner. However, when she was in need of mentoring the services provided were, in her experience, inadequate. She said:
There’s a lot mentoring programs…and I found them useless because I’m always matched with a non-Native mentor. And I’m sorry but, I appreciate the volunteers, but they don’t speak to me as a Native woman trying to run her business.

The absence of support services was noted by P103; however, she did not identify this as one of the major challenges she encountered. The significant challenge she encountered was the lack of support from her family. P103 believed that a lack of family support has the potential to seriously impact a young person’s career path and self-esteem. In her life, she stated:

My mom was probably one of the biggest barriers and challenges in my life. She was, you know, she had a really hard time growing up and I’m sure nobody ever told her anything positive about herself. So she passed that to me.

P103 emphasized the need for family to be supportive and to foster the self-esteem of the young people in the community, particularly those who are already encountering barriers. She suggested:

We need to have a community of, like, aunties and grandmothers who are there helping the young mothers who are coming to this state. ... And I don’t have any of that around me. And I think that’s a big – I think that’s common for urban Aboriginal people.

P103 also observed that there are likely differences in the experiences of urban Aboriginal people, compared to those living in rural communities, in terms of the supports that are present and absent. She also talked about the difference in the attitudes toward Aboriginal people in her home town (a small rural town) and Toronto, the large
urban center in which she currently resides. P103 indicated that the attitudes in larger urban centers, in her experience, are much more positive and that these attitudes can impact self-esteem.

**Self esteem.**

Throughout her interview, P103 often returned to the idea of self esteem for Aboriginal people and especially for Aboriginal young people. In her own story, P103 noted how her mother did not enhance her self esteem, rather she did the opposite by telling P103 that she would like get pregnant and not graduate high school. P103, rather than succumbing to the negative predictions, rebelled against them and was determined to graduate high school and she did. P103 stated, “You can think whatever you want about me as a reflection of yourself but I’m not going to succumb to that mentality.”

P103 suggested that the low self esteem present in the Aboriginal community is an ongoing consequence of colonization and specifically the residential school system. “Our Native pride, our self-esteem are really still hurting [as a result of the residential school system.]” P103 went on to emphasize the importance of parents supporting their children and helping them build their self esteem. In her words, “I think about Native children growing up and not having self esteem. And that’s something that has been happening because of the residential schools.”

P103 discussed the opportunities for the community to enhance self-esteem among young Aboriginal people. In her words, “There’s always been a political focus in my work. And advocacy – trying to empower other people who are not as empowered.” She emphasized the role, and responsibility, of organizations to provide opportunities for young people to display and develop their skills and passions. She suggested that this can
be accomplished by finding opportunities to spend money in the community by hiring community members. P103 has made it a priority to include these objectives in her own work because she has seen the positive impact in the community. She stated:

I managed to set aside $2,000 for 3 Aboriginal youth to create some photos for me and to write their stories for me... I just saw like – one of the youth is 12 who worked with me. It’s been such a boost to her self esteem to have that project.

And I think like what an amazing difference that I was able to make just from a little bit of money.

In addition to the role of organizations, P103 observed that youth are capable of supporting one another in positive ways. She stated “It’s already youth supporting youth.” P103 asserted the importance of positive young role models in the community and lauded the work of those already present. Speaking about a positive young role model in the community, P103 stated “She has good self esteem and she believes that she can do what she’s doing.” She suggested that in order to see more young role models that the challenge of low self esteem needs to be addressed in the community.

**Culture infused work.**

Another theme in the interview with P103 was the need to infuse and fully accept culture into the workplace. In her own work, P103 endeavours to be a “bridge between the Native community and the non-Native.” Her role involves the integration of Western and Traditional Knowledge through the development of health promotion tools. In her words, “I take mainstream health information and I combine that with Traditional Knowledge and try to create tools that respect, that have balance.”
P103 observed how work environments are often set up in ways that are incongruent with Traditional values and practices. “It is hard for many of us to go to work in an office tower where our feet don’t touch the ground, where we can’t smudge.” She noted that although some work places technically allow practices like smudging, there is often so much paperwork to go through to get permission that it suggests the practices are not truly accepted, and certainly not encouraged. She commented that “Employers need to be open to those kind of approaches and maybe they’ll actually get something out of it… A lot of our cultural values really bring depth and, you know, add joy to a workplace.”

P103 also recognized a more subtle challenge that exists in work environments which is the interviewing process. She described instances in which she saw qualified young Aboriginal people miss an opportunity because they were not able to convince the other members of the selection committee that they were the best person for the job. In her own experience, P103 described her frustration when she was not selected for a position:

I say, [to the prospective employer], why did you not pick me because I am going to the best job for you. And they say because I wasn’t selling myself enough. I wasn’t chatting enough. And I was just like, you know, obviously there’s cultural differences. Like, we listen as Aboriginal people. We don’t brag about ourselves generally. We have the 7 teachings about humility, honesty, bravery…. I’m not going to go and say like ‘I’m the shit.’

P103 noted that the need to blatantly sell oneself in an interview can be a significant deterrent for Aboriginal youth who have been raised with Traditional values.
She suggested that Aboriginal young people need to take risks in applying for jobs even if they do not have every listed qualification because she believes that they will be surprised at the opportunities that taking a chance may afford them. In her own experience, she applied for a job that she did not have every qualification for and surprised herself and others when she was offered the position. She noted that in her own role she finds opportunities to support Aboriginal young people and there are others out there who will do the same.

**Participant One Hundred Four**

Participant One Hundred Four (P104) is an Aboriginal woman who is twenty seven years of age. She is currently attending a university in pursuit of a Bachelors degree in Aboriginal studies and political science. She appeared excited to participate in the interview and answered all questions fully. As a result of her interview, an initial story map was developed (Figure 8); however, P104 was unreachable after the initial interview despite multiple attempts to contact her and, as such, a second interview was not completed. The core message from the initial interview with P104 was finding direction, while the themes were importance education, preserving culture, and cultural identity.

**Core Message and Themes.**

**Finding Direction.**

Throughout the interview with P104, the message of finding direction in her career path was prominent. P104 described a journey that continued to evolve in unexpected ways that were often a result of unmet expectations. Throughout her stories, P104 displayed a strong work ethic that she hoped would lead to a comfortable lifestyle.
### Figure 8. P104 Initial Story Map

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<td>• Lack of consistent employment</td>
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<td>• Difficulty finding employment</td>
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<td>• Value of cultural education</td>
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<td>• Connecting with culture</td>
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<td>• Challenges of returning to school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Desire to work in community</td>
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<td>• Working in the community</td>
<td>• Education increases opportunity for quality jobs</td>
<td>• Financial security</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Appearance as a barrier</td>
<td>• Immersing in culture</td>
<td>• Connecting with community of origin</td>
<td>• Education will help with working in the community</td>
<td>• Working in community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Preservation of culture through work</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
She said, “I just felt like I was working, working, working. And I just wanted to have, kind of, a nice lifestyle.” P103 indicated that she always knew she wanted to complete post secondary education; however, she was unsure what to pursue. P104 spoke to her guidance counsellor “she told me that I should probably go to school for aesthetics and spa management. She recommended a program at ______ college.” P104 followed this advice with the hopes of being an entrepreneur in the spa industry because she believed that would provide her with a luxurious lifestyle. She remarked,

I don’t know what I was thinking. I guess I was a teenager at the time. I was just like ‘I’ll open a spa.’ You know things just aren’t that easy. You have to get in there, get your work experience and everything else.

She pursued her program of choice and graduated with honours. She indicated that she enjoyed the program and found that she was more interested in the spa management components than the hands on work. P104 remarked, “What I wanted to do was open up my own spa... I guess I wanted to be a lady of leisure. (P104 laughs) I soon learned that things don’t always work out the way that you want.” Once P104 graduated and tried to find work in the field she was disappointed by the way she was treated by employers and the minimal rates of pay. Reflecting back, P104 said “I’ve always kind of had these retail jobs that just haven’t paid a whole lot. And it’s just, uh, it’s kind of frustrating... because I would like to have a good job that I feel secure in.” She went on to explain:

When I graduated I saw that the diploma didn’t really translate into much in the working world... Aestheticians aren’t paid very well and that is something I really should have looked into before, you know, getting into the field.
Despite her realization that the beauty industry would not provide her with a long term career, P104 was able to recognize the parts of her work that she did enjoy, such as being in a leadership role and finding work that was congruent with her personal values. She went on to reflect on a new direction for long term careers and asked herself important questions. P104 stated:

I knew I wasn’t going to stick around there, so I was like, ‘I really need to figure out what direction I want to go in now.’ I was really scattered and I just need to think ‘ok, what was I good at in school? What did I excel in, in college? And where do my strengths lie? And where am I going to go from here?’

As a result of her reflections, P104 decided to return to school and pursue Aboriginal studies and Political Science at a university. P104 is presently attending university and indicated that she is enjoying what she is learning. Moreover, being at university provided her with an opportunity to connect with the Aboriginal community on campus and in turn the Aboriginal community in Toronto. This newfound connection and sense of belonging has reinforced her new career direction. She reported, “I definitely want to work in the Aboriginal community... in areas of cultural preservation. Obviously, I have to reconnect with my culture if I’m doing that.” She eventually hopes to “get into some form of leadership” and emphasized the importance of preserving Aboriginal language and culture as objectives in her career path. P104’s connection to her culture has helped her find direction in her career path that she was previously missing. She is very hopeful for the future and said “I’m very optimist about it. It feels like I’m on the right track.”
Importance of Education.

The role of education in P104’s career path was evident throughout her interview, as was the value she placed upon it; as such, education was noted as one of P104’s themes. P104 indicated that she had a long standing interest in pursuing post secondary education which informed some of her early career choices. P104 had a number of jobs while in high school and the purpose of these jobs was to make and save money for post secondary education. As P104 stated,

I saved a lot of money. I just wanted to put it away... I worked a lot. I went to school and just ploughed through and tried to do the best that I could. And then I decided – I always knew I wanted to go to university but I wasn’t sure what I wanted to go to school for.

The money P104 saved in these jobs allowed her to get through her college program comfortably. She pursued an aesthetics program at a college and enjoyed her program there. “I started in January of 2003 and I went right through – like, four consecutive semesters. So that would be two years at _________ college and I graduated with honours.” However, P104 found that her college certification was not valued in many of the positions she held. “So they really didn’t value education, or really experience. They just cared if people could sell.” P104 found work in a number of positions, yet she reported that none of the positions were satisfactory due to a number of factors which included low rates of pay, poor treatment by employers, and incongruence with her personal values. As a result, P104 reflected upon her opportunities and decided to return to school. P104 emphasized the importance of obtaining an education in order
to broaden employment opportunities and finding a job that is satisfactory and has long term potential.

At present, P104 is attending a university pursuing a program in Aboriginal studies and political studies. She stated, “I want school to be my primary focus.” She explained that while she is in university, that she is not working despite the impact on her finances. P104 recognized the importance of focussing on her studies at present in order to obtain a better job in the future. “School has given me the opportunity to learn about my culture. And that’s really, umm, going to help me get a job for what I want to do in the community.”

In P104’s experience, her studies at university not only increase her job qualifications but also help her to understand her own history. “I feel like from taking Aboriginal studies and learning about how the history of how colonialism has happened – it’s filling in a lot of blanks.” This understanding and feeling connected to her culture, is shaping P104’s future career path as she intends to work in the Aboriginal community. P104 commented on the importance of informal learning that takes place in the community. She remarked, “I understand that while being in school and learning is important... I understand that actually involving myself in the community is way more important than how I do in school.”

P104 discussed both the importance of education and the barriers to education for others in the Aboriginal community. She recognized the challenges in terms of literacy and graduation from high school. She commented that the perceived barriers may be more difficult to overcome than the practical barriers. P104 commented,
There’s a lot of people who are coming from reserves and they don’t have the literacy skills and as a young adult they might want to go to college and there’s just so much upgrading that they would have to do that they would really feel overwhelmed by that.

_Preserving Culture._

Another theme that was present in the interview with P104 was a need to preserve culture. P104 spoke of preserving culture through education, language and maintaining ties with the community. P104 made a particularly salient comment on preserving culture:

I really think that is something that needs to be done. Yes, while literacy, education, work training – all of these things are important, umm, the focus on helping Aboriginals for the sake that they are Aboriginal will disappear if what makes them Aboriginal disappears.

P104 suggested that the preservation of culture starts in education of young people. Reflecting on her experience, P104 stated “I always felt that I need to learn about, not only my own culture, but I’ve always been attracted to all Aboriginal communities and how different they are.” She noted that the history of Aboriginal people in Canada is not fully acknowledged or taught in the Canadian educational system. In her own experience, P104 had minimal exposure to the history of Aboriginal people. When discussing the residential school system P104 remarked, “Because they don’t teach it in high school, so you almost can’t even blame people for being that ignorant. I didn’t know a lot of things before I started taking Aboriginal studies... it opened my eyes a lot.” She
went on to say, “I think in order to reconcile what has happened, the truth needs to be told to everyone.”

P104 clearly noted the importance of language in preserving culture. In her own family, none of her family members speak the traditional language and she reported that her great grandmother told her grandmother not to teach her children (including P104’s father) the language because it would not be helpful in finding a job. In her words, “I think that language is extremely important and so it makes me really sad that my great-grandmother told my grandmother to stop teaching the kids.” However, P104 has recently enrolled in lessons to learn her language. P104 observed that the link to culture and language can be tenuous and challenging to re-establish once broken. “That’s all it takes, is one break in the chain and then it’s gone.”

P104 emphasized the value of staying connected with the community as a means to preserve culture. She went on to say “I think with being exposed to the culture more, it just strengthens it. Because as soon as you go and get a job somewhere else, that becomes more of a priority and then you’re separating yourself.” She suggested that finding community involved or culturally related work is ideal and that at times there can be conflict between preserving culture and financial incentives. She commented, “I just kind of feel that it’s not a traditional area anymore. And so it’s kind of losing its roots again that way. It’s good financially for people but it’s not good for the culture.” In her own, life P104 hopes to become more involved in the community through attendance at community events, participation in protests and volunteering with Aboriginal organizations.
Cultural identity.

Identity was noted as a theme for P104 because she spoke directly and indirectly about identity throughout her interview. At the beginning of her interview, P104 stated “I’m a quarter Native but I identify more with that part of my culture than, you know, my German side.” She often spoke about reconnecting with her Aboriginal heritage and community as an important way to learn about herself. P104 commented, “I wanted to learn about my culture because it’s been lost to me.... I want to be close to my family and to my roots.” P104 noted that in the past she has not felt totally connected to the Aboriginal part of her identity and that a significant shift occurred when she became connected to the Aboriginal community at the university she attended. She described this as a positive experience and went on to say “I kind of stopped feeling like such an outsider. I realize that visually, yes, I don’t look Aboriginal. And that’s always going to be a challenge for me. But that doesn’t mean I don’t feel connected.” P104 indicated that not “looking” Aboriginal has been challenging for her and has caused her to feel that her identity was questioned by others. She stated:

I feel very connected to the culture, but you know, I see when I say that I identify as Aboriginal, you know, Aboriginals kind of look at me and go ‘ok, you know, I can maybe see it somewhere in there.’

P104 hopes to reconnect with her extended family that is still living on the reserve. P104 observed the loss of Aboriginal identity in her close family. She attributed this to the impacts of colonization and also to a purposeful separation from culture. In speaking about her grandmother’s generation she said:
They were sort of assimilated by not speaking their language, by moving off of the reserve into town. My grandmother married a white man. I think they all married white people. Not that that’s a bad thing, but, um, again just really separating themselves from culture.

P104 also discussed having an Aboriginal identity in more general terms. She emphasized the importance in recognizing the diversity among Aboriginal groups. She stated, “I think that it’s just, uh, kind of doing an injustice to all Indigenous people because it is not looking at everyone individually. It’s just grouping everyone together and I think that’s wrong.” She went on to suggest that generalizations contribute to the negative stereotypes about Aboriginal people and said “I think it’s difficult, obviously, for people who are visibly Native because racism definitely exists. Umm, even in Toronto where it’s supposed to be multicultural and accepting – it’s really not.”

**Participant One Hundred Five**

Participant One Hundred Five (P105) is a twenty-seven year old Aboriginal woman who is currently pursuing a graduate degree in counselling psychology. P105 answered all questions thoroughly and thoughtfully. The product of the initial interview with P105 was the initial story map (Figure 9.) P105 was provided with an opportunity to comment on and revise the story map. After reviewing the story map P105 indicated that she felt it was an accurate representation of what was discussed in the interview, as such, the initial story map and final story map are identical. The core message that was woven throughout the interview with P105 was Adaptability. The themes that were present were cultural connection, guidance, and education.
### The World of Participant 105

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past Experiences</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Culture informed identity
  • Seeking guidance
  • Interconnectedness | • Negative stereotypes
  • Culture is linked to identity | • Family support
  • Key supporters
  • Limitations of band funding
  • Work valued over education | • Education has always been a priority
  • Completed undergraduate education | • Job/money oriented
  • Employment equity helps obtain jobs but does not translate into the workplace
  • Outside pressure to follow a specific career path |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Present Experiences</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Influence of family
  • Changing priorities
  • Just do it mentality
  • Self confidence
  • Finding balance | • Work that is congruent with values
  • Honouring Aboriginal history
  • Myth that Aboriginal people are in the past | • Collaboration
  • Key supporters
  • Desirable jobs related to community
  • Connection with the community | • Institution based training alone is not sufficient
  • Need for credentials
  • Pursuing masters degree | • Career oriented
  • Community oriented work
  • Culture informed work choices |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Future Intentions</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Indigenous Culture</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Optimistic attitude
  • Open to change and growth
  • Whole identity | • Culture informs all aspects of life
  • Work informed by traditional values | • Community based education and training
  • Addressing needs of community through work | • Education enables change
  • Completing masters degree
  • Education within the community | • Inviting culture into the work place
  • Working as a counsellor with Aboriginal people
  • Open to change |

Figure 9. P105 Initial Story Map
Core Message and Themes.

Adaptability.

The core message in the interview with P105 was adaptability. Adaptability allows P104 to change her priorities and to maintain an optimistic attitude. She commented:

I’m open to changing. I’m open. I have an idea of what I want but I’m open to it shifting and transforming. And I’m sure it will. Depending on where I am, you know, location-wise, depending on where I am spiritually, emotionally, whatever.

P105 observed that in her career journey the role of work has changed for her. Initially, the jobs she held were jobs that allowed her to meet her financial obligations but were not jobs she enjoyed. P105 stated, “I didn’t enjoy the work I was doing, I was doing it for the money. But later, after I graduated I was able to find jobs that I actually had an interest in.” Once she completed her undergraduate degree she noted a shift in this which allowed her to pursue jobs she enjoyed, that were congruent with her values and that allowed her to meet her financial obligations. P105 discussed her goals in terms of a career path and academic objectives; she indicated that she “was always going to go all the way up to [a] PhD” and she wants “to work as a counsellor with First Nations people who may be two-spirited people.” At present she is pursuing a Masters degree in counselling psychology and when asked if obtaining a PhD remains a priority, she stated that her priorities had shifted significantly and remarked that “maybe I will return to school later on, but [a masters is] all I need for right now, for my purposes.” Her priorities changed when she had her first child and she indicated that she hopes to have another child. On the subject of changing priorities P105 remarked:
It’s just really that my baby is my priority whereas before my school and my work was my priority. And I feel that it’s not very complementary. It’s difficult to balance the two. And because my priorities have shifted, I’m going to finish what I have started [referring to her masters] and that’s it.

P105 went on to note that for many people it can be difficult to return to school after having a child; however, in her case she stated: “I think a lot of people would have – might not have – gone back to school after having a baby. But I’ve always had the attitude that I could just do it.” This confident attitude extends beyond P105 returning to school after the birth of her child, she commented “I think that I’m not worried. You know what I mean? I’m not too worried about things. I always trust that things will work out.” P105’s adaptability and optimistic attitude was evident when P105 spoke about her career path as well when she said “Maybe I won’t be a great counsellor, so maybe that path or plan has to change. I would have to look at something else.” Nonetheless, P105 did note that not everyone shares her perspective, especially when the encounter obstacles or unexpected changes in life circumstances. In her words, “If you’re really passionate about it, if you’re really committed to it, you’re going to find a way... maybe. Maybe. Then, on the other hand, you might just continue on and not go where you want to go.” P105 emphasized the importance of persevering and taking chances. She suggested that there is a need to increase self-confidence; she described an experience she had when she was listening to a female Aboriginal writer speak:

I just remember her saying you should just write, you should just do it. Aboriginal people, we don’t have enough writers. You look at the non-Aboriginal population: there’s bad writers, there’s good writers. We don’t have to
be so self-conscious or thinking ‘I’m not good enough.’ So just do it, and then we’ll have the range too... It connected to me no just as a writer but as an Aboriginal person.

In this way, P105 addressed the need to improve self-esteem and she also suggested that self-esteem is linked to career. In her own experience, she displayed self-confidence and self-esteem which allowed her to persevere despite the challenges that are faced by returning to school after having a child.

**Connecting with culture.**

The first theme noted in the interview with P105 was an emphasis on connecting with culture. She observed the role culture played in her own career journey, the visibility of Aboriginal culture, and the potential role for culture in the workplace.

In P105’s story, culture has had a pervasive impact. She stated, “I think culture has always played in for me in my work experiences and my career choice and my academic experiences.” P105 went on to explain that the experience of finding her culture helped her find her identity and school played an integral role in that process, as it encouraged her to ask herself tough questions. She remarked:

I think that in finding my culture and finding my identity I really started to, um, ground my work... and I think that if I hadn’t found my culture I wouldn’t be where I am today. I wouldn’t be on the career path that I am.

She went on to describe how doing healing work on herself was the first step in the path that lead her to the counselling program of which she is now a part. She suggested that connection to her culture was what prompted her healing work.
P105 also noted the importance of the connection between culture, community, and work. She indicated that culture will inform the way she practices in her chosen profession of counselling. In her words, “The kind of work that I want to do is, it follows, you know, Traditional modes of healing and maybe... a marriage of Western and Traditional practices.” In addition, P105 discussed her desire to do work that meets the needs of the community as well as being congruent with her own passions and interests. She said:

I think that you can’t operate in isolation and that community is really important. And the input of your community and what your community is asking for. You know, this is what you need to do because it’s what’s going to benefit.

P105 addressed challenges related to working in the community, such as the lack of employment opportunities available on reserves. She spoke about the difficult choice Aboriginal people are often faced with:

Most of the jobs off the reserve or in the cities, you have to travel a lot – or make a choice, you know, are you going to be unemployed on the reserve or are you going to have to leave your family to go into the city.

In speaking about employment in the city, P105 commented on the employment equity policies that allow her to self-identify as an Aboriginal person. She suggested that these policies may have helped her get the job; however, once in the position she found that she was “a little bit pigeon-holed, a little bit stereotyped” and that her own worldviews were not openly invited into the work place. She went on to say:

I think in a way I benefited from identifying as an Indigenous person. Not with wage things, but with, umm, getting jobs … because it’s like, it’s a buzz word in
some ways. They wanted to have representation at the ________ (name of a workplace). To say “oh we have First Nations staff.”

P105 recognized the importance of obtaining employment; however, she also maintained the importance of having culture and the need for work to be congruent with culture. She believed that Aboriginal people should not have to choose between culture and employment. She stated:

So not having one or the other, like leaving your Aboriginal identity behind to get a job or having it be kind of way to get a job and then leaving it behind at the door once you get the job. So having it incorporated into a workforce, into the workplace, having it be honoured in some way.

P105 emphasized the importance of Aboriginal businesses in demonstrating that the Aboriginal culture is living and active. She commented that, “People generally have no idea of who Aboriginal people are, of this territory or anywhere really. It’s something in the past.” She proposed the Aboriginal business provide an opportunity to have culture integrated into the workplace. For this reason, P105 underscored the importance of support young Aboriginal entrepreneurs. P105 remarked:

Helping Aboriginal young people create, you know, their own business or their own, um, I don’t want to say company, but I guess workforce or workplace that is in – that is congruent or in line with Aboriginal worldviews.

**Guidance.**

P105, throughout her interview, discussed guidance in a number of ways and as such it was noted as a theme. P105 described herself as someone who was open to guidance and actively sought it. She said:
I never had a really set idea of what my life was going to look like. So, I’m a very open person in terms of where I might go and change paths. I’m also very open to other people’s input... I’m open to taking advice.

One important instance where P105 asked for guidance was when she was attempting to decide whether or not to pursue a Masters degree. She commented, “I remember asking one of my Elders, after I was finished my undergraduate, ‘should I go back to school? Should I stay in the community?’ and she was like, ‘no, go back to school, get your Masters.’” For P105, it was not only important to seek guidance from individuals, like Elders, but to also seek guidance from the community in order to address community needs. P105 went on to comment on how some of the supports and guidance available for young people in the Aboriginal community has the potential to be misleading. She commented:

I think there is very targeted supports trying to tell Aboriginal young people which jobs to take.... There’s not a lot of general support.... There’s a lot of umm, I guess, voices in your ear telling you how to do that and where to go

P105 observed that there is a need to support young people and allow them to make their own decisions. Interestingly, P105 related how she was able to provide guidance for herself by connecting with her spirituality. She said, “Just finding myself spiritually, it’s acted as a guide and a support.”

Another support for P105 was her family; she had very supportive parents who encouraged her on her career journey. She also noted the impact that a partner can have on important decisions. She commented “my partner has been really good, although, he’s in the boat where he doesn’t really ‘get’ education. He didn’t finish high school. Umm,
it’s been a bit of a barrier and a support at the same time.” There were other individuals that P105 saw as supports in her life, she talked about the different ways that people have supported her in the past and may support her in the future. She said:

So specific individuals are going to be a support for sure... maybe by providing research,... writing letters... working with them... So having a lot of contacts. It’s going to be a hard road so those people that I connect with are going to be important.

Education.

Education was an important theme for P105 for a number of reasons. She discussed the role education has played in her career path, the importance of both institution-based and community based-education and the need to include Aboriginal history in the early education system.

P105 completed her undergraduate in Native studies and she suggested that components of her coursework served as a catalyst which lead her to connect more with her culture and to find her identity. She has continued with post secondary education, despite some misgivings from people close to her. She reported that she was asked, “Why are you going to go through an educational system that historically and continues to oppress us and misrepresent us?” P105 expressed her belief that: “we need to have those key people with degrees to enable change: the lawyers, the writers, the counsellors. So that we can kind of right ourselves as Nations. And then maybe change the system from the inside.”

P105 commented on the scarcity of Aboriginal students pursuing post-secondary education and said “Most of the young people that I’m friends with don’t have an
undergraduate degree.” She attributed this partially to an attitude in the community which emphasizes work over post-secondary education. She suggested that this can be a barrier for Aboriginal young people because “it’s discouraging for Indigenous people who are interested in academics, who are interested in going on. Because there’s a very strong divide in the community... that’s difficult to navigate.” P105 indicated that initially she was uncertain what a Masters degree would provide for her other than credentials and she believed she would get her “real” training in the community. When talking about her masters, P105 said:

It is a means to an end in one sense. I want to work with communities and do healing work. On the one hand I want to have that piece of paper, that degree. Um, on the other hand, I think that I’m learning in the program that I’m in. I think it’s providing some training that I need. Actually, I want to work with Elders...

I’m looking at it as half of my training. It’s going to complement the next half of my training.

In this way, P105 recognized the importance of community-based education; however, she noted that as she has progressed through her program she has been pleasantly surprised at what she has learned. P105 noted that in the community, education outside the formal institution is highly valued.

Another thing that P105 talked about regarding education was the need to include Aboriginal history in the early educational system. “I think that has to come through the school system. From kindergarten up we have to learn about who the original caretakers of the land are. And it’s just not there.” She suggested that this would foster respect for the culture and eventually would impact work environments.
Summary

This chapter has outlined the core messages and themes present in individual participant interviews, as well as providing initial and final story maps for each of the participants. Many of the themes were overlapping and the following chapter will discuss the commonalities that are shared among the participant interviews.
Chapter Five: Across Participant Results

In this chapter I present my understanding of the shared narratives among the career related stories of the participants in this study. Chapter Five includes an account of the process used to identify metatheme, a comprehensive description of each metatheme and the relationship between the metathemes and the information available in the current literature.

Identifying Metathemes

The term metathemes originates from “meta” meaning “of a higher or second-order kind” (Canadian Oxford Dictionary, n.d.) and theme, which in qualitative research is defined as “labels for assigning unites of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Thus, a metatheme is second-order theme which is evident throughout the data and reflects a more general statement than a theme (Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997).

Identifying metathemes was the culmination of the data analysis in this study. Marshall (2006) states “the analytic process demands a heightened awareness of the data, a focused attention to those data and openness to the subtle, tacit undercurrents of social life” (p. 158). I used what Crabtree and Miller (1992) refer to as an immersion style of analysis for identifying metathemes in which the metathemes are not set out in advance. Immersion consisted of reading and re-reading the transcripts numerous times, both individually and in succession. In addition, I reviewed the audio recorded interviews. It also included reviewing and making additions to my field notes and field journals. As suggested by Marshall, I searched for metathemes which were internally consistent yet
distinct from one another. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advise that analysis is complete when themes are saturated and regularities in the data are readily identified.

Immersion in the data provided me with the opportunity to identify three metathemes that were consistently apparent in all of the participants’ stories. The identified metathemes were: career journey, community, and importance of education career journey. These three metathemes are interrelated across participants, and this will be illuminated in the following in-depth descriptions of each metatheme. The interrelatedness of metathemes is displayed visually in Figure 10.

![Figure 10. Metathemes](image)

**Metathemes**

**Career Journey.**

Participants in this study described career as a journey; career consists of past experiences, present experiences and intentions for the future. As P103 stated, “A career
is a long time, we work for, like, forty-five to fifty years.” Participants characterized career as continually evolving. Most participants discussed their first jobs as being focussed on making money; a number of the participants continued to work in positions that were unfulfilling in order to meet financial obligations, such as the costs associated with postsecondary education.

The experience of working solely to meet financial needs is what Blustein (2006), in his psychology of working that is described in Chapter Two, characterizes as working for survival; he states that this is one of the fundamental purposes of work. Blustein goes on to suggest that one moves from working for survival to working to enhance power:

One of the outcomes of working, following logically on the need for survival, is the accrual of economic, social and psychological power. By developing systematic access to the resources necessary for survival, one can ideally consolidate greater power within a given community or culture. (p. 73)

Furthermore, Blustein (2006) suggests that “while not all workers are necessarily focussed consciously on becoming powerful, in a more subtle fashion, working functions to help people establish the means for empowerment” (p. 75). The participants in this study demonstrate this movement from working for survival to working for power; however, Blustein’s characterization of power focuses on the use of power for the benefit of the individual. In this study, though there are aspects of utilizing power to help oneself, there is also evidence that participants used the power they accrued to improve the experiences of others in the community. As P103 stated:
I think I would not have a hard time finding a job because people want someone who knows cultural expectations, traditions... I have expertise in that... the reason why I go to work is to make the world a better place for Aboriginal children.

The participants in this study, by emphasizing the importance of contributing to the community, demonstrated that Blustein’s conceptualization of accumulating individual power through work can be expanded to consider the use of power, whether it is used for individual or collective gain. Aboriginal societies traditionally operated from a collectivist orientation (International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1996), as such the use of personal power to improve the collective experience is congruent with traditional values. Also, in Juntunen et al.’s study the conceptualization of success focussed on the collective experience of success and “success being measure by one’s ability to contribute to the well-being of others” (p.278).

As participants moved from being oriented towards a job to be oriented towards a career, levels of job satisfaction increased. P101 described this briefly when she said regarding previous jobs, “you’re not valued as a person, you’re replaceable. But if you’re working on a creative project, or something more professional, it’s a lot more fair. And that’s more rewarding to me.” P105 also noted this when she commented, “after I graduated I was able to find jobs that I actually had an interest in and vowed never to do waitressing again.” When looking toward the future, women described goals that involved finding balance and working in the community; they also took into account the impact of family life.

The participants in the study conducted by Juntunen and colleagues (2001), much like the participants in the current study, described career as involving planning, goal
setting, and making purposeful choices. In the current study participants also noted these factors which comprise career; in addition, participants in this study extended the definition to incorporate the mutability of career, specifically pertaining to the influence of family. The participants in the current study also noted the importance of both working in the community and infusing culture into the workplace. This is congruent with the finding in Juntunen and colleague’s study, where they noted a variant category “wherein four participants directly linked career to promoting traditional ways” and “meaningfulness of the work was related to sharing a tradition with the next generation” (p. 278).

McCormick and Amundson (1997) also emphasize the importance of career planning and goal setting in the First Nations Career-Life Planning Model. The First Nations Career-Life Planning model, as is described in Chapter Two, is a culturally oriented career counselling approach that has been used successfully with Aboriginal youth (Neumann et al., 2000). McCormick and Amundson suggest that when Aboriginal youth are engaged in career goal setting, in a culturally appropriate way, they are more likely to persist in completing high school and continue on to post-secondary education. The participants in this study, though they did not note specific career counselling, all engaged in career goal setting and all completed high school. This study suggests that goal setting is an essential part of the career journey and if the First Nations Career-Life Planning Model can enhance goal setting among youth, it has the potential to be beneficial in both educational and career trajectories.

In the interviews with participants it was noted, on multiple occasions, that there is limited information, which is both accessible and available, regarding career options.
P102 commented, “I came and did a Bachelors and didn’t really... understand the rules of what that meant and what jobs that (a Bachelors degree) could take me to.” P102 went on to say, “I was really afraid of asking questions... because you don’t want me to know that you don’t know.” P104 discussed an experience where she completed a college program without knowing what the job prospects were upon completion of the degree; she remarked “Aestheticians aren’t paid very well. And that is something I really should have looked into before, you know, getting into the field.” Participants also suggested that the supports available to youth tend to be targeted in the sense that they are encouraging youth to follow a specific career path, rather than allowing youth to explore their own interests. P105 noted this when she said, “I think there’s very targeted supports trying to tell Aboriginal young people which jobs to take... there’s a lot of, um, I guess voices in your ear telling you how to that and where to go.” P102 suggested that the targeted nature of supports is a result of funding limitations, a focus on numbers and community organizations working asynchronously. A number of the participants suggested that postsecondary education provided career guidance and allowed them to become more focussed on a particular career path which matched their interests.

The study conducted by Hoffman et al. (2005) noted that among high school students there was little knowledge or consideration of the breadth of career options available. The authors suggested that there was “particular social and family pressure against atypical career aspirations” which may have contributed to the limited identification of career options. Interestingly, Hoffman and colleagues noted that male students identified fewer possible career paths when compared to the female students in the study. The participants in the current study indicated that, for those who had the
support of their family, they were encouraged to pursue postsecondary education without being persuaded to follow a particular career path. Moreover, the participants in this study suggested that there was limited information available about career options; this was mentioned in Hoffman and colleague’s study as a potential consequence of living on reserves. The current study suggests that limited information on career prospects is also an issue in urban areas.

Throughout the participant interviews it was obvious that family has a significant influence on career path, whether it is the support of parents or the changes that happen when one has children. P103 talked about her parents early in her interview, “Both of my parents are workaholics... I grew up surrounded by people who were extremely had working.” Other participants spoke about their parents as sources of support and encouragement, particularly regarding the pursuit of postsecondary education. P101 commented on the support offered by extended family “When my parents split up we came here because that’s where the whole family was. And it benefited us so much to have that connection and support.” Participants also discussed the changes in their career paths when they had children or anticipated the changes they would need to make in the future to accommodate children and family life. P102 stated, “The big change I see for myself is... I don’t have children now, I’m not married. I think that weight that my career has will change as those things change.”

The study conducted by Juntunen and colleagues (2001) suggested that family was a supportive factor for participants who had completed postsecondary education. The findings in the current study are congruent and suggest that these findings are also applicable to Aboriginal women living in an urban community Canada.
In addition, McCormick and Amundson (1997) note the importance of family as part of career decision making; however, they conceptualize the impact of family as the input of parents on career decision making rather than considering the impact of having a family on career choices. The participants in this study acknowledged the role of parents and family on their career journeys; however, they also extended beyond McCormick and Amundson’s assertions to suggest that, for Aboriginal women, children may influence the course of women’s career paths. This is consistent with the comment made in the document by Milligan and Bougie (2009) which suggests that Aboriginal peoples “have different pathways to postsecondary education than individuals in the overall Canadian population” (p. 1); this research suggests that bearing children can impact more than paths to postsecondary education and extend to career paths. As P105 remarked, “What someone said once, joking, was that Indians have their careers first and their children later.”

Participants also suggested that as they progress in their careers they are searching to find balance between their work lives, family lives and roles in the community. Participants emphasized that they were striving toward balance and that part of finding balance was finding sustainable employment. P101 described a job where there were many demands and a strenuous schedule, she commented “on that schedules I wasn’t able to balance well enough to be healthy in that place. So after six months I decided to go back to school.” Participants suggested that balance extends beyond time management to incorporate a holistic balance of mind, body, intellect and spirit which is often described in Medicine Wheel teachings (Bopp & Bopp, 2001). Finding balance is not an easy task, according to participants; P105 stated “It’s just really that my baby is
my priority, whereas before my work and my school was my priority. And I feel that it’s not very complimentary. It’s difficult to balance the two.”

McCormick and Amundson (1997), in the First Nations Career-Life Planning Model, describe the importance of balance in Aboriginal worldviews. In a follow-up article articulating the guidelines for practitioners using the model, the authors stated “maintaining balance among the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of a person is considered essential for health and well-being” (McCormick, Neumann, Amundson and McLean, 1999, p. 169). They also suggest that one has to balance roles and responsibilities to “one’s self, the family, the community, that nation, the ancestors, the natural world and the spiritual world” (McCormick & Amundson, p. 174). Participants in this study reaffirmed the assertion made by McCormick and Amundson and suggest that the salience of their commitment to a particular role may change with time.

A number of participants discussed discrimination in the workplace, which often resulted from a lack of appreciation for or understanding of Aboriginal culture. It was suggested that the Employment Equity principles, described by Dwyer (2003), were potentially useful in obtaining a position; however, once a position was obtained Aboriginal culture and worldviews were not openly invited into the workplace. P104, regarding the Employment Equity principles, remarked “I think that on the one hand it helped me get the job, but on the other hand they didn’t really want that worldview to be brought in.” P104 went on to say:

Participant: Having a job should be congruent with that culture
Interviewer: So, kind of making an explicit connection between culture and employment?

Participant: Yeah, so not having one or the other. Like, leaving your Aboriginal identity behind to get a job or having it be kind of way to get a job and then leaving it behind at the door once you get the job. So having it incorporated into the workplace, having it be honoured in some way.

Other participants emphasized their desire to have Aboriginal worldviews brought into the workplace. P103 made a particularly salient comment on this topic when she said “It is hard for many of us to go to work in an office tower where our feet don’t touch the ground; where we can’t smudgy because people think we’re smoking pot.” She went on to say “a lot of our cultural values really bring depth and, you know, add joy to the workplace.” Participants noted the idea of self-promotion during the interviewing and hiring process was incongruent with Aboriginal values. However, participants did note the importance of networking, especially in the community.

Dwyer (2003) acknowledges that certain Western oriented workplace practices, such as self-promotion, make advancement in the Canadian Federal Public Service more challenging for Aboriginal people. This study suggests that these practices are also challenging when finding work in other employment sectors. Dwyer emphasized the importance of networking with senior management in his study; however, in this study, participants emphasized both networking in the community and networking in the employment environment. It is notable that the participants in this study expressed a desire to work in the community, as such, their desire to network with community members is understandable.
Career journey was identified as a metatheme because the shared framework in participants’ stories conceptualized career as a journey which is impacted by past decisions and incorporates goals and planning for the future.

Community.

Community is defined by the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* as “all the people living in a specific locality.” This broad definition is not readily applied to an urban center such as Toronto, where people may experience little, if any, connection to those living around them. In the context of this study, community described a group of people with shared Aboriginal heritage, who connect with each other in both social and work spheres. The importance of community for Aboriginal peoples has been described in studies on the determinants of health (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003) and more specifically on mental health (Stewart, 2008) and suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998).

Community was identified as a metatheme because participants in this study asserted the connection between community and career in a number of ways; P103 commented that as she progressed through school she “started to reframe how [she] thought of work and community as being connected in some ways.” Participants expressed a desire to work in the community and have positions which were congruent with Aboriginal values and teachings. Participants also discussed how career can have an impact on their roles within the community and their perceived identity in the community. They noted the benefits of being connected to the community, such as finding role models and receiving guidance.

Throughout the interviews, participants related a desire to maintain their connection to the Aboriginal community and participants identified work as a means to
connect with the community. As P105 remarked, “I think that you can’t operate in isolation and that community is really important.” Connection to the community allowed participants to connect with their Aboriginal identity; it was suggested that work also pertains to a component of identity, where when one is not working in the community their Aboriginal identity may be questioned or scrutinized. Nonetheless, participants indicated that in the Aboriginal community their identity was perceived as more than their work-roles, whereas in the larger community they indicated that their work-roles comprised a greater part of their identity. Furthermore, for some participants works was the primary means of connection with the community and when not working they felt disconnected. P102 described an experience when she was not working which lead her to feel disconnected, in her words:

I hadn’t been working for... a couple of months... So that was really hard because it sort of snowballed then. I hadn’t seen anyone in a couple months and I didn’t have a job, so I couldn’t, you know, umm... it just felt really, sort of... afraid or down on myself.

The idea that work provides an opportunity for social connection is congruent with Blustein’s psychology of working which suggest that working is one of the primary means by which people connect. “Working links us with the broader social contest, often providing people with their major or even sole connection to their culture, political systems and economy” (Blustein, 2006, p. 89). Blustein notes that historically work has taken place in the context of social bonds, as is seen in traditional hunting and gathering practices. The current study suggests that connection to Aboriginal community is a strikingly important function of work for the women in this study. Which, in turn,
implies that the connection to community provided by working in specific positions potentially influences choices of employment.

Participants expressed a desire to work in the community, or continue to work in the community, because it was work that was congruent with their values and because of a desire to contribute to the wellbeing of the community. Discussing work that is congruent with values, P101 remarked, “I think that I’ve had the opportunity to see where my cultural beliefs intersect with other areas of knowledge and ways of thinking;” while P105 commented on her desire to contribute to the community, “I also feel that it’s something that I need to do. I want to do work that would, like, that benefits the community.” The focus on the community expressed by the participants is consistent with the collectivist orientation shared by many Aboriginal peoples (Steinhauer, 2002).

Blustein (2006), in his psychology of working, acknowledges the impact of a collectivist rather the individualist orientation on theories in vocational psychology. He suggests that collectivist orientations receive relatively little consideration in vocational psychology literature; rather the literature focuses on the individualistic orientation that is predominant in the Western paradigm. An excerpt from Triandis (2002) provides a useful summary:

Individualism and collectivism are reflected in the goals of the members of the culture. People in individualist cultures to have self-actualizing goals; those from collectivist cultures are oriented in achieving for the sake of others. As goals have important implications for work motivation, culture too has implications for work motivation. (p. 110)
This passage suggests that people from collectivist cultures, such as Aboriginal cultures, may emphasize achievement for the good of the community. It is certainly true the participants were interested in contributing to the well-being of the community; nevertheless, it is also true that were interested in addressing their own interests through work. The influence of community needs was not limiting career volition for participants. This study is significant because it suggests that Aboriginal people are finding ways to integrate both the interests of the community and personal interests to find a mutually beneficial and satisfying occupation. As Blustein (2006) states, “people who can find a good fit for their interests and personal attributes are more likely to be satisfied and more intrinsically interested in their work” (p. 121).

For the participants in this study, community needs are influential when making career related decisions. Participants noted the importance of guidance from within the community; P105 was especially vocal about this and said “before I went to do my graduate studies, I asked various Elders what I should do. So in that regard, I am very open to taking advice.” Elders were noted as a significant source of support in the community by participants; discussing Elders, for a number of participants, lead to a discussion of the importance of unpaid roles in the community. As P103 stated “I’m starting to realize more and more that my job – that what I do is who I am – and that whichever parts of it I get paid for are maybe no more or less important because of that.” Participants were conscious of their own roles in the community that extended beyond their work roles and noted the sources of unpaid support in the community, such as Elders and other role models.
Community was a significant factor in McCormick and Amundson’s (1997) First Nations Career-Life Planning Model which is outlined in Chapter Two. The authors described the community as “a natural support system” (p. 173) and noted the importance of looking at an individual’s roles and responsibilities in the community. They emphasized the importance of community input on career planning of youth by including community members in the initial career goal setting process delineated in the model. This study expands upon the model developed by McCormick and Amundson because the results indicated that it is important to have the ongoing input of the community and that Aboriginal people make seek guidance on career decision making at multiple points in their career paths.

Throughout the interviews with the participants in this study, community was identified as a significant influence and support in participants’ career related experiences. The pervasiveness of community in participants’ stories lead to its identification as a metatheme in this study. It is apparent that the importance of community for Aboriginal people extends to multiple life-spheres, including the sphere of work.

Importance of Education

The importance of education was identified as a metatheme because it provided a foundation upon which participants’ career related experiences were built and provided a framework for participants to expand their career opportunities. The participants identified multiple roles of education which included: increasing job opportunities, enhancing cultural learning, and community based education. Participants also
illuminated barriers to education which are congruent with and expand upon those identified in the literature.

The participants all acknowledged the role education plays in increasing opportunities for employment. As P103 stated: “Aboriginal people with a university degree have a whole different access to jobs.” Participants described the limited job opportunities that they had before obtaining an education; many of these positions were obtained solely to meet financial obligations. As P105 remarked, “I didn’t enjoy the work I was doing; I was doing it for the money.” Participants went on to suggest that more fulfilling jobs were accessible if one had an education. Also, P101 commented:

I think that the more education you have, the more likely you are to be able to find that healthy balance of a job you love that also gives you some good money, [and] that you can also be healthy yourself.

The participants also noted that education enables them to have a more positive impact on their communities. As P105 stated “I think that we need to have those key people with the degrees to enable change.” This implies that participants view career success from a collectivist orientation, where part of a person’s success is determined by their ability to positively impact the community.

The idea that educational attainment improves employment opportunities is not a new idea, in fact, it is well documented statistically with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations (Betz, 2006; Milligan & Bougie, 2009). As stated in Statistic Canada’s (2005) document entitled Aboriginal peoples in Canada’s urban area – Narrowing the education gap:
As is the case for the Canadian population as a whole, employment rates are higher for [Aboriginal] individuals who have completed university or college than they are for those with only high school and those who have not completed high school.

The study conducted by Juntunen and colleagues (2001), which is outlined in Chapter Two, also noted the importance of education as a supportive factor in career development for American Indian peoples. The authors noted a difference between participants with postsecondary education and those with high school education in the emphasis placed on the importance of education. Juntunen and colleagues found that among the participants with only high school education, the category of education emerged as a supportive factor and that these participants “stated that they would encourage, or had encouraged, their children and other children to finish high school and to go on to college” (p. 279). Education was not noted as a supportive factor among participants with postsecondary education. This is a contrast to the current study where all five participants had obtained, or were in the process of obtaining, postsecondary education noted the importance of the role of education for themselves and for others in the Aboriginal community. Results from the current study suggest that education remains an important supportive factor in career development for women who obtain postsecondary education.

The participants in this study also discussed the importance of education, especially postsecondary education, in learning about Aboriginal history and culture. Four of the participants identified opportunities to learn directly about their culture while pursuing postsecondary education. As P104 stated, “School has given me the opportunity
to learn about my culture. And that’s really, umm, going to help me get a job for what I want to do in the community.” Another participant indicated that learning about her culture while in university helped her solidify her desire to work in the community. Both of these things suggest that education about Aboriginal culture and history plays a role in career decision making and career prospects. The remaining participant who did not pursue Aboriginal studies in university identified mentors whom she encountered in the educational system and who encouraged her to learn more about her culture; as such, her education played a more indirect role in learning about her culture.

As discussed previously, Juntunen and colleague (2001) noted education as a supportive factor; however, the connection between education and knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history has not been explored in the literature. The finding that university education has allowed participants to learn about Aboriginal history and culture may come as a surprise given that the educational system was one of the primary means by which colonization occurred (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003).

Another significant finding in this study, was the emphasis participants placed on community-based education as a part of employment training. Community-based education included learning from mentors and Elders, volunteering in the community and networking. These components of community based education were conceptualized by participants as a valuable part of their preparation for work. This is consistent with traditional models of teaching and learning in Aboriginal communities where teaching occurred through modeling and storytelling; education was conducted in a way that was integrated with daily life and emphasized relationships (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). Participants indicated that education in the community context was as important, if not
more important, than education which occurred in a formal institution. A balance of community and institutional education was perceived as ideal; the two types of education were thought of as complimentary rather than contradictory. Participants P105 spoke about this when she said:

The program that I’m in... [is] providing some training that I need. Actually, I also want to work with Elders... this (university education) is half of my training... it’s going to complement the next half of my training (in the community).

Participants also discussed this in the context of networking which was also identified as essential to career development by all participants. P102 stated “Being involved volunteer-wise... with different Aboriginal organizations... it helped a lot for when I graduated to know people and to have, sort of, people to vouch for me. In addition, P101 when discussing finding a job, commented “you still need those connections. You still need that networking.” Participants noted that pursuing education allowed them to network with others and also provided an opportunity to encounter mentors.

The study conducted by Dwyer (2003) noted a lack of Aboriginal mentors in the Canadian Federal Public Service (CFPS), which he suggested impacted Aboriginal peoples’ ability to move into executive positions within CFPS. Dwyer recognized the importance of Aboriginal role models in the work environment, despite participants in his study not identifying role models as an active source of support. This study builds on Dwyer’s assertion by suggesting the Aboriginal mentors and role models are important throughout the career development process. In addition, Dwyer discusses the importance
of networking for Aboriginal people in the CFPS; in this study, the importance of networking is extended to the educational system and working in Aboriginal communities.

The participants in this study all emphasized the importance of postsecondary education; yet all were aware of the challenges for Aboriginal people associated with obtaining postsecondary education. The perceptions of participants are congruent with the information provided by the census. According to Milligan & Bougie (2009), census data suggests that rates of postsecondary educational attainment, (which includes college credentials, university degrees and trades certifications) for Aboriginal women (39%) are lower than the rates attained by women in the Canadian population as a whole (55%). The largest gap, fourteen percentage-points, was seen at the university level with the proportion of Aboriginal women obtaining a university degree at 9% while the proportion of women in the overall population was 23%. Given the multiple barriers to education that have been identified in this study it is not surprising to see these differences in rates of educational achievement. Another important consideration is that the listed rates of educational achievement do not take into account the education that takes place in the community; this is likely due to difficulties in measuring education occurring in community contexts.

In this study the barriers to education identified by participants were limited financial resources, lack of community support, and a negative stereotype that suggested that Aboriginal people cannot succeed in education. All participants discussed the financial costs associated with postsecondary education and many noted that these costs pose as a substantial deterrent to pursuing postsecondary education. Despite some of the
women having opportunities to obtain funding through their First Nation they noted the limitations of this funding. P105 remarked, “If you’re getting funding they feel like they can ask you any kind of question and its very invasive.” P103 also stated:

I went to do my masters and I couldn’t get any funding from my First Nation to do my masters because they considered me well educated enough. But that’s my treaty right to go to school and have my tuition covered.

Lack of financial resources also contributed to participants working in jobs that were unsatisfying in order to fund their education and meet the resulting financial obligations. The financial stresses of school continued to impact participants after graduation. P101 remarked, “I’m considering working there for minimum wage because I’m going to need to be working full-time in a professional position and part-time to be able to recover financially from school.”

Financial barriers to education were also identified in the study by Hoffman et al. (2005). The students interviewed in this study identified the financial costs of education as one of three barriers to achieving their career goals. The participants in the study by Hoffman et al. suggested that receiving financial assistance for education would effectively eliminate barriers to postsecondary education. This study suggests that despite the financial assistance provided by First Nations it appears that financial barriers continue to be a challenge for Aboriginal people interested in postsecondary education; however, financial barriers are not insurmountable as the participants in this study successfully pursued postsecondary education.

Another barrier identified by participants was community attitudes towards education. Participants suggested that education in a formal institution was not valued in
the community, despite having support from immediate family. As P103 commented, “the message that you get about school, university, is that a university degree is useless, pretty much.” This idea seems reasonable given the considerable gap between Aboriginal women with university degrees (9%) and non-Aboriginal women with university degrees (23%) (Milligan & Bougie, 2009). However, statistics describing rates of employment with a university degree (80%) versus without a university degree (58%), dispute the idea that university degree is “useless” (Milligan & Bougie). P105 described an experience where her choice to pursue graduate studies was questioned when someone close to her asked, “Why are you going to go through an education system that historically and continues to oppress us and misrepresent us?” This is consistent with Battiste’s (1998) suggestion that colonization continues to negatively impact the experience of education for Aboriginal peoples. Conversely, when participants felt supported by family and community in pursuing education, it was noted as an asset. As P103 stated, “I didn’t get a lot of support in the Aboriginal community to pursue my work. But now I do... I have a lot of older women who support me.” As discussed earlier in the chapter, recognizing the impact of community support, or lack thereof, on both education and career is an important contribution of this study.

The importance of community support for education and career was discussed in the study by Hoffman and colleagues (2005) that is described in Chapter Two. One of the significant findings in this study was the importance of family support in overcoming perceived barriers to education and career. The authors went on to suggest that the participants in this study experienced some degree of pressure to conform to particular career paths and community norms. In this study four out of five participants had the full
support of their families and of those four, none described feeling pressured to follow a predetermined career path. Interestingly, for the participant who did not have the support of her family, the negative attitudes expressed in her family motivated her to excel and prove that she could succeed. Regardless, it seems clear that family attitudes toward educational and career success impact career related decision making. This study is significant because it indicates that not all Aboriginal young people experience pressure to follow a specific career path.

Another less tangible barrier to both education and work are attitudes present in the community which suggest that success is not the norm. P102 related her understandings of some of the attitudes in the Aboriginal community which she summarized as “work and school and all those things are for other people.” One participant suggested that this attitude is linked to low self-esteem which is a result of colonization. Participants emphasized the need to normalize success of Aboriginal people in both career and education. It was suggested that success could be normalized by positive Aboriginal role models in the community, especially young role models. Although the importance of role models has been noted (Dwyer, 2003), there is relatively little information regarding community norms related to success. Milligan and Bougie (2009) suggest potential barriers to completion of postsecondary education, such as pregnancy; however, they are unable to comment on the impact of community attitudes. This study is significant because it identifies a gap in the literature pertaining to community attitudes regarding work and education.
The impact of education on career development and prospects is well documented and this study is no exception. Education was identified as a metatheme because of the numerous ways it impacted the career related experiences of participants.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I reviewed the analytical process which allowed for the identification of the following metathemes: community, education and career journey. These metathemes were recurring through multiple lines of data. The metathemes were connected to the currently existing literature and expanded upon this literature. Education and community describe influential factors in the career related experiences of urban Aboriginal young women, while career journey describes the overarching conceptualization of these experiences. As is evident in the descriptions of the individual metathemes, they are interconnected. Education and community influence career opportunities and choices; so too does career journey impact participants educational choices and connections with their community.

The next chapter will provide a discussion of the implications of the research, the limitations of the study, and my concluding remarks.
Chapter Six: Implications and Conclusion

Chapter six provides the conclusion to this thesis; it includes a summary of the thesis, the limitations to the study, the implications of the study, suggestions for future research and my research reflections.

Thesis Summary

The question that guided this thesis was: “What are the career related experiences of Aboriginal young adults living in an urban setting?” This thesis employed a qualitative design to explore the career related experiences of urban Aboriginal young adults using a narrative methodology. The thesis was based on a framework of social constructionism which emphasized the importance of constructed meaning in participants’ experiences.

The participants interviewed in this study were five self-identified Aboriginal women living in Toronto. The analysis was conducted using a narrative approach and developing story maps, analysis of participant interviews yielded both within and across participant results. There was notable overlap in the themes identified in the within participant results. The metathemes, or across participant results, identified in this study were: career journey, community and education. These results suggest that career, for urban Aboriginal young women, is conceptualized as a journey while education and community are essential components of this career journey. Education and community were noted to provide both support and guidance for participants. The interrelatedness of the three metathemes were noted as there were reciprocal relationships between each of the metathemes. The stories presented in this thesis provide insight into the authentic career related experiences of young Aboriginal women living in Toronto.
Limitations

This thesis contains a number of assertions based on the results; these results are not meant to be interpreted as applying to all Aboriginal people living in urban settings because of the diversity present in Aboriginal cultures, traditions and beliefs. The limitations to the generalizations and interpretations which can be drawn from the results are outlined below.

Generalizability.

In qualitative research methods the ability to draw generalizations from the research is often cited as a limitation. Although generalizability is sought in quantitative research, in qualitative research the necessary sample size to achieve generalizability is too large to meaningfully conduct qualitative analysis (Silverman, 2000). Alasuutari (1995) suggests that generalizations, although helpful in quantitative analysis, are not well suited to qualitative research and that “extrapolation better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research” (p.157). This, in turn, suggests adding depth to our understanding, rather than breadth, is what underlies the methodology of qualitative research.

Silverman suggests that there are four ways to extrapolate from results in a qualitative study; in this thesis I employed what Silverman described as purposive sampling to extrapolate the results of this thesis to a wider population. Purposive sampling implies that samples are chosen because they “illustrate some feature or process in which we are interested” (Silverman, p. 104). In this case, the women who participated all shared three characteristics that were relevant to the research question: they were all self-identified Aboriginal women, they were in limited age range (27-30) and they had
completed or were in the process of completing a university degree. Education has been noted to have a significant impact on employment prospects; as such, this thesis highlights the experiences of Aboriginal women who have found the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education. This thesis does not claim to provide insight into the career related experiences of Aboriginal women without postsecondary education or Aboriginal men; however, this study does provide a template for exploring the experiences of other groups.

**Validity.**

Validity refers to the ability to establish the plausibility, sturdiness and confirmability of data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Hammersley (1990) describes validity as follows: “By validity, I mean truth: interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers” (p.57). Miles and Huberman suggest that without establishing validity in a study “we are left with interesting stories about what happened, of unknown truth and utility” (p.11). As such, efforts were made in this thesis to establish validity.

Koch (1994) emphasizes that researcher self-awareness is an essential part of establishing validity in the study. She suggests that keeping a field journal is a method of increasing researcher self-awareness. Throughout the development of this thesis, I have kept a field journal which documented my immediate impressions and reactions to the interviews, as well as my reflexive contemplation of the data. This was helpful in identifying researcher biases, which are outlined below.

Another opportunity to establish validity of the data is through respondent validation (Koch, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2008). Respondent
validation entails bringing initial results to participants and then refining results based on
the participants’ feedback. As described in the Methodology and Results chapters of this
thesis, respondent validation was an essential component of this study.

The final measure of validity employed in this thesis was triangulation. Miles and
Huberman (1994) describe triangulation as supporting “a finding by showing that
independent measures of it agree with it or, at least, do not contradict it” (p.267). The
independent measures listed by Miles and Huberman are: data source, method,
researcher, theory and data type. In this thesis three measures were used: data source
(participants), researcher (through field notes and journals) and theory. These three
measures were used to corroborate conclusions drawn from the data and replicate the
findings using different measures.

Bias.

Bias is an inevitable part of qualitative research because “qualitative researchers
stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the
researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (Denzin
& Lincoln, 2003, p. 1). The researcher is an instrument in this research and as such, the
characteristics of the researcher impact the results of the research (Denzin & Lincoln).
However, bias in qualitative research does not have the same negative connotations that
are associated with bias in quantitative research. Qualitative research, particularly from a
social constructionist foundation, focuses on the constructed meaning in data (Silverman,
2000); as such, researcher bias, when adequately recognized, serves as part of the process
of meaning making in qualitative research.
There are three biases in my approach to this study of which I am aware. Rather than use the term, bias, I am choosing to refer to these ideas as assumptions which underpin the construction of the current study. These assumptions are outlined below.

1. The first bias, or belief, that I hold as a researcher which informs this study is being non-judgemental. This entailed increasing my awareness of any preconceived notions I have about participants and their career related experiences and recognizing these notions as stemming from my experience rather than the experience of the participants. As Silverman (2000) suggests, “being non-judgemental is often a key to acceptance in many settings.” I believe having a non-judgemental and non-expert approach enhances my ability to interact more meaningfully with the participants.

2. The second assumption that has influenced this study is that participants are truthful and willing to engage in meaningful conversation throughout the interviews. This does not suggest that participants are telling the truth, because in both the social constructionist and Indigenous Knowledge frameworks there is not a single truth, rather the study assumes that participants are telling their truth. I believe that by using the non-judgemental approach described above that I was able establish a level of trust with participants that would allow them to share their stories honestly and openly.

3. The final assumption that informed this study is that there is a difference between the career related experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada. As a non-Aboriginal person working with Aboriginal people in a research context, I recognize that my own worldviews and experiences may be different from the participants in the study and it important to avoid understanding their experiences in
contrast to my own. Nonetheless, there is also room to appreciate the similarities in our experiences because we are all human beings who are striving towards our goals.

Implications

Employment supports.

The participants in this study suggested that although employment supports are available, they are not adequately meeting the needs of Aboriginal peoples in general. The findings in this study suggest that current employment supports offered at community levels need to be re-evaluated. For example, it was suggested that mentoring programs for Aboriginal people are most effective when the mentors are also Aboriginal. The suggestion by participants in this study reiterates the suggestion made by Dwyer (2003) in his review of Aboriginal people employed in the Canadian Federal Public Service. Another potential area of improvement is providing Aboriginal young adults with career supports which allow them to explore and identify their own interests rather than emphasizing specific career options. This suggestion builds upon Hoffman and colleagues (2006) finding that young Aboriginal students in the United States identified a limited range of careers. Participants emphasized the need to empower young people to find careers that are congruent with their interests and desires. The final suggestion regarding employment stems from the emphasis placed on connecting with the community. It is important that employment programs and supports find ways to connect Aboriginal people to their communities as networking was identified as an essential part of the career journey.


**Education.**

This thesis reinforces the importance of education, especially postsecondary education, for Aboriginal peoples. The education gap between levels of achievement for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples needs to be addressed. This study suggests that increasing access to education for Aboriginal peoples is a complex process because there are invisible barriers to education such as community attitudes about the value of education. This, in turn, suggests that reducing the education gap is likely to require both a bottom-up and top-down approach. The bottom-up approach could address the community attitudes and stigma toward education while the top-down approach would involve revisiting treaty promises regarding the provision of financial support for education for Aboriginal peoples.

**Policy**

In this study attention was paid to the employment equity provisions outlined by the Canadian government (Dwyer, 2003). The participants in this study suggested that the employment equity provisions may increase the likelihood that they are offered a job; however, participants indicated these provisions may increase stereotyping of Aboriginal people and are another form of discrimination. Participants indicated that the employment equity provisions are ineffective in fostering an accepting atmosphere in the working environment. Participants noted that in non-Aboriginal agencies they were often expected to leave their Aboriginal identities at the office door. This creates work environments that are not likely to be comfortable for Aboriginal people, which may impact their desire to continue their employment. This study suggests that future employment provisions will not only respect Aboriginal worldviews and traditions, but
will encourage employers to bring these practices into workplaces in order to create safe workspaces. The importance of infusing culture into the workplace needs to be reflected in future employment policy and provisions.

Future Research

There are many potential directions for further development of this research. One direction is exploring the career related experiences of Aboriginal young women in other urban centers. Given the diversity among Aboriginal peoples in Canada, as described in Chapter One, it is important not to assume that what applies to Aboriginal women in Toronto will also apply to Aboriginal women in Vancouver, Montreal or Winnipeg. If researchers are able to reaffirm these findings in other locations it would enhance the applicability of the research. Alternatively, for comparison purposes one may want to explore the experiences of women in rural settings. It has been suggested that there are differences in the experiences of Aboriginal people living in urban and rural areas (Hoffman et al., 2005) and this suggests that a comparison could provide valuable information on enhancing employment services for rural areas where rates of unemployment tend to be higher (Milligan & Bougie, 2009). This information may also shed light on the reasons for elevated rates of unemployment.

This study focused on the experiences of Aboriginal women in an urban setting; however, in the future it is important that the experiences of Aboriginal men are also explored. In this way there would be insight into the shared experiences of women and men, as well as recognizing the differences. For example, gender may moderate the impact of family life on career decision making; that is, men are less likely to be in the primary care giver role and, in turn, having a child may not have the same impact on a
man as it would on a woman. Furthermore, there may be differences in the kinds of work in which men are interested. In Hoffman and colleagues’ (2005) study, it was noted that the male participants felt more pressure than female participants to follow a particular career path. This suggests that gender differences are likely to be present between Aboriginal men and women. Identifying the similarities and differences in the career related experiences of Aboriginal men and women would likely provide opportunities to tailor employment supports to the needs of women and men.

Another direction that warrants exploration is the experiences of Aboriginal young adults who have not completed postsecondary education. Education increases employment opportunities and options and, as Blustein (2006) suggests, it is the experiences of people who have little volition which continue to be absent from the literature. As such, it would be worthwhile to explore the experiences of Aboriginal people who do not have postsecondary education because it may provide insight into the barriers to postsecondary education and will illuminate the possible differences in their experiences when compared to Aboriginal people who have completed postsecondary education.

Finally, the results of this study could be employed to develop quantitative methods, utilizing surveys, in order to draw on the experiences of a larger portion of the population. Quantitative methods would likely be most useful after further qualitative research has been conducted.

**Research Reflections**

There are two significant ways in which this study has impacted me as a researcher. The first is gaining an appreciation for the intricacies and involvement that is
essential to qualitative research. The second is the experience of conducting researcher as an outsider to the community.

Quantitative research was emphasized in my undergraduate academic career and, as such, I had very few preconceived notions of what it would be like to conduct qualitative research at a graduate level. I found that qualitative research insists on an intimate familiarity with data that is not present in quantitative research. I appreciated the emphasis on staying connected with the participants and the co-construction of the research between myself and the participants. I encountered challenges moving from immersing myself in the data to seeing the bigger picture. Engaging in this project convinced me of both the rigour and validity of qualitative research in providing insights that simply are not accessible through quantitative methodologies. Perhaps, most importantly, I came to realize that in conducting qualitative research I was expected to be immersed in the research rather than attempting to separate myself from it. This provided me with a very rich experience.

As a non-Aboriginal person, there are inherent challenges conducting research with Aboriginal peoples. There is literature about the benefits and challenges of both insider and outsider research (Brant-Castellano, 2004); however, the literature did not prepare me for the experience of being an outsider. I am aware of the history of disrespectful research in Aboriginal communities that has been conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers. To address my concerns about conducting disrespectful research, I utilized a community based approach in the study. However, when the time came to recruit participants for the study it was challenging to go to Aboriginal community events where I felt out of place. The support I received from my supervisor and others was
crucial. I found that when I spoke to the women who eventually participated in the study that my fears were unfounded. This experience taught me that although it is important to do what I can to inform myself about protocols, it is most important to be a human being sitting across from another human being and listening to their story.

**Conclusion**

I believe that this study has accomplished the goal of providing insights into the career related experiences of Aboriginal women in an urban context. These insights serve as the basis for suggestions on improving employment supports, access to education and government policies and provisions for Aboriginal employment. In addition to answering a question and suggesting solutions, this study poses many more questions which can be addressed in future research endeavours. Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this study is highlighting the success of Aboriginal women and identifying the innate strengths that are present in Aboriginal communities. Accessing the strengths of Aboriginal communities is likely to be key in improving employment experiences for Aboriginal people in Canada.
References


Remark: The text below is a document from the University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics. It is a protocol reference document for a research project titled "Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults' Work Life Narratives" by Dr. Suzanne Stewart.

**Appendix A**

**University of Toronto**
Office of the Vice-President, Research
Office of Research Ethics
PROTOCOL REFERENCE #24574
November 16, 2009
Dr. Suzanne Stewart
OISE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St.
Toronto, ON
M5S 1V6

Dear Dr. Stewart,
Re: Your research protocol entitled “Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults’ Work Life Narratives”

**Original Approval Date:** November 16, 2009
**ETHICS APPROVAL Expiry Date:** November 15, 2010

**Continuing Review Level:** 1

We are writing to advise you that a member of the Social Sciences, Humanities & Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study, for a period of one year, under the REB’s delegated review process. Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report at least 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study. Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,
Daniel Gyewu

Research Ethics Coordinator

McMurrich Building, 12 Queen's Park Cres., W, 2nd Floor Toronto, ON M5S 1S8
TEL: 416-946-3273 FAX: 416-946-5763 EMAIL: ethics.review@utoronto.ca

(please see pdf file for official document).
Appendix B

Sego _______________(Director of Community Agency),

My name is Danika Overmars and I am a student completing my Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology under the supervision of Dr. Suzanne Stewart. Dr. Stewart is an Assistant professor in the Department of Adult Education and Counselling Psychology at the University of Toronto.

Together we are working on a project titled Walking in Multiple Worlds: Aboriginal Young Adults Work Life Narratives. The purpose of this research project is to explore the young Aboriginal people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced and are facing in their quest to find sustainable work. An integral part of this project is developing partnerships with Aboriginal agencies in the community to work collaboratively on the research. It is to this end that I respectfully request a meeting with you to discuss the project at your earliest convenience.

Mashi cho - Miigwetch - Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Danika Overmars
Appendix C

COMMUNITY CONSENT LETTER

Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults’ Work Life Narratives

_______________________(Community Agency name)  
Mr./Ms.____________________(Executive Director name)  

01 October, 2009  

Sego Mr./Ms____________________:  

I am requesting your permission to recruit Indigenous graduate students who access services at your agency for a current research project entitled Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults’ Work Life Narratives that is being conducted by me, Professor Suzanne Stewart and a research team.  

You may already know me as an Assistant Professor in the department of Department of Adult Education and Counseling Psychology at OISE - University of Toronto and you may contact me if you have further questions via telephone at 416-978-0723 (my office) or 416-978-0688 (research office) or email: suzanne.stewart@utoronto.ca.  

As a faculty member, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements of my job description. My research interests include Indigenous education and conceptions of mental health and healing in counselling theory and practice.  

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the young Aboriginal people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced and are facing in their quest to find sustainable work. The research question is: “What supports, challenges, and barriers do Aboriginal young adults experience with regard to finding and keeping work?” Research of this type is important because the results will help improve career education and counselling support for Aboriginal people. The research is being conducted on two sites: Victoria, British Columbia; and Toronto, Ontario.

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an Aboriginal community service within the greater Toronto community, and it is my desire to work within the local urban Indigenous community.
If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your informed consent will allow me to recruit self-identified Indigenous youth between the ages of 18 and 29 via posters placed within your agency.

The recruitment process is as follows:

Recruitment of possible participants will then occur through the placement of recruitment posters at your agency. Then screening of possible participants through telephone or email contact will occur as they respond to the recruitment poster. Interview time and dates will be set up at a mutually convenient place for the researcher and participant within the GTA.

Attached is a copy of the Recruitment Poster (Appendix A), the Consent Letter for individual participants (Appendix C) and the list of Interview Questions for the individual interviews (Appendix D).

There are no known or anticipated risks to your agency or to individual participants by participating in this research. Participants will be discussing general everyday work-related topics related to their knowledge and work/education-experience, and the interview will not breech confidentiality regarding particular topics or particular employers or instructors or vocational counsellors with whom he or she works.

The potential benefits of participant participation in this research include clarification of his or her own views of work and education in his or her experience. Potential benefits to society include informing education and policy about cultural perspectives on work-life in order to better serve the career and educational needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and to inform academic literature and data about and Indigenous paradigm in education.

Your participation as a community organization in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate by allowing me to recruit participants at your agency, you may withdraw your agency’s support at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study at any time recruitment from your agency will cease immediately, posters will be removed and negotiation with any possible participants recruited from your agency will end and not be completed or confirmed. Confirmed or currently participating participants will be informed of your agency’s withdrawal of participation/support, and these participant will be given the option of withdrawing from the study at no consequence to themselves.

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will visit consent orally throughout the life of the research project. I will do this by contact you via email at approximately at 3 stages of the project with a short one page report on the progress of the research to date, and asking for feedback on the process and/direction, which will be included in the research: 1) upon completion of recruitment (date TBA), 2) upon completion of data collection (date TBA), 3) upon completion of data analysis and results write up (date TBA). These timelines are approximate and subject to minor revisions.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with you and others in the following ways: directly to community participant (you at your agency) participants by hand delivery of
results in a community newsletter, through published articles in scholarly journals, in policy report to Native and non-Native governments and health organizations, and at scholarly conferences/meetings.

Data from this study will be disposed of through audio tapes being erased and transcripts and notes shredded five years from the date of data collection.

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include the researcher, Suzanne L. Stewart, and two graduate research assistants, Allison Reeves and Danika Overmars, both Graduate students in education at OISE, as per the contact information listed at the beginning of this consent form.

In addition to being able to contact the researchers at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Office of the Vice-President, Research at the University of Toronto (416-978-4984)

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of community participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

Name of Community Participant & Agency  Signature  Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults’ Work Life Narratives
Individual Interview

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Walking in Multiple Worlds. Aboriginal Young Adults’ Work Life Narratives”. The research team for this project is led by Dr. Anne Marshall, a faculty member in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria and Dr. Suzanne Stewart, a faculty member at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. Other team members include: Danika Overmars, Allison Reeves, Jennifer Coverdale, Jackie LeBlanc, research assistants for this project, and ________________ (other RAs, community based research assistants, and Community Partners). If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may contact Dr. Stewart at (416) 978-0723 or suzanne.stewart@utoronto.ca, Dr. Marshall at (250) 721-7815 or amarshall@uvic.ca, Danika Overmars at (647) 213-3686 or d.overmars@utoronto.ca, Jackie LeBlanc at (250) 721-7784 or dleblanc@uvic.ca, or Jennifer Coverdale at (250)721-7784 or jcoverda@uvic.ca.

This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The purpose of this research project is to explore the young Aboriginal people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced and are facing in their quest to find sustainable work. The research question is: “What supports, challenges, and barriers do Aboriginal young adults experience with regard to finding and keeping work?” Research of this type is important because the results will help improve career education and counselling support for Aboriginal people. The research is being conducted on three sites: Victoria, British Columbia; and Toronto, Ontario.

You are being invited to participate because you are between the ages of 18 and 29 and have Aboriginal status and have indicated interest in sharing your perspectives on employment as an Aboriginal young person.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will consist of one audio-taped interview with one of the above researchers (about 60 minutes). The
focus of the interview will be on your experiences in searching for employment and maintaining employment both in the past and at present.

We do not anticipate that involvement in this research would involve any substantial inconvenience for you other than the time to travel to and participate in the interview.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you through participating in this research. The potential benefits of your participation in this research include contributing to the knowledge and development of partnership practices in career development. Your participation will provide new information on the career development process of Aboriginal young people.

As a way to compensate you for your participation, you will be given a $20.00 gift certificate at the time of the interview. It is important for you to know that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants and, if you agree to be a participant in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. If you would not otherwise choose to participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline. Should you withdraw from the study at any time the honorarium is yours to keep.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time, or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or any explanation. In the event that you withdraw from this study, your taped interview will be erased and the transcript and all field notes or data associated with you will be destroyed. In the event that you withdraw from the study part way through you will be asked if you want the data you have contributed to be part of analysis. If you agree your data will remain in the study, if not your taped interview will be erased and the transcript and all field notes or data associated with you will be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be protected by storing interview audiotapes and the transcribed data in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researchers will have access to the data. The audio-tapes from your interview, the transcribed data, and any notes taken during the interview will be destroyed after five years.

To preserve your anonymity, your name will not be recorded on the transcribed data, a code or pseudonym will be assigned and used in place of your name. The key to the coded names will be kept separately from the interview data. Signed consent letters will also be stored separately from any data.

Research findings will be communicated to participants, local community members and interested professionals through interactive workshops. The results of the study will be published in peer-reviewed journals, in various scholarly publications, and will be presented at professional and/or scholarly conferences, as well as community/school meetings in your town. Summary results will also be posted on an internet website.
In addition to being able to contact the researcher and/or research assistant as above, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Ethics Review Office, 416-946-3273 or ethics.review@utoronto.ca.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_________________________  ____________
Participant Signature  Date

Participant Name (please print) ____________________________

I have received an honorarium of ______ for participation in this research.

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER.
Appendix E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview #1:

Each participant will be asked to do one audio-taped interview using this format, which will be unstructured in nature. I will invite the participant to share his or her story using the following statements as a guide:

1. I would like to hear your story or stories of how you have come to be part of the work force.

2. I am particularly interested in how you understand work and for Indigenous youth.

3. Has this understanding changed from past to present, and how do you see it into the future?

4. How, in your past, present, and future experiences, does culture inform your story of Indigenous work and career life and your story of career development?

These statements posed to participants will be in an open-ended and unstructured manner. Prompts such as “Tell me more about that” will be used to encourage open-ended answers that will facilitate participants’ narratives.

Interview #2:

Each participant will be asked to do one audio-taped interview using this format, which will be unstructured in nature. I will invite the participant to share his or her story using the following statements as a guide:

1. From your narratives in your interview I have constructed a story map…how does this map illustrate your views?

2. What is missing from your story map? What would you like to add?

3. Do you have anything else to say about your story map?

These statements posed to participants will be in an open-ended and unstructured manner. Prompts such as “Tell me more about that” will be used to encourage open-ended answers that will facilitate participants’ narratives.