WHO AM I AT WORK? WORK LIFE IDENTITY OF ABORIGINAL YOUTH AND THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS ON CAREER SUCCESS

by

Nicole E. Elliott, B.A.

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Applied Psychology and Human Development
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Nicole Elliott 2013
Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada. Over half of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 24, yet the voices of Aboriginal young adults are absent within the literature. Aboriginal young adults, between the ages of 18 and 24, are two to three times more likely to be unemployed than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Very little is known about the career-related experiences of Aboriginal young adults, even less is known about how their identity as an Aboriginal person affects these experiences. This study employs a narrative inquiry method to explore the work-life narratives of Aboriginal young adults living in Toronto. Results identified three metathemes that employers have in regards to cultural identity for Aboriginal youth. These themes are: cultural respect in the workplace, racism and oppression in the workplace, and inspiring youth. Limitations, implications and future research directions are discussed.
Acknowledgments

I would like to deeply thank the Aboriginal community in Toronto, especially the members that participated in the focus group and for sharing their experiences with us for this research and providing wonderful insights with such vigor and excitement. I would also like to thank the traditional people of this territory, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

I would like to send my strong sentiments of thanks to my supervisor and mentor, Dr. Suzanne Stewart, who has provided me with an abundance of support, has shared her wisdom, and has given me her time, efforts and patience throughout this task. She also has served as an incredible mentor throughout my journey thus far as a graduate student and has inspired me to continue in a career path in academia, and with the Aboriginal community. She has demonstrated passion, hard work, and a healthy balance in life that I fondly admire, and I could not have made it through this project, and degree without her support and guidance. I would also like to thank Dr. Roy Moodley for being the second member of my thesis committee and issuing patience and encouragement through this process.

Lastly, I would like to thank my wonderful family who have been my strongest source of encouragement and support and have been beside me on every step of the way. I would especially like to thank my father, Joe Elliott, for demonstrating to me what true humility and strength is, and for always having a smile on his face and saying the right things to promote positivity and encouragement. You are truly an inspiration to me! Finally, I would like to thank all of my friends and strong support network that I have from my community, who have been empathetic, encouraging and extremely supportive of everything that I do and accomplish. Thank you!
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ........................................................................................................ iii  
List of Tables ................................................................................................................ vii  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................ viii  
List of Appendices .......................................................................................................... ix  
Introduction .................................................................................................................... 1  
  Rationale ....................................................................................................................... 5  
  The Present Study ........................................................................................................ 7  
  The Research Site ......................................................................................................... 7  
  The Research Goals ...................................................................................................... 8  
Literature Review ........................................................................................................... 10  
  Career Success ............................................................................................................. 10  
  Cultural Identity and the Workplace ............................................................................ 13  
  Current Career Counselling Theories ......................................................................... 14  
  The Career Counselling of Aboriginal Peoples ............................................................. 16  
  Historical Context of Aboriginal Peoples and the Workplace .................................... 17  
Methodology .................................................................................................................. 20  
  Social Constructivism .................................................................................................. 20  
  Qualitative Research ................................................................................................... 21  
  Narrative Inquiry ......................................................................................................... 22  
  Research Design .......................................................................................................... 23  
Procedure ....................................................................................................................... 24  
  Participants ................................................................................................................... 24  
  Recruitment .................................................................................................................. 24  
  Focus Groups ............................................................................................................... 25
Work Life Identity of Aboriginal Youth and Employers

Analysis

Dissemination

Results

Cultural Respect in the Workplace

Traditional human resources

Cultural awareness and respect

Lack of resources

Employer education to recognize gifts

Racism and Oppression in the Workplace

Advocacy and action plan

Misguidance and lack of support

Negativity and oppression/ isolation

Systemic oppression

Low self-esteem/ defeated

Inspiring Youth

Working with youth

Empowerment

Outside the box

Positive reinforcement

Confidence

Business opportunities

Proactive

Healthy leadership
Work Life Identity of Aboriginal Youth and Employers

Discussion ........................................................................................................................................... 42

Cultural Respect ................................................................................................................................. 47

Racism and Oppression ...................................................................................................................... 51

Inspiring Youth ................................................................................................................................. 52

Limitations ........................................................................................................................................... 53

  Generalizability ............................................................................................................................... 54
  Bias .................................................................................................................................................... 55
  Group effects ..................................................................................................................................... 57

Implications for Employer, Policy and Educators .............................................................................. 58

  Workshop for Employers ............................................................................................................... 58
  Policy changes ................................................................................................................................. 59
  Education ......................................................................................................................................... 59

Future Research Directions ............................................................................................................... 60

Researcher Reflections and Conclusion............................................................................................. 62

  Thesis Summary ............................................................................................................................. 62
  Researcher Reflections .................................................................................................................... 63
  Conclusion ........................................................................................................................................ 65

References ........................................................................................................................................... 67

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster ....................................................................................................... 98

Appendix B: Recruitment brochure ................................................................................................... 99

Appendix C: Community Consent Letter ............................................................................................ 100

Appendix D: Participant Informed Consent ....................................................................................... 104

Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Format ..................................................................................... 108
Work Life Identity of Aboriginal Youth and Employers

List of Tables

Table 1: Focus group responses to question 1 ................................................................. 38
Table 2: Focus group responses to question 2 ................................................................. 39
Table 3: Focus group responses to question 3 ................................................................. 40
Table 4: Focus group responses to question 4 ................................................................. 41
List of Figures

Figure 1: intersections of cultural identity in the workplace for Aboriginal youth… 29
List of Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Poster.................................................................98
Appendix B: Recruitment Brochure............................................................99
Appendix C: Community Consent Letter.....................................................100
Appendix D: Participant Consent Form.......................................................104
Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Format.................................................108
Who am I at Work? Work Life Identity of Aboriginal Youth and the Role of Employers on Career Success

Introduction

This thesis presents a community-based approach that examines aspects of the workplace that influence career and identity for Aboriginal young people. “Aboriginal peoples” is referred to throughout this thesis as the collective name for the original peoples of what is today Canada and their descendants, who before the settlement of Europeans thrived and met all their material and spiritual needs through the resources that the natural land had to offer (Waldram, 2004). The term Aboriginal will be used throughout this thesis and is used interchangeably with the terms “Indigenous”, “Indian” and “Native”.

The Canadian constitution act and the assembly of First Nations (2002) recognize three distinct groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (AANDC, 2011). The Canadian government, through legislation outlined in the Indian act of 1876, legally defines what it is to be an Aboriginal person, and has not done so to any other group within Canada (Gibbins, 1997 as cited in Offet-Gartner, 2008; Wilson & Urion, 1995). The Canadian government uses this legislation to define the Aboriginal peoples in categories of First Nations (Status; Non-Status; Registered), Inuit and Metis (Offet-Gartner, 2008). However, this terminology is rarely used by Aboriginal people themselves as many find it to be a further means of colonial oppression. The government of Canada thus defines who qualifies for “Indian” status and thus denies some individuals of their Aboriginal identity. Furthermore, Aboriginal people possess certain Aboriginal and treaty rights that were recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Act of 1982. Even though they are vague and outdated, they still remain a subject of legal dispute (McMillan & Yellowhorn, 2004).
Although the Canadian government only recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people, it is important to contest to the fact that the Aboriginal peoples in Canada are a heterogeneous group, having many differences amongst communities all over Canada. The Indian Act in 1876 was a formal administrative document, which defined “Indians” and land reserves for “Indians” in accordance to treaty rights. Initially, as was with the legal convention of Canada at that time, the term “Indian” referred to adult males, and any wives or children that were dependent on these males. The term “Indian” used in the Indian act of 1876 is referred to as what is today recognized as “First Nations” people, as it implies many separate, formerly sovereign entities. Furthermore, the legal definition of “Indian” expanded to include the Inuit people, but still excluded many other Aboriginal groups, thus creating the category of “non-status Indian.” Lastly, it is important to mention that the government of Canada only formerly recognized Metis people as an Aboriginal group in 1982, even though they emerged with the fur trade, well before the Indian Act and the Canadian Constitution (McMillan & Yellowhorn, 2004).

There are many differences between Canadian Aboriginal groups. However, as a population Aboriginal peoples share a similar world-view that vastly differs from the current mainstream Canadian society, which is based from a Eurocentric Western lens. The effects of colonization have left Aboriginal people in Canada with a loss of healing methods, land, economies, cultural norms and beliefs and have isolated and excluded them from the rest of the Canadian society (Johner, Gingrich, Jeffery & Maslany, 2008). An Aboriginal worldview and spirituality is mainly described as an understanding of the many interrelationships that can co-exist together. This includes but is not specific to nature, humanity, and the creator. Furthermore, it is stated that for many Aboriginal people, a material way of life can not exist without maintaining harmony and reciprocity with nature, as it is essential that all physical and spiritual things are an interwoven entity and that respect for all of life’s interconnections (nature and
spirit) are identified as being central to Aboriginal values. This includes respect and care for the environment, the importance of community, generosity and sharing, respect for the teachings that come from Aboriginal elders, and humility (Johner et al., 2008; McKenna, 1993).

To mainstream Canadians, the general way of life in society is based on material aspects of politics, economy, and social systems and furthermore, nature is viewed as physical resources and material gains in which to endorse a profit. Johner and colleagues (2008), highlight the connection that Canadian society as a whole represents a disconnection from the spiritual aspects of the natural world. This disrespects Aboriginal worldviews and further disconnects them from mainstream society and contributes to feelings of devaluation, oppression, and marginalization. This disconnection thus results in many Aboriginal people feeling like they are not a part of the general Canadian society, or choose to isolate themselves from it.

According to 2006 Canadian Census data, currently there are 1,182,505 Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008). Furthermore, there are 11 major language groups with more than 58 dialects distributed among approximately 596 bands residing on 2284 reserves, in rural communities or large urban areas (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000). The Aboriginal population in Canada is increasingly becoming more urban, where off-reserve Aboriginal people are the fastest growing group in Canadian society. Furthermore, the 2006 census data demonstrates that 56% of Aboriginal peoples lived in an urban area (AANDC, 2011). The Urban Aboriginal Peoples study (2010a), examined the values, experiences, identities and aspirations of urban Aboriginal peoples, and found that First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples living within Canadian cities are migrating to metropolitan areas to strive towards better education, healthier family life, and to strengthen their cultures and traditions.
Furthermore, pursuing higher education was the leading aspiration of urban Aboriginal peoples, especially for young people who see education as a path towards a good job or career.

The city of Toronto is home to over 26,000 Aboriginal people and 31,910 in the Greater Toronto Area; and is described as one of the largest and vastly diverse Aboriginal communities in Canada (City of Toronto, 2010). The 2006 census reported that the Toronto Aboriginal population was younger than the population as a whole, with a much higher proportion of seniors and higher proportion of Children and youth (City of Toronto, 2008). This is also consistent with the greater Aboriginal population in Canada where over 50% of the Aboriginal population is under the age of 24; and 40% are under the age of 16 (Statistics Canada, 2009). The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS): Toronto Report, found that Aboriginal Torontonians expressed a strong sense of their Aboriginality in the city and felt that they belonged to a non-Aboriginal community more so than any other city except Vancouver. Furthermore, in Toronto there is a strong Indigenous pride among urban Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal Torontonians were found to be the most likely in all cities to be very proud of their First Nations, Metis, Inuit, and Aboriginal identities and were among the least likely to express strong pride in being Canadian (UAPS, 2010b).

Although Aboriginal Torontonians have a strong sense of culture, community and pride, many Aboriginal peoples in Toronto face barriers to thriving in an urban environment. According to the City of Toronto (2008), local Aboriginals had a significantly smaller percentage of individuals who had completed a university degree, and a significant higher percentage of individuals who had not completed high school, when compared to non-Aboriginal Torontonians. Furthermore, Aboriginal households of all types in Toronto have lower income than non-Aboriginal households; 10% lower than Aboriginal households in Canada, 15% lower
than Aboriginal households in Ontario, and 45% lower than Aboriginal households in the rest of the Greater Toronto Area. These statistics demonstrate that urban Aboriginal people living in Toronto face many challenges in regards to income, employment, and education.

**Rationale**

It has been highly recognized by communities, individuals and governments that employment is a major issue for Aboriginal young people in Canada. According to 2006 census data, unemployment rates for Aboriginal young people ages 15-24 is 2-3 times higher than for non-Aboriginals. The provincial rates range from 12% to over 20%, as opposed to an average of 6% for non-Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada, 2006). There are also differences among the three Aboriginal identity groups, with First Nations and Inuit unemployment rates that are consistently higher than the rates for Metis people. Similarly, in the United States, American Indians have the highest unemployment rates and the lowest education rates in the country: 50% of those available for work on or near reservations are unemployed and, of those who are employed, 30% earn wages below the poverty line (Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Seibel, Winrow & Morin, 2001). As we see the Canadian Aboriginal population is becoming increasingly more urban, in theory there should be more opportunities for employment in a higher populated city such as Toronto. This suggests that Aboriginal people as a group encounter further barriers toward access and holding employment than simply the challenge of lack of job availability.

Researchers have identified several contributing factors to the low levels of education, high levels of unemployment, and limited career advancement in Canadian Aboriginal communities, especially for those ages 18-30. Aboriginal young people face multiple employment barriers related to poverty, access, literacy, discrimination, colonization, and the
traumatic legacy of residential school abuse (Hoffman, Jackson & Smith, 2005; McCormick & Amundson, 1997; White, Maxim & Gyimah, 2003). Programs and policies have been implemented to increase employment rates for Aboriginal young people, yet these efforts appear to have had limited effects (Dwyer, 2003; White et al., 2003). This may be in part because little is known about their work related needs and preferences (Juntunen et al., 2001; Turner, Trotter, Lapan, Czajka, Yang & Brissett, 2006). Even less is known about those who thrive despite all the obstacles (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Turner et al., 2006; White et al., 2003). Furthermore, minimal literature exists that capture the work life experiences of Aboriginal youth themselves, or those who work directly with Aboriginal youth.

Employment is not only a means of surviving economically, it is how we identify ourselves and participate in the greater society. The Aboriginal workforce states that, “Employment is the cornerstone of participation in modern Canadian society. Employment is not only a source of income: It is also the basis for self-respect and autonomy” (Mendelson, 2004, p. 1). As statistics show, employment is a pressing issue for Aboriginal people demonstrated by the high rates of unemployment among the Aboriginal population in Canada, which in some communities is approximately double that of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2006). Social and economic marginalization of Aboriginal peoples places them in poverty (Shepard, O’Neil & Guenette, 2006), placing the need of employment as a means of survival for many. Issues such as career advancement and obtaining an education to work out of interest may not be plausible for those who need to work to survive. It has been suggested by a number of researchers that current career counselling and employment settings do not adequately meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples and that additional cultural factors need to be taken into account when working with Aboriginal peoples (Darou, 2000; Herring, 1990; Neumann, McCormick,
Amundson & McLean, 2000). Furthermore, current career models are based on the career development and employment issues that exist for white middle classed people.

The Present Study

The research question for this thesis project asks, “what are the intersections of cultural identity and work-life experiences for Aboriginal youth as they relate to employment outcomes?” A focus was placed on how the cultural identity as an Aboriginal person influences the experiences of work-life for youth, and also, what can be improved to make the work place a safe and prosperous environment.

The present study builds on and extends the finding from previous projects that examined the aspects of career development for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people, as well as those enrolled in secondary school in rural communities (Marshall, 2002; Marshall, Guenette & Stewart, 2008; Marshall & Harrison, 2005; Marshall, Stewart & Harrison, 2006; Shepard & Marshall, 2000) and also in an urban Aboriginal setting (Stewart & Marshall, 2011a, 2011b; Stewart, Reeves, Mohanty, Syrette & Elliott, 2011). This research project has a focus on the urban aspects of work-life for Aboriginal youth, and examines some of the experiences of Aboriginal identity in the work place through an urban lens, contributing to the knowledge regarding the fast growing urban Aboriginal population.

The Research Site

The site for this research project was within the largest urban center in Canada, the city of Toronto, Ontario. This developed metropolis is home to approximately 2.48 million people, and expands to approximately 5.5 million in the Greater Toronto Area (City of Toronto, 2010). Furthermore, Toronto has often been described as being the most culturally diverse city in the world. In 2006, the city of Toronto was home to 30 per cent of all recent immigrants and 20 per
cent of all Canadian immigrants. Furthermore, 47 per cent of Toronto’s population (1,162,635 people) reports themselves as being part of a visible minority (City of Toronto, 2010). As mentioned previously, there is an increasing population of Aboriginal peoples in Toronto. Since the Canadian Census data only accounts for individuals living in family homes, and does not take into account those who are living in a group setting, shelter or on the streets; agencies serving the Aboriginal community in Toronto estimate that there is more likely to be approximately 70,000 Aboriginal Torontonians, as more than half are likely to be missing from the data (City of Toronto, 2010).

The site for this research was the Native Canadian Center of Toronto, which is located in the heart of downtown Toronto and is an “urban Aboriginal cultural center.” This center is a community based, non-profit organization that provides social, recreational, cultural, and spiritual services to Toronto’s urban Aboriginal community. The Native Canadian Center of Toronto envisions “a healthy urban Aboriginal community by living, learning, and celebrating the Aboriginal culture through honouring Aboriginal knowledge and traditions, integrating the spirit of youth and elders, and fostering the development of healthy families” (Native Canadian Center of Toronto, 2010).

The Research Goals

The main goal of this research project is to incorporate the voices of Aboriginal young people into the literature and to add depth and detail into the knowledge of how identity as an Aboriginal young person influences work experiences. This thesis project also aims to provide some insight as to what affect the employers themselves have on these work-life experiences and in what ways that they help or hinder career growth for Aboriginal youth. The results of this research project can be viewed as having a great amount of potential for furthering the
knowledge of the current barriers that exists for Aboriginal youth in regards to employment, as it has already been well identified that unemployment and poverty is a pressing issue for Canadian Aboriginal young people.

Furthermore, the voiced experiences of the Aboriginal people themselves will help to make adequate advancements and improvements to current career counselling models that have been recognized as being inappropriate for the use with Aboriginal youth and will help to extend the field of Aboriginal career development and contribute to potential changes in regards to counselling education curriculum, which needs to include more Indigenous perspective of healing.
Literature Review

Work plays a central role in the lives of people and communities and contributes to the overall social and economic welfare of a population. Work is the way we establish meaning and identity in our lives (Amundson, 2006; Blustein, 2006; Juntunen, 2006). Not only does work establish who we are and what we contribute to a society, it is a source of means for survival and furthermore, is a substantial part to our lives in both time devoted to our work as well as the meaning in our life. People’s experiences of work can either promote well-being or lead to distress; work satisfaction or dissatisfaction has been shown to be a significant predictor of overall mental health (Blustein, 2001a; Kirmayer, et al., 2000; White et al., 2003). Cultural factors play a significant role in all aspects of life and development including work (Bruner, 1990). Ethnic identity, family and gender are also cultural locations affecting life and work decisions (Andres et al., 2007; Shepard & Marshall, 2000; Young, Ball, Valach, Turkel & Wong, 2003).

Career Success

The extent to which an individual is considered “successful” in his or her career is a variable construct and furthermore, “successful” may have many different meanings to different individuals, and or different groups. However, in the existing literature on career theory, Seibert and colleagues (1999) define career success as “positive psychological or work related outcomes or achievements that the individual accumulates as a result of work experiences” (p. 417). There are many different factors that are involved with career success, including job choice (or factors that limit one from flexibility in job choice), demographic factors, personality, and organizational influences.
As mentioned previously, work is an important aspect of one’s identity and contributes to the way we view ourselves in conjunction with the greater society. However, many other aspects contributing to our identities (i.e., family roles, responsibilities, etc.) may also factor into the choice of a specific career, and resultantly have an influence on career success. Brown (2002) identifies the process of choosing a career as one of estimating the individual’s abilities and values, estimating the skills and abilities required for success in a given occupation, and estimating the work values that will be satisfied by the various occupational alternatives available. In other words, it is presumed that individuals will choose careers that they feel are reflective and accommodating to their own attitudes, personality, values and lifestyle.

Current research regarding young people’s experiences in the work place has indicated that career success and satisfaction among young workers has a greater emphasis on the flexibility that employers give in regards to allowing for a balanced lifestyle, involving flexible work hours, flexible schedules, and respect from employers in terms of extra-curricular activities. This differs from how young people would have defined career success previously, in that traditionally one’s success in the workplace had more to do with high salaries, prestigious job titles, and intensive work hours (Beauregard, 2007).

Career satisfaction and success can also be explained by person-environment fit theory (French & Caplin, 1972); this theory posits that the intersection of attitudes and experiences will influence the degree of satisfaction that one has in regards to their work environment. Furthermore, this theory postulates that if an individual has a discrepancy between a personal need and preference and the work environment’s ability to satisfy those needs and preferences, than the result will ultimately lead to stress, physical, psychological, and behavioural strain. As a response to this theory, Sanders, M.L. Lengnick-Hall, C.A. Lengnick-Hall and Steele-Clapp
(1998) indicates that if employees' expectations for the configuration of work life and family life are not met, their attitudes and reality in terms of the transition of work and family will become blurred, thus leading to dissatisfaction, strain, and other negative consequences. Comparatively, if there is a good understanding and separation of family life and work expectations, then the employee is expected to have a positive attitude and thus have more career and life satisfaction, as well as self-perceived success.

The relationship between employer and employee has also been identified as having an influence on the satisfaction and success of young people in the workplace (Shore & Tetrick, 1994). The loyalty to a supervisor by an employee has been associated with the commitment of work, and the dedication to a specific organization. There are many factors that can contribute to this loyalty; one of the said influences is when the employer acts as a companion along side the role of supervisor, and works in a role of meeting the needs of his or her subordinates, rather than the reverse (Callanan, 2003; Jackall, 1983).

There are many factors that account for the success or dissatisfaction in career attainment for young people. Most of the literature focuses on environmental factors and situational considerations, such as influences from family roles, personal life, etc. However, what is missing from the literature is the degree to which cultural identity and the experiences of other culturally diverse groups who are working as a means of survival through a cultural lens that is very different from their own. To be specific, in North America, social institutions (particularly the education system, and many corporations) are based on a European, “westernized” lens. When examining the career success of culturally diverse groups (i.e., most career theory is based on research conducted on white, middle class individuals), it is important to account for one’s cultural identity and how this identity helps or hinders success in career. Furthermore, as
previously mentioned, employers have an impact on the work satisfaction of employees, therefore experiences of employer’s influence on cultural identity and sensitivity should also be examined when looking at the career success of culturally diverse groups.

**Cultural Identity and the Workplace**

The overarching conceptual framework for this research is social constructivist career development theory that emphasizes the meaning of work and career actions as embedded in social and cultural contexts (Savickas, 1995; Young, Vallach & Collin, 1996). More specifically, the psychology of working as conceptualized by Blustein and colleagues (Blustein, 2001b; Blustein, 2006; Blustein & Ellis, 2000; Blustein, Schulthesiss & Flum, 2004) and Worthington and Juntunen, (1997) have focused on less advantaged workers. These scholars point out that the bulk of career development research and theory has focused on population cohorts who “exercise some degree of volition in their choices about their work lives” (Blustein, McWhirter & Perry, 2005, p.353).

It has been suggested that the concept of career choice, may not even exist among Aboriginal peoples, especially those living on reserves, as individuals take jobs that are defined by their tribal community as necessary, filling needs as they exist, rather than seeking out work that is personally interesting or rewarding (Darou, 2000). There has been little investigation of the experiences of those who need to work for personal survival and the survival of their families, or those whose work environments are determined by community needs and values as is commonly the case for Aboriginal peoples (Diemer & Blustein, 2007; Kenny, Gualdron, Scanlon, Sparks, Blustein & Jernigan, 2007). It is essential to develop career development models that include one’s cultural identity and history into context of career and employment experiences.
There are many cultural factors that need to be considered when reflecting on career development for Aboriginal peoples. The physical environment and a sense of place, or homeland, have been identified as important factors in the identity of Aboriginal peoples (Choney, Berryhill-Paapke, & Robbins, 1995). These factors have become intensified and more important to the consideration of career development as the forced relocation of many Aboriginal tribes since the arrival of Europeans to North America and the continuing migration of Aboriginal peoples to increasingly urban locations in search of job opportunities have been identified as a major concern.

It has also been argued that Aboriginal people who remain in rural, reservation communities are likely to maintain a different set of cultural values and traditions than those who leave, which contributes to the complexity of Aboriginal racial identity (Choney et al., 1995). Strong family ties and loyalty that are core parts of the Aboriginal identity, and furthermore, when problems arise in an Aboriginal family, they become problems of the community, not of just the individual (LaFromboise, 1988). The community will come together to support the individual and to help him or her return to the social life of the group. The importance of community and the social environment often limits the effectiveness of traditionally individual-focused counselling strategies.

Current Career Counselling Theories

There is a substantial amount of literature attending to the problems of applying Western frameworks of career development theories and counselling techniques to populations whose values and cultural norms are in contrast to the dominant culture, such as with Aboriginal communities (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003; Leong & Hartung, 2000). Increasing recognition of cultural influences on career development has prompted a call
for expanded theoretical and practical perspectives to increase the cultural validity of career
development practices (Leong & Brown, 1995). Theories need to explicate the interplay between
individual and systemic levels of cultural influences and provide direction for career counselling
interventions.

Systems Theory Frameworks perspective emphasizes both parts within a whole system
and view the whole system as greater than the sum of its parts. Clients seeking career
development assistance are viewed within the contexts of their lives, in turn; individuals are
viewed as active agents for influencing their surrounding contexts. Systems Theory examines
interconnections between internal and external variables that could be having an impact on a
person’s career development (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). It is also a theoretical lens for
examining both microanalyses of external influences on people’s lives while also facilitating
microanalysis that are relevant for the career development of individual clients (Patton &
McMahon, 1999).

Multicultural career theory suggests that explorations of cultural influences on people’s
career development must extend beyond group membership to appreciate the culture internalized
by the individual (Ho, 1995). Systems Theory accommodates the aspects of culture that are
relevant for each client, including salient cultural dimensions and the intersections of cultural
identities that are related to each client’s life roles. Career counselors need to be informed about
the systems surrounding clients and the influence of those systems on clients’ career
development. This helps to redefine the client’s issues as more than individual problems as
clients presenting concerns may be centered on systemic and cultural barriers that have an impact
on their career development (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). Systems theory appears to have strong
conceptual utility for integrating issues of culture into career development practices, and could potentially be a theoretical framework that could be adapted for use with Aboriginal peoples.

**The Career Counselling of Aboriginal Peoples**

There are few studies that have investigated the characteristics, values, and needs of Aboriginal workers (Brown & Lavish, 2006; Hoffman et al., 2005). Since Aboriginal peoples are underrepresented in vocational psychology research and literature, “little is understood about the issues that may be related to their career development” (Juntunen et al., 2001, p. 274). A number of authors have maintained that career counselling does not adequately meet the needs of Indigenous people (Herring, 1990; Jackson & Smith, 2001; Neumann, McCormick, Amundson & McLean, 2000; Poonwassie, 1995). In particular, the emphasis on individual choice and fulfillment may be at odds with the collective identity and community needs orientation evident in Native contexts. Additional cultural factors to consider include the strong sense of place or ties to the land, kinship systems, and spiritual values (Clark, 2002; McCormick, 1997). These differences would suggest that many western-based career theories, programs, and resources are not appropriate for use with Indigenous clients and groups, as many are based on the career ideology of middle class white people (Amundson, 2006).

The focus of this research is how people understand their situation as told through their unique career stories. These stories help create a certain narrative truth about how people live their lives, and in turn how it affects other aspects of life such as employment. Furthermore, especially when exploring career considerations of Aboriginal peoples, holistic and client-centered approaches would be much more appropriate for career counselling. Personal and contextual variables such as family, community, ecology, leisure and spirituality need to be taken into account when considering career issues (Amundson, 2003; Hanson, 1996; Plant, 1999).
Historical Context of Aboriginal Peoples and the Workplace

The recent decline in resource based industries such as fishing, forestry and mining that are the mainstay of many small Native communities has had a devastating effect on employment. There are diminishing work options available to young people in many Native communities (Ommer & team, 2007; White et al., 2003). Families became focused on day-to-day survival and the ever-increasing costs related to living. Cities are full of young people who have left small towns and villages to pursue work and education opportunities especially for the Aboriginal community. This process can be very distressing as individuals have to move away from their families, homes and communities to pursue school or work possibilities often resulting in mixed feelings for Native young people who strongly identify with their community (Larsen, 2004; Marshall, Stewart & Harrison, 2006; McCormick & Amundson, 1997).

As it has been identified, there are extensive barriers for Aboriginal people in the process of finding and maintaining work. Furthermore, for those that do have stable jobs there are still very few Aboriginal peoples in executive positions. Research (Abella, 1985) has demonstrated a number of issues ranging from a lack of commitment by the employing departments to racism rooted in long-standing and deeply ingrained stereotypes, and work environments with cultures that alienate Aboriginal people. Furthermore, culturally based values and norms can create conflicts for Aboriginal individuals working in organizations where western values and norms dominate.

Furthermore, Burke & McKeen (1992) suggest that non-Aboriginal mentors may not provide effective psychological support for Aboriginal individuals due to differences in culturally based values and norms. There may also be differences in leadership styles, lack of support programs and mentors for Aboriginal employees, and Aboriginal people working in an
environment where individualism, interpersonal competition, and other such embraced norms and values may experience stress and conflict (Dwyer, 2003). As the literature demonstrates, even when Aboriginal peoples find sustainable work, there are many internal barriers that affect the employment experience that relate to the individual’s identity as an Aboriginal person.

The present study builds on results from previous research conducted by Stewart et al. (2011), which examined Aboriginal young people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced in their quest to find sustainable work. Results of that project demonstrated that employment experiences for these youth had more to do with systemic oppression, culture and identity, and less foundation in education and training as existing literature and statistics suggest. Specifically, participants shared solutions to employment challenges that they felt could build on their existing strength of cultural identity with a vested interest in building their work-life identity as both cultural and resistant to the colonial oppression they experienced systemically.

Specifically, participants shared solutions to employment challenges that they felt could build on their existing strength of cultural identity with a vested interest in building their work-life identity as both cultural and resistant to the colonial oppression they experienced systemically in employment contexts. Furthermore, in terms of identity, participants identified feelings of a split identity where they felt there was not a place for them as an Aboriginal person in mainstream society, giving them a marginalized identity.

The present research project, which is part of a larger SSHRC funded study lead by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, plans to extend these results and investigates the depth and details of how this culturally based work-life identity is understood by Aboriginal youth within the context of employment outcomes; more specifically, it is the research goal to improve employment
outcomes by influencing programming, policy, and supports that address the issues and solutions raised by the youth. Aboriginal perspectives on work-life identity development can assist employment counsellors and other career practitioners to become aware of the hidden assumptions and limitations of current ethnocentric models of development and to identify new approaches and appropriate interventions for dealing with Native youth needs in a global context. Furthermore, the experiences of Aboriginal youth in terms of cultural identity and the stories they share about how employers have helped or hindered their success in the workplace will also serve as a knowledge base that can help adapt current policy and career counselling models that can make work environments a safe and prosperous place for Aboriginal youth.
Methodology

Social Constructivism

Social constructionism is a framework that holds an emphasis on the role of social processes and action in constructing knowledge (Young & Collin, 2004). Even though the natural and physical world are conductive 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 (Young & Collin, 2004). Human beings are viewed as engaging in an ongoing process of self-constructing and interpreting the world around them; from this perspective, individuals create meaning based on their culturally bound construction of reality (Crushman, 1995; Young & Collin, 2004). This idea is congruent with traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing that suggest there are multiple truths and no single reality (Steinhauer, 2002).

There are four key assumptions that underpin social constructionism. The first is that taken-for-granted 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 product of knowledge, which are negotiated understandings, or “social constructions,” have a variety of different forms. Social constructionist perspective veers away from the focus of individual knowledge and objective proof and instead emphasizes the process and dynamics of social interaction (Burr, 1995).

A Social Constructionist approach is, according to Blustein et al. (2004), “well-suited as a foundation for movement from the traditional style of middle-class careers to a more broadly inclusive of working across cultures and social classes” (p.428). It has also been noted by
Blustein (2006) that the social constructionist perspective is ideal to inform the development of the psychology of working. Furthermore, the determination of “reality” is inherently local, with cultural norms, historic shifts and idiosyncratic relationship patterns (Blustein & Noumair, 1996; Crushman, 1995). The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that individuals in interaction with their world are socially constructing meaning. This implies that a social constructionist approach is both necessary and appropriate when conducting qualitative research. Social constructionism will be the theoretical framework that is the foundation for this research.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative methodologies are designed to enhance the understanding of the lived experiences of individuals from the perspective of the individual (Schwandt, 1994). 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) and qualitative methods allow for more flexibility and exploration which is not defined by researcher assumptions (Patton, 2002). 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). Therefore, qualitative research is most appropriate for understanding the life contexts of Aboriginal people as the peoples have control over what they are sharing with the research and is less intrusive. This is crucial to the research process as Stewart (2009) explains that in the past, Aboriginal communities were further victimized by many research agendas that did not include them in the process. Furthermore, members of the Aboriginal community themselves should have control
and leadership over the research being conducted in their communities, as they know what can be beneficial and helpful for their communities directly.

Narrative Inquiry

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). This suggests that narrative inquiry is not a static, standard set of principles that is applied to research; but is an approach that continues to grow and evolve. This approach is centered on the experiences of people and the approach can be as diverse as the experiences of these people.

Chase (2005) demonstrates that there are five analytic lenses utilized in narrative inquiry methodology that make it distinctly different from other forms of qualitative research methods. The first lens recognizes that the narrative method utilizes the narrator’s perspective in a retrospective manner incorporating the narrator’s emotions, thoughts and interpretations in such a way that gives a unique understanding of the individual’s experiences over time. This emphasis on the interpretation and meaning made by the narrator is, according to Chase (2005), another unique feature of narrative inquiry. The second lens is the recognition for the narrator’s voice by the research as having the capacity for “verbal action” (p. 657), suggesting that narratives are constructed by an individual to communicate their experience of reality; this deemphasizes the factual aspect of the story and instead focuses on the person’s experiences of reality.

The next lens described by Chase (2005) emphasizes that a narrative is constructed to address a particular audience and with a particular purpose. Furthermore, the narrative inquiry
method also looks at the individual’s experience taking into account the social context that is involved. The final distinguishing characteristic of the narrative method as outlined by Chase (2005) 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.

Aboriginal peoples usually describe themselves as being storytellers and many traditions and beliefs are embraced through oral history (Lightening, 1992; Medicine-Eagle, 1989); therefore, given the storytelling traditions of Aboriginal peoples, narrative methodology is an appropriate choice in working with Aboriginal people. Furthermore, the congruence between narrative inquiry and Aboriginal epistemology suggests that narrative inquiry is both culturally appropriate and conducive to exploring the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples (Barton, 2004).

**Research Design**

The depth and detail involved in the goals of this thesis project requires a qualitative methodology that emphasizes co-construction and meaning making in context. This was required for the research question of the larger SSHRC funded study that is being principally investigated by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, a leading expert in the field of Aboriginal education and mental health. More specifically, as previously mentioned, a narrative orientation is most appropriate.

Community partnerships and ethical principles are integral to the study design. Our experiences as researchers in Aboriginal communities have underscored the necessity of respectful and reciprocal relationships. In the past, those who conducted research in Aboriginal communities had little knowledge of Aboriginal traditions and history, without involving the
community in the process. Therefore, First Nations communities are understandably suspicious of researchers (Cochran et al., 2008; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 2001; Marshall & Stewart, 2004; Menzies, 2001). Further, Stewart’s (2008) research suggests that the adoption of an Indigenous research paradigm could support Native communities to more effectively deal with their healing issues.

**Procedure**

The focus group was conducted at the research site of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto. Focus groups are unique to the process in that, analysis is part of data collection and is conducted by the research participants themselves, allowing a rich form of data collection, where the community members are actively involved. The process begins with the facilitator presenting the first of four questions to the group by writing it out on a large board and reads it out loud. Participants are asked to break into small groups of 4-6 people and to brainstorm individually a list of ideas for each person of the small group. Each person then puts up his or her best idea on a sheet and the facilitator collects each idea and puts it up on a wall.

**Participants.** There were 16 self-identified Aboriginal (First Nation, Metis, and Inuit) adults ages 18-30, residing in the Greater Toronto Area who work directly with Aboriginal youth that were asked to participate in a focus group in a Canadian urban setting; for this study the main urban center is Toronto, where there is a rich community of Aboriginal people. Research participants were not excluded by gender, class, or position and were recruited through the Toronto Aboriginal community partner, The Native Canadian Center of Toronto.

**Recruitment.** The recruitment of participants was conducted as part of a large SSHRC-funded study called “Work-life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of
challenges and strengths in career,” lead by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, a faculty member of the University of Toronto and in collaboration with Dr. Anne Marshall, a faculty member at the University of Victoria. The recruitment process began with the formation of community partnerships with local Aboriginal agencies. The term partnership is used because the community agencies are invited to provide feedback on the proposed study and are encouraged to be actively involved throughout the research process. This is consistent with the Ownership Control Access 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). Recruitment of participants for the scheduled focus group occurred through word of mouth to those who frequently visit the Native Canadian Center of Toronto and through other Aboriginal agencies affiliated with the Native Canadian Centre such as Anishnawbe Health Toronto, Native Child and Family Services, and Native Men’s Residence.

**Focus Groups.** To gather input from as broad a representation as possible, a focus group interview for adult participants was used. This group interview provides an opportunity for participants to reflect together on their stories and experiences. With respect to ethical considerations, the principles outlined in Marshall and Stewart (2004) was closely followed. Participants were asked: “We already know that racism and oppression are issues Aboriginal youth face in the workplace. What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues? How do employers help or hinder the success of Aboriginal youth in the workplace? What are some of your hopes for Aboriginal youth in regard to employment outcomes? What are some of your fears for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes?”
Analysis

Constant comparison analysis, developed by Glaser and Strauss as a framework for qualitative data analysis, was used to derive the overall metathemes from the focus group data (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987). There are three main stages that are involved in constant comparison analysis (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech & Zoran, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the first stage, the data was chunked into small units (open coding). The facilitator, the author of this research project, read all of the ideas and asked people if they had any other contributions that they would like to add. During the second stage, the codes were grouped into categories (axial coding). The facilitator presented 6 neutral symbols as markers on the wall and then asked one person from each group to go up and arrange the ideas (codes/categories) under each in similar groupings. The facilitator then asked the large group to name each category (theme) and rearrange each code to best fit the themes. Throughout the process, the facilitator recorded the process into notes. Finally, in the third stage, the researcher developed one or more themes from the content of each of the categories (selective coding). The facilitator listed “key result areas” (themes) that represent the categories that were named for all questions that were asked in the focus group. The theme development was analyzed with two other research assistants to ensure inter-rater reliability and to avoid bias.

Focus groups are a unique form of qualitative research as they provide a methodology that can allow the researcher to learn about the meaning of the subject of interest from the perspective of the specific population. It is very unique to the data analysis process, as the participants themselves analyze the data and make meaning from their discussion. This is important because during the analysis phase of qualitative data, researchers are at risk of unconsciously interpreting the experiences of individuals of another culture than their own
through the lens of their own experiences and worldviews. This can potentially lead to ethnocentric assumptions about the meaning of those from other cultures’ experiences and behaviours that are inaccurate, and thus can be a way of further oppression and colonization (Podolefsky & Brown, 1999).

**Dissemination**

Knowledge dissemination and transfer are important goals of this project, as incorporated into the larger research project developed by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, “*Work Life Identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges in career.*” This larger project will target three main audience groups for communicating the research results. For academic colleagues and graduate students, Dr. Stewart anticipates peer-reviewed papers for publication in various academic journals and scholarly presentation at various national conferences. A second audience group is educators, counselling professionals, and policy makers, who need professional publications, in-service workshops, hands-on resources, curriculum packages, implementation manuals, policy briefs, and executive summaries. The third important audience is the urban residents themselves—the Aboriginal young people, teachers, parents, elders, service workers, and other community agencies or support people. Poster sessions, brochures, newsletters, and community workshops are the most relevant dissemination choices for this audience. Together with our community partners, the research results will be used to develop practical tools and strategies that will be specifically adapted for the local contexts.
Results

Previous research conducted by Dr. Suzanne L. Stewart (Stewart et al., 2011), regarding the work experiences of Aboriginal youth, revealed that barriers to employment were based more in racism and oppression and had less to do with education and experience as the literature would suggest. Continuing on that research, four focus group questions were asked and discussed among a group of 16 adults who work with Aboriginal youth, regarding work-life identity. The questions were: (1) we already know that racism and oppression are issues Aboriginal youth face in the workplace. What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues? (2) How do employers help or hinder the success of Aboriginal youth in the workplace? (3) What are some of your hopes for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes? (4) What are some of your fears for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes?

The results and themes identified by the focus group in response to each of these questions are detailed below. The themes and categories to each of the four focus group questions are presented in Tables 1 through 4. Furthermore, the interrelatedness of the three overarching metathemes, and the influence they have on cultural identity in the workplace for Aboriginal youth are presented in figure 1. These overarching themes are representative of what this group of Aboriginal people felt in regards to how employers influence the cultural identity of Aboriginal youth and how this can promote both success and challenges in the workplace.
Figure 1: intersections of cultural identity in the workplace for Aboriginal youth

Cultural Respect in the Workplace

The focus group participants identified a global need for cultural respect and awareness of Aboriginal peoples from employers. It was also recognized that employers of Aboriginal youth are not providing adequate cultural resources in current employment environments. The focus group participants identified four categories that related to a need for more cultural awareness and respect of Aboriginal culture in the workplace. These categories were (a) traditional human resources, (b) cultural awareness and respect, (c) lack of resources, (d) employer education to recognize gifts.
**Traditional Human Resources.** The first category entitled *traditional human resources* provided policy recommendations that would encourage cultural awareness and respect in the workplace for Aboriginal youth. The participants recognized that more supports such as other Aboriginal mentors, consultation from elders, cultural sensitivity workshops and training (talking stick circles), and promoting youth to know more about their human rights as employees would all be ways to promote cultural respect in the workplace, but need to be provided through internal policy. One participant recognized the need for employers to encourage youth to understand their rights as workers and know what resources are available by stating, “Employers need to educate youth on their rights in a work environment.”

**Cultural Awareness and Respect.** The second category entitled *Cultural awareness and respect* provided ideas regarding how employers can develop a work environment that is culturally safe and respectful of Aboriginal traditions and worldviews. Furthermore, an environment that acknowledges Aboriginal culture and or promotes cultural engagement would help Aboriginal youth to flourish in an employment setting. The participants suggested that in order to promote cultural awareness and respect in an employment setting, employers need to: provide equal opportunities for Aboriginal employees, be more understanding of Aboriginal culture, provide more support for single mothers such as flexibility and fair income, provide cultural leave and respect cultural protocols for death and disabilities. The participants also mentioned that youth need to be treated with respect and fairness. One participant highlighted this need by stating, “Youth need to find business opportunities that are culturally sensitive to their needs.”

**Lack of Resources.** The third category entitled *lack of resources* mentioned many of the barriers in current employment settings that do not allow Aboriginal youth to flourish in their
careers, or promote Aboriginal identity in an employment setting. The focus group participants mentioned specific issues that youth may face, such as: they wont be able to access higher education due to a lack of finances; that they wont have the appropriate training and education opportunities. One participant highlighted this issues by saying, “my fear is that youth won’t have the training and education they need to succeed far into the future.” It was also recognized that there is currently a lack of traditional knowledge and cultural identity in Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, in response to the acknowledgment of a lack of resources in employment environments for Aboriginal youth, the focus group participants also provided recommendations for promoting success in the workplace that suggested a greater need for supports and cultural resources. More specifically, one participant suggested that, “youth need better access and resources of Elders and more access and use of teachings by Elders. They also need activities and programs at younger ages and programs and funding that actively benefit youth. We require more funding for activities for youth -such as sports and music programs.”

**Employer education to recognize gifts.** The fourth category entitled *employer education to recognize gifts* highlighted the ways that employers help or hinder Aboriginal identity for youth in the workplace and focused primarily on cultural respect and awareness. Focus group participants mentioned that currently, employers are unaware or uneducated on Aboriginal culture. One participant mentioned that “there is a lack of understanding and responsibility from the government and few job opportunities for Aboriginal youth.” Suggestions for dealing with these issues included the need for employers to foster more opportunities for cultural inclusion in the workplace. For example it was stated that, “having employers allow time for Aboriginal youth to be themselves and share their culture and not feel they have to forget about their culture is important while at work.” It was also noted that employers of Aboriginal youth need to provide more networking opportunities.
Racism and Oppression in the Workplace

The focus group participants recognized that negative work environments for youth and uneducated employers sustain systemic oppression and create a sense of isolation for youth in a work environment. Furthermore, the participants recognized that oppression in the workplace is dealt with by providing cultural resources, speaking out against racism and inspiring youth. The focus group participants identified five categories that related to racism and oppression in the workplace: (a) advocacy and action plan (b) misguidance and lack of support (c) negativity and oppression/isolation (d) systemic oppression (e) low self-esteem/defeated.

Advocacy and Action Plan. The first category entitled advocacy and action plan presented ways of actively engaging in speaking out against racism and reducing racism and oppression in a work environment to encourage employment settings to be a safer place for Aboriginal youth. The participants addressed ways of adaptively dealing with systemic oppression and racism. One participant spoke of this by saying how youth can address aspect of racism at work by, “using your voice to talk about the oppression and not sit and watch, and to be supportive to others that have challenges.” Participants also recognized that employers could foster this by, “teaching youth how to confront racism in a positive way.” It was also demonstrated that youth could actively deal with racism by, “confronting those who say/ do things that contribute to racism (let them know it is not okay… sometimes people do not realize that what they are doing/saying is negative).”

Misguidance and lack of support. The second category entitled misguidance and lack of support highlights some of the focus group participants’ individual experiences of having non-supportive employers and how they did not feel supported as an Aboriginal youth within an employment context. One participant recognized the lack of education about Aboriginal identity
and culture by employers, and the lack of resources within a workplace, “My employer referred me to an Aboriginal program.” Moreover, another participant shared her experience of racism and stereotypes of Aboriginal people where she was viewed negatively. She said, “I was told when I was 11 that I would never be a hairdresser.”

**Negativity and Oppression/ Isolation.** The third category entitled *negativity and oppression/ isolation* mentioned the ways that Aboriginal identity can be a negative experience for youth in an employment context. The focus group participants mentioned that one of the biggest issues is that employers put all Aboriginal people into one category. They also recognized ways that employers create negativity and sustain oppression for Aboriginal youth in the workplace. Specifically, participants reflected that employers sustain racism, “by putting up barriers based on negative judgments”, “by hindering Aboriginal youth through a lack of knowledge of our culture”, “by downgrading their morals and values.” One participant spoke about how employers do not give Aboriginal youth opportunities to succeed and said that employer, “don’t use the skills youth have to offer like computers- but make them clean and make them feel that they are unimportant to the company”. It was also mentioned that stereotypes could cause a lot of damage making youth not want to admit that they are Native. More specifically, one participant said, “some employers don’t want to work with Native youth because of preconceived notions of Native people.” Participants recognized that there is a need to reduce the belief and stereotype, “that Native people are lazy”.

**Systemic Oppression.** The fourth category *systemic oppression* included issues of systemic issues regarding stereotypes and preconceived ideas of Aboriginal people have a continued hindrance of employment sustainability for Aboriginal youth. The focus group participants recognized that: employers who believe in the stereotypes sustain systemic
oppression. One participant said that, “employers don’t think that our world will change enough for them [Aboriginal youth] to be accepted.” When asked about fears for Aboriginal youth in regards to employment outcomes, one participant spoke of her worry for Aboriginal youth in the workplace by saying, “they’re not going to get treated right.” Another participant spoke about oppression in the workplace by stating, “stigmas will continue to grow- that we must just be lazy because of the views that we get everything for free- there is no reason not to go to school. When in reality we don’t, those who claim this aren’t educated properly.” Another participant spoke of her own fear in regards to employment and stated that she is “afraid there will be a lot of discrimination.” Another participant spoke of fear for Aboriginal youth and mentioned concern that employers will have a “misunderstanding of health and wellness issues for Aboriginal peoples”.

**Low self-esteem/ defeated.** The fifth category entitled low self-esteem/ defeated discusses some of the negative effects that racism and oppression have towards Aboriginal youth in the workplace. The focus group participants recognized some of these negative effects by saying that Aboriginal youth experience, “depression due to limited opportunities, stereotypes, hiding their identities.” Another participant stated that, “youth may not want to seek employment opportunities in non-Aboriginal businesses” and that “Aboriginal youth will not be accepted for who they are.” A participant also spoke of a concern that “Native cultural traditions will not be respected” and that “there is a negative view that Native people cannot manage their money”. One Participant thought it could be helpful for youth to make themselves more presentable at the workplace to promote job prosperity, by stating “Our youth need to make themselves more presentable to employers and not wear rags.”
Inspiring Youth

The focus group participants recognized that employers have the potentiality to encourage and support youth in flourishing within a work environment. They identified that employers need to be strong leaders who recognize Aboriginal issues, and address them appropriately. It was also noted that employers could influence the success in the workplace by providing and encouraging cultural practice and supporting youth. The focus group participants recognized eight categories of how employers can be positive role models and inspire youth in an employment context. These categories are: (a) working with youth (b) empowerment (c) outside the box (d) positive reinforcement (e) confidence (f) business opportunities (g) proactive (h) healthy leadership.

Working with youth. The first category entitled working with youth mentioned that overall, employers need to demonstrate healthy behaviour in the workplace for Aboriginal youth and to embrace them and encourage them. Specifically participants stated that employers need to “be positive role models to the youth” and “employers need to love Aboriginal youth.”

Empowerment. The second category entitled Empowerment, recognized the ways that Aboriginal youth can deal with racism and negativity in the workplace in a more productive and empowering way. One focus group participant mentioned, “I have dealt with racism by walking away.” One participant recognized that Aboriginal youth could adaptively work better in an employment setting by “learning to understand racism over time.” Another individual prompted that youth need to “walk away from the individual and do not stay near them and instead trying to focus on what they know inside which is the truth.”
Outside the Box. The third category entitled *outside the box* incorporated some unique ideas that could help employers work better with Aboriginal youth and communicate better in a work environment. These suggestions stated that employers should “write things down” and “ask the youth what would be beneficial for them”, and to “use things such as music and art to engage them in work activities”.

Positive reinforcement. The fourth category entitled *positive reinforcement* consisted of various ways that employers could work better with youth and promote cultural safety and increase their value as an Aboriginal young person. Such ideas were, “employers should praise or reward youth for their achievements in the workplace”; “employers should encourage Aboriginal youth to share their feelings when they are frustrated”; and “supervisors should encourage youth to smudge when they are frustrated.” Another participant stated that supervisors should, “allow us to go to events where we learn more about our culture, like this event [the focus group].” Some other ideas included, “give youth free resources such as access to a housing worker, hot meals and medicines.” One participant spoke of their own positive experience, “I had a supervisor who purchased items to create a room with a relaxed feeling. He also gave us medicines and traditional items for this relaxation room.”

Confidence. The fifth category entitled *confidence* gave note to the importance of giving youth advanced opportunities and to demonstrate that they are valued in an employment setting. One participant mentioned that young Aboriginal employees should be given more leadership roles and opportunities and said, “there needs to be more leadership roles- more responsibilities from when you first start.” The value of such opportunities, such as, “Aboriginal businesses give youth leadership roles that will look at skills and use these skills for the youth to feel confident” was explained by one of the participants. It was also recognized that Aboriginal youth
particularly need a greater amount of encouragement from their employers. It was mentioned from a participant that, “our youth need also a lot of encouragement to face these challenges as well.”

**Business Opportunities.** The sixth category entitled *business opportunities* identifies some of the hopes for Aboriginal youth and recognized the importance of employers on the success and growth of Aboriginal youth in terms of overcoming various obstacles so that Aboriginal youth can flourish in their careers. Focus group participants said that they would like to “see Aboriginal managers in all businesses”; that they would like to “see Aboriginal youth start their own businesses”; they would like “to see more jobs that require higher education”; “to see youth become CEO’s of large corporations”; and “to see more Aboriginal teachers in the education system”.

**Proactive.** The seventh category entitled *proactive*, brought mention to specific policy and programming suggestions that could help employers of Aboriginal youth become more involved and engaged in a work setting. The focus group participants suggested that, “bigger companies should have an Aboriginal department”; that there should be “job positions specifically for Aboriginal youth”; and that there should be “healthy environments training” for employers. More specifically, a participant said that, “promotion and encouragement to live healthy lives will reduce the number of sick days, employment leaves, and disability claims.”

**Healthy Leadership.** The eighth category entitled *healthy leadership* recognized ways that employers of Aboriginal youth could demonstrate better care for Aboriginal employees and promote safe environments for Aboriginal workers. One participant stated, “I hope for better healthy First Nations Aboriginal leaders.” A participant also stated that she hopes that Aboriginal youth will continue, “to become more positive youth in the future.” It was also recognized that
employers should, “incorporate more mental health awareness,” and that “there is a need for jobs that accommodate mental health issues.”

The following tables provide the direct responses to each question asked in the focus group, in which the previous overall themes were derived by the researcher. The themes that were labeled in response to each question were categorized (analyzed) by the focus group participants and were collectively titled to represent the theme.

Table 1: Focus group responses to question 1 “We already know that racism and oppression are issues Aboriginal youth face in the workplace. What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working with youth</th>
<th>Advocacy and action plan</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Outside the box</th>
<th>Traditional human resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Being a positive role model</td>
<td>• Using your voice to talk about the oppression and not sit and watch. Be supportive to others that have challenges.</td>
<td>• Walked away</td>
<td>• Mentors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Love Aboriginal youth</td>
<td>• Teach youth how to confront racism in a positive way.</td>
<td>• Learned to understand it over time</td>
<td>• Consult elders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Confront those who say/do things that contribute (let them know it’s not okay… sometimes people don’t realize it’s negative).</td>
<td>• Walk away, don’t stay near them. Instead try to focus on what you know inside (the truth).</td>
<td>• Cultural sensitivity workshops/training. Talking stick circles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Write things down</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Helping educate youth on their rights in a work environment.</td>
<td>• Using music and art</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Focus group responses to question 2, “How do employers help or hinder the success of Aboriginal youth in the workplace?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misguidance and lack of support</th>
<th>Negativity and oppression/Isolation</th>
<th>Positive Reinforcement</th>
<th>Confidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer referred me to an Aboriginal program</td>
<td>They put us down in one category</td>
<td>Praise or reward them for their achievements in the workplace.</td>
<td>Leadership role- more responsibilities from when you first start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have no idea! I was told when I was 11 I would never be a hairdresser.</td>
<td>By putting up barriers based on negative judgments</td>
<td>Help- Supervisor purchased items to create a room with a relaxed feeling. He also gave us medicines and traditional items for this “relaxation room.”</td>
<td>Our youth need a lot of encouragement to face these challenges as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hinder- lack of knowledge of our culture.</td>
<td>Help: Encouraged to share our feelings of frustration.</td>
<td>Aboriginal businesses give youth: leadership roles will look at skills and use the skills for the youth to feel confident.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peoples’ words can cause a lot of damage making youth not want to admit they are native</td>
<td>Help: Youth are given free resources such as, access to a housing worker, hot meals, and medicines.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Downgrade their morals/values</td>
<td>Help: Supervisor encourages us to smudge when frustrated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t use the skills youth have to offer like computers- but make them clean and make them feel that they’re not important to the company.</td>
<td>Help: Allows us to go to events where we learn more about our culture. i.e- this event!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some employers don’t want to work with Native youth because of preconceived notions of Native people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Focus group response to question 3, “*What are some of your hopes for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes?*”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Awareness and respect</th>
<th>Business Opportunities</th>
<th>Proactive Leadership</th>
<th>Healthy Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Equal opportunities</td>
<td>• See Aboriginal managers in all businesses</td>
<td>• Bigger companies to have an Aboriginal department</td>
<td>• I hope for better healthy First Nation Aboriginal leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To be treated with respect and fairness</td>
<td>• Starting their own business</td>
<td>• Job positions for Native youth specifically.</td>
<td>• To become more positive youth in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More understanding of Aboriginal culture in work space</td>
<td>• More jobs requiring higher education</td>
<td>• Promotion/Encouragement to live healthy lives reducing the number of sick days/employment leaves/disability claims.</td>
<td>• Mental health awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Find businesses that are culturally sensitive to their needs.</td>
<td>• To see youth become CEO’s of large companies</td>
<td>• Healthy environments training.</td>
<td>• Jobs that accommodate mental health issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More support for single mothers- flexibility and fair pay.</td>
<td>• See more Aboriginal teachers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural leave</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respecting cultural protocols for death and disabilities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Focus group response to question 4, “What are some of your fears for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eliminating Stereotypes</th>
<th>Systemic Oppression</th>
<th>Lack of resources</th>
<th>Low self esteem/defeated</th>
<th>Employer Education to recognize gifts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A reduction in the belief that we are lazy</td>
<td>• Employers who believe in the stereotypes.</td>
<td>• They won’t be able to access higher education due to a lack of finances.</td>
<td>• Depression due to: limited opportunities, stereotypes, hiding their identities.</td>
<td>• Unaware or uneducated employers on Aboriginal culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Don’t think that our world will change enough for them to be accepted.</td>
<td>• That they won’t have the training and education they need to succeed far into the future.</td>
<td>• That our cultural traditions will not be respected.</td>
<td>• Having employers allow time to be themselves and share their culture and not feel they have to forget their culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• They’re not going to get treated right.</td>
<td>• Lack of traditional knowledge and cultural identity.</td>
<td>• Negative view can’t manage money</td>
<td>• Lack of understanding and responsibility from government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stigmas will continue to grow that we must just be lazy because of the views that “we get everything for free, there’s no reason not to go to school.” (When in reality we don’t, those who claim this aren’t educated properly.</td>
<td>• Better access and resources of Elders. More access and use of teachings by elders.</td>
<td>• Won’t be accepted for who they are.</td>
<td>• Few job opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Afraid there will be a lot of discrimination</td>
<td>• Activities and programs at younger ages</td>
<td>• They may not want to seek employment opportunities in non-Aboriginal businesses.</td>
<td>• More networking opportunities for youth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Misunderstanding of health and wellness.</td>
<td>• Programs and funding that actively benefit youth</td>
<td>• That they need to make themselves more presentable to employers (example: “rags”- clothes they wear).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

This study is significant to the understanding of the economic difficulty and poverty that is experienced in many Aboriginal communities. According to the United Nations Social Development Index, the Canadian population ranks 8th in the world for economic and social success. However, the Aboriginal population in Canada ranks 32nd in the world in terms of social development (Cooke, Mitrou, Lawrence, Guimond & Beavon, 2007). Experiences of poverty are recognized as being a large issue for Canadian Aboriginal families (Iwasaki, Bartlett & O’Neil, 2003) and is further associated with food insecurities, inadequate housing, social service involvement, and social exclusion (Clarke & Van Ameron, 2008) as well as the many health challenges that are experienced in Aboriginal communities such as high rates of heart disease and diabetes (Anand, Yusuf, Jacobs, Davis, Yi… & Lonn, 2001).

Education and employment have been identified as critical issues that are linked to experiences of poverty as Canadian Aboriginal peoples have many factors that contribute to the substantial disadvantage in educational achievement and employment success compared to that of the non-Aboriginal Canadian population (Mendelson, 2006). Employment has been identified as a primary factor that can help individuals, families and communities to emerge from experiences of poverty (Brown & Fraehlic, 2012). However, the results from this study demonstrate that employment settings can be and continue to be a negative and unwelcoming experience for Aboriginal peoples fostering racism and stereotypes that do not encourage Aboriginal people to maintain and prosper in employment environments.

Aboriginal young people face many barriers towards the process of finding and maintaining work that is much different from their non-Aboriginal peer groups. This becomes problematic, especially for services that are implemented in order to address some of these
issues, such as individual psychotherapy or career counselling, as many of the current models are based on a westernized lens that is targeted predominantly for middle class white people (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994; Gysbers, et al., 2003; Leong & Hartung, 2000). Aboriginal youth have a number of issues that serve as barriers towards attaining career success, ranging from a lack of commitment by the employment department of various corporations or agencies, to management that ignores systemic issues such as racism that is rooted in long standing and deeply ingrained stereotypes, and fostering work environments with employers and co-workers who alienate Aboriginal people. What was specifically mentioned in the results of this study, was Aboriginal youth are not feeling supported by their employers and that lack of understanding and knowledge about Aboriginal issues hinders the success of Aboriginal youth as specific resources are not issued to help meet specific needs.

Employment barriers for Aboriginal youth identified in this study, such as a lack of cultural knowledge by leaders and supervisors; racism and oppression; and the need for Aboriginal youth to be inspired to grow, can also be connected to experience of Aboriginal youth in educational environments. Although secondary education levels are increasing for Aboriginal people, in the workforce Aboriginal peoples are still underpaid in comparison to their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Kunz, Milan & Schetagne, 2000). This is particularly true in urban environments where there is a high concentration of Aboriginal peoples (Pendakur & Pendakur, 2008), such as Toronto.

It has been noted that one of the main contributing factors to low wages in Aboriginal families is that there are not enough economic development efforts in place in such communities (Fraser, 2002) and there is a growing shortage of local Aboriginal business owners (Brown, 2002). The participants of this research also recognized that this is a growing concern for the
economic prosperity for Aboriginal young peoples, as it was mentioned that there is a need for more Aboriginal leaders, managers, teachers, small business owners, and CEOs of large companies. The results of this study are important to the concerns that Kunz, et al., (2000) raise in regards to the economic disadvantage that Aboriginal people experience, as participants of this study shared suggestions and ideas of how to encourage youth to move towards breaking the ceiling and becoming more present in positions of authority. Such suggestions included providing youth with more opportunities for higher education, providing Aboriginal youth with more opportunities and responsibilities earlier on in their career experiences, and encourage healthy leadership and confidence.

Racism and Eurocentricism continue to dominate mainstream discourse and attitudes (Battiste, 2010) leading to negative presentation of Aboriginal people in the media, and resultantly in the grander Canadian public (Belenger, 2002). Non-Aboriginal business and labor leaders in general do not see the importance of hiring Aboriginal peoples (Canadian Labour and Business Center, 2004). Furthermore, employers are uneducated and ignorant to the actual historical context and reality of the issues that are prevalent in Aboriginal communities and further foster the effects of systemic racism and oppression of Aboriginal people by ignoring the unique needs of Aboriginal youth within an employment setting.

The results of this study, and thus the experiences shared by the Aboriginal peoples that participated in the focus group, reiterate these barriers. One of the main concerns across all questions was that Aboriginal youth need employers who have an understanding and respect for Aboriginal culture and traditions so that they can create an environment that fosters the development and safety for a cultural identity to exist within a work environment. This research also suggests that currently, work environments are not a safe place that promotes prosperity for
career success of Aboriginal youth, and thus could potentially explain why unemployment rates are so high for Aboriginal young peoples, as they do not feel supported or that they have a sense of belonging. Furthermore, this research also tells us that employers are not adequacy motivating young people and providing them with the opportunities, praise, and support that they need to flourish in the work place. It is also identified that many employers of Aboriginal youth, especially those in non-Aboriginal agencies do not have the cultural knowledge or awareness, nor do they provide the appropriate respect that would allow for Aboriginal youth to develop and foster a cultural identity in a work environment.

The ideas and suggestions provided in this research project that emerged from the focus group discussions, such as: educating employers about Aboriginal culture and needs; breaking down stereotypes through educating employers and teaching youth to speak out against racism at work; and encouraging Aboriginal young people to take on more leadership roles, also exudes some of the specific challenges and needs that Aboriginal young peoples face in terms of employment. Thus, this research contributes to the field of Aboriginal career counselling, which is still absent in many curricula. It is a growing field of research and the experiences shared can help in suggestions towards changing various career counselling that include indigenous world-views and pedagogy. For example, it would be beneficial to educate career counselors on the history of Aboriginal peoples, and how many Aboriginal young people do not enter the labour force and chose a career out of interest and means of contributing to a greater society, but as a means of survival. Findings from this study revealed that Aboriginal youth need to be embraced by their employers and thus who they are as an Aboriginal person also needs to be recognized as being part of their strength in a work environment. This was specifically evident in the results when participants developed a theme of “Employer education to recognize gifts.” One
participant acknowledged this by stating that it would be beneficial for youth to have “Employers allow time to be themselves and share their culture and not feel like they forget their culture.”

The findings of this research further illustrate that racism is a large barrier for Aboriginal people in the workplace. The participants in this study gave suggestions of how youth can empower one another and furthermore take action against racism. This is consistent to what Stewart (2009) describes as being resistance, and a part of the decolonization process for Aboriginal people. This process means to break down pain and denial that Aboriginal people have been engrained with since the beginning of European settlement. By working together and brainstorming ways to foster prosperity and growth in employment context for Aboriginal youth, the results of this study contribute to the decolonizing process and furthermore, focus on the strengths as positive aspects of identity as an Aboriginal young person. This focus on identity as a strength, begins to move away from the over pathologizing and limitations of Aboriginal people, as Brown and Fraehlic (2012) identify as being the bulk of research that has been conducted regarding Aboriginal people.

Although it was recognized that employers do not currently promote Aboriginal cultural identity in the workplace, the participants involved in this study did however have high hopes for the future of Aboriginal youth, and had many proactive and concrete suggestions for encouraging youth to succeed in the work force. However, in order for Aboriginal youth to prosper in an employment context, there are many barriers and issues that remain and need to be addressed, especially by individuals who are in positions of power, such as managers and employers as discussed previously. The results from this study highlighted three major themes that need to be addressed in employment in order to help Aboriginal young people succeed in career. These include a greater awareness in the workplace of Aboriginal culture and issues, addressing
stereotypes and racism, and the need for Aboriginal youth to be inspired to do well in an employment context.

Cultural Respect

Employers are in a position where they can promote and encourage career success for young people, however, according to the research participants in this study, this is not the case for Aboriginal youth. As recognized through the experiences and concerns of these Aboriginal people, there is a need for more Aboriginal services and resources for individuals who are currently in the workplace, especially in large established companies. Furthermore, as Aboriginal based agencies become more predominant in urban settings, it is important for these cultural based services to continue to challenge the influences of colonization. Brown and Fraehlich (2012) highlight the importance of recognizing how Eurocentric services and approaches have historically been oppressive and damaging to Aboriginal people and therefore, employment settings and the services within these establishments continue to be harmful for Aboriginal people. In the past, institutional establishments have severed the relationships between youth and their communities through residential school, and from the 60’s scoop where Aboriginal children were forced from their homes (Dickason, 1993; Dockstator, 1993). It is not surprising given the history of these traumatic experiences, that Aboriginal peoples would continue to be suspicious and resistant to institutional and government agencies.

In this study, lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues and the continued ignorance of Aboriginal people’s specific needs were recognized as further means of colonization in the workplace. Furthermore, participants recognized that continued stereotypes of Aboriginal people create fear for Aboriginal youth, which in turn creates barriers for seeking employment. The participants in this research also discussed the inclusion of more Aboriginal services within large
companies and cultural training for employers regarding Aboriginal issues as a means of
decolonization and protection against racism. This is consistent with the research by Brown and
Fraehlic (2012) who recognize the need for ownership by the Aboriginal community to promote
more respect and cultural awareness in the workplace for the Aboriginal community, especially
for young people.

The participants of this study recognized that Aboriginal youth need greater access to
Elders, cultural activities, cultural sensitivity workshops, and access to traditional human
resources as a means for promoting a greater sense of cultural identity in the workplace. These
are parallel to the findings from participants in a study conducted by Brown and Fraehlic (2012),
which identified the need to have cultural basis for their work experience in employment. It was
noted in the literature that connections to the community where the employment was situated
was important in securing a successful employment experience (Gold, Meisler, DuRoss &
Bailey, 2004). The present study, combined with the existing literature recognizes a need for
more cultural resources and services in employment environments (i.e., knowing what services
are available in that community, having access to these services, and being provided with said
services in the workplace).

Another important factor in terms of policy that was identified in the results of the
present study was the need for more flexibility and income for single mothers. Aboriginal people
are more likely to be in lone parent families, as identified by the National Household Survey
conducted by Statistics Canada (2013) in 2011. In this survey, it was demonstrated that
Aboriginal children were more likely to be living in a single-parent home (34.4%) than non-
Aboriginal children (17.4%). Furthermore, Aboriginal identity has been linked with social
exclusion and associated with poor social determinants of health including: poverty, poor
housing conditions, substance use, low levels of education, unemployment, few social supports 
and a lack of resources (Raphael, 2007; Shah, 2004).

Aboriginal single mothers are a further marginalized and vulnerable population, as being 
a single mother in general is linked to poor health outcomes (Curtis, 2001; Johner, et al., 2008; 
Perez & Beaudet, 1999), a reliance on social assistance benefits (Kapsalis & Tourigny, 2002); 
and to social exclusion (Stewart et al., 2008; Toronto and community Neighbourhood services, 
2003). Furthermore, single mothers are also more likely to suffer from disability or limiting long-
standing illnesses than mothers who have a partner living in the same household (Levitas, Head 
& Finch, 2006). This becomes an important issue in regards to employment, because not only do 
Aboriginal peoples as group have specific needs in terms of cultural identity and barriers towards 
sustaining and maintaining employment, but also Aboriginal single mothers are further 
marginalized group who have substantial barriers in regards to education and employment. The 
participants in this study recognized that not only is there a need for employers to accommodate 
for Aboriginal single mothers, especially those who are young, but greater awareness and 
accommodation is required for those with mental health issues and disabilities. This is important 
as mental health issues; economic disadvantage and disabilities are prevalent amongst Aboriginal 
groups and can be linked to generational trauma experienced through the history of Aboriginal 
people.

Many employers have a general lack of knowledge and education regarding the history of 
Aboriginal people, and their context within the current Canadian society which has lead to lower 
social determinants of health that are experienced by the group as a whole. Even though some 
non-Native employers within the workforce mean well, the lack of knowledge and understanding 
of Aboriginal context can have many negative consequences. Aboriginal people in Canada have
experienced cultural genocide, loss of language, and trauma experienced from being separated from their communities and families during residential school (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report, 1996). This abuse that has been experienced by Aboriginal peoples as a group has been identified as being systemic, where children were forbidden from speaking their language of origin, excluded from access to traditional supports, resources, and socialization, and were imposed with dominant Christian religious ideals. Moreover, Aboriginal peoples were not provided with the proper skills or opportunities that would allow them to enter the mainstream workforce, or to reenter their own communities. Employer lack of recognition of said issues is further perpetuating colonization and continuing the cycle of trauma and oppression.

What is suggestive from the results of this study, combined with information in the existing literature, is that a culturally sensitive approach that is consistent for Aboriginal people who are in the workforce is needed. Employers of Aboriginal young people need to be aware of and acknowledge cultural tradition and worldviews and recognize the centrality of kinships and ties to the land, which are core to many Aboriginal belief systems. It is recognized that Aboriginal peoples in the workplace need to have choices and flexibility in employment contexts, so that they do not fall into a marginalized lifestyle (Darnell, 2009). Including awareness and respect of Aboriginal histories and context and allowing for Aboriginal employees to feel a sense of their Aboriginality in their place of work, gives flexibility to these differences. This can allow for a sense of autonomy to be developed at both the individual and cultural level, and can be identified as one factor to which Aboriginal youth can begin their healing journey in this specific context.
Racism and Oppression

Racism continues to be a very large issue for Aboriginal peoples, and is a major determinant towards health outcomes as previously mentioned. Racism has also been linked to negative experiences of education and employment for Aboriginal peoples (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012; Stewart, et al., 2011). Stereotypes can be a very big determinant on the success of Aboriginal people in education and employment contexts. Stigmatization is created by the initial recognition of differences based upon the individual’s distinct attributed characteristics and by the subsequent devaluation of that individual (Dovidio, Major & Crooker, 2000). Once an individual has been stigmatized, they are often treated as “less human” and may be subjected to various levels of discrimination that may limit that individual’s life-experiences and success (Goffman, 1963). Stigma has more recently been described as social construction “determined by the broader cultural context (involving stereotypes, values, and ideologies), the meaning of the situation for participants, and the features of the situation that influence this meaning” (Dovidio et al., 2000, p.3). Stigmatization is recognized to be detrimental to the experiences of a person at an individual level. However, stigmatization can promote many long-standing barriers and issues, when attached to an entire population or group. Stereotypes of Aboriginal people and the resulting stigmatization has been a long standing residual affect of colonization and continues to affect Aboriginal people in all walks of life, including education and employment.

Cultural identity and having the space to feel a connection to culture and beliefs is essential for prosperity and success in a work environment. A space such as this would provide a sense of safety that allows the individual to bring forth their strongest attributes in their place of employment. The importance of cultural identity as having an influence on career success was one of the major themes that emerged from the results of this study. Furthermore, the
participant’s experiences firmly attested to the influence that employers do have on the career experiences of Aboriginal youth. However, what is interesting from this set of data, is that many of the experiences were negative and demonstrated that employers hinder young people’s success as many of them feel that they need to conceal their Aboriginal identity as a protection against stereotypes and racism. This is a very important finding, as Choney and colleagues (1995) identify that Aboriginal people who migrate off reserves, begin to take on different value sets, and find it more difficult to stay connected with their culture. Furthermore, many participants in this study felt that they would be given less opportunities or viewed negatively in terms of their Aboriginal identity, rather than being viewed for their hard work, enthusiasm or work-ethic.

**Inspiring Youth**

By 2017, is it estimated that Aboriginal people will represent 3.4% of the working-age population within Canada (Statistics Canada, 2005). This recognizes Aboriginal youth as being an essential role in Canada’s future educational and economic development (Preston, 2008). Considering that education is a central tool for economic development and in establishing one’s sense of self-worth, the need for increased educational attainment for Aboriginal youth is essential for labour integration and future employment (Bazylak, 2002; Duncan & Sokal, 2003; Hampton & Roy, 2002; James, 2001; Malatest & Associates, 2004). This would also be an important factor as it would provide more Aboriginal peoples with the means for acquiring leadership roles in academic and political institutions (Preston, 2008). Inspiring more Aboriginal youth to pursue higher education and high-powered careers was also identified by the participants in this study as an important factor in bridging the gap of high unemployment rates and poverty for Aboriginal peoples.
The qualifications obtained by Aboriginal peoples through formal education have not yet met with the same level of employment or income that non-Aboriginal peoples with the same education achieve (Mendelson, 2006). The availability of culturally based Aboriginal primary and secondary schools as well as adult learning centers, ranging from upgrading to postsecondary programs and courses are a great community asset (Battiste, 2004). According to census data, there continues to be a gap in employment rates and earning despite improvements in educational attainment in Aboriginal communities (Wilson & Macdonald, 2010). With this being said, to encourage more Aboriginal youth to enter positions of higher education and employment, the participants in this study addressed this concern by stating that there is a need for Aboriginal pride and leadership in current educational and employment settings.

Although it was recognized that employers do not currently promote Aboriginal cultural identity in the workplace, the participants involved in the focus group did however have high hopes for the future of Aboriginal youth, and had many proactive and concrete suggestions for encouraging youth to succeed in the work force. However, in order for Aboriginal youth to prosper in an employment context, there are many barriers and issues that remain and need to be addressed, especially by individuals who are in positions of power, such as managers and employers. The results from this study highlighted three major themes that need to be addressed in employment in order to help Aboriginal young people succeed in career. These included a greater awareness in the workplace of Aboriginal culture and issues, addressing stereotypes and racism, and the need for Aboriginal youth to be inspired to do well in an employment context.

**Limitations**

Although this thesis presents many bold statements regarding current issues and environments, especially for urban Aboriginal youth; the information presented in the results of
this thesis project are not meant to be interpreted or to be assumed to apply to all Aboriginal peoples. This is primarily important as the employment rates and work-life experiences of rural and reserve individuals can be assumed to be much different than youth who are currently residing in an urban setting. Furthermore, the results presented in this thesis project cannot be presumed to be applicable to all Aboriginal peoples in Canada residing in an urban location, as there is a vast diversity in the various Aboriginal cultures, traditions, beliefs, and views across different geographical regions. Furthermore, geographic location may also present differences in the experiences that urban Aboriginal youth, not in Toronto, but in a different large urban center (i.e., Vancouver, Montreal, Edmonton, Halifax, etc.) where experiences of cultural identity in an employment setting may be different. The limitations to the generalizations and interpretations of this research are described in detail in the following section.

**Generalizability.** Qualitative research is used to explore a certain unknown subject area, specific group of people or more specifically, an issue that is unknown. In this type of study design, the researcher does not know what to expect and does not hypothesize what the research will reveal, as in quantitative methods. Qualitative methods are also used to better define, understand or to develop solutions as an approach to a certain issue or problem (Trotter, 2012). However, generalization, defined by Haslam and McGarty (2003) is recognized as “the process of making statements about the general population on the basis of relevant research (by experiments or surveys) that is usually associated with quantitative research” (p. 42).

In qualitative research, generalization becomes absent and in turn external validity is sacrificed in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the issue of interest (Goodman, 2008). However, Sandelowski (2004) argues that instead, qualitative research can offer “analytic or idiographic generalizability” (p.138) and suggests that the knowledge and understanding that
is acquired through qualitative methodological research can be generalized to a wider understanding of a specific issue. In pertinence to this research, although this study is limited in terms of being able to be generalized to the greater Aboriginal population regarding cultural identity in the workplace for Aboriginal youth, it is suggested that these results can be generalized to the larger systemic issue of cultural identity as being an issue in the workplace for Aboriginal people.

The subjectivity involved in the interview nature of this type of methodology, again limits the generalizability of this study (Trotter, 2012). Terminology is not standardized and therefore, a specific term could have multiple meanings across similar research, or even across participants in one specific study. Although this research utilized a focus group as its methodology and therefore, consensus from the group was achieved in terminology and meaning; the metathemes and themes could possess different meaning to other Aboriginal youth in a different study.

Sample size is another limitation in qualitative research and in association, this study. A large sample size is usually required in order to be able to generalize research results to the general population. However, in qualitative research, if the ideal sample size that is usually required for generalization were to be applied, there would be a lot of redundancy, since qualitative methodology is generally interviews. A smaller sample can then be applied and interviews can be conducted until the data collected through the interviews begins to be repeated, and or similar concepts and themes appear multiple times and reach saturation (Bernard, 2011; Schensul & LeCompte, 2010).

Bias. Qualitative research is subjective by nature, and thus bias is an unavoidable aspect of the research process. This is primarily the case because the investigator is involved throughout
the research and immerses him or herself in the entire process including the inception of the project, the development of what questions will be asked, recruiting the participants, asking the research questions, and in the case of focus groups which was the methodology utilized in this research project, facilitation of the discussion itself.

The first type of bias involved in this research that limits the results is that of observational bias. Observational bias arises during data collection and occurs when the researcher and others involved in the research process (co-facilitators if any) obtain an insufficient documentation of behaviours, comments, or ideas from the participants (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). Since the participants themselves wrote down their responses to the focus group questions, there was a lack of depth and detail to the answers, which serves as a limitation to the internal validity of the study as well as holds observational bias. However, this made it much easier for the participants to categorize the data and influenced creative discussions.

In attempts to reduce observational bias, the author of this thesis had the principal investigator of the larger project, Dr. Suzanne Stewart, to co-facilitate the focus group. Furthermore, there were also two other research assistants that worked on Dr. Stewart’s research team who helped in collecting the participant’s focus group responses and throughout the process. In order to reduce observational bias, the focus group facilitator kept notes throughout the process and asked all individuals who assisted with the focus group to write a reflection of the experience following the focus group discussion.

Another form of bias that needs to be identified as a potential limitation to this study is that of researcher bias. Research bias is known to occur when the researcher has personal biases or a priori assumptions that are unable to be put aside during the research project. These may be both conscious and unconscious (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). This bias can influence the data
collection process as the subconscious biases could be reflected to participants through the researchers and thus have an influence on the participant’s behaviours, attitudes and experiences (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The researcher can also induce researcher bias by asking leading questions during the focus group by the language they use and the directive questions that are used to facilitate. To reduce the amount of researcher bias in this study, the focus group questions were pre-decided and only statements and prompts that would encourage more detailed discussions were used.

**Group effects.** Since this research included methodology that utilized focus groups as the main source of data collection, it is important to highlight the effects of social pressure and influences of being in a group that could have possibly impacted the participant’s responses and thus limiting the results in this study. One major limitation of having data collected in the form of a group is the possibility of the “Hawthorn Effect” which is when individuals act or speak in a way that will make them look better in front of their peers (Cherry, 2009). This can especially influence the data from a focus group if there is a particularly dominant participant that influences the entire group. This is also something that needs to be highlighted in this study, as the participants are all from a small cultural group community and may know each other well and or want to perform in a manner that makes them stand out.

Another issue in regards to group data collection and analysis that needs to be considered as a potential limitation to this study is aspects of conformity which occurs when people in a group yield to real or imagined social pressures (Weiten & McCann, 2010). The participants in the focus group may have felt obligated to speak and share their influences as a result of social pressures and therefore may have overtly agreed with what others were saying, even if they did not actually agree.
Implications for Employers, Policy and Educators

This research contributes rich attributes to the field of Aboriginal career development and identity. The experiences of the participants in this thesis project provided a great amount of detail in regards to how employers help or hinder career success for Aboriginal youth, and furthermore, how they influence the work-life identity of Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, the participants in this focus group provided suggestions and recommendations of what can be done in the future to foster growth and prosperity for Aboriginal youth in an employment context, which serves as the foundation of this implications section.

Workshop for employers. A reoccurring statement that was mentioned in all of the four focus group discussions was in regards to cultural sensitivity and awareness of employers in the workplace. This can be implied as being one of the greatest issues that is currently creating challenges in work place settings for Aboriginal youth. In response to these findings, one major implication that can stem from this research project that can imminently respond to some of the issues raised in the focus group discussion is a training workshop for employers on how to work better with Aboriginal youth.

The results from this research project suggest that such a workshop should include cultural training for employers that provides knowledge on the history of Aboriginal peoples including the context of the current marginalization that is experienced by many Aboriginal people, as well as the various systemic barriers that exist as a result of colonization and a society that oppresses it’s Native people. This workshop would also include awareness in regards to the harm that comes from stereotypes and the influence that it has for the prosperity of Aboriginal young people, which at it’s current point, contributes to the cycle of poverty and social stressors that are experienced by a majority of Canadian Aboriginal people. As specified by the focus
group participants, the workshop for employers would also include strategies that would help employees’ foster growth and opportunities in order to promote career success for Aboriginal youth. Some suggestions recommended by the research participants to this regard were to give Aboriginal youth more responsibilities in the workplace and give them opportunities to advance in a workplace. Techniques on how to motivate and encourage youth were also identified as a particular strategy for promoting healthy work environments for Aboriginal youth.

Policy changes. The results of this study emphasized a particular importance on the need to make change at a policy level, in order to make the workplace a more prosperous place for Aboriginal youth. Although the participants were not all employers who work directly with Aboriginal youth, there were many policy issues identified that could be implemented. One thing in particular that was discussed was that employers should be aware of Aboriginal traditions and beliefs and provide the appropriate respect. For example, participants noted that employers need to provide more than the mainstream time allotted for a burial, as Aboriginal traditions of grief and morning are not the same as the typical Eurocentric Christian funeral. It was also noted by participants that there needs to be more Aboriginal services within larger corporations. The lack of cultural supports and resources is currently creating barriers towards Aboriginal youth wanting to pursue employment at non-Aboriginal agencies.

Education. The results that were derived from this thesis, also reiterate the importance of postsecondary education for Aboriginal youth, especially in regards to career outcome and success. However, as mentioned earlier, education remains a challenge and can be viewed as a barrier towards career success as the Canadian education system has been used in the past as a means of oppression and the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, current education modalities and curriculum focus on a westernized worldview and further disconnect Aboriginal
youth from their cultural identity. Incorporating Indigenous pedagogy and worldviews into the education system and to bring more cultural awareness and education into the mainstream education system on Aboriginal history and traditions, is a way that would make the education system a safer and more encouraging place for Aboriginal peoples, and thus we would see more Aboriginal youth completing post-secondary education and overcoming challenges and barriers in employment contexts.

**Future Research Directions**

There are a variety of different directions in the development of future research projects that can expand from the results of this research project. One of the major potential research developments would be to explore the same research question among other different urban settings in Canada. This is important, as discussed in the generalizability section in the limitations of this study, geographic location has a large influence on the research results, as there are so many differences between Aboriginal groups. Furthermore, the employment experiences may be very different for Aboriginal youth in other urban centers depending on the type of resources etc. Furthermore, literature suggests that there are many differences in terms of experiences between urban Aboriginal youth and rural Aboriginal youth (Hoffman et al., 2005). Therefore, the inclusion of the experiences of work life identity for Aboriginal youth living on reserves or other rural communities should be examined.

As previously mentioned, this research project is part of a larger SSHRC funded study that is currently being conducted by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, at the University of Toronto, and Dr. Anne Marshall at the University of Victoria. As a further investigation of this project, approximately 15 individual interviews will be conducted with urban Aboriginal youth, and individual interviews and a focus group will be conducted with rural reserve youth in Victoria.
The added experiences of the urban Toronto youth, as well as the experiences from rural youth in British Columbia will help to address some of the issues raised in the limitations section of this thesis.

This study raises many considerations in terms of how employers have an impact on cultural identity in the workplace for Aboriginal youth. Another direction of future research that might contribute to the understanding of the challenges that Aboriginal youth face in the workplace in terms of identity, would be to examine how identity develops for Aboriginal youth in terms of employment and how this influences career success. It would be interesting to see what supports help to encourage career success for Aboriginal youth, and furthermore, how background and previous experiences in regards to racism; nuclear family experiences; geographical location and influences; and education has shaped an individual’s cultural identity and how he or she views themself as a current intricate part of a working societal system (i.e., career).
Researcher Reflections and Conclusion

This final chapter concludes this thesis and provides a summary of the discussed research, and a personal reflection of my own experiences of being involved in this research project, and my connection to this research.

Thesis Summary

The overarching question that guided the direction and scope of this thesis project was, “What are the intersections of cultural identity and work-life experiences for Aboriginal youth as they relate to employment outcomes?” In keeping with the depth and detail that this research requires, a qualitative design using narrative methodology was used, and was appropriate in adhering to Aboriginal ways of knowing and tradition. A narrative methodology was deemed appropriate as Aboriginal peoples generally describe themselves as being storytellers and transfer knowledge through oral means. This thesis project was also guided by a social constructionism framework, which, contests to the importance of maintaining a research structure through constructing meaning from the actual experiences of the participants of interest. The participants for this thesis project were sixteen self-identified Aboriginal people who have in the past or currently work with Aboriginal youth. The narrative methodology used in this thesis was a focus group design that provided a unique and interactive way of involving the participants throughout the entire process including data analysis.

There were three metathemes that emerged through response to the four questions that were asked which were: We already know that racism and oppression are issues Aboriginal youth face in the workplace. What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues? How do employers help or hinder the success of Aboriginal youth in the workplace?
What are some of your hopes for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes? What are some of your fears for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes? The four overarching metathemes that emerged from these questions were: cultural respect in the workplace; racism and oppression in the workplace; and inspiring youth.

These results suggest that currently, Aboriginal youth are not receiving the support that they need from employers in the workplace. The main challenge for Aboriginal youth in terms of employers was that stereotypes and ingrained racism are linked to how Aboriginal youth suppress their Native identity in the workplace. Furthermore, it was recognized that there is a global lack of understanding of Aboriginal traditions, culture and history, especially in non-Native organizations that make it difficult for Aboriginal youth to express and embrace their Aboriginal identity in a work environment.

The ideas that were presented through the focus group framework of this thesis provide insight to the real issues and concerns that Aboriginal youth are experiencing in an employment setting, and provide concrete and practical solutions for employers so that they can make the workplace a more successful place for Aboriginal youth.

Researcher Reflections

As a student studying counselling psychology, I have become immersed in Aboriginal issues, especially pertaining to vocational, employment and other social issues through involvement with Dr. Suzanne Stewart’s research team. Through this involvement I have become engaged with the Aboriginal community of Toronto and have become passionate about Aboriginal issues especially in regards to policy improvement in both the education and employment levels. I was also involved in the preceding project “Walking in Multiple Worlds:
Aboriginal young adults work life narratives” that lead to the development of the project titled, “Work life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges in career” principally investigated by Dr. Suzanne Stewart, which is a larger SSHRC funded study that this thesis project was derived from.

Throughout my undergraduate degree, a great deal of my experience was in quantitative research, where I conducted an undergraduate thesis that was quantitative in methodology, as well as two independent studies. All of these projects were completed at Correctional Service Canada under the supervision of Dr. John Weekes. Through my experience working in corrections I became aware of Aboriginal issues and became interested and invested in Aboriginal mental health research. Being involved in this type of research has had profound influences on me as both an individual and as an aspiring researcher and psychologist.

This research has influenced me in terms of understanding and learning the methodology, analysis and the process of what is involved in qualitative research designs. Through involvement with this thesis project, and many other research projects that I have been involved with as a member of Dr. Stewart’s research team, I have become familiar with the aspects of qualitative research and have become invested in the intimate and rich detail that this modality of research brings. I also find qualitative research to be solution focused and has a capacity for being able to make change and gives a deep knowledge base of the actual lived experiences from the people and the issue in question. Furthermore, it is interesting to be an intricate part of the research, where my involvement is central to the data collection and analysis. It was interesting to see how everyone engaged in the rich discussions and to witness the passion and interest around the research at hand.
Second, the experience of developing a relationship with the Aboriginal community of Toronto had a large influence on me during my involvement with this research project. As a non-Aboriginal person, there are many challenges involved with conducting research with Aboriginal peoples. In the past, research has been conducted on Aboriginal peoples in very disrespectful ways by non-Aboriginal researchers and has been viewed as a further means of colonization and oppression. In order to reduce my concerns of conducting disrespectful research, I took a community based approach to this project. The focus group was conducted at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto and all recruitment was through the community partner.

Furthermore, since my involvement with Dr. Stewart’s research I have become involved with the Aboriginal community in Toronto by attending cultural events such as local Pow Wows and occasionally attending the weekly drumming social at the Native Canadian Centre. Furthermore, I have taken an active involvement in learning Aboriginal world-views, traditions and knowledge so that I can have a better understanding as a non-Aboriginal person researching the lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples.

Lastly, I had incredible support from my supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Stewart who provided her knowledge, patience, and dedication to this project and other members of the research team who also worked very hard throughout this endeavor. Further, members of the greater Aboriginal community of Toronto have welcomed me warmly, and have exhilarated great amounts of effort and time in teaching me and supporting me throughout this entire process.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights regarding the work-life identity of Aboriginal youth and the role that employers have on career success. The experiences shared by the participants in
this study have highlighted important suggestions and insights that will help to better address employment issues for Aboriginal youth in the future. This study has achieved the aspired goals of providing insight and knowledge regarding employer’s influence on the cultural identity and career success for Aboriginal youth. Furthermore, besides the rich detail that this research provides in terms of the experiences of the participants themselves, this research generates many solutions and highlights potential advancement in terms of career success for Aboriginal youth. Ultimately, it becomes clear that there is a need for Canada as a nation to move towards innovative models of career development and success for Aboriginal peoples, rooted in Indigenous knowledges and methodologies, because this need is imminent in the current context of social and political change that envelopes our economic landscapes.
References


*International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*, 3-14. Retrieved from

http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/0044118X06296704


http://www.counseling.org/docs/david-kaplan's-files/arthur-n-mcmahonFE4D15E5D31D.pdf?sfvrsn=2


Retrieved from http://www.afn.ca


doi: 10.1177/0011000001292001


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1006/jvbe.2001.1823


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/106907270000800407


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/1069072705278047


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/0011000004272268


Assessment, 14, 116-129. Retrieved from

http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/1069072705281368


10.1177/0741713611418357


10.1108/09649429210011354


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1108/13620430310471032


http://psychology.about.com/od/hindex/g/def_hawthorn.htm


City of Toronto. (2010). *Toronto’s racial diversity*. Retrieved from
http://www.toronto.ca/toronto_facts/diversity.htm

City of Toronto. (2008). *Toronto Aboriginal persons demographic snapshot 2006*. City of Toronto social development, finance and administration division:

Toronto, Ontario. Retrieved from


Darnell, R. (2009). Cross-cultural constructions of work, leisure and community responsibility:

doi:10.1080/14427591.2009.9686634


Retrieved from Eric Database


York University, Toronto, ON.


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1108/02621710310505476


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1177/0894845305277038


http://aisc.metapress.com/content/wm706483h416245j/


http://jaie.asu.edu/v40/V40I2A2.pdf

James, K. (2001). There are doorways in these huts: An empirical study of educational programs, Native Canadian student needs, and institutional effectiveness in British Columbia and


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1037/0735-7028.37.4.342


In C. Pantazis, D. Gordon, & R. Levitas (Eds.), *Poverty and Social Exclusion in Britain* (pp. 405–431). Bristol: University of Bristol Policy Press.


http://www.publications.gc.ca/Collection-R/Statcan/82-003-XIE/0029982-003-XIE.pdf


Considerations of oppression and renewal. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling* 28, 227-240. Retrieved from

http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1007/s10447-005-9008-8


http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130508/dq130508a-eng.htm?HPA


http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/labour/pdf/97-559-XIE2006001.pdf
http://cansim2.statcan.ca/cgiwin/cnsmcgi.pgm?Lang=E&SP_Action=Sub&SP_ID=10000


http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.11.021


Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study. (2010a). *Background and summary of main findings*. Environics Institute: Toronto, ON. Retrieved from
Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (2010b). *Toronto Report*. Enveronic Institute:

Toronto, ON. Retrieved from:


Enhancing content validity by consulting members of the target population.

*Psychological Assessment, 16*, 231-243. Retrieved from

[http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1037/1040-3590.16.3.231](http://dx.doi.org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1037/1040-3590.16.3.231)


Toronto, ON: Nelson Education Ltd.


*Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, 40*, 391-415. Retrieved from


Appendix A: Recruitment Poster

Are you Aboriginal youth age 18 - 26 currently living in Toronto?

I am from the Yellowknife Dene Nation and am currently an Assistant Professor in Counselling Psychology at OISE – University of Toronto. I am interested in exploring young Aboriginal people’s experiences of work life identity and the supports and challenges they face in career.

To participate in my project you must:

1) Be a self-identified Aboriginal person between the ages of 18 and 26.

If you might be interested, please contact me by phone or email.

_Mahsi cho – Miigwetch - Thank you very much!

In Spirit,

Suzanne L. Stewart

Telephone: 416-828-4715 Email: Suzanne.stewart@utoronto.ca
Appendix B: Recruitment brochure

Study Timeline

Year 1 (2012-2013)

October 2012
- Community meetings
- Initial focus groups
- Hiring of Community research assistants (CRA)
- Research team training

Fall 2012
- Community meetings and M&Ms
- Initial focus groups
- Hiring of Community research assistants (CRA)
- Focus groups
- Focus group data analysis
- Community meetings

Year 2 (2013-2014)

Summer 2013
- Workshop meeting #1
- Data analysis

Fall 2013
- Community workshops
- Individual interviews and data analysis

Year 3 (2014-2015)

Summer 2014
- Community workshops
- Individual interviews and data analysis

Work-life identity of Aboriginal Youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges and strengths in career

What...
This project will investigate how culture-based work-life identity is understood by Aboriginal youth within the context of employment outcomes in both urban (Toronto) and rural (Victoria) settings.

The research question asks: What are the interactions of cultural identity and work-life experiences for Aboriginal youth as they relate to employment outcomes?

Goals...
This research seeks to identify employment outcomes and consequences of cultural identity on the structural barriers and opportunities for Aboriginal youth in the workplace.

What can this information help?
Aboriginal perspectives on work-life identity development can assist employment counselors and other career practitioners to become aware of the hidden assumptions and limitations of current dichotomous models of development and to identify new approaches and appropriate interventions for dealing with Native youth needs.

Research Team
Dr. Suzanne Stewart
Allison Stavros (PhD Student)
Candace Hachey (PhD Student)
Nicole Elliott (MA Student)
Dominique Solomons (MA Student)
Jennifer Gavino (MA Student)
Ashley Hyatt (MA Student)

What we know...
Employment is a major issue for Aboriginal young people in Canada. Results from a study conducted by Stewart and research team, exploring Aboriginal young people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they face in their quest in finding sustainable work experiences.

- That employment experiences had more to do with systemic oppression, cultural and identity.
- Shared solutions to these challenges needed to strengthen cultural identity by building work-life identity as both cultural and resistance to systemic oppression experienced in employment contexts.

Are you interested in sharing your story?
We want to talk to Aboriginal young adults about their experiences of their identity in the workplace and what cultural supports, challenges and barriers they have encountered in work-life.

If you or your self-identified Aboriginal person between the ages of 18 and 26 and are currently living in Toronto, we respectfully invite you to participate with our project.

Fall 2013
We are recruiting for individual interview.

For more information please contact...
Dr. Suzanne Stewart
416-978-0723
suzanne.stewart@utoronto.ca

Ms. Nicole Elliott
416-978-0603
nelliott@utoronto.ca

Ms. Ashley Hyatt
416-978-0603
ashley.hyatt@utoronto.ca

Work-life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges and strengths in career

Community Partners

Toronto
The Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

Victoria
The Victoria Native Friendship Centre
The Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Coalition of Youth-Serving Agencies

Preliminary Results

- There is a need for cultural respect and awareness from employers.
- Employees need to be strong leaders who recognize Aboriginal issues, and address them appropriately.
- Currently, employers of Aboriginal youth are not providing adequate cultural resources.
- Opposition in the workplace is dealt with by providing cultural resources, speaking out against racism, and inspiring youth.
- Employers can influence success in the workplace by providing and encouraging cultural practice and supporting youth.

Funding
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Insight Grant) 41155001
July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2019
Appendix C: Community Consent Letter

Work-life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges and strengths in career.

_______________________(Community Agency name)

Mr./Ms.__________________(Executive Director name)

September, 2012

Sego Mr./Ms__________________:

1.1.1 I am requesting your permission to recruit Indigenous graduate students who access services at your agency for a current research project entitled “Work-life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges and strengths in career,” 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 Applied Psychology and Human Development 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.

This project builds on the results from previous research that examined Aboriginal young people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced in their quest to find sustainable work. Results from that study showed that employment experiences for these youth had more to do with systemic oppression, culture and identity, and less foundation in education and training as existing literature and statistics suggest. The purpose of this research is to explore how this culturally based work-life identity is understood by Aboriginal youth within the context of employment outcomes and thus the research questions asks: “What are the intersections of cultural identity and work-life experiences for Aboriginal youth as they relate to
employment outcomes?" 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 26 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 B), the Consent Letter for focus group participants (Appendix D), the Consent Letter for individual participants (Appendix D) and the list of Interview Questions for the focus group interview (Appendix E), and the list of Interview Questions for the individual interviews (Appendix F).

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 interviews will not breach 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 via email 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 audiotapes 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 a graduate research assistant, Nicole Elliott, an M.A. student 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 Informed Consent

Applied Psychology and Human Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Work-life identity of Aboriginal youth: Exploring the momentum of challenges and strengths in career.

1.1.2 Focus Group Interview

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Work life identity of Aboriginal youth: the momentum of challenges and strengths in career”. 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: Nicole Elliott, student research assistant for this project, and community based research assistants, and Community Agency 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, Nicole Elliott at (416) 978-0688, nic.elliott@utoronto.ca. This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

This project builds on the results from previous research that examined Aboriginal young people’s experiences of the supports, challenges and barriers they have faced in their quest to find sustainable work. Results from that study demonstrated that employment experiences for these youth had more to do with systemic oppression, culture and identity, and less foundation in education and training as existing literature and statistics suggest. Therefore, he purpose of this research project is to explore how this culturally based work-life identity is understood by Aboriginal youth within the context of employment outcomes. The research question is: “What are the intersections of cultural identity and work-life experiences for Aboriginal youth within the context of employment outcomes?” 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 invited to participate because you are a self-identified Aboriginal person between the ages of 18 and 26 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 focus group interview with one of the above researchers (about 60 minutes) and 5 to 8 other participants. 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 responses in the group interview will be removed from the data set 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 responses 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 audiotapes 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. However, due to the nature of focus group interviews complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Participants will be asked not to disclose information about other participants but there is the possibility that a participant may choose not to oblige this request. As such, it is important that you are aware of the limits to confidentiality and anonymity in the group interview process.

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) ________________________________

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER
My signature below indicates I received an honorarium in the form of a $20.00 gift certificate from a local bookstore for participating in this interview.

________________________________________
Signature
Appendix E: Focus Group Interview Format

Focus group questions:

(1) We already know that racism and oppression are issues Aboriginal youth face in the workplace. What are some ways that you have creatively dealt with these issues?

(2) How do employers help or hinder the success of Aboriginal youth in the workplace?

(3) What are some of your hopes for Aboriginal youth with regards to employment outcomes?

(4) What are some of your fears for Aboriginal youth with regard to employment outcomes?