Relational and Cultural Impacts on the Work Life of Young Indigenous Men
Impacts relationnels et culturels sur la vie au travail de jeunes hommes autochtones

J. K. Payden Spowart
E. Anne Marshall
University of Victoria

ABSTRACT

Little is known about the unique experiences of Indigenous people in their work life journeys. In particular, there has been very little research on this topic specifically with young males. In this qualitative study, eight young Indigenous men shared their stories regarding their search for and engagement in work and education. The research question was «What are the supports, challenges, and obstacles experienced as you search for and maintain work?» Thematic analysis identified metathemes and themes related to their work life experiences. The results have important implications for theory, research, and practice in regards to work and career development with young Indigenous men.

RÉSUMÉ

On en sait très peu au sujet des expériences uniques vécues par les personnes autochtones dans leurs parcours de vie au travail. Et le faible nombre d'études est particulièrement observable dans le cas des jeunes hommes autochtones. Dans le cadre de cette étude qualitative, huit jeunes hommes autochtones ont partagé leurs récits en ce qui concerne leur recherche et leur engagement sur le plan du travail et de l'éducation. Voici la teneur de la question ayant servi de base à la recherche : « Quels sont les appuis, les défis, et les obstacles que vous avez connus pendant votre recherche d'emploi et votre maintien en poste? » L'analyse thématique a permis de cerner des métathèmes et des thèmes liés à leurs expériences de vie au travail. Les résultats ont des implications importantes pour la théorie, la recherche, et la pratique en ce qui concerne le travail et le développement de carrière chez les jeunes hommes autochtones.

Employment success and educational attainment are significant issues for the Indigenous[1] population of Canada. Statistics Canada figures show that, in the 15-to-24-year-old category, unemployment rates are two to three times higher for Aboriginal people when compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and Aboriginal men face exceptional hardships in the workforce (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2011). Additionally, educational completion rates for Aboriginal people are lower at both the high school and postsecondary levels when compared to the general population (Statistics Canada, 2011). Despite this, Indigenous populations are underrepresented in educational and vocational psychology research and literature, and there is limited understanding of the issues that relate to their career

and academic development (Juntunen et al., 2001; Turner et al., 2006). Hoffmann, Jackson, and Smith (2005) state that they are particularly concerned with career development for Native American males, and therefore urge researchers to further explore this area. These concerns have not gone completely unattended; there is a growing body of literature that highlights the numerous strengths and challenges of Indigenous people in Canada (Coverdale, 2011; Merrill, Bruce, & Marlin, 2010).

The present article describes our research that explored the supports, challenges, and obstacles that young Indigenous men experienced through their work life pursuits. We begin with our theoretical framework, which draws from relational theory and social constructionist approaches. Following this, we present a brief overview of the demographics and literature related to our topic. We then describe our qualitative study and discuss metathemes and themes identified in the analysis of interviews with eight young Indigenous men.

RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Relational perspectives serve as a metaframework for numerous theories and ways of understanding (Blustein, Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004; Schultheiss, 2007). The framework posits that relationships are central to human functioning, and that interpersonal and intrapersonal struggles reflect natural human strivings for connection, affirmation, support, attachment, and mattering (Schultheiss, 2007). Relationships are part of every person's life; a sense of well-being and safety develops through building and maintaining positive connections (Jordan, 2008). Blustein (2011) noted that people learn about themselves and the world around them through relationships, that there is a sizable overlap between relationships and work, and that work is an inherently relational act embedded in external and internal relational contexts. Individuals are rooted in family, social, and cultural relational contexts; understanding these contexts is necessary for learning about how plans for work are created and implemented (Schultheiss, 2007). Schultheiss put forward four tenets for understanding career development from a relational perspective:

> (a) the influence of the family as critical to understanding the complexities of vocational development, (b) the psychological experience of work as embedded within relational contexts (e.g., social, familial, and cultural), (c) the interface of work and family life, and (d) relational discourse as a challenge to the cultural script of individualism. (p. 192)

Blustein et al. (2004) argued that understanding the connection between interpersonal relationships and the career and work world is necessary for understanding individual and community career concerns. A relational perspective of careers provides a framework for understanding how people comprehend, construct, and act in response to the contemporary working landscape (Blustein et al., 2004). The authors argued that getting closer to individuals' experiences as they reflect on their work and careers provides a deeper understanding of the connection between

relationships and work. Further, they suggested that the goal of the relational perspective of careers "would be to construct generative discourses that challenge existing traditions of knowledge and suggest new possibilities for practice and policy" (Blustein et al., 2004, p. 435). Use of this metatheory allows for exploration of the intertwined nature of people's work and relational experiences (Schultheiss, Watts, Sterland, & O'Neill, 2011). In Indigenous ways of being, the importance of community and connectedness is stressed; as such, this framework can provide understanding and highlight important relational aspects and intricacies that are relevant in Indigenous people's work life transitions.

Consistent with an overarching relational framework, this research is also influenced by social constructionist theory. The underlying premise of social constructionism is that reality is created and maintained through cultural, socioeconomic, and sociopolitical contexts (Gergen, 1999; Whiston & Rahardja, 2005). Blustein et al. (2004) listed four key assumptions of social constructionism: (a) the position challenges the idea that all knowledge is unbiased and objective, and questions positivism and conventional empiricism; (b) the perspective acknowledges both the historical and cultural basis of knowledge and traditions; (c) knowledge is created through interpersonal relationships and interactions, not objective observations; and (d) socially constructed views of the world will vary, lead to patterns of actions, and lead to new possibilities of discourse and action. Moreover, social constructionism maintains that reality is co-constructed through language in both social and cultural settings, and that multiple perspectives exist, each influenced by culture, history, and context (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005).

This perspective is particularly useful for understanding career development. Whiston and Rahardja (2005) stated that qualitative career assessment is often focused on social processes and the influence of historical and cultural contexts. Adding to this, Blustein et al. (2005) maintained that social constructionism is highly useful for understanding career and work. As researchers, utilizing this framework allowed us to connect to both the cultural and societal components of the participants and their stories. Acknowledging that there is no singular truth, and that knowledge is co-constructed between people through interactions and relationships, has been central to this process and is consistent with Indigenous ways of relating.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic data collected by Statistics Canada have long indicated that Aboriginal people have higher unemployment rates, and lower employment rates and levels of educational attainment compared to non-Aboriginal people (Statistics Canada, 2006, 2011). The report *Aboriginal People and the Labour Market: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey* (Statistics Canada, 2011) analyzed data from Statistics Canada's 2008, 2009, and 2010 Labour Force Surveys. It focused on off-reserve Aboriginal people's labour experiences, unemployment and employment rates, and educational attainment rates (Statistics Canada, 2011).

It included statistics from the 10 provinces of Canada for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over the age of 14. In 2006, there were 24,772,000 non-Aboriginal people, and 593,000 Aboriginal people over the age of 14 living off reserve in Canadian provinces.

This Statistics Canada (2011) report indicated that in recent years Aboriginal people, especially men, have faced increased hardship in the work force. Across Canada, Aboriginal people between the ages of 25 and 54 experienced higher unemployment rates (12.3%) and lower employment rates (65.8%) compared to non-Aboriginal people (6.8% and 80.9%, respectively). In 2010, unemployment rates in this group were 13.3% for Aboriginal men, 11.3% for Aboriginal women, 7.9% for non-Aboriginal men, and 6.3% for non-Aboriginal women (Statistics Canada, 2011). In addition, between 2008 and 2010, Aboriginal men experienced the largest employment decline when compared to both Aboriginal women and non-Aboriginal men and women (Statistics Canada, 2011).

In the 15-to-24-year-old group, employment rates were 45% for Aboriginal youth (7.5% decrease from 2008), and 55.3% for non-Aboriginal youth (4.7% decrease from 2008). Similarly, the unemployment rates were 21.1% for Aboriginal youth (5.8% increase from 2008) and 14.6% (3.1% increase from 2008) for non-Aboriginal youth (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Similar discrepancies exist regarding education for these groups. According to Canadian census figures, 34% of Aboriginal adults had not completed high school and 21% had a high school diploma as their highest educational qualification (Statistics Canada, 2006). This was compared to 24% and 15% of the general population, respectively. Further, 44% of Aboriginal adults between 25 and 64 had completed some form of postsecondary education, compared to 60% of the non-Aboriginal population across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2006).

The link between educational attainment and levels of employment has been well established, and we see this relationship in Canadian census data. Most notably, Aboriginal people without a high school education suffer the highest unemployment rate, at 21.9% (Statistics Canada, 2011). Aboriginal workers were hit particularly hard by the economic downturn in 2008, and this was especially true for men and those with lower educational levels.

The above figures paint a consistent and rather disturbing educational and employment picture for Canadian Indigenous people. Rather surprisingly, though, there has been limited research directed at vocational and educational development for this population. The following section will highlight the current body of research related to this topic.

INDIGENOUS VOCATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Juntunen et al. (2001) focused on American Indians' conceptualizations and experiences of career and were particularly focused on the definitions and meanings of both "career" and "career development" for American Indians. The authors conducted qualitative interviews with 18 American Indians, aged 21–59. Sixteen

of the participants identified career as a lifelong pursuit that included planning, making goals, and participating in the workforce; 4 participants spoke about the important link between career and promotion of traditional ways, and said that meaning for work was derived from sharing traditional knowledge with future generations; 16 participants said that success could be measured by a person's ability to contribute to the well-being of another person, including family members, the next generation, and their American Indian tribe. For those who pursued postsecondary education, all but two cited family as a support for career development and work life. Additionally, participants also said that educational achievement was a support for gaining employment. The authors concluded by saying that career was clearly an important concept and activity for the participants. It was considered to be a lifelong endeavour that required planning, influenced personal and family goals, impacted personal identity, and represented a contribution to the individual's community (Juntunen et al., 2001).

Jackson and Smith (2001) were interested in Native Americans' transition from high school to college and work environments, and were particularly concerned with why so few complete a postsecondary education. They conducted guided interviews with 10 male and 12 female Navajo Indian high school graduates (mean age 19.4) who were considering or were enrolled in postsecondary education. The authors identifed themes that impacted transitions, most notably related to family. These included both family pressure to stay home and family pressure to pursue education, which left participants feeling ambivalent at times; family financial problems, which reduced the chances of pursuing postsecondary education and frequently led to individuals finding "unskilled labour to help resolve financial strain" (p. 10); family conflicts, which tended to be related to issues of divorce and alcoholism and inhibited educational pursuits; and family encouragement, which was tied to greater self-confidence and further underscored whether a family member had graduated from college and/or found success in a particular career. Other themes that impacted the transitions included difficulties adapting to postsecondary learning environments, positive and negative experiences with faculty members, vague postsecondary and career plans, lack of knowledge about transitions from postsecondary education to career, and difficulties maintaining connection to homeland and culture during their postsecondary education. The authors concluded by stating that further research is needed to help support the transition from high school to postsecondary and employment for First Nations people.

Supports and Obstacles

Juntunen et al. (2001) described the supports and obstacles to education and career that were experienced by their participants. For those with a high school education, the main supportive factor was a high value placed on education by the family, and the main obstacle identified was lack of family support. For those who had a postsecondary degree, supportive factors that were identified included sobriety, family influences, family support, and being a provider. Obstacles iden-

tified were discrimination, alienation from tribal community, and restrictions of living on the reservation (such as lack of opportunities). Juntunen and colleagues (2001) underscored that discrimination was experienced in both educational and work environments, which negatively impacted experiences.

In their review *Considerations for Successful Transitions Between Post-Secondary Education and the Labour Market for Aboriginal Youth in Canada*, Merrill et al. (2010) examined peer-reviewed journal articles, government and agency reports, documents, policy and program reviews, Canadian policy research, and Indigenous-related postsecondary research. From this analysis, the authors described eight barriers that exist for Canadian Indigenous youth and young adults as they transition into both postsecondary education and the labour market: (a) Aboriginal people's dissatisfaction with postsecondary experiences due to culturally inappropriate curriculum and delivery; (b) the historical impacts of residential school and transgenerational trauma; (c) financial barriers to accessing postsecondary training; (d) geographic isolation from education and employment opportunities; (e) cultural differences, including racism and discrimination; (f) social and personal implications, including the complex cycle of how lower education and socioeconomic status negatively impact individuals' well-being and self-concept; (g) family and community differences, including the positive and negative impact that these systems have on the individual; and (h) education-labour force linkages, which speak to the mismatch between educational attainment and specific job requirements.

Young Indigenous Males' Employment Expectations

Minimal literature exists that specifically addresses the employment experiences and expectations of young Indigenous males. Using a qualitative lens and semistructured interviews, Hoffmann et al. (2005) explored the perspectives of barriers to chosen careers for 29 Navajo high school students: 14 female and 15 male. The authors identified a number of barriers to career development and achievement in the combined gender sample, including difficulties in school, lack of finances, and negative support from family and friends. Several strategies for overcoming barriers were identified, including seeking academic help from teachers, seeking monetary and emotional support from family, working harder in school, and securing financial assistance in order to eliminate schooling barriers. The authors also identified a number of complex themes that they said spoke to a limited knowledge of the process related to achieving a career goal. This included ease of getting a job, normally only one identified barrier to preferred career, lack of concern regarding barriers, and pressure to conform to perceived social pressure (Hoffmann et al., 2005).

Hoffmann and colleagues (2005) also raised specific concerns regarding the male Native American students, and stated that the male group had more problematic future employment expectations than did the female group. They found that male Native American students more often believed jobs were readily available postgraduation, and that little training would be required to obtain jobs. When

compared to their female classmates, males listed fewer career possibilities, and the most expected type of work was trades. Professional careers including veterinarian, computer technician, and musician were also mentioned, but to a lesser extent. Male Native American students saw few, if any, barriers between their current state and their future careers; however, most could not identify how they would achieve their goal. In addition, many displayed ambivalence toward their future desired career. The authors noted that the males seemed to have a less developed employment expectation when compared to the females. Hoffmann et al. stated that their findings pointed to the need for increased support for career pathway exploration and addressing career challenges.

Research conducted by Marshall and colleagues involved surveys and interviews with Indigenous students and high school graduates in several rural and coastal communities in British Columbia, Canada (Marshall, 2002; Marshall, Stewart, & Lawrence, 2011). Social and economic restructuring in these communities had led to closures and hardships in local fishing, forestry, and mining industries. Indigenous youth both on and off reserve recognized the increased importance of education and training to prepare them for a different world of work than their parents and grandparents had experienced. Many wished to stay in their home communities but had to leave to find work and pursue postsecondary education. They described the often-conflicting values and priorities that they had to consider when planning their future work and career paths. These findings led to a larger study discussed below titled "Walking in Multiple Worlds."

"WALKING IN MULTIPLE WORLDS" RESEARCH PROJECT

"Walking in Multiple Worlds: Aboriginal Young Adults' Work Life Narratives" (WIMW) was a 3-year research project conducted in two Canadian cities: Victoria, British Columbia, and Toronto, Ontario. The purpose was to explore life and work transitions for Indigenous emerging adults. The research team was particularly interested in learning about the impacts of culture and community, and the supports and barriers that were experienced in finding and maintaining employment (Marshall, Stewart, Coverdale, Spowart, & LeBlanc, 2012). The larger research question being explored was "What supports, challenges, and barriers do Indigenous young adults experience with regard to finding and keeping work?" For the project's data collection, we specifically chose to use a culturally informed narrative orientation, as Indigenous people typically describe themselves as utilizing an oral-based storytelling tradition (Medicine-Eagle, 1989; Stewart, 2008). Indigenous community partners participated in the study's design, recruitment, and dissemination; ethics approval was obtained through the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto. More than 100 Indigenous men and women aged 18 to 33 were interviewed in either individual or group formats. The findings from the Toronto site and other findings from the Victoria site are reported elsewhere (Coverdale, 2012; Marshall, Stewart, & Coverdale, 2013; Marshall, Stewart, Popadiuk, & Lawrence, 2013; Overmars, 2011).

The present study was part of the larger WIMW research project and focused specifically on the experiences of young Indigenous men. Recruitment letters and posters were brought to and discussed at local Indigenous community agencies and centres. Additionally, information about the study was distributed to Indigenous community contacts through word of mouth. Eight individual interviews with Indigenous men aged 18–33 were conducted by the first author in Victoria, British Columbia. Each interview was completed in early 2012, was approximately 60 minutes in length, and was digitally recorded. All of the young men self-identified as either First Nations or Metis and had previous work experience.

Each participant was asked, "Tell me about your story or stories of finding and keeping work." As the story unfolded, prompts such as "Can you tell me more about that?" or "Can you give me an example?" were utilized to deepen the exploration of the personal, cultural, relational, and employment details of their stories. The recorded interviews were transcribed. To maintain a holistic view of each participant's individual story, a condensed version of each participant's story was crafted using a process called *ghostwriting* (Rhodes, 2000)—this involved co-construction by the first author of the participant's story in the first person. The ghost story was sent back to the participant for additions and changes, as a form of member-checking. Next, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach was utilized to analyze the transcripts. This method involved multiple readings to identify patterns or themes across the participants that captured significant and meaningful concepts and experiences in the data set. Two major metathemes were identified in the data, *Relational Supports* and *Culture and Work*; both metathemes incorporated several related and more specific themes. These are summarized below, with verbatim quotes from the participants in quotation marks.

Relational Supports

Relational supports were of central importance for all participants when they described their work life transitions. Kirmayer, Cori, and Margaret (2003) noted that Indigenous people are defined by their web of relationships, including family, kin, and clan. When considering work life transitions, Schultheiss (2007) wrote that relationships are central to human function, and are integral components of how people obtain and maintain employment. Additionally, Juntunen et al. (2001) and Jackson and Smith (2001) noted that relationships were of key importance to their participants as they navigated their transitions. Similar to these findings, all of the participants spoke at length about how their relations supported them as they navigated employment and academic pursuits. Not surprisingly, this reflects pillars of Indigenous culture, including interconnectedness, connection to community, and relationship with future generations (Coverdale, 2012). The participants' relational network included immediate family members, extended family members, community members, and employees of both community agen-

cies and postsecondary institutions. Four themes related to relational support were identified across the participants: *Finding work*, *Keeping work*, *Basic needs*, and *Supporting others*.

Finding work. All of the young men indicated that finding work was made possible through their relationships. Support came from family, friends, community, and agencies, and was a necessary component throughout their search for work. The participants indicated that the relational support helped with finding work in three specific ways: learning about and securing job opportunities through community connections, receiving encouragement and support, and obtaining necessary gear and training.

All eight participants said that they had found and secured at least one job through their relational network, and more than half of the participants worked for or alongside their family, friends, or community members at their first job. One participant said that his jobs had "always come through connections like through friends or family." Another said, "I've actually had a lot of help from the people here at the community agency." The experience of searching for work was positively and significantly impacted by the participants' community connections. The men realized that their relational connections helped them search for and, in some cases, gain employment, and would be an integral part in their future search for work. Connections and networking have long been identified as important by work and career researchers (Blustein, 2011; Schultheiss, 2007); the present participants are in agreement.

Participants spoke about the sometimes daunting task of finding and securing a job, and mentioned that the encouragement and support that they received, particularly from their family, was immensely important. One participant who was struggling with finding a job at the time of the interviews said that his sister was providing "encouragement and support" while he was looking for a job in a new city. These findings are similar to those of Juntunen et al. (2001) and Hoffmann et al. (2005), who identified the importance of emotional support during vocational and educational pursuit. Also, Jackson and Smith (2001) found that encouragement from family members led to greater self-confidence for those pursuing work.

Finally, the young men talked about the training and gear that was needed for obtaining certain jobs. Lack of either was a significant barrier to employment that several participants experienced; the associated cost limited the number and types of jobs for which they could apply. One young man said that a local Indigenous agency "has been really great for support, and their work training program was great because it helped me with the résumé part of it." Another said that his band office "got me all hooked up with all the gear I needed: shoes and gloves and everything." Community support is often cited as a key support for Aboriginal youth (Merrill et al., 2010); for these young men, such supports provided necessary and tangible work gear and training needed before they could enter the labour market.

Keeping work. Participants discussed how their relational supports helped them face the challenges that they experienced before, during, and after their workday,

and helped them keep their jobs. Most commonly, support at work came through other coworkers, often family members, who were present at the work site. While off duty, individuals spoke about their wider network that supported them.

Seven of the eight participants talked about the benefit and importance of having supportive coworkers, who offered encouragement, guidance, and motivation. Many of the participants had the opportunity to work alongside family members, while others worked with friends and other community members at their job. One participant said, "The manager was actually my uncle … I tried to work so hard was because I figured if I look bad then it doesn't really look good on him for hiring me right … he was a great help."

Six of the eight participants talked about the ongoing relational support that they received outside of work hours and how it helped them maintain employment. Support came from family members, friends, partners, Elders, and other community members. Experiences ranged from specific task-oriented help such as "My girlfriend supports me a lot, she makes sure I get up every day, and makes sure that I don't get into any trouble" to broader and more general support: "encouragement from my family and friends and relatives, I wouldn't have been able to do it without them for sure." Other participants echoed the need for and utility of ongoing support and described support from their relational connections throughout a variety of contexts, stating "Obviously there is family, and I'd say the support has been from the Elders here at the University" and "Being connected to your community and family, that's kind of where your greatest support comes in throughout it all." Although not specifically addressed by these participants, Hoffmann et al. (2005) noted that family support was often sought to help overcome perceived barriers to employment.

Basic needs. Participants consistently reported that their families provided tangible life support on a day-to-day basis, which included housing, food, and financial assistance. For many, this ongoing support extended beyond the teenage years and into their present lives. One participant, who had moved back to the city after losing a job elsewhere, said, "I remember coming back here and not being able to find any work. And if I didn't have my ma, I would have been out on the street … without the support of her, I would have not made it." Even when working a full-time job, financial constraints still existed for many of the young men. Similarly, Hoffmann et al. (2005) said that family financial contribution was a commonly cited support for pursing employment and academic pathways. Because many Indigenous people in Canada endure financial hardship (Statistics Canada, 2011), additional financial support is critical for those struggling with employment and economic struggles. Merrill et al. (2010) stated that financial difficulty commonly results in limited access to postsecondary education and can lead to students having to drop out and obtain full-time employment in low-skilled labour jobs to alleviate their financial burden. The participants in the current study also spoke about how family members helped them with their basic needs during schooling, noting that parents and other family members helped with tuition, housing, and food.

Supporting others. Six of the eight participants spoke about giving back to people around them. Two primary ways that this occurred was through direct financial support to immediate family members and mentoring of family, friends, and community members.

Participants spoke about the financial constraints and hardships that they and their families had experienced in the past and present. Gaining employment and contributing financially was often seen as a way that the individual could help support their immediate family members. One participant began his first job when his father, the family's primary earner, passed away. Another participant stated, "I moved back into my family's house when my parents separated, so I could help my mom pay for bills and everything." These young men responded to an acute event, and chose financial contribution as a way to support their immediate family. Others supported their family financially on an ongoing basis. One participant recalled how he supported his mother from a young age: "I've always contributed rent, I've been paying rent since, I don't know how long, but ever since I was making money I was always giving her money." Across the participants, a common thread was the importance of helping their families. Juntunen et al. (2001) also noted that, for the participants in their study, being a provider for their family was often positively experienced because it made work worthwhile.

Most participants had experience with giving and receiving work-related guidance. Many of the young men spoke about advice that they had received from an older family member, as reflected in the statement, "My grandpa was always telling me to show up on time and to work hard." They spoke about their desire to pass these messages on to those younger than them. Additionally, they wanted to pass on, and had passed on, lessons that they themselves had learned in their process. Commonly, participants said that they would use their own personal struggles as teaching points to guide those close to them toward a better path. These lessons exemplified the oral transmission of knowledge that is a key component of Indigenous ways of being (Medicine-Eagle, 1989; Merrill et al., 2010; Stewart, 2008), and showed the participants' desire to give back to their relations through mentoring.

Culture and Work

Throughout the interviews, the young men discussed how culture had played a role in their vocational pursuits. Most frequently, they talked about their experiences with culture at work, and the personal validation that engaging with their culture brought them. Similarly, Merrill et al. (2010) stated that "Aboriginal people's cultural backgrounds influence their workplace experiences; they want to feel that their cultures, beliefs, and ways of thinking and problem solving are respected and valued" (p. 28).

Six of the eight participants indicated that one or more of their work experiences included culturally connected components. These employment opportunities included work for their band office, Aboriginal sector work, culturally traditional work, and work for or with Indigenous communities. For those who had experi-

ence with practicing or learning about their culture through work, these opportunities were highly positive and often were seen as key experiences in their work life that shaped future aspirations. Similarly, Juntunen et al. (2001) stated that work that included promotion of traditional ways and sharing of traditional knowledge was highly valuable, and that career counsellors should spend time exploring career choice as it relates to culture and community membership.

Connection to culture through work. Participants spoke about how work was a major way in which they connected to their culture. This is consistent with Blustein (2006), who observed, "[W]orking links us with the broader social context, often providing people with their major or even sole connection to their culture" (p. 6). Practicing or doing culture through work was a highly positive experience that served to strengthen the connection of the participants to their own culture. For some, it was only one way that they connected to their culture, but for others, it was the first time that they felt a deep connection to culture. One participant reflected on his increasing involvement with traditional art and said, "The work I'm doing right now is traditional Native art and being immersed in that aspect of the culture has been really awesome. I guess that's really just one of the big draws for me is the cultural aspect." Another said, "I'd even do some carving. I'd wing out a piece and then go sell it. Got into that for a few years … most of my life I wasn't living that close to my culture. I liked it a lot." These men were thankful for their opportunities to learn more and practice culture through their work. Kirmayer et al. (2003) stated that in contrast to young Aboriginal women who have experienced more continuity in social roles and are more often involved in child rearing, young Aboriginal men have often experienced a separation between traditional roles and opportunities in their home communities. These authors call for culturally constructive and meaningful opportunities for young people, so that they can develop their potential. In this vein, the young men who were interviewed highlighted the positive impact that culturally related work has had for them.

Motivation for future direction. Culturally related work also served as a motivating factor for future employment; Juntunen et al. (2001) stated that career is viewed as an opportunity to engage in culture. Half of the present participants said that the thought of working in a field related to their culture was highly appealing, and that past and present culturally related jobs helped solidify future plans for related work. One participant was involved with an art piece for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, which has a mandate to learn about what happened in Canadian residential schools and to share the findings with Canadians (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2013). He said, "I'm getting more and more immersed as I go. I don't know where I will be a year from now but hopefully more involved, which is what I want to do, which I am striving to do." Another participant was considering educational paths that would lead him toward employment options "because of the urban population, Indigenous people don't have that connection to the land that's often touted 'cause I'm in the city. So focusing on Indigenous food in the city would be one thing I'd really like to work on."

A third participant was planning his future career in clinical social work, and said that he wanted to work with those who have been and are affected by residential schools, so that he could give back to his people and follow his preferred career path. For these men, finding culturally related work was highly desirable and played a large part in shaping their employment pathways. Each participant who had previous experience with a culturally related job desired a culturally related job in the future.

Validation. Participants who had had one or more culturally related jobs spoke about the great sense of pride they had in their work, and about the personal implications that pursuing a culturally related job had for them. Doing this type of work provided opportunities for them to learn and grow, both as individuals and as members of their communities, and these opportunities helped to validate their own cultural experience. Quite often, participants were eager to share the personal implications that doing a culturally related job had, and were excited to recount their journey. One participant stated, "It's great being one with the culture … it's a big honour." Another participant was particularly affected by his summer job, where he learned about traditional ways of working with cedar bark and cedar plank removal. In addition, he remarked on how his work would impact the generations ahead of him as he kept this knowledge alive:

> It's a lot of self-meaning. It's really cool doing CMTs (culturally modified trees) and GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) plotting and all that stuff, keeping it alive for the next generation. It was genius how they could take planks and build a house and still leave the tree standing and alive. It was really meaningful and a great learning experience.

A third young man spoke about the personal and cultural validation that he felt through the traditional art that he did:

> It's all been a part of my life and that validation has been really good, and just knowing that I am good at it and it is something that I love to do is empowering in itself … there is also cultural validation from family because they love the work that I do and they support me in that way too.

These participants had a great sense of pride and an eagerness to share the deeply meaningful nature of these jobs. It brought them work experience that helped solidify their sense of self and their connection to their Indigenous culture.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This study highlighted the work life experiences of young Indigenous men. Through a relational and social constructionist framework, we explored the supports and barriers that young Indigenous men experienced as they found and kept work. Both relational and cultural components had dramatic impacts on the participants' lives; our findings suggest that researchers and practitioners should

consider these central components when working with Indigenous populations. At the same time, as with all qualitative data, we recognize that interpretations must be done cautiously. The present findings will be of particular relevance to young Indigenous men whose backgrounds are similar to the participants'; however, young men with other cultural or minority backgrounds may also have some similar experiences.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the importance of evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research. Throughout this study, we were guided by Krefting's (1991) recommendations to address trustworthiness. These included member checking, researcher reflexivity, careful attention to data coding, and prolonged and varied field experience. Nevertheless, we recognize the boundaries that exist in this study. We acknowledge that it was conducted within a certain context and time frame. Due to time and resource limitations, there were only a certain number of young men that could be interviewed; our findings and conclusions are drawn from their experiences. Further, as related to member checking, although the majority of participants confirmed the accuracy of the ghost stories that were written for them, two participants did not respond. In terms of confirmability, a number of the findings from the present study are similar to other studies in the literature and to other studies within the larger Walking in Multiple Worlds project (Coverdale, 2012; Marshall, Stewart, & Coverdale, 2013; Marshall, Stewart, Popadiuk, et al., 2013).

Implications for Research

Conducting research with Indigenous populations requires a high level of awareness, dedication to ethical practice, and commitment to communities. Cochran et al. (2008) stated,

> [A]n extensive body of health-related research has been conducted on Native American populations around the world, but it appears to have had little impact on their overall well-being and argued that the *how* of doing research with these communities is equally as important as the outcomes. (p. 22)

Cochran et al. emphasize that it is of the utmost importance that researchers maintain a stance of conducting research *with* the population rather than *on* them. Similarly, our research team has found that it is absolutely imperative to spend time becoming familiar with Indigenous community protocols, local agencies, and key contact people. This is a necessary step toward respectful communication, which is a long-term and continuous process.

A certain level of disclosure is appropriate when working with Indigenous communities. With regard to introductions, for example, it is important that researchers explain who they are and why they are there as well as what they are doing, and be prepared to answer any questions. Sharing where parents and grandparents are from can be both culturally appropriate and expected in certain communities. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the local land and traditional territory names. These respectful practices help build trust and a collaborative relationship.

We recommend connecting with a member from the specific community of interest to obtain guidance and make sure that protocols are followed.

Relationships are of central importance in Indigenous contexts. The Walking in Multiple Worlds research team incorporated western theory that could complement Indigenous ontology and epistemology (Coverdale, 2012). Relational theory and social constructionist theory were deemed appropriate lenses for this study, as Indigenous scholars have advocated use of theories that reflect Indigenous worldviews (Stewart, 2008). These frameworks allowed for respectful exploration of participant narratives while paying attention to relational and subjective realities. The critical importance of relational connections and social contexts was clearly evident in the young men's narratives, which underscores the importance of social contexts and connection in the work development process.

Implications for Counselling

As indicated by our results and those of previous authors (Juntunen et al., 2001; Merrill et al., 2010), many young Indigenous people are already turning to their communities to access support. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to help communities and agencies further develop their culturally relevant helping capacity. Our findings indicate that training in relational and family-oriented intervention methods is appropriate for counsellors working with Indigenous clients. Non-Indigenous counsellors and those from different communities should seek mentors to help them become familiar with local customs and protocols, just as they may encourage their clients to seek out information and mentoring related to their work interests and goals. Encouraging individuals to seek support from many different people in their relational network is consistent with Indigenous values and the importance of extended family.

For those clients who are geographically separated or feel disconnected from their home communities, other relational supports are recommended; Indigenous service agencies, Band offices, friendship centres, and community groups were mentioned by participants in the present study. Career practitioners and counsellors should become familiar with the programs and services available for Indigenous clients and, if possible, develop relationships with Indigenous agency and community members that can facilitate clients' access to appropriate support.

Culturally related work experiences were found to be shaping moments in the participants' lives that deepened their connection with their culture. Several young men noted that their initial exposure to a culturally related job helped to open the doors to other culturally related jobs and prompted participants to consider certain jobs that they would not have otherwise. Awareness of opportunities and maintaining relationships with local Indigenous communities and agencies can assist counsellors to find culturally related work opportunities.

Success in secondary and postsecondary education is important for future job attainment. For some Indigenous youth, additional educational resources such as resource rooms, learning assistance, and tutoring are needed. Educational attainment has been shown to be higher among members of Indigenous communities

that are supportive of education (Juntunen et al., 2001); this has a cascading positive impact for both current and future generations. Encouraging schools to partner with communities to develop culturally based curricula could, in turn, increase community support for education as well as encourage academic and vocational aspirations.

At the postsecondary level, targeted funding would allow more Indigenous students to pursue higher education. Having Indigenous-specific services and contact people at recruitment and advising centres would assist both those considering educational programs and those currently enrolled. Further, increasing the number of culturally related programs and courses could have a positive impact on student enrolment and retention.

CONCLUSION

In presenting the stories of these eight young Indigenous men who shared their search for, and engagement in, work and education, one of our goals was to present a more balanced picture—much of the existing literature and census data seem to focus on the deficits and challenges among Indigenous people. While acknowledging challenges, we also heard stories of resilience, pride, strength, and commitment to culture and community. We believe it is of the utmost importance that these positive aspects of identity and attributes are highlighted when supporting young Indigenous men in their work life exploration and development. We would like to close with a quote from one of our participants, who had found work at an organization that focuses on supporting urban populations of Indigenous people and was pursuing a university degree with the support of his immediate and extended family:

> The barriers and obstacles are now easier to remove, because I have options, I have a stronger identity, I have resources, I have people behind me. It's just a matter of me making that move and just finding that direction.

Note

1   The term Native, Native American, Indigenous, Aboriginal, and First Nations are often used interchangeably in research literature, and the selection of terminology often depends on the writer's focus and location. The Assembly of First Nations (2002) stated that there is no one lexicon to describe Indigenous people in North America. The Canadian Constitution defined *Aboriginal people* as a collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants (The Constitution Act, 1982). In Canada, the term Aboriginal refers to one of three groups: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (The Assembly of First Nations, 2002). It is important to note that we have attempted to use language in the most respectful manner possible in this chapter. When we have cited from authors, we have kept consistent with their terminology for Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nations, and Native American.

References

Assembly of First Nations. (2002). *Top misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples.* Retrieved from http://tricitiesecd.ca/files/4013/3599/2965/FACTSandMisconceptions.pdf

Blustein, D. L. (2006). *The psychology of working: A new perspective for career development, counseling, and public policy.* Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum. doi:10.4324/9780203935477

Blustein, D. L. (2011). A relational theory of working. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 79*(1), 1–17. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2010.10.004

Blustein, D. L., Kenna, A. C., Murphy, K. A., DeVoy, J. E., & DeWine, D. B. (2005). Qualitative research in career development: Exploring the center and margins of discourse about careers and working. *Journal of Career Assessment, 13*(4), 351–370. doi:10.1177/1069072705278047

Blustein, D. L., Schultheiss, D. E. P., & Flum, H. (2004). Toward a relational perspective of the psychology of careers and working: A social constructionist analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 64*(3), 423–440. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2003.12.008

Braun, B., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3,* 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cochran, P. A. L., Marshall, C. A., Garcia-Downing, C., Kendall, E., Cook, D., McCubbin, L., & Gover, R. M. S. (2008). Indigenous ways of knowing: Implications for participatory research and community. *American Journal of Public Health, 98*(1), 22–27. doi:10.2105/ajph.2006.093641

Coverdale, J. (2012). *Walking in multiple worlds: Aboriginal young people's life work narratives* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Victoria, Victoria.

Gergen, K. (1999). *An invitation to social construction.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. doi:10.1353/sof.2001.0015

Hoffmann, L. L., Jackson, A. P., & Smith, S. A. (2005). Career barriers among Native American students living on reservations. *Journal of Career Development. 32*(1), 31–45. doi:10.1177/0894845305277038

Jackson, A. & Smith, S. (2001). Postsecondary transitions among Navajo Indians. *Journal of American Indian Education. 40*(2), 28–47. Retrieved from http://jaie.asu.edu/

Jordan, J. (2008). Recent developments in relational-cultural theory. *Women & Therapy. 31*(2/3/4), 1–4. doi:10.1080/02703140802145540

Juntunen, C. L., Barraclough, D. J., Broneck, C. L., Seibel, G. A., Winrow, S. A., & Morin, P. M. (2001). American Indian perspectives on the career journey. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 48*(3), 274–285. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.48.3.274

Kirmayer, L., Cori, S., & Margaret, C. (2003). Healing traditions: Culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian aboriginal peoples. *Australasian Psychiatry, 11*(1), 15–23. doi:10.1046/j.1038-5282.2003.02010.x

Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 45*(3), 214–222. doi:10.5014/ajot.45.3.214

Lincoln, Y.S., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Marshall, E. A. (2002). Life-career counselling issues for youth in coastal and rural communities: The impact of economic, social and environmental restructuring. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 24*(1), 69–87. doi:10.1023/a:1015003423613

Marshall, E. A., Stewart, S. L., & Coverdale, J. (2013, January). *Walking in multiple worlds: Aboriginal youths' worklife experiences.* Presentation at Cannexus 2013, Ottawa, ON.

Marshall, E. A., Stewart, S., Coverdale, J., Spowart, P., & Leblanc, J. (2012, May). *Worklife and mental health for aboriginal youth.* Presentation at the conference of the Canadian Counselling & Psychotherapy Association, Calgary, AB.

Marshall, E. A., Stewart, S. L., & Lawrence, B. C. (2011, November). *Transitions and possible selves: Research and counselling with rural youth and families.* Paper presented at the conference of the New Zealand Association for Research in Education, Tauranga, New Zealand.

Marshall, E. A., Stewart, S. L., Popadiuk, N., & Lawrence, B. (2013). Walking in multiple worlds: Successful school-to-work transitions for Indigenous and cultural minority youth. In G. Tchibozo (Ed.), *Cultural and social diversity and the transition from education to work* (pp. 185–202). Rotterdam, Netherlands: Springer. doi:10.1007/978-94-007-5107-1_10

Medicine-Eagle, B. (1989). The circle of healing. In R. Carlson & J. Brugh (Eds.), *Healers on healing* (pp. 58–62). New York, NY: Penguin.

Merrill, S., Bruce, D., & Marlin, A. (2010). *Considerations for successful transitions between postsecondary education and the labour market for aboriginal youth in Canada: Final report*. Sackville, NB: Rural and Small Town Programme, Mount Allison University.

Overmars, D. (2011) *Finding a path among the concrete: Work-life narratives of urban Aboriginal young adults* (Unpublished master's thesis), University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.

Rhodes, C. (2000). Ghostwriting research: Positioning the researcher in the interview text. *Qualitative Inquiry, 6*(4), 511–525. doi:10.1177/107780040000600406

Schultheiss, D. E. P. (2007). The emergence of a relational cultural paradigm for vocational psychology. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 7*(3), 191– 201. doi:10.1007/s10775-007-9123-7

Schultheiss, D., Watts, J., Sterland, L., & O'Neill, M. (2011). Career, migration and the life CV: A relational cultural analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 78*(3), 334–341. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2011.03.013

Statistics Canada. (2006). *Aboriginal peoples highlight tables*, 2006 Census. Retrieved from http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97558/index.Cfm?Lang=E

Statistics Canada. (2011). *Aboriginal people and the labour market: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2008–2010*. Retrieved from http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/bsolc/olc-cel/olc- cel?catno=71-588-X2011003&lang=eng

Stewart, S. (2008). Promoting Indigenous mental health: Cultural perspectives on healing from Native counsellors in Canada. *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education, 46*(2), 49–56. doi:10.1080/14635240.2008.10708129

Truth and Reconciliation Commission. (2013). *Residential schools*. Retrieved from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=4

Turner, S. L., Trotter, M. J., Lapan, R. T., Czajka, K. A., Yang, P., & Brissett, A. E. A. (2006). Vocational skills and outcomes among Native American adolescents: A test of the integrative contextual model of career development. *Career Development Quarterly, 54*(3), 216–226. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2006.tb00153.x

Whiston, S. C., & Rahardja, D. (2005). Qualitative career assessment: An overview and analysis. *Journal of Career Assessment, 13*(4), 371–380. doi:10.1177/1069072705277910

About the Authors

J. K. Payden Spowart, M.A., CCC, Registered Provisional Psychologist, is a graduate of the counselling psychology program in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies (Faculty of Education) at the University of Victoria, Canada. In Victoria, he worked at Aboriginal Child and Youth Mental Health for the British Columbia government, and delivered outreach mental health treatment to on- and off-reserve Indigenous families living on Southern Vancouver Island. Currently, he works at a private practice in Calgary, where he continues to support Indigenous families.

E. Anne Marshall, PhD, RPsych, is a professor of counselling psychology in Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies (Faculty of Education) and director of the Centre for Youth & Society at the University of Victoria, Canada. She is the codeveloper of the Indigenous Communities Counselling Psychology graduate program, the first of its kind in Canada. Dr. Marshall's community-engaged research focuses on youth well-being, transitions, and mental health in cultural and community contexts. Much of her work involves Indigenous communities and marginalized youth. She is the coauthor of *Knowledge Translation in Context: Indigenous, Policy, and Community Settings* (University of Toronto Press, 2011).

Address correspondence to Payden Spowart; 830 4 Street NE, Calgary, AB, Canada, T2E 3T1. E-mail: payden@gmail.com