

Cultural Infusions and Shifting Sands: What Helps and Hinders Career Decision-Making of Indigenous Young Adults

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Abstract

Indigenous young adults experience disproportionately high rates of unemployment, which are exacerbated by systemic factors such as poverty and oppression (Britten & Borgen, 2010). Despite these challenges, many Indigenous young adults do well in their educational and employment pursuits (Bougie et al., 2013). This study explored what helped and hindered the career decision-making of 18 Indigenous young adults in Canada who see themselves as doing well in this regard. Using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT), a qualitative research method which focuses on helping and hindering factors (Butterfield et al., 2009), 13 categories were identified: (a) Family/Relationships & commitments, (b) Setting goals/Taking initiative/Focusing on interests, (c) Support from community/mentors, (d) A healthy way (physical, mental, social), (e) Finding meaning/motivation & contributing, (f) Networking & who you know, (g) Systemic/ External factors (institution, job-market, sexism, racism, interpersonal aspects), (h) Financial situation, (I) Knowledge/Information/Certainty, (j) Experience (work/life), (k) Educational opportunities/Training & specialized education, (l) Indigenous background/Cultural factors, and (m) Courage & self-worth (vs. fear/doubt in self/others). These categories highlighted the systemic, interpersonal,

and experiential processes in career decision-making for Indigenous young adults in Canada. Implications for career counselling practice and future research are also discussed.

Keywords: career decision-making, Indigenous, young adults, ECIT

The world of work is shifting in unprecedented ways, fueled by continuing trends in globalization, increasing digitization, competition for scarce resources, increased mobility of individuals and families, the transformation to a technology and knowledge-based economy, the increased diversity of workers, and the rise of social change movements (e.g., human rights, environmentalism, mass migration/immigration). While these transformations have an impact on the career decision-making of all people, it is expected to have a very particular effect on Indigenous young people in Canada. Some of the challenges experienced by Indigenous young people are unique to their experiences of finding a place in the Western world of work, which only minimally recognizes the social, cultural, and spiritual meaning of work that Indigenous traditions have valued for centuries. Notwithstanding, some Indigenous young people are emerging successful in their career journeys as they overcome the multiple obstacles in their quests for meaningful participation in their chosen vocations

in this Euro-Canadian context of the labour market.

Socio-Economic Context

Successfully securing and sustaining employment is dependent on many factors including socio-economic factors, cultural views, education, and organizational factors. Indigenous communities live with disproportionately high unemployment rates, and mental and other health conditions, all of which are exacerbated by poverty and oppression (Britten & Borgen, 2010). While the 2008/2009 economic recession posed challenges for the nation as a whole, the recession particularly impacted young people; Indigenous young people were more deeply affected, widening the employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people to 45.1% compared with 55.6% respectively in 2009 (Government of Canada, 2011). This is also a particularly young population; based on 2011 National Household Survey data, 46% of the Aboriginal population of Canada were children and youth 24 years' old or younger (Statistics Canada, 2013). Further, the 2016 census indicated a population boom, suggesting that young Indigenous people will increasingly be entering the labour market. It is anticipated that by the year 2036 Indigenous people could make up more than a fifth of the labour force growth—if current barriers are ad-

dressed (Drummond et al., 2017).

According to OECD Economic Survey of Canada (2018), socio-economic outcomes, including education, employment, and income, are worse on average for Indigenous populations than others in Canada; there is a significant socio-economic gap that needs to be closed (Drummond et al., 2017). Evidently, despite all the systemic challenges they face, many Indigenous young adults do well in terms of their educational and employment experiences (Bougie et al., 2013). As indicated by Britten & Borgen (2010), we believe it is imperative that Indigenous young adults have access to these stories of success, to learn from these accomplishments and envision a broader range of possibilities for themselves and their futures. Further, improving career development and economic prospects supports the autonomy and quality of life of Indigenous individuals and communities, and is a necessary component of addressing systemic inequalities and establishing equity (Caverley et al., 2014).

Indigenous Context

The term Indigenous signifies multiple populations including First Nations, Metis, Inuit people, both urban and rural, who are culturally diverse, with over 70 different languages (Statistics Canada, 2017). It is important to note that while there are some commonalities between these cultures, they are also distinct with their own needs, values, and how easy or difficult it has been for them to meet their needs consistent with their values, especially as it relates to life and vocation. It has been found that the ability to freely express Indigenous cultural values and realize them in life decisions leads to a greater likelihood of overall health

and wellbeing (Caverley et al., 2014). McCormick (1994) describes how Indigenous people perceive healing as that which will help attain and/or maintain balance, self-transcendence, and connectedness. The worldviews of Indigenous people in Canada tend to approach economic and career development in holistic ways, prizing interconnectedness and long-term cultural sustainability over capitalistic motivations. The Indigenous wholistic framework (Pidgeon, 2016) provides a comprehensive picture of this interconnectedness and the balance that is so highly valued in pursuing the Indigenous way of life. However, the pressure to conform to the mainstream worldview creates conflict for Indigenous young people in every path of their career journey including adapting to the Western education system and future career decisions (Stewart & Reeves).

Systemic Oppression and Impacts of Colonialism

Addressing the barriers and facilitators in career decisions facing Indigenous young adults in Canada also requires a solid grounding in the impacts of colonialism and inter-generational trauma. The challenges faced by young Indigenous people today do not exist in a vacuum; rather, these are the survivors of over 500 years of colonial trauma, taking place since first contact, which included intentional and systematic policies of forced assimilation, displacement, and cultural genocide (Garrett & Herring, 2011; Stewart & Reeves, 2013). The adaptive and creative strategies of Indigenous young people should similarly be considered through the lens of Indigenous survivance—“an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a

mere reaction, however pertinent” (Vizenor, 2008, p. 1).

In acknowledging its complicity in the oppressive systems that continue to harm Indigenous Peoples in Canada to this day, the profession of psychology emphasizes the need for reconciliation and healing between the field as a whole and Indigenous peoples, as well as active steps toward creating culturally appropriate research and psychological services that serve and support these populations (Canadian Psychological Association, 2018).

Young Adults and Career Decision-Making

Amundson and colleagues (2010) highlighted the centrality of career in the human experience such that it is impossible to separate career decisions from other life questions and difficulties. They argued that modern career counselling requires an understanding of the factors that individuals consider when making career choices, acknowledging “the unique psychological experiences of the individual within cultural, social, historical, and economic contexts” (p. 337). Further, adolescence and young adulthood is a critical time of transition, self-exploration, and identity formation, wherein young people face unique developmental challenges (Arnett, 2000; Borgen & Hiebert, 2006). Hence, supporting the career decision-making of Indigenous young adults requires directly working to address the historical and present socio-economic harms which create the barriers they face. Moreover, facilitating young people’s vocational journeys during this important time also requires an understanding of the kinds of support they will find useful and relevant in securing and maintaining employment, given the multiple

barriers they experience resulting from the developmental stage as well as historical cultural barriers. One of the ways that has been found to help young people succeed in their career journey, as reported by Indigenous young women, includes connections to Indigenous community support, and participating in vocational activities that involve Indigenous people (Goodwill et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

For Indigenous young adults, the experiences of finding and maintaining work have a direct relationship to identity and historical context. Since career is an interaction between the individual and the rest of society, culturally responsive societal changes need to be in place to support Indigenous young adults, which includes addressing experiences of discrimination, presence or lack of modeling or mentorship, and access to educational and career opportunities (Stewart & Reeves, 2013). While the Canadian cultural landscape is continually changing and evolving, career development models thus far have not adequately addressed the mismatch between dominant cultural values and culturally diverse populations, including the broad range of Indigenous cultures. Current models of career development and career decision-making do not appear to address the needs of Indigenous young adults as well as they might other populations. Additionally, very little research appears to explore the experiences of Indigenous people who perceive themselves to be doing well in their careers. This study was part of a larger exploration of both Indigenous and immigrant young adults who self-identify as doing well with their career decision-making. Findings from other aspects of the

study have been published elsewhere (see: Borgen et al., 2021; Goodwill et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to explore *What factors help and hinder Indigenous young adults to make career decisions well?* Using a combination of narrative research design and the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT), we explored the stories of career decision-making with this population, as well as specifically what they found helpful, unhelpful, and would have liked to have available. This paper focuses specifically on the ECIT findings from this study.

Materials and Methods

Qualitative inquiry that centralizes Indigenous experiences requires Indigenous community engagement and a commitment to increase the capacity of the next generation of Counselling Psychology scholars to respectfully do this work. The first two authors are mentored by an Indigenous Psychologist Research Practitioner (Ferguson) and a senior qualitative researcher and scholar with expertise in Career Counselling (Borgen). This study integrated Indigenous Research values and methods with qualitative interviewing techniques used in dozens of studies led by Indigenous researchers (such as Rod McCormick, Harley Neumann, and Alanaise Goodwill).

The Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) was used to help participants reflect on their experiences of doing well with career decision making. ECIT is a qualitative research method, which seeks to identify key events that participants state helped or hindered in their experiences with the topic in question. In this study, the question pertained to career decision-making. Eighteen individuals who identified as Indige-

nous provided a total of 282 critical incidents (135 helping incidents, 87 hindering incidents, and 60 wish list items) addressing experiences of what helped and what hindered in their career decision-making.

Participants

Approval for this study was obtained from the behavioural research ethics board (BREB) of the University of British Columbia (H15-01935). The recruitment methods included putting up posters, contacting Indigenous-serving agencies, advertising in local newspapers, and using social media platforms. Participants were also recruited through word-of-mouth, and snowball sampling. In line with inclusion criteria, participants were Indigenous young adults between the ages of 26 and 34 (mean=29.06; median=29), who saw themselves as doing well in their career decision-making. Of the 18 participants (13 female, 5 male), two reported having had specific Indigenous education.

Enhanced Critical Incident Technique

The ECIT is a revision of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), which has been adapted for research in counselling (Butterfield et al., 2005). This method was chosen for its applicability to studying psychological experiences (Woolsey, 1986), and its successful use with Indigenous populations (Goodwill, 2016; McCormick, 1997). While ECIT mostly relies on the assumptions of the post-positive paradigm (McDaniel et al., 2020) and reflects Western and colonial values both in the history of its development and application of the method, an attempt was made in this study to

honour Indigenous values in fostering relationships and collaborating with Indigenous scholars. This was especially helpful in the initial stages of conceptualization and recruitment with greater opportunities for reflecting and receiving feedback on the relevance of this study for Indigenous people (see Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991/2016). Using ECIT, participants are asked in interviews to provide descriptive accounts of factors that facilitated or impeded their experiences with the topic being studied, which, in the current study, is career decision-making. Interviews are then analyzed, and the *critical incidents*—those things that helped or hindered—are extracted and grouped to build categories. *Wish list items*—factors that were not present but that the participants believed would have been helpful—are also identified.

Data Collection

Participant interviews were conducted by a team of trained interviewers. They took place both in person and by telephone, and included participants from all over Canada. Interviews followed the data collection procedures outlined by Butterfield et al. (2009). After obtaining informed consent from the participants, the ECIT interview was conducted, and afterwards demographic information was collected. Prior to conducting participant interviews, interviewers were trained in culturally sensitive interview techniques. ECIT interviews lasted approximately one hour, and were audio-recorded, with additional hand-written notes taken by the interviewers. According to the ECIT, interviews continue until exhaustiveness (saturation) is reached. A standardized ECIT interview protocol was followed to maintain consistency across interviews. The protocol was

first described in Butterfield et al. (2009). All participants were invited to participate in a follow-up interview over email; no changes were made at this cross-checking stage, and no participants withdrew at any point in the duration of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the steps outlined by Butterfield et al. (2009), starting broadly with: 1) selecting the frame of reference, 2) forming the categories, and 3) determining the level of specificity versus generality most appropriate to present the data. After transcription and anonymizations, researchers carefully reviewed the content of the interviews before coding. Extracted incidents were grouped according to similarity to form categories. A further nine credibility checks were also followed to bolster the trustworthiness of the findings: (1) audio recording the interviews; (2) interview fidelity checks; (3) independent extraction of critical incidents; (4) calculating exhaustiveness; (5) calculating participation rates; (6) placement of incidents into categories by an independent judge; (7) cross-checking by participants; (8) expert opinions; and (9) theoretical agreement.

Results

There were 282 critical incidents that were reported in total (135 helping; 87 hindering; and 60 wish list items) by the 18 participants. These incidents were identified as belonging to 13 categories. Findings are presented in Table 1; the categories list the number of participants who endorsed an incident in the category, followed by the percentage of participants who endorsed the category, followed by the number of incidents

in that category; this is done for helping incidents, hindering incidents, and wish list items respectively.

Helping

There were seven categories that had a higher representation of helping incidents, which are discussed first.

Family/Relationships & Commitments

Fourteen participants (78%) reported helping incidents that belonged to this category. Critical incidents included in this category pertain to aspects of the family such as parents, siblings, and children who have impacted the career decision-making of the participants. They also include family situations such as being part of a single parent family, relationship strains, and factors related to family background. One participant stated that “[family] just being there for the emotional support and the mental support and all those other things ... just being... having them there [was helpful]. In terms of school, ... they were always there to influence me to be the parent that I am capable of being” (249).

However, six participants (33%) found family to be a hindering factor in the career decision-making process. According to one participant “you have these people that depend on you in a lot of ways, like that boyfriend I mentioned; he depended on me a lot, so I felt obligated to stick to some of the things that I was doing... Also, my family members require a lot of emotional support that I can’t give when I’m in school.” (631)

Table 1

Categorization of Results

| Categories | Helping | | | Hindering | | | Wish List | | |
|--|---------|-------|----|-----------|-------|----|-----------|-------|----|
| | P# | P% | I# | P# | P% | I# | P# | P% | I# |
| Family/Relationships & commitments | 14 | 77.78 | 23 | 6 | 33.33 | 10 | 1 | 5.56 | 1 |
| Setting goals/Taking initiative /Focusing on interests | 11 | 61.11 | 19 | 3 | 16.67 | 3 | 1 | 5.56 | 1 |
| Support from community/Mentors | 11 | 61.11 | 15 | 7 | 38.89 | 10 | 6 | 33.33 | 11 |
| A healthy way (physical, mental, social) | 8 | 44.44 | 11 | 7 | 38.89 | 9 | 4 | 22.22 | 5 |
| Finding meaning/Motivation & contributing | 8 | 44.44 | 14 | 3 | 16.67 | 3 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 |
| Networking & who you know | 8 | 44.44 | 17 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 | 0 |
| Systemic/External factors (institution, job-market, sexism, racism, interpersonal aspects) | 1 | 5.56 | 1 | 13 | 72.22 | 22 | 4 | 22.22 | 6 |
| Financial situation | 4 | 22.22 | 6 | 8 | 44.44 | 9 | 7 | 38.89 | 12 |
| Knowledge/Information/Certainty | 1 | 5.56 | 1 | 6 | 33.33 | 8 | 4 | 22.22 | 5 |
| Experience (work/life) | 7 | 38.89 | 8 | 1 | 5.56 | 1 | 6 | 33.33 | 7 |
| Educational opportunities/Training and specialized education | 6 | 33.33 | 8 | 1 | 5.56 | 1 | 6 | 33.33 | 7 |
| Indigenous background/Cultural factors | 5 | 27.78 | 8 | 5 | 27.78 | 5 | 3 | 16.67 | 4 |
| Courage & Self-Worth (vs. Fear/Doubt in Self/Others) | 4 | 22.22 | 6 | 5 | 27.78 | 6 | 1 | 5.56 | 1 |

Note. P# = Number of Participants; P% = Percentage of Participants; I# = Number of Incidents

Setting Goals/Taking Initiative/ (Career-Related)/Focusing on Interests

Eleven participants (61%) reported goal setting and taking initiative as helping in their career decision-making. The incidents included in this category focus on planned strategies that are aimed towards increasing career success through activities such as career assessment, career exploration, goal setting and taking career-related initiatives (focusing on future job options or educational paths). Also included are activities that are based on interest/passion, which have influenced future career decision-making. One of the participants stated that “research has really helped me a lot, like researching online. Anything available online that explains processes like university processes, tuition, watching the job market on Indeed, and the pay scales that the government puts out ... it kind of helps me plan out my career like anything that’s available online.” (274)

Support From Community/Mentors

This category was represented by 11 participants (61%). There was also a representation of hindering incidents and wish list items for this category with 39% and 33% of participants respectively. When participants reported critical incidents that were associated with support they received (or not) from the community, or significant people/mentors in their life such as a teacher, coach, friend, or a boss, they were included in this category. It also comprises incidents that are related to larger organizational support. (This category does *not* include family members.) An example of how support from community and mentors were helpful can be seen

in this quote from a participant who mentioned that “surrounding myself with people who are doing the best of the best of their work [has helped]. I’m very inspired by the women that sit at the table because they’re very strong but they’re also very gentle again... they’re laughing and they’re so lighthearted, and they very much help the conversations around policies take shape so subtly and that’s their power.” (789)

A Healthy Way (Physical, Mental, Social & Spiritual)

Eight out of 18 participants (44%) mentioned helping incidents that belonged to the healthy way category. Also, seven participants (39%) talked about incidents in this category that they considered hindering. The critical incidents in this category pertain to how career decision-making has been influenced by a healthy (or unhealthy) lifestyle such as counter-acting negativity, practicing self-care, avoiding drugs and alcohol, staying away from bad debt, choosing to surround oneself with positive people. Also included are factors related to mental health and behavioural/emotional problems in self or family. One participant reflecting on their personal experience stated that “the one thing that I would say is important is developing your own self-care discipline. Understanding when, why and what your spirit and your emotional body need. I think this is even more important than exercising. To be connected spiritually and emotionally to those around you, what you’re doing, where you’re coming from, and where you see yourself, it just ties you to absolutely everything.” (789)

Finding meaning/Motivation & Contributing

Similar to the previous category, eight participants (44%) reported critical incidents they believed were helpful from this category. These are incidents that have inspired the participants or motivated them in a way that influenced their career decision-making towards meaning making. They also refer to factors related to personal/cultural identity and ways in which they capitalized opportunities to make a difference to others through career decision-making. According to a participant, “having a child makes you feel like you have a lot more responsibility to get things right. I have the most insanely compassionate child. Honestly, if I’m having a hard day, she says ‘mom do you need a hug?’ Just give me a hug and I’ll feel better. So, in that, in that moment whatever is going on is not really that important in the grand scheme of things. She helps me feel like a deeper sense of purpose.” (331)

Networking & Who You Know

This category also had eight participants (44%) mention incidents that were helpful. The incidents in this category reflects participants’ access to (or lack of) people, connections, networks that they believe are related to career decision-making (increasing familiarity). They also include using social media as well as in-person interactions initiated/maintained by the participant or which they became a part of. One of the participants talks about how they build relationships in the workplace: “So, my approach in the workplace is generally to build really close relationships. And that, that helps me certainly, certainly internally. So, like I generally tend to have very

healthy and strong relationships with my managers, my superiors. But also externally, so a lot of the work I do is about having a strong relationship with someone who works for a different company.” (149)

Experience (Work/Life)

This category is the last of the seven categories that had higher representation of helping incidents with about 39% of participants mentioning at least one helping incident belonging to this category. This denotes previous experience related to work, education, training, or life that have contributed (or lack thereof) towards the process of career decision-making. These experiences may have been gathered from any life context such as home, school, workplace, community, or culture. According to a participant, “I’ve done so many different things, and had so many different experiences, which have gotten me so many different jobs. A lot of us have that experience of ... we’ve been casual, temporary, all the things. ... I think that makes us more well-rounded.” (939)

Hindering

There were four categories where critical incidents associated with hindering items were more represented than helping or wish list items and one category with equal participation rate for both helping and hindering incidents.

Systemic/External Factors (Institution, Job-Market, Sexism, Racism, Interpersonal Aspects)

This category had the highest participation rate (72%). The incidents in this category are related to factors external to the participants

and those that are beyond their control such as institutional structures, policies and practices of government/organization, experiences of oppression and discrimination that influence career decision-making. Also included are personal characteristics and interpersonal factors that cannot be changed. One participant stated that “My responsibilities as an Indigenous person sometimes don’t align with my responsibilities as a university employee. And my responsibilities as, as a graduate student who is kind of motivated by faculty to critique a lot of things that I see kind of doesn’t always align with somebody who works in a university” (678). Another participant (928) alluded to both sexism and racism in the workplace. According to her, “being a woman ... especially at the oilfield jobs” was challenging. She said that, “it just made me not want to achieve...and I was just okay with whatever job I was doing”. She added that “they also gossiped about me as well, which made me not want to be at this job and I wonder now if it was based on the fact that I’m Indigenous ... I’m not too sure what the factor was in that situation.”

Financial Situation

When participants mentioned incidents related to money or financial situations that have impacted their career decision-making, they were included under this category. They may be related to affordability of education/housing, funding for school, financial stress, or poverty. With 44% of participants reporting financial situations as hindering and 39% of participants mentioning this as their wish list, this category is very salient in terms of being critical to career decision-making. One participant mentioned: “I have to look at the

financial aspect . . . I always have to budget in terms of everything that I am doing. I wanted to have an income that financially supports all the other activities and everything, because I have realized that just raising my kids on like on low income does not allow to do much activities.” (249)

Knowledge/Information/Certainty

This is a category that 33% participants reported as hindering. This category includes incidents that make reference to access to (or lack of) information or having knowledge/awareness about labour market, education, workplace, and career strategies that have influenced their career decision-making. This category also includes aspects related to managing uncertainty and how that has affected decision-making. According to one participant, “My lack of awareness, my lack of knowledge of the current labour market and what was coming in, what jobs were going to be in demand in the future and all that I had no idea. So, labour market information was one that would be a hindering factor at the time.” (938)

Courage & Self-Worth (vs. Fear/ Doubt in Self/Others)

With 28% of participants reporting an incident from this category, it is also a category that had more hindering incidents than helpful or wish list items. This category includes incidents reported by participants that allude to inner strength, courage, and finding value in one’s worth (or lack of) that has affected career decision-making. These are factors that are more internal to them such as aspects of personality, faith and attitudes and beliefs about self, which according to them are associated with career decision-making.

One of the participants said, “I didn’t have the greatest self-esteem growing up; it’s still something I’m working on. It is just taking longer to make those decisions, even if you have a general idea kind of in the back of your mind that it’s a good decision to make; I had heard about that admin thing for a long time, but it took me a really, really long time to actually, to actually decide on that even though I knew in the back of my head it was a good idea. So, I think it just, it kind of delays things a bit more than is really necessary.” (631)

Indigenous Background/Cultural Factors

This category has equal participation rates for both helping and hindering incidents (28%). These relate to the participants’ experiences of their Indigenous culture that have influenced career decision-making. These experiences may be associated with the challenges and opportunities that were unique to their cultural heritage along with the meaning associated with aspects of culture such as faith, ancestry and ceremonies that influenced career decision-making. One of the participants reported “I knew that I didn’t fit into the environment and culture of the construction company that I worked at before; I just kind of felt that I was like a fly on the wall, that I was just looking at how corporations treated Indigenous peoples.” (274)

Wish List

There were four categories that had participation rates of 25% and above such as support from community/mentors; financial situation; experience—work life; and educational opportunities/training and specialized education. Only the latter had

a participation rate that was equal to or higher than hindering or wish list items belonging to the same category, which is discussed below.

Educational Opportunities/Training & Specialized Education

The incidents in this category had a participation rate of 33% participation. Incidents describe opportunities that the participants got (or did not get) to attend an educational program, which they reported as impacting their career decision-making. These may pertain to specialized training, a skills course, or education in general. Of the many participants who shared their dreams of acquiring more education, one participant mentioned that he would love to have an opportunity for post-secondary education. He said “It would give me accreditation, which would feel reassuring. But I think that it would also be a strong opportunity to flesh out part of my skill set. ... It would be great to be able to go and get a business administration degree or work towards getting an MBA.” (149)

Discussion

Findings from this study echo themes identified in the literature, particularly around the centrality of community and relationship in Indigenous identity. This study also contributes novel findings through exploring the little studied career experiences of Indigenous young adults. In our discussion, we aim to connect these emerging themes to the established literature on young adult career decision-making, and explore those factors that are unique and pertinent to Indigenous populations. The results of our study reflect three dimensions that help understand the career decision-making process of Indigenous

young adults. These dimensions are systemic, interpersonal, and experiential (personal) aspects that they believe have helped and hindered their career decision-making.

Systemic Influences

The findings of this qualitative exploratory study reiterate what Indigenous people have long been emphasizing with regards to what communities deem important for successful career development. The discrediting and even criminalization of Indigenous cultural practices, sponsored by the Western system of administration, has impacted the very meaning of work, vocation, and career to Indigenous people. Hence, the participants have identified systemic factors associated with doing well with career decision-making. Indigenous young people making career decisions in a Western dominated society noted that their Indigenous background and culture is a factor that has both helped and hindered their career decision-making. One of the systemic factors that was highlighted was education, which has previously been acknowledged in research involving Indigenous young people. For example, Stewart and Reeves (2013) discuss the relationship between career development and post-secondary education for Indigenous people highlighting the challenges young people face when navigating the landscape of education that is far removed from Indigenous ways of knowing and being. To make a transition into the vocational system of the Euro-Canadian world, there is a need for opportunities to bridge this gap of cultural divide. Financial circumstances also emerged as a significant concern for many participants. While individual participants might have framed this as a person-

al concern, a broader view of the Canadian socio-economic landscape is telling that this is a systemic issue, which directly ties to the impacts of colonialism.

The participants in this study who identified themselves as doing well with career decision-making acknowledged that the opportunities to get a Western education, though flawed, were helpful. The need for inclusive education continues to exist, and yet equity of access is not fully realized in many sectors of education where Indigenous young people would like to enroll and pursue education of their choosing. Many participants wish that they could get an opportunity in the future for education and specialized training, which at the moment is a challenge due to the many systemic barriers. The systemic factors that are identified in previous literature, which is consistent with the findings of this study include discrimination, lack of initiative to understand Indigenous worldview and philosophy, institutional structures, policies and practices of government and organizations founded on Western knowledge that put disproportionate emphasis on rationality and empiricism, and logical positivism (Caverley et al., 2014).

Interpersonal Context

Another dimension which was reflected by three categories relates to the interpersonal context of career decision-making. While the last two decades have increasingly paid more attention to the relational aspect of career development (Schultheiss, 2007), they become more relevant when applied to the career decision-making of Indigenous young adults. Relationships – both family based and outside the family – have an enormous impact on many aspects

of career decision-making, starting from being oriented to the very definition of career to prioritizing career decisions based on relational values. The Euro-Canadian culture within which most of the Indigenous young people in this study are making career decisions reflects a worldview that is founded on individualism (Blustein, 2011). There is a call to rethink career as a merely individual enterprise, with success and failures mostly resting on the shoulders of the one making the decisions, and to reframe it as a contribution of and to the community. This study echoes the dominant worldview of Indigenous people wherein being connected and sharing a sense of community comes before what would be considered career success in the Western world (McCormick & Amundson, 1997).

One of the findings of this study that reflects the interpersonal dimension of career development is the mentoring and support participants received or wish to receive from the community. This finding is consistent with earlier studies, which revealed that successful career development for Indigenous young people is anchored on modeling and mentoring. Stewart and Reeves (2009), in a qualitative study that used narratives of Indigenous graduate students, found that one of the contributors to the successful career development pathways for these students was the availability of mentoring in the university – both related to their educational/vocational needs and their personal lives. It is especially important that Indigenous young adults have access to Indigenous mentors, to support the development of community and belonging, as well as helping guide and inform career decision-making in culturally relevant ways (Goodwill et al., 2019). The findings of the current study re-emphasize the need for mentoring

relationships in conceptualizing what successful career development means for Indigenous young people. The current study extends these findings to also include networking opportunities.

Experiential (Personal) Process

Along with the systemic and interpersonal dimensions of career decision-making, we also have the experiential and personal dimension reflected in these ECIT interviews. The categories that highlight personal qualities, experiences, and patterns of behaviour with the associated feelings, thoughts and attitudes are stated as important determinants of career decision-making as reported by the Indigenous young people in this study. Some of these qualities were identified as helpful, such as setting goals, taking initiative, following a healthy way of life, and finding meaning and motivation. However, there were others that were reported as hindering, such as lacking courage, inability to affirm their self-worth, and experiencing fear and doubt both in relation to the self, others, and the future. These results can be best interpreted using the Indigenous wholistic framework (Pidgeon, 2016), which helps understand the interconnections of the self with other communities at different levels including global communities; also, the framework acknowledges how the physical self is connected to spiritual, intellectual, and emotional aspects of the self. The balance of these interrelationships is where the needs arising from these linkages are well met. Another perspective is the developmental framework, especially as pertaining to minority youth development. According to Neblett et al. (2012), ethnic-racial socialization plays an important role in minority youth experience

and response to the developmental tasks associated with each stage of growth. Of particular importance are the “promotive” and “protective” factors (Neblett et al., 2012) related to overcoming the challenges associated with discrimination, threats to identity development, and forced acculturation of Indigenous young adults as a result of systemic oppression stemming from colonization. They apply to the career development of Indigenous young adults as well. The experiential and personal dimensions identified in this study may be considered similar to the promotive and protective factors that emerge as a result of struggling to adapt in the Western Euro-centred world of work and labour market where career pathways that are unique to Indigenous ways of life are neither acknowledged nor valued. Hence, the need to adapt builds resilience in some young people, but also leaves self-doubt and fear in others.

Implications for Career Counselling

It is evident that systemic injustices have created inequities in access to information, opportunities, and relationships that Indigenous young adults want and need in their career pursuits. Many of the participants highlighted the hindering impacts of systemic and external factors in their career decision-making. This highlights an important need for career counsellors supporting Indigenous young adults to have a grounding in Indigenous cultural safety and an attitude of cultural humility when doing cross-cultural work. While not all participants spoke about culture, it appeared as both a helping and hindering factor in this study; participants spoke of drawing strength from their cultures, but also feeling out of place or unwelcome

due to their ancestry. Career counsellors working with Indigenous young adults might need to be flexible in how they engage around questions of culture, inviting their clients to incorporate this as much or as little as fits for them. Career counsellors also need to be able to assess for cultural inclusivity in certain labour market contexts, as a way of understanding client experiences.

Among the helping incidents, participants highlighted the benefits of supportive relationships, networking opportunities, goal setting, and taking initiative. With this in mind, career counsellors can assist by listening for those missed opportunities, and facilitate in filling these gaps where possible. Particularly where Indigenous young people might be experiencing self-doubt or low sense of self-worth, the opportunity for witnessing role models who have navigated similar contexts and challenges would significantly increase their efficacy in work roles and development. Indigenous peoples move through systems and structures in ways that are distinct from non-Indigenous peoples, and role models can affirm pathways that have successfully worked through the tensions and challenges. Also relevant is the need to design interventions that are group based and help foster relationships both at a professional level and involving opportunities for shared cultural initiatives.

On an individual level, career counsellors could affirm clients' worldviews, explore skills for navigating challenging relationships, and be well versed in employment rights around cultural diversity. It is also important that the field of psychology continues to use its influence to keep holding society accountable for creating equitable and just living conditions for all people. An emergent finding

from this study, that builds on themes of the importance of relationship in Indigenous traditions, is that of mentorship. Career counsellors may serve themselves as a type of mentor, and may also assist clients in establishing mentorship relationships within their communities or fields of interest. The results of this study also call for varied interventions that include support around accessing financial resources. The dissemination of information related to financial supports that already exist for the career development of young people must be aligned with strategies to target policy for increased funding in this area.

Limitations and Areas for Future Study

While this study contributes to an important gap in the literature around understanding the unique career decision-making experiences of Indigenous young adults, some limitations are worth noting. The researchers incorporated some training, particularly around interview approaches, for working with Indigenous populations, however it did not incorporate an explicitly decolonizing or Indigenous methodology. According to Goodwill et al., 2016, “Locating oneself in the research is integral to Indigenous research methodology and decolonizing the role of research among Indigenous peoples”. Further research in this area could benefit from more deeply integrating Indigenous methodologies at all levels of their approach. Because the ECIT method draws from participant accounts, it is reliant on participant recollections and interpretations of events. Findings may therefore be influenced by communication and memory-related factors. Further, because we specifically interviewed those individuals

who perceived themselves as *doing well* in their career decision-making, we do not know the extent to which these findings apply to those who may not identify this way. Future research could benefit from exploring the experiences of a broader range of Indigenous young adults, as well as specific applications of career counselling for these populations.

Conclusion

This study provided an opportunity to listen to the experiences of Indigenous young adults making career decisions. Indigenous young adults who see themselves as doing well in career decision-making spoke about drawing strength from their relationships and cultural heritage, and being able to make use of career opportunities and networks. They also spoke about overcoming substantial systemic challenges including financial barriers, self-doubt, and lack of implicit knowledge about the workforce. The findings of the study guide our attention to the systemic, interpersonal, and experiential dimensions associated with the transition of Indigenous young adults entering the workforce. These findings inform areas of opportunity for career practitioners and policy makers in terms of increased awareness as well as areas of focus to consider when working with Indigenous young people. The importance of access to social and systemic supports has been reiterated; they include tangible financial and educational supports, including access to relevant funding. On the interpersonal front there is a need to support mentorship and networking opportunities, and other ways for Indigenous young people to develop cross-cultural understanding of the workforce. Career interventions should also focus on integrating Indigenous cultural

safety and cultural humility in facilitating career development of Indigenous young people. With regards to personal experience of young people making career decisions, we were able to identify strengths of courage and resilience that helped Indigenous young people overcome barriers to vocational success in spite of fears and doubts. While this study informed initial exploration, we hope that researchers, policy makers, and career development practitioners including career counsellors will aim to tailor their approach and interventions based on what Indigenous young adults have identified as helping and hindering (along with their wish list) in doing well with career decision-making.

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