INDIGENOUS FOOTPRINTS ALONG THE CAREER JOURNEY
BETWEEN ADOLESCENCE AND ADULTHOOD

By
Lianne M. Britten.
B.A. (Lib. Studies), R.M.I.H.E., 1988
P.D.P., S.F.U. 1994

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Counselling Psychology)

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2006.

© Lianne M. Britten, 2006
ABSTRACT

Career development and transitions are hot topics at this time. Research into First Nation’s culture has also begun to receive the attention it deserves. However these two concepts have rarely been researched simultaneously as one phenomenon. Notable gaps occur in career development and First Nation’s literature. Cultural influences, worldview differences, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes are all elements of life for anyone. For First Nation’s people these multiple realities are further imbued with complexities not widely understood by non-Aboriginal peoples and as such the concepts of “career”, “success”, “transition” and “career development” may not fit with Aboriginal paradigms of research and with the Aboriginal population in general.

Little is known about career development with regard to minority populations and even less is known about First Nations’ career development. Similarly another rarely researched phenomenon in any population is career development during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. With high rates of unemployment, low rates of high school graduation, drug and alcohol abuse, high suicidality and other difficulties faced by many First Nation’s youth this issue is of crucial importance to future success (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Health, 1996). Consequently it is important that positive stories from this culture be heard. Most research up to this juncture has been focussed upon non-minority population adolescent employment rather than the outcomes of schooling and other factors during the transition from adolescence to adulthood (Leventhal, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). My study has attempted to shed light on some of the factors that have helped and hindered First Nation’s youth during this transitional period. A sample of 8 (n=8) First Nations young adults, aged 20 to 28 years,
were interviewed using a Critical Incident Technique. The participants were recruited from local Vancouver populations. The research involved the collection of data by interviewing participants using an open-ended question format to record each participant’s story and to explore critical influences upon their career development. Findings from this research were found to be relevant to a range of settings including First Nations’ employment counselling services, therapy for youth-at-risk, school counselling for First Nation’s youth, and multicultural therapy.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ABSTRACT** .................................................................................................................. ii

**TABLE OF CONTENTS** ................................................................................................. iv

**LIST OF TABLES** .......................................................................................................... viii

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ............................................................................................... ix

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION** ...................................................................................... 1

  - Rationale ...................................................................................................................... 4
  - Bracketing .................................................................................................................... 7
  - Definition of Terms ..................................................................................................... 10
  - The Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................ 11
  - The Research Question ............................................................................................... 12
  - Significance of this Study ........................................................................................... 13

**CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW** ........................................................................... 15

  - Overview of First Nations Literature ........................................................................ 15
  - Career Development ................................................................................................ 16
  - Transitions ................................................................................................................. 21
  - First Nations Wellness ............................................................................................... 25
  - Summary of the Literature ......................................................................................... 30

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY** .................................................................................... 33

  - The Critical Incident Technique ............................................................................... 34
  - Recruiting Procedure ............................................................................................... 39
  - Data Collection Procedures ..................................................................................... 41
  - Interview Procedures ............................................................................................... 42
  - Piloting the Interview Questions .............................................................................. 42
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The First Interview</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Interview Process</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Interview</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extracting Critical Incident Items</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forming the Categories</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining the Credibility of the Categories</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 4: RESULTS</strong></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category Descriptions</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful Critical Incidents</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 1: Family</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 1A: Role Models</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 1B: Support/Environment/Stability</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 2: Wellness</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 2A: Alcohol &amp; Drugs</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 2B: Spirituality/Rituals/Creativity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 2C: Maintaining Physical Health</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 2D: Self Esteem</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category 3: School</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 3A: Expectations for Success</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subdivision 3B: Teachers</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Critical Incidents totals by group ........................................... 65
Table 2: List of Helpful categories, participation rates and respective frequencies ...... 67
Table 3: List of hindering critical incident categories, participation rates and their Respective Frequencies ......................................................... 93
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. William A. Borgen, my thesis supervisor, for his incredible support and guidance throughout this process. His unflagging availability at all hours, his patience, enthusiasm, understanding and expertise were invaluable in the production of this thesis and my gratitude for this is immeasurable.

Special thanks goes to the people who helped me to recruit the participants in this study, not least of which include Valerie Monkman and Norma Guerin. Their assistance and enthusiasm for my project were invaluable and I am honoured by their trust and support of this project.

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation goes out to the participants themselves. I will forever remain grateful and honoured that these incredible people shared so much of themselves, and trusted me with incredibly touching stories that are their lives and their journeys to a place filled with hope and success. I am truly appreciative of the time, honesty and support these people gave to this study and hope this thesis is worthy of those sacrifices.

A special thank you goes out to my colleagues in the education and counseling psychology field and to my cohort for their support, guidance, feedback and encouragement. I would especially like to thank Ms. Lee Butterfield for her amazing inspiration and tremendous feedback. Without her guidance and assistance in so many ways I doubt I would have made it. Secondly, I would also like to thank my friend, Leanne Fessler, for her continued support and understanding, as well as her positive feedback and the ability to consult with me at anytime. Thank you both! I would like to acknowledge my teaching colleagues, Greg Hockley, Kelly Berry and Grant Mundell for their support in terms of giving their time, encouragement and belief in me. The support will always be remembered.

I also would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Ishu Ishuyama, and Dr. Marv Westwood for their support, encouragement and interest in this research project.

I would like to thank my parents, Ken and Margaret Britten for always believing that I can achieve anything and the love and support they endlessly give. Three friends, Tim McLeary, Marna Thomas and Devon Harabalja also figure greatly in terms of the continued support, pushes to finish and the unerring belief that I could actually do this, even when I didn’t!

The last mention I make is to thank the Creator for all that has been given to me and the endless gifts I have received. The circle continues, life is joined to life and heart and hand unite. Haitchka!
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I did not know then how much was ended. When I look back now from this high
hill of my old age, I can still see the butchered women and children lying heaped
and scattered ... And I can see that something else died there in the bloody mud,
and was buried in the blizzard. A people’s dream died there. It was a beautiful
dream... the nation’s hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer
and the sacred tree is dead.
Black Elk
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee (1979).

The dreams of many people in the indigenous communities are still alive and
well. The concurrent realities of life on reserves and in urban centres for many of these
people, however, is submerged under the mire of oppression, multiple mental and
physical health issues, and the real circumstance of poverty. Today the dreams of many
youths are being lost in a haze of negative media, reality and oppression. In order to help
stem the future loss of dreams it is important to tell stories of positivity from this
population and help slow the tide of loss.

Overwhelming statistics report the many problems that First Nations’ societies are
subject to, and First Nation’s youth are often featured as being the most problematic
element of this society. High unemployment rates, poverty and suicide are illustrative of
the wide disparity in career achievement for Native people in relation to many other
socio-cultural and ethnic groups across North America (Juntunen et al., 2001). In 2002
The British Columbia Ministry of Education released a report indicating the 61% of
Aboriginal youth did not graduate within six years of beginning grade 8. Other statistics
included high dropout rates for Aboriginal students compared with non-Aboriginal
students, and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal students in special education and
under-representation in gifted programs (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2002). These current statistics are reinforced by older statistics within America citing high rates of poverty and deprivation for many indigenous communities. In 1990 the U.S Bureau of the Census reported that 31% of Native peoples lived below the poverty levels and of 760,000 available employees in the American Indian population, 50% were unemployed, of those that were employed, 30% were receiving wages below the poverty guidelines. According to recent statistics from Health Canada (2003) the leading causes of death for aboriginal youth and young adults were suicide and self-injury. 38% of Aboriginal youth aged 10-19 years deaths were a result of suicide and self-inflicted injuries, and that rate decreases marginally to 23% from age 20-44 years. The rate of 4,909 deaths per 100,000 people due to injury for Aboriginal peoples is almost four times the national Canadian average (1,271) for the same category (Health Canada, 2003). Further statistics from British Columbia’s Ministry of Education and British Columbia Statistics (2001) site a 62.9% labour force participation rate for Aboriginal peoples with a 48.7% employment rate and a 22.5% unemployment rate. These statistics contrast markedly with non-Aboriginal participation rates (65.3%), employment rates of 59.3% and an 8.5% unemployment rate.

While the gap has been reduced between 1996 and 2001 there are still marked gaps in incomes between Aboriginal peoples (median income $13,242) versus non-Aboriginal Canadians (median income of $22,095). When considering employment income only, Aboriginal people earned 64.7% as much as non-Aboriginals (BC Ministry of Education, BC Statistics, 2001). The increasingly depressing statistics do not reflect the gains that have been made by Aboriginal people in this time. In a mere 5 years
Aboriginals experienced a 5.5% increase in real earned income over previous reported statistics. These improvements come in the face of many obstacles. It is vital for future generations of First Nation’s youth to be privy to these stories of success in employment and real gains made so that these successes can be replicated or at the very least, celebrated by the communities. Such celebration takes on even greater significance when it is understood that the Aboriginal population is young in comparison to the non-Aboriginal population. In order to continue reducing the gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal employment and income status it is imperative that this pool of youth be able to access equal education and employment opportunities (BC Ministry of Education; BC Statistics, 2001).

Other sources also constantly site the plight of indigenous peoples here in British Columbia. News stories from the Okanagan in 2005 concentrated on murders and rivalry as well as other endemic problems in the Penticton Native band without reference to any measures of positives in that community. Media sources report the abuse of free access to prescription medications and the cost to taxpayers. According to van der Woerd and Cox (2003) Aboriginal communities suffering from many of the above-mentioned issues cannot afford the fallout from continuing low graduation rates from high school. Very few sources in print or media concentrate on the success stories that are experienced within this culture. Studies that have incorporated Native elements in consideration of vocational interests are based on Western methodologies which fail to consider the Native paradigm when using measures such as Holland or the Self Directed Search, or measures of self-efficacy and other popularly used career measures (Juntunen, 2001). Little research is actually available with regard to North American aboriginals, and of the
existent research much of it is critical of the Western cultural bias that is endemic in this research. Given the need for understanding the uniqueness of issues and concerns that face minority populations across the spectrum (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004), it is increasingly evident that a new paradigm must be used when working with such populations, and this paradigm should not merely focus on the negatives previously studied.

The history of First Nation’s people from the first contact with white people speaks of disempowerment, paternalism, demoralization, loss and devastation. Rarely in the literature has voice been given to the resilience of these people and the stalwart resistance to definitions imposed by external entities. Ways of being, oral traditions, storytelling, ways of knowing, culture and language are all facets of Native understanding of life (Paulsen, 2003). Traditional academic research has often failed to give respect to these types of Native understanding and for these reasons much research and literature written has failed to include respect for Native cultural traditions. This study comes from a paradigm of trying to respect previously invalidated ways of knowing and understanding that are a central component of indigenous people’s lives. Therefore many articles such as first person narratives of Natives are included as references.

Rationale for the Study

Research on adolescents and the transition into adulthood is scarce. Noteworthy gaps occur when looking at adolescent employment and the outcomes of adolescent employment on the transition to adulthood. Furthermore little research has been done to look at associations between adolescent employment and goals for the future in the contexts of family, schooling, environment, and ethnicity (Leventhal, Graber, & Brooks-
Research in the field of change and career development has shown that transitions cause many problems in life and the transition from adolescence into adulthood has important effects upon future career choices of individuals and general life directions.

Transitions cause difficulty for many people. Transitions have been studied in many different guises and with many different populations and are seen as the means by which people react to and experience change. Additionally, transitions that involve adjustment of a cultural norm and ways of behaviours different from the individual’s culture are even more complex (Arthur, 2000). Ishiyama (1995) identifies disruption in the usual sources of personal validation as one of the many causes of personal stress, and this stress then becomes associated with a multitude of responses, both adaptive and maladaptive.

Transitional theories have been proposed by many including; Super, (1969), Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman, (1995), Sugarman, (1986), and Bridges, (1995). Models of transition attempt to describe the responses to change that each individual encounters, including changes in environment and in personal life. There are many types of change, and many different degrees of impact of change, and it is important to note that not all change causes stress. However, it has been recognized through the research of such theories as life role, life-span development and life stage theories (Super, 1969; Sugarman, 1986; Schlossberg, Waters and Goodman, 1995; and Bridges, 1995), that transition is a primary cause of stress. It is also noted that stress arises from both positive and negative change, not merely negative.
With regard to First Nation’s populations few studies regarding this transition have occurred. First Nation’s people from Canada are often seen as alienated in their homelands. Such cultural difficulties and the history of colonization may be very influential in terms of this study and this phenomenon has had well researched effects on indigenous society. Unfortunately, the resilience and power of those who have survived and succeeded, especially among First Nation’s youth, has rarely been examined with respect to career development. Furthermore, the exploration of First Nation’s youths’ perspectives upon transition through adolescence to adulthood is scarce, and research into transitions with regard to career development with First Nation’s is relatively non-existent. Borgen, Amundson, and Tench, (1996) examined psychological well-being during the transition from adolescence to adulthood, in a quantitative study with high school students from Burnaby, British Columbia, to examine need satisfaction and identity formation as essential components of healthy adulthood. Yet the question remains as to whether such ideas of identity formation as based on western concepts have incorporated the environmental, individual, spiritual and cultural components so central to First Nations youth. Also, while this was an exploratory study, the follow-up research in career development with relation to adolescent transition into adulthood is scarce.

Transition is a difficult component of life for all people, not just First Nation’s people. Sometimes it is the similarities between experiences that are not focussed upon, but rather the differences. It is important to keep in mind that this study comes from the perspective that individual experiences can be both similar and different and each story is meant to offer an in-depth perspective of one person’s lived experience of the phenomenon of transition that is not necessarily applicable to others.
A final complexity in the issue of First Nation youth, career development and transitions is the constant bombardment on our senses of negative images of youth in general. Stereotyped portrayals of youth in general are furnished via many media sources and word of mouth. Crime statistics, fear of terrorism, and many other images constantly remind us of the continuing downward spiral of humanity, and little hope is given to us for our up and coming generations. For First Nation's youth the problems are amplified as a result of the years of discriminatory policy at the governmental level that have left a huge scar on the fabric of this society. Many factors have added to the complexity of carving a “successful” path through life for many First Nation’s people (Miller, 1990; Crofoot Graham, 2002; Dickson & Green, 2001; Gamlin, 2003). My study will hopefully be a testament to those people who have survived the difficult journey into adulthood and defined themselves as “doing well”. It is hoped that through listening to the voices of young people who have self-identified as “successful” in life, in the face of multiple types of oppression based on race, gender, class and age, ideas will be changed about this specific population studied. Also, it is hoped that this study will provide valuable insight into the lived experience of career development and transitions into adulthood for employment counsellors, teachers, parents, and any other people working with First Nation’s young people. Moreover, through the use of a qualitative paradigm that allows for individuals to tell their own stories it is hoped that cultural norms can be respected and the imposition of researcher bias will be limited.

Bracketing

I preface this section with one statement; “My blood is as red as yours, but my skin reflects the external differences of our internal experiences”, (Britten, 2004).
Working with other cultures engenders a myriad of ethical dilemmas. The literature clearly addresses many problems associated with working cross-culturally and “treading on” feet and egos as we walk so warily across the quagmire of possible misunderstandings, misrepresentations and misinterpretations. It is from one basis that I work from with regard to other people regardless of culture, ethnicity, age, gender, race or religion/spirituality; that foundation is respect. Underlying all my efforts in this work is the belief that with respect and an open mind I can try to bypass many of the limitations that are inherently mine as I work from the perspective of an educated Caucasian, Australian-Canadian, single female.

I have had extensive contact with other cultures beginning with my exchange as a Grade 12 student to the U.S.A, and culminating in my immigration from Australia to Canada. I have also worked extensively with minority populations and been personally involved with many First Nations cultures including the Metis, Musqueam and some Plains Indian tribes. I have lived with a Musqueam family and am still intimately involved with them. Two of my best friends are from indigenous cultures here in North America and through my high school years in Australia my best friend was Aboriginal. I have also taught and tutored ESL students, from the ages 10 – 70 for over 8 years at all levels. Currently I am a member of the Aboriginal Education Committee for the North Vancouver School Board, and for the past year I have also been on the North Shore Youth and Family Justice Committee. Both of these positions have given me an insight into many aspects of life for youth, but particularly they add to my experience with the First Nations communities and my knowledge of the issues currently facing aboriginal youth. My intimate knowledge of minority cultures is in no way meant to prove extensive
knowledge of the phenomenon of being a minority, it is merely meant as a preface and foundation to my own personal biases and understandings of myself as I begin to research this population. Furthermore, my gender (female) has given me personal insight into power paradigms and oppression.

Key assumptions I bring to this research include the knowledge that general indigenous populations and indigenous individuals can have differences in their experiences of life, as is the case with all populations of humanity. I expect to find many different reasons for success and the phenomenon of “wellness” in indigenous cultures. My choice of using a critical incident technique is expressly for the exploratory nature of trying to find some common categories, however, this may not occur due to the widely variant experiences of people no matter what cultural background, or belief system. My own values, cultural background and ethnicity, as well as my own personal experience of being “foreign” will form a component of how I interpret my data. Finding categories is an expectation, however, it was also possible that I would find categories very different to other researchers given the exploratory nature of my research and the acknowledgement that individual experiences are diverse. My openly curious and respectful nature towards other cultures, as well as my personal experience of being a part of the First Nations culture (albeit as an outsider) was also a component of how my data was interpreted.

In contrast to my belief that I am open-minded and respectful is the knowledge that my own cultural background, experiences and socioeconomic status bear great influence upon how I wrote, interviewed, and reported my findings during this research. However, by being aware of many of my own limitations and relying on a wide variety of professionals, colleagues, First Nation friends, and peers to review and help guide me in
this process, I hope that the majority of my value-laden perspectives are either clearly acknowledged in my writing or clearly missing from the interpretations and manner in which I conducted and reported my research.


The old men say the earth only endures. You spoke truly. You are right. (Brown, 1979).

I hoped that I have brought stories of truth and respect in this research.

Definition of Terms

As mentioned above, the term “success” is meant as a directional term rather than a limitation to the inquiry. The self-identification of success by the participants is central to the exploration of career development from the participant’s perspectives. Secondly, the term First Nation’s refers to the indigenous peoples of North America, including but not exclusively, the Musqueam, Tsawassen and Squamish nations, Metis people, and any other bands as well as any person who self-identifies as Aboriginal with any mix of heritage. Finally, the terms “career” and “career development” are also meant to be viewed as “directional” terms. Given that First Nation’s people may view these terms in ways completely different from the traditional Western perspective, career shall be seen as any means of life that has meaning to the participant. For the purposes of the proposed study the definition of “transition” offered by Bridge’s (1994) is used, denoting the concept of change as the experience felt by the individual. The term “connectedness” is meant to embody the intricate relations that form the basis of life including but not exclusively those of family, friends, culture, traditions, ethnicity, environment, individuals and society. This term is meant to personify the indigenous paradigm of
relationality, and the knowledge that we cannot and do not exist within a vacuum but are in fact intimately tied to all of the world around us and within us.

The Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of First Nations’ youth in order to understand the lived experiences of transition between adolescence and adulthood in terms of career development. I was interested in exploring the factors that helped and hindered these participants in their quest for success in life and career. Data was gathered in open-ended interviews and a critical incident analysis was employed to categorize themes that emerge. Detailed descriptions, stories and revelations from the participants were encouraged in order to explore the significant events that have led these people to identify themselves as “doing well” or as being successful. Using Tripp’s (1993) and Woolsey’s (1986) interpretations of Flanagan’s (1954) critical incident technique as the means of data analysis, the goal of exposing previously untold stories and delving deeper into the world of the First Nation’s youth experiences of career development transitions was positively encouraged. By sharing stories the oral tradition of First Nation’s people was honoured (Crofoot Graham, 2002), while simultaneously it provided examples of situations that are advantageous or unhelpful in the career development transition from school life to post-secondary school life. It was hoped that these experiences would provide examples of factors that were significant and helpful, as well as identifying factors that the participants thought would be helpful in the future, through the use of a “wish-list”. The emphasis on participant voice and the semi-structured interview hopefully addressed the traditional power imbalance often felt by
this culture in terms of imposed research as well as the reality of everyday discrimination that may or may not have occurred in their individual lives. The participants themselves, spoke of how this procedure was both interesting and more intense than they had expected, yet it also allowed them great latitude in expressing themselves and changing things they felt were not accurate. (This is discussed in the methodology section in Chapter 3.) Such validation of each individual’s lived experience was a critical component of this research study.

The Research Question

The research for this study centres on the question: How do First Nation’s youth journey along the path of career development during the transition from adolescence into adulthood? Open-ended questions and a semi-structured interview format were used to help bring out each individual’s story for the purpose of extracting critical incidents. Participants were asked to discuss what “doing well” meant to them. They were also asked what career and career development meant. Further, these participants were then asked to provide examples of challenging or problematic situations that they felt they had overcome and what had helped and hindered them in this process. It was expected that questions used in pilot interviews for the first two to three interviews would possibly be modified for subsequent interviews. It was hoped that categories would emerge from the data that would show how individuals were helped along the way, how individuals were hindered along their journey of discovery and what factors they wished would have been there to help them.
Significance of the Study

Today First Nations' people and others are doing much research into the lived experiences of minorities in many different facets of life. However, much of the current research has been done from a quantitative perspective. Although more qualitative studies are currently underway, the literature review revealed a paucity of research with regard to both career development for First Nations' people, and also for transitions of youth into adulthood in the context of career development. More qualitative research is needed to provide a deeper understanding of career, transitions, success, and career development from the point of view of First Nation's people, especially here in Canada. Through providing a means whereby First Nation's people could speak freely and give voice to their experiences, new definitions, new meanings and a greater understanding of the needs of this particular group could be explored. It was hoped that information from this study would be of help to First Nation’s communities, professionals, and lay people who work with these populations to provide better support and understanding for those people transitioning from secondary school to post-school life and careers.

Few studies have been done with regard to the journey from adolescence into adulthood in Canada. One study from the United States examined the representation of American Indians in vocational literature and the cultural factors that needed to be considered in vocational counselling (Juntunen et al., 2001). Such research is scarce and it is necessary to add to the present knowledge through conducting research that is cognizant of tribal traditions, cultural differences and spiritual considerations. More importantly, it is critical to First Nation’s people that positive voices be heard amongst...
the many negative images that surround portrayals of their cultures. More importantly, the uniqueness of individual stories heard by others could provide empowerment for future individuals to follow.

It was hoped that information revealed in this research shed some light on many factors that help and hinder the First Nations’ youth that participated in this study. Experiences shared will hopefully help us to learn about transitions and provide insight into resilience and success. Whatever information that has resulted from this study it is hoped that some light has been shed on previously untold stories from a relatively unknown population. The information from this study could be used by a wide variety of people including First Nation’s employment counsellors, school counsellors, parents, teachers and First Nation’s communities as a means of interpreting, understanding and providing support for people undergoing the transition from secondary school into post school life.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of First Nations Literature

What do we know about the journey from adolescence into adulthood? What are some of the issues and successes of indigenous youth here in British Columbia? Is it correct to assume that help is needed during this transition? How are the concepts of career and career development interpreted by First Nations’ young adults? How do these understandings affect the lived experiences of these young people as they move through the transition from secondary school to post-school life? None of these questions have been answered before and therefore any review of the literature has been speculative in nature. While it may be acceptable to assume that the following theories regarding career development, transitions and wellness are relevant to this study, only the stories of those who participated allowed us to consider the virtue of these current theories in light of the lived experiences of the participants. This chapter will provide a background to the study and summarize the literature found to be relevant to the study.

A review of the literature reveals a paucity of research in the field of First Nation’s career development. As a result this literature review focusses upon minority populations as well as indigenous populations. Furthermore, to pay respect to Aboriginal oral tradition some articles that will be utilized in this section, as mentioned previously, may not fit with the academic notion of suitably rigorous literature. For generations Native peoples have been fighting to attain equality and respect for oral traditions as well as the inclusion of spirituality and non-western perspectives on issues that feature prominently in First Nation’s wellness. For these reasons the literature search will also incorporate these components as a background to career development. According to
Wilson (2003), it is unfortunate that there is a need to justify the differences between indigenous research and the dominant-system of scholarly research. Wilson further elaborates upon the idea of "validity" as being based on separation rather than unification. For the purposes of this study, such separation is anathema to the indigenous concept and belief in unity and that knowledge is relational. According to Wilson, (2003) indigenous knowledge is based on the premise that all knowledge is shared with all creation and there are no boundaries between "all relations". For this study to maintain validity in the eyes of the population it is centered upon, it is therefore necessary to see career from the perspective of integration and interdependence as well as through differentiation and autonomy.

Career Development

As mentioned above the lack of research in the field of First Nations' career development caused me to look into the literature of minority groups for the purposes of career issues. Among the studies identified a number have dealt with African Americans, Latinos, women, disabled populations and runaway or homeless youth. While these minorities are studied separately in the literature it is difficult to ignore some of the similarities experienced in accessing equal opportunities in work that indigenous people may also experience. In a study focussing on women's career and professional development in developing countries, six female doctorate students were interviewed in order to assess challenges and experiences in undertaking higher education. From this study it was found that an intrinsic motivation to succeed was supplemented by an overriding feeling that traditional values and cultural expectations of the societies also placed limitations upon them. Many barriers were identified by
these women, including traditional pressures upon them to be wives and mothers as well as the "embedded" conceptions that the value of careers for women is marginally less than those of men. Pressures identified came from both external and internal sources. From this study it became clear that for women to succeed on a chosen career path they had to fulfill both socio-cultural expectations as well as personally held psychological beliefs and to develop exceptional determination to overcome the barriers posed by life (Bhalalusesa, 1998). My study may shed some light upon the varying pressures and obstacles that any minority group may feel, including First Nations’ people, when trying to establish themselves on any career path. Questions still remain as to whether discrimination and societal expectations are experienced by all First Nation’s youth and secondly whether this occurrence actually affects choices or directions taken.

In a second study undertaken by Karunanayake & Nauta (2004), the relationship between race and career role models was examined. While the sample population was racially mixed and drawn from a Midwestern university, over 31% of the sampled population were of Caucasian/European American origin. The minority status sample consisted of only 9% African American, 1% Hispanic/Latino, 2% were Pacific Islanders. This quantitative study found that the majority of career role models identified by students were of their own race, even when the role models were not family members. This suggests that students may identify with people deemed “similar to themselves”. A further suggestion may be that it is an intentional coping mechanism to look at same-race role models in order to find ways to navigate through the mire of careers while facing such obstacles as stereotypes, minority status in the workplace and the concomitant difficulties of such realities of life. One positive finding from this study was that even
though there were often few minority career role models from the particular races, the reports indicated that these minorities did not feel as though there were fewer role models. One suggestion from this finding is that the reduction of racial discrimination has led to more discernible minority role models for non-white students (Karunanayake & Nauta, 2004). However, this study did not even mention the participation of Native American students and this failure could be an indictment of a number of failures within the system including a lack of representatives at university from this population. Important elements missing from the literature in all respects is the discovery of individual voices of indigenous peoples. Given the few studies in this field with particular reference to this population it is imperative that more research is done in this area.

In my literature review, the only article that came to light in terms of career development and American Indians was a study done by Juntunen, Barraclough, Broneck, Siebel, Winrow, & Morin, (2001). A number of aspects of career and indigenous perceptions of career are examined in this study yet transition from adolescence to adulthood is notable by its absence. This article underscores the previously mentioned findings for minorities in general including the need to examine Native communities in light of cultural factors and to beware of bias from a westernized system. As found in the Bhalalusesa (1998) study, key components that need to be considered when assessing American Indian Vocational development include family issues and the interrelationships between values, traditions, communication style and beliefs. The sample population ranged in age from 21-59 years and included predominantly Native American Indians from a variety of educational backgrounds and
tribal affiliations and they were subject to a qualitative design, semi-structured interview format. This study found among other things that a number of unifying themes emerged from the interviews. These themes included the idea that success is a collective, rather than individual experience, and that a number of supportive factors helped to propel these participants into careers including the feeling that education was important, supportive family, sobriety, and encouragement. Typically identified obstacles that needed to be overcome included lack of support from significant others, lack of access to resources both economic and social, as well as some mention of domestic violence, alcohol usage and oppression. Questions remain as to whether these identified obstacles from this type of research are similar to those experienced by indigenous youth here in British Columbia, Canada.

Given that the Juntenen et al. (2001) study used a similar definition of career to the current proposed study and definitions, and found that it is important to consider community as well as individual interests, skills and goals, it seems that findings from this study are relevant for my study. However it is important to remember that these are speculative ideas because no previous studies have been done in this field. The examination of specific factors that helped and hindered First Nations' youth during the transitions from secondary school to post-secondary school life is missing from the literature. A recommendation from the Juntenen et al. (2001) study indicates the need for further contributions to the understanding of career concerns for indigenous people and highlights the issue that findings from their study are not applicable to the general populace of American Indians. Furthermore, from my study it becomes clear that even as recently as this year; there is much to be done in the field of career and transitions for this
The Juntunen et al. study provides a starting point for further research in this area, and suggests that the most important concept to consider when career counselling for the indigenous North American peoples is the context of community and interrelationships so as to help equalize employment opportunities and accessibility (Juntunen, et al. 2001). It is hoped that my study provides a starting point for future research in this field.

With regard to career development for First Nations people, McCormick & Neumann, (1999) developed some guidelines for practitioners working with this population. This guide suggests methods for recruitment of participants, counselling and post-counselling considerations and fills a gap in this largely unmapped territory of First Nations counselling work. This guideline was a follow-up to a previous model developed by McCormick & Amundson, (1997) that discussed the limitations of a Euro-American model that was in use with this population and introduced the importance of connectedness, spirituality, ceremony and tradition, balance, and meaning with regard to First Nations people. While little follow-up research has been done to gauge the success of this model, the innovative ideas are key to successfully working with a First Nations population and some elements suggested by McCormick & Amundson, (1997) are interwoven into my research study including the foundation of connectedness and wholeness. These two concepts will be further discussed below in the “wellness” section of this literature review.

One final indictment of the current research into career development among indigenous peoples is that constant use of assessment instruments that are utilized in the many quantitative studies that have been undertaken. While few have specifically
targetted First Nations people, those that have included members of these communities in their overall samples have used successful Westernized measurement tools including Holland’s RIASEC, the Self-Directed Search (Gade, Fuqua & Hurlburt, 1984) and the Strong Campbell Interest Inventory (Lattimore & Borgen, 1999). While these studies made some notations as to limitations of generalizability to First Nations populations, it is also clear that from these studies, little research is available on these specific populations.

Transitions

The importance of transitions in the realm of career counselling cannot be underestimated, yet little, if any, research has been done with regard to transitions for indigenous people from secondary school to post-school life. For minority populations many transitions occur at multiple levels on a daily basis, but for indigenous peoples across North America, these transitions are multiply complex. Often considered aliens within their own lands, Native Americans and Canadians are subject to unusual demands. Acculturation, biculturalism and traditionalism are concepts that are often a part of everyday life for many indigenous people. Confounding this already complex phenomenon is the transition from adolescence into adulthood. According to Vega (1995) research about social psychological adjustment of minority populations (in this case immigrants), has been limited to adult observations with little research focussing on children and adolescents. Simply put, little research has been done with regard to this transition in any population, let alone First Nations youth.

As previously mentioned Borgen, Amundson, and Tench (1996) conducted a study of 172 high school leavers to assess “psychological well-being during the transition from adolescence to adulthood” (p.189). This quantitative study examined the transitions
using western theories of vocational counselling, adolescent development and unemployment. One finding from the study was that there is a scarcity of research related to successful transitions and that this attributed well being to “satisfying work” and adult identity. Many different methods of alleviating the transition were identified but a key finding was that the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities helped participants. Furthermore, this study found that finances and parental support were seen as more important helping factors in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, than were employment or continued schooling. This study could have some implications for the proposed study. However it is important to bear in mind that Borgen, Amundson, and Tench’s study was done from a Westernized perspective, using a quantitative design and the individual meanings derived by more Westernized participants may not fit in the paradigm of indigenous community contexts. Furthermore, the studied sample population did not indicate the proportion of indigenous participants so it is difficult to interpret these findings with reference to this population.

Another study that dealt directly with minorities and transitions from adolescence considered primarily the concept of adolescent employment as an antecedent, correlation or consequence of successful transitions into adulthood (Leventhal, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001). This study used a quantitative analysis and sampled 251 low-income African American youth. Again, as stated before, while this population is not First Nations, it is representative of minority status and as such was one of the few available resources to examine in this area. It was found that a number of factors were indicated as helpful in the transition to adulthood, including adolescent employment. From this particular sample it was also found that those students, who had entered the workforce
earlier, were more likely to complete high school than their peers, and the males were more beneficially affected by adolescent employment than females. A surprising finding was that family circumstances were not associated with adolescent employment and that maternal role modelling of work was not as influential as expected. This study revealed some interesting results including the fact that as mentioned above, early entry into the workforce was often correlated with high school completion at age 19-20, particularly for young men. Some examination of gender role expectations is missing from the analysis and would indeed be beneficial but only in so much as for the purposes of my study it may be interesting to note what influences gender may have on decisions and choices for First nations’ youth.

A number of limitations exist in this study but for the purposes of informing the proposed study it is interesting to note the results concerning male and female differences and the correlations between adolescent employment and high school graduation, as well as the lack of influence of family circumstance. Many questions arise from this study but its primary usefulness for the purposes of my research is the concentration upon minority youth experiences of the transition from adolescence to adulthood within the realm of career. The findings from this study leave many questions unanswered and again reiterate the need for further research in this area especially from a qualitative paradigm.

Another study entailed dealing with the transitions into adolescence and the roles of significant adults that aided in this journey. Lang-Gould’s (2001) thesis identified a number of themes and factors which adolescents identified as helping them in the transition into adolescence including open communication, a sense of belonging, connection, messages about feeling special and role models. The reason it is important to
include this study in my literature review is that very few studies have concentrated on helping factors for transitions with regard to young people. The scarcity of such literature in mainstream academic circles repeats the necessity for such research to be conducted with minority groups. This particular study shed light on relevant factors that could be influential for First Nations' people, keeping in mind the limitations that this study did not indicate racial nor ethnic backgrounds, and was focused on finding out about helping relationships with significant adults.

The final study examined regarding transitions from adolescence into adulthood for minority youth was one targeting that journey for runaway and homeless youth. Again, this focus on minority is due to the lack of available research with regard to an indigenous population. Kurtz, Lindsey, Jarvis, & Nackerud, (2000) found that while most adolescents navigate this transition successfully due to the support systems of family, school and community, for runaway and homeless youth this transition is made much more difficult due to the lack of these supports. This exploratory research used a qualitative design and utilized focus groups with professionals in the field as well as semi-structured interviews with 12 participants from North Carolina and Georgia. Findings from this study showed that help from others “was a critical factor in being able to resolve problems faced” (p. 387). Major helpers identified were professional helpers, family, and friends. The different types of help that were important were caring, trustworthiness, setting boundaries, accountability, concrete assistance and counselling. Findings from this study included the central concept that people are more important than programs. This is a key tenet of my research. A repeated finding throughout the literature search in terms of both career development, success and transitions is the
importance of family and friends (Kurtz, Linsey, Jarvis, & Nackerud, 2000). Implications for my research from this study include the need to be aware of individual diversity and independence while acknowledging the intricacies of relationships and interdependence as well as paying attention to cultural and ethnic demands.

First Nations Wellness

As First Nations’ youth traverse the journey between adolescence and adulthood, who and what resources do they turn to for help? If we are to accept that indigenous perspectives accentuate “wholeness” and relations with others as integral components of Aboriginal well-being, then all aspects of life should be incorporated in this study. As noted previously Aboriginal health and wellness is a topic which invokes images of poverty, illness, unemployment, and many other problems. The proposed study, however, is devoted to uncovering stories which fly in the face of these negative stereotypes and statistics. According to McCormick (1995) “health means much more than freedom from disease” (p.252). For indigenous peoples around the world wellness is a term that is indicative of all elements of life, representative of this idea is the sacred circle which incorporates the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional elements of life. The four directions are all embodiments of beliefs in the relationship between all things.

Allusion throughout most literature reviewed in this section is constantly made to the Medicine Wheel and the four directions. The sacredness of the circle and the interrelationships between all elements of this Wheel cannot be underestimated when studying indigenous people from both Canada and the United States. For indigenous people it is not possible to separate an individual from her family, society, community, environment and beliefs and in order for health and wellness to be achieved all of these
elements must be integrated (McCormick, 1995; Kirmayer, 2000; Crofoot Graham 2002; Weaver, 2002). I believe it is critical to the success of this study to incorporate all elements that are considered important to Aboriginal people and therefore a discussion of the realities of life as well as the successes should incorporate wellness as a holistic concept.

To acknowledge the frequency of deplorable conditions for indigenous youth in British Columbia is a critical component of understanding the importance of trying to fathom how regardless of such conditions, indigenous youth still manage to do well. A recent quantitative study looked at the significance of educational status with regard to risk and protection factors in the indigenous community of Alert Bay, B.C. This study showed that school and family connectedness were not associated with either delinquency or health and well-being measures, but rather that despite previous studies indicating connectedness to school and family as being important no associations between family connectedness and delinquency could be found (van der Woerd & Cox, 2003). From this study it is important to note that while previous studies had in fact found relationships between certain factors as being “protective” it is incorrect to assume that this would be the case in all communities or for all individuals. While this study was specifically located in one community it may be possible that the lack of studying “community” connectedness could have limited the study. The suggestion for the current research is to acknowledge that many different factors lead to wellness for an individual and a community and the central notion of relational knowledge could be important for indigenous youth. A report by the Ministry of Education (2001) titled “Over-representation of aboriginal students reported with behaviour disorders” (S. R. McBride,
& McKee) also details the significant issues facing aboriginal youth in the school system and points to many systemic problems within the First Nation’s communities, within the communities as a whole and also within the education system. While this study was limited to aboriginal students still in the school system, it discussed many factors which contributed to resilience and success for First Nations’ youths including the involvement of parents/guardians, family variables and the involvement of the Aboriginal community in steps to help with prevention, intervention and implementation of strategies. This study was useful for the current study as it referred to the dilemmas facing Aboriginal youth as well as looking into strategies that have garnered success for the communities as a whole, and the individuals most likely to suffer.

Studies in wellness for indigenous people have become more common over the past decade, and this seems to be an emerging theme with regard to indigenous populations, as well as many mainstream populations. In 1995, McCormick undertook a qualitative study with 50 First Nations participants from British Columbia. The study was devoted to developing categories that First Nation’s people found helpful to healing. The inclusion of this study in the review is necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, this is one of the few extant studies that was qualitative in method, secondly it used a Critical Incident Technique, thirdly it was done from the perspectives of First Nations people and finally this study was done by a First Nation’s researcher. The rarity of such available research is profound. This intensive study looked at indigenous psychologies, interconnectedness, First Nations’ culture and mental health alongside the notions of spirituality, ceremony and tradition and culture. The concept of similarities in difficulties being suffered by both First Nations communities and Western communities as well as
the distinctions between Western and indigenous concepts of mental health served as a backdrop to the need for understanding those factors that were facilitative for First Nations peoples healing. Acknowledging the increase in chronic health conditions as well as mental health problems in the indigenous communities within British Columbia ran parallel to the suggestion that Western notions of aid were of little consequence for these people. Furthermore, the admission that little research has been done in this field again reiterated the need for further studies to be undertaken from the perspectives of those people most affected by the issues. The study re-emphasized the different ways that indigenous people see the world as distinct from their Western counterparts, and the need for seeing someone in terms of balance and wholeness rather than unidimensionally. In McCormick’s study the participants found balance and direction in life through the achievement of both “self-transcendence” and “connectedness”. The connections that were expressed by participants as being important included “family, nature, community and spirituality” (McCormick, 1995). While it is not possible to generalize the findings from this qualitative study the reiteration of the concept of “wholeness” and connectedness seem to be an important element in First Nations wellness, and this concept was significant for my study. The emergence of recognition of the need for a feeling of connectedness with both community and within the individual to their culture seemed to be an important emerging theme from this study.

A third perspective on wellness for First Nations people came in the form of an introductory narrative to a volume dedicated to wellness. Weaver’s (2002) study on wellness is derived from the idea of resilience and strength as opposed to the deficit focus of many studies on First Nations wellness. The metaphor of the “Red Road” is employed
to discuss the concept of “the path to wellness in indigenous communities” (p.6). Weaver also employed similar terminology to denote wellness from a First Nations perspective, incorporating the notions of balance, wholeness and integrity as some basic concepts in the more multifaceted complexity that we term “wellness” in a First Nations sense.

Allusion throughout the literature to the Medicine Wheel is underscored by the idea that humans are threefold — body, mind, and spirit. The mind is the link between the body, or physical world, and the spirit. While the mind and body are ephemeral, the spirit is eternal. It existed before coming into the body and continues to exist after the body dies. To maintain wellness, one must have harmony in all three areas. (Wing, Crow, & Thompson, 1995, p.57).

From this narrative the idea is reinforced that cultural identity is crucial to well-being and that the constant external definitions of these communities has disempowered and demoralized these indigenous communities. In understanding the history of the indigenous peoples of Canada and America, Weaver asserted that we can begin to understand the strength it has taken to overcome great difficulties and hardship in order to reach the place First Nations people are at today. Concurrent sources of help for wellness are often utilized by indigenous communities to try and achieve better mental and physical health, but much still needs to be done. In the words of an Ojibwe youth

*I know the pain of seeming family die because of overdoses or their bodies shutting down on them because they have been drunk too long. It impacts me, no it scares me to see these people want help but are too weak to out and get it... Alcohol isn’t the “Red Way.” I have also seen the children following in their parent’s footsteps...cheating themselves out of a future because all they know is what their parents showed theme.* (Isham, 2001, p. 7)

Such pain and suffering is an indication of the need for positive stories to be told as well as an acknowledgement of the many problems that must be faced before the road to wellness for First Nations people can be achieved. Sacrifice and strength, wholeness and
balance, community and tradition are all central issues in this new tale of positive beginnings for First Nations youth. These are the stories that this current study has tried to incorporate to show other youth that there are different paths than those that have been taken by some who have gone before them. Many different perspectives and experiences of success and challenge are needed to be heard by these different communities. Thus it can be seen that another emerging theme in this field is the recognition of resilience and strength, and the balance between culture, community and tradition as an important component of First Nation’s wellness and could be an important factor for future study.

Summary of the literature

In a summary review of the literature on young First Nations adults, career and transitions from 1998 – 2005, research in this field is scarce. From this one could speculate that with the current concern with low graduation rates for aboriginal youth and the large number of aboriginal youth at risk, more research needs to be done with regard to finding factors that shed light on positive outcomes for the communities that are suffering. A recurring theme in the literature about indigenous people from North America, regardless of the origin of the author, is the need to respect the traditions and differences of the culture under study. For indigenous people oral traditions teach youth and such stories offer an interpretation of and application of elder’s directives (Gamlin, 2003). In order to strike a balance between meaning and lived experience, indigenous peoples often engage in dialogue with others, reflective thinking, and are open to new experiences. According to Paulsen (2003) in her study on Native literacy, any method of education for indigenous people cannot be divided from the culture, tradition, worldview, language and way of knowing by both the individual and the culture from which they are
brought up. This idea and theme is reiterated at all levels of indigenous understanding and study. Curwen-Doige’s (2003) discussion of “culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal students” also reiterated the need for an understanding of spirituality as a component of education. Indeed, this study describes spirituality as the “missing link” between traditional Aboriginal education and the system of education in Western society. While Curwen-Doige (2003) acknowledges her non-Aboriginal status she intimates that such spirituality is impossible for others to enter, it is a personal and “sacred territory”. Yet, it is this central phenomenon that is accented as being of integral importance to indigenous people.

At this point it is perhaps salient to again acknowledge my own non-Aboriginality, as was mentioned in the bracketing section. In an attempt to shed light on my emotions regarding entering a sacred realm I would like to quote Walter Lightning (1992):

\begin{quote}
Grandfather, I don’t know how to do these things. I am trying to prepare the protocol but I realize that basically I don’t know anything. As a matter of fact, I have no idea what I’m doing. Please, I implore you, have compassion for what I am doing. (p.216).
\end{quote}

Actually it was with great humility that I entered the task of trying to understand the world of indigenous people. From my perspective as a female, and an immigrant, I also believe that knowledge is relational, and although I am a researcher trying to gain an insight into the world of First Nation’s young adults, the knowledge I gained is not for the individual, it is to be shared. Evelyn Steinhauer’s personal narrative on indigenous research methodologies addressed the indigenous paradigm of the uniqueness of knowledge in each culture, locale, society and individual. It is the connectedness of
indigenous people that leads to wellness, wholeness, and knowing oneself, but I believe this is also true of many people regardless of culture, race and ethnicity. To try and separate all of these entities and divide a person into specific components is anathema to Native worldviews (Steinhauer, 2003), yet it is also anathema to me personally. As I entered this world of holistic wellness I valued the ideas of respect, reciprocity and relationality. These concepts are central to my own concepts of well-being and understanding. Suffice for the moment to say that I had to engage in my work with both "passion and compassion." Also it was with the understanding and knowledge of my own "otherness" from this culture that I felt it was so important to address the huge gaps in the literature. While there was some mention of minorities with regard to transitions, and there are some references to First Nations people with regard to career development the two subjects are noticeably absent from any research I made into the field. The question of career development for First Nations youth during the transition from adolescence to adulthood in this study was derived from a position of respect, reciprocity and relationship. Literature on the First Nations population has focused on wellness and mental health issues, little effort is currently being made with regard to researching positive paradigms of career development during the transition from adolescence into adulthood. The proposed research question has not been addressed in any literature at the moment and is integral to a new, more positive story emerging from some indigenous people.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

First Nations people are a dynamic cultural group undergoing many changes. Those young adults who are making the transition from adolescence into adulthood are inundated with many complexities that are obstacles necessary to overcome in order to make a successful passage from life in school to life outside. As the literature review has endeavoured to show, many facets of life can come into play to either hinder or help this transition along its way. While it is speculative to assume that wellness, indigenous concepts and the history of oppression influence this transition; it is also necessary to understand these concepts given that so little literature exists in this domain. Allowing First Nations youth to have a voice and express their experiences, knowledge and the resources that have helped them to manoeuvre the sometimes tricky path to adulthood is a valuable resource for any person working with this population. This chapter is designed to discuss the methods used to conduct my research as well as noting the significant awareness for cultural differences that research with the First Nations population engenders.

As a result of many previous impositions upon this culture in the form of racism, governmental policy, illness, isolation and disempowerment I chose a qualitative design that I felt most embodied a spirit of wholeness and integrity, as well as providing a vehicle for "voice". I felt that First Nations people needed a vehicle that allowed for empowerment, positive environments and a true voice in a process that has often been derogatory, disrespectful, non-reciprocal and non-relational throughout their history. It
was important to me that this research was respectful of indigenous traditions, culture, ways of being and concepts of unity. The critical incident technique seemed to fit most appropriately in this way because it has been used successfully with this population before (McCormick, 1995). Although this technique was developed by a Western researcher (Flanagan, 1954), the appropriateness of this technique is verified by the usage of this technique by a First Nations researcher working with a First Nations population from British Columbia as most appropriate for providing voice (McCormick, 1995). Furthermore, the open-ended interviews allowed participants an opportunity to tell their own stories and to change or modify any items they did not feel appropriate in follow-up interviews. This was an exploratory, descriptive study which hopefully shed a sliver of light onto a previously unknown area of life for indigenous populations.

The Critical Incident Technique

Flanagan (1954) developed the Critical Incident Technique to use with aviators in the United States Army Air Force during World War II. This technique however has changed markedly over the years and suggests that Flanagan’s original technique may be limiting with regard to the nature of this research. As a means of generating descriptive and qualitative data of an experience that is mostly uncharted in the literature, the critical incident technique was invaluable with regard to my study. According to Tripp (1993) the vast majority of critical incidents are not obvious and dramatic but rather simple “accounts of very commonplace events that occur”. For Tripp (1993) the reason these events are critical comes from within the person who experiences the event. Tripp explained that these incidents are critical in the “sense that they are indicative of underlying trends, motives and structures” (pp. 24-25). In essence, the event becomes
critical to the person through their interpretation of how significant an event is or was. The criticality is based on the meaning that the person ascribes to the event, even if it is a minor everyday event (Tripp, 1993). Angelides (2001) further elaborated upon the concept of a critical incident as being a surprise or problematic situation which leads to a period of reflection. This interpretation of the critical incident is markedly different from Flanagan’s (1954) description in that Flanagan categorized incidents as effective or ineffective. For the purposes of my research and the importance to which I ascribe participant voice, it was not possible for me to categorize incidents as effective or ineffective; rather the participant had to identify these events as in someway important to them. Here, it was also important to acknowledge the danger inherent in my attempts to define what constitutes “success” versus “unhelpful” in the sense that I could have fallen into the trap of comparing First Nations ideas with Euro-American models. In order to maintain a sense of integrity, it was thought that pilot interviews and supervision limited researcher bias in this way. Therefore, the definition of critical incident used was a combination of Tripp, (1993) and Angelides (2001) definitions and the definitions of the participants’ themselves as they explored events that helped or hindered them in the transition from adolescence to adulthood in terms of career development.

A further departure from Flanagan’s (1954) technique was the innovation of a second interview which constituted a participant check-in (or for validation purposes, a participant cross-check of identified items) (Alfonso, 1997). The critical incident technique was chosen because at many levels it addresses the need to explore an unknown area of research; it has been identified as an efficient method for gathering rich qualitative data and has been shown to get at deeper levels of social processes.
Such success with a more holistic understanding of a phenomenon is central to the paradigm of indigenous research. Furthermore, the critical incident technique can be used in a participatory way (Angelides, 2001, Butterfield, 2001) as seen in terms of the participant second interview cross-check and verification of identified categories.

For my own purposes I desired that the participants could feel that they had a measure of control over the process, given the disempowering processes that have been a consistent component of many previous Western research studies upon indigenous peoples. It was my desire to consult with the participants regarding the effectiveness and appropriateness of the questions in pilot interviews, as well as providing reciprocal measures of feedback and cross-checking so that participants felt valued and respected in the process of collecting data. Angelides (2001) further asserted that the critical incident technique is an appropriate technique for collecting data about practices for the purposes of making improvements and for making sense of the role of culture in the experiences of minority groups. If we are to see the critical incident technique as a means of gathering rich qualitative data, from a previously uncharted area, and a previously uncharted population, while also considering culture and as a means of bringing about improvements then for the purposes of this study it would seem to be most appropriate. Also, given that it has been used with minority populations and on a population very similar to which I intend to conduct my research, (McCormick, 1995) the efficaciousness of this technique seems most applicable.

This study followed the five steps of a critical incident technique as outlined by Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey (1986). Firstly the aim of the activity to be studied was
identified. Secondly, plans, specifications and criteria for the information to be obtained were laid out. Thirdly, after this proposal was accepted data was collected, and then that data was analyzed for categories. The final step was to report the findings of the study (Butterfield, 2001). For understanding the transitions of First Nations youth from adolescence to adulthood in terms of career development, this critical incident technique offered the best means of hearing these people’s voices.

Recruiting the Participants

A total of 8 (n=8) First Nations young adults aged between 20 and 28 years from the Vancouver area were recruited to participate in this study. The primary inclusion criterion was that the youths were out of the school system for at least three years, and were between the ages of 19-29 years. The eight participants were aged between 20 and 28 years of age and all had been out of the high school setting for a minimum of three years. The participants indigenous status ranged from Metis, Cree, Coast Salish to half-white/half-Native. This study interviewed eight participants, (n=8) aged between 20 years and 28 years of age. Seven of the participants were female, one a 26 year old male. Most participants were in the beginning period of determining their careers and thinking about what they would like to pursue. The youngest female was 20 years old, from British Columbia, currently pursuing a degree, and earning up to $15,000. Another participant was a 21 year old female, also from British Columbia, and pursuing an intensive college diploma who currently earned in the range of $0 - $15,000, and was a full-time student. The next youngest participant was a 25 year old female, from British Columbia, engaged in courses to be transferred to a university degree and also earning in the $0 -$15,000 range. Two participants were aged 26. One was from British Columbia, who had completed a trades diploma and was beginning work in the field currently earning up to $15,000 per annum. The second 26 year old was from the prairie provinces, had
undertaken degree work and was now operating a consultancy business earning up to $30,000. Two female participants were aged 28. Both were originally from British Columbia, but one had spent a lot of time in Alberta. Both were pursuing degrees, and earning up to $15,000 at the time of the interview, although at the time of the second interview one had completed her degree and was working two jobs. The male participant was originally from the prairies but had moved to British Columbia during his school years. He completed his Masters of Environmental Science and was currently earning above $45,000. All participants were actively engaged in work or volunteering at the time of the first interview, and were either back in school or at the ready to work stage at the time of the second interview. All participants self-identified as doing well and were able to give examples of success in their lives, ranging from graduating from high school, gaining degrees or working towards a degree, having post-secondary degrees and also to successfully running a business and being a healthy, caring parent. Pre-screening questions included:

(1) How long ago did you leave school?
(2) Are you currently employed?
(3) How did you hear about this study?
(4) What is your First Nations band affiliation?

These questions proved sufficient for recruiting the participants and only one person who expressed interest was unable to continue with the study for reasons of not being out of high school for three years at the time of the interviews.

The designation of First Nations was both via status and self-identification, given that some aboriginal people are not considered status as a result of many different
government policies throughout the past decades. Due to the relatively young ages of the people that were involved in this study it was expected that these people may or may not have had clear ideas of what had helped and hindered them in the transition from adolescence into adulthood. The fact that there were significant events that the participants did recall was helpful in the analysis of the data that was transcribed.

The open-ended interview technique and the critical incident methodology were expected to help the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study. According to Woolsey (1986) the main purpose of a critical incident study is to gain as much coverage as possible of the “content domain”. Tripp (1993) also identified the idea that the critical incident comes from a historically significant turning point or change in the life of the person and leads them in a particular direction. This study also expanded upon these definitions to provide a more elastic and uniform definition that may be applied over time and to suit many different situations that may arise (Angelides, 2001). Given these founding ideas the recruiting procedure seemed appropriate for this study.

The Recruiting Procedure

The participants were recruited through a variety of means. Firstly, my personal links to the First Nations communities within Vancouver and North Vancouver provided me with a more relational approach to both elders and youth in communities that I wanted to study. Secondly, I placed letters at the UBC Longhouse and Faculty of Education hoping to recruit some participants via personal connections in these locations also. However I did not gain any recruits via that method. Thirdly, my position as a teacher in the North Vancouver school district has provided me with links to the Burrard (Tsleil Waututh) nation and the Squamish nations through both the Esla7an Centre and
the Squamish Nation Employment Centre. It is important to acknowledge that both introductory letters and personal visits were required for me to gain entry and permission from these nations to proceed with research within their communities. I spoke personally with band members and gave them letters to place in certain employment centres or where they felt people might see them. I did not succeed in recruitment via these means either. Another means of recruitment was via people who knew and trusted me in the community, who then gave my details to prospective participants, or spoke directly with me regarding possible arenas for me to gain participants in my study.

I was very indebted to two particular members who garnered me my second, third and fourth participants. Furthermore, on an ethical level I was constantly aware of the difficulty of keeping my participants’ names confidential in some areas as they spoke to others about their participation and then the new participants contacted me. I was able to speak with the participants about this and their feelings regarding being known by other participants and as only two were in this situation and they both worked together they assured me that they were fine with the situation given that anonymity was being assured in the paper. For the other six participants there was no issue with the knowledge of who had participated as they were recruited via different means. One manner of recruitment was an instructor at UBC sent the introductory letter out to his class lists and one of his students responded to me via email. I did not inform the professor who had contacted me but did let him know that his letter send out had been successful. A secondary means of recruitment was via my own personal contact with people in the community. "The Redway" (an indigenous ezine) published my introductory letter and I received two respondents via that means. In speaking at certain events, a funeral and a gathering I was
able to gain two more respondents and finally, one respondent had seen my letter at one of the various points that friends in the community had placed it (she was not specific as to the location) and she phoned me to ask if she would be suitable to participate. It was important to me to maintain a respectful, reciprocal relationship with those people and communities that I was studying. As a result of that I am still in contact with the participants and have been invited to some community events. To show respect, and also because of my genuine interest with regard to this community I will be attending some future events but have been unable to do so at this point due to my time constraints. Therefore I will continue to consult with the individuals and communities to ensure that they feel included in the process and that the benefits of participating in this research shall indeed be returned in some manner to them.

Confidentiality and respect for information was critical to the success of this research and taped interviews are kept in a secure location at my house. Furthermore, I used personally known transcriptionists to ensure that confidentiality was maintained during the transcription of tapes. A system of coding for names with randomly assigned participant numbers was used to prevent any breach of participant confidentiality and third party references were screened out. Informed consent was secured from all participants who agreed to participate in the interview process at the beginning of the first interview (Butterfield, 2001).

Data Collection Procedures

In-person interviews were conducted using audiotapes for transcription purposes. The critical incident technique and open-ended interviews were utilized to establish rapport between the participants and myself and to ensure that all questions were
understood. Open-ended questions allowed for hearing the participants experiences and ideas in their own words, and contributed greatly to the data collected in this exploratory type of research. Probing questions were developed and utilized for more information as required in order to capture as rich a picture of the participant’s world as possible (Butterfield, 2001).

Interview Procedures

Piloting the Interview Questions

The first interview was piloted to ascertain the effectiveness of the questions asked and to assess how effective the process was. Due to its relevance and the depth of information gathered, the pilot interview was included in the analysis. The participant understood the questions and overall, did not encounter any difficulties with the questions that were asked in the first interview, with the exception of the introduction of the timeline (which will be discussed later in this section).

After a brief contextual preamble, that basically oriented the participant to the study again, (as this had been done during the prescreening interview), the interview was started. The following open-ended questions were asked at the first pilot interview:

1. Tell me about your experience of where you are today.
2. What does “doing well” mean to you?
3. What does career” mean to you?
4. What were something(s) that you found helpful (most helpful) to you in being where you are today?
(5) What were something(s) that you found to be not helpful to you in your journey to where you are today?

(6) Is/Are there anything(s) you would have liked to have been there for you in this journey that were not?

(7) What would be some of the things you would like to be doing in the future (at any time, any age)?

These questions were not framed by a theoretical perspective or by any Euro-American conceptions of success. They were worded in an unambiguous, relatively specific manner to encourage open disclosure by participants. These questions were analyzed to extract critical incident categories only. Also, according to Woolsey (1986) it is important to ask relevant demographic questions in order to establish some data about respondents. Prior to the introduction of the demographic questions at the end of the interview I asked the participant if she had anything further to add. When no further incidents could be recalled I then proceeded with the collection of data for the demographic section of the interview. I asked 11 questions at the end of each interview to gather such data.

(1) How long ago did you leave secondary school?

(2) What is your current occupation and/or responsibility?

(3) What was your occupation/responsibility at the time you left school?

(4) If you are currently employed what is your employment status? (Full-time, part-time, unemployed, student, seasonal, casual)

(5) If you are currently employed what is your level of satisfaction with your present job? (5=Very satisfied, 4=satisfied, 3=neutral, 2=dissatisfied, 1=very dissatisfied)
(6) What is your educational level? (Elementary, High School, Post secondary, Post Graduate)

(7) What is your age?

(8) What is your band affiliation?

(9) What is your marital status? (Married, single, common-law)

(10) Do you have any children?

(10) If you are willing to disclose what is your current annual income? (approximate to the closest thousand) (0-$15,000, 15,001-25,000, 25,001-35,000, 45,001-55,000, 55,001+)

The purpose of gathering this demographic data was more for adding to the depth and richness of the story and data gathered rather than for analysis purposes. It must be noted that while it was important to gather such demographic information, if the participant showed any hesitance or reticence in disclosing any of this information I did not force them to answer. In fact two of the participants preferred not to fill out the data, as they felt it was not important for the purposes of the research. As I was very concerned about the nature of building trust and rapport with the participants, I felt that this was an important factor that should be noted. Perhaps further research could be done on the notion of what demographic data might be important to First Nations people rather than the researcher. Also, the most important information was gleaned from the interviews themselves rather than the demographic information and to ensure feelings of safety and reciprocity, no participant was forced to answer any demographic questions they felt uncomfortable with. For the purposes of analysis this personal information was mostly to help describe the research participants, and provide further insight into their
lived experiences. The data gathered from these demographic questions was not intended for analytic purposes but rather to provide another filter for the analysis of the stories that are collected as background information (Butterfield, 2001). While the demographic data was useful for the purposes of "fleshing out" the character of the participants, it offered little extra information after the interviews had been completed. The interviews themselves offered much information.

The First Interview

The first interview was piloted in order to reduce researcher bias and allow participants input as to whether or not these questions worked for them, or to make any suggestions as regards the interview process. This interview allowed me to gain a greater knowledge of the balance between empathy and probing as well as flagging any attempts at "leading the interview". After taping the interview I consulted with my supervisor for the purposes of having him independently judge my interviewing style and to advise me with regard to my interviewing ability and if I had been asking leading questions or any other problems that would interfere with the gathering of the data. With input from my supervisor this first interview allowed me to perfect my interviewing technique and become more familiar with the pacing and timing for the following interviews. Furthermore, the pilot interview helped to identify areas where probes could be needed and helped to improve the collection of rich, meaningful stories for data analysis (Butterfield, 2001, Alfonso, 1997, Angelides, 2001). After consulting with my supervisor, it was decided that the information in the interview was important and the
data from it should be included in this paper. Also, a refinement of the original questions was suggested and the following questions were used for the remaining 7 interviews.

Interview Process

I asked a number of questions to gather data and contextual information from the participants but the purpose was to collect and report upon Critical Incident data. The following questions were asked to build better relationship with the participants and to gather general information from each one to help set a comfortable tone for the interview. This helped the purpose of extracting critical incidents for analysis only. The interview had a contextual preamble and the interview proceeded along the following guidelines:

A. Contextual Component

Preamble: As you know, I am investigating the ways in which indigenous young adults have successfully manoeuvred their way through the transition from adolescence to adulthood with regard to their career development. This is the first of two interviews, and its purpose is to collect information about what helped and hindered indigenous young people in their career development during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. As a way of getting started could you tell me about your experience of what helped and hindered your life journey with regard to careers since leaving High School?

1) You volunteered to participate in this study because you identified yourself as doing well with regard to career development in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. What does “doing well” mean to you?

2) What does “career” mean to you?
3) I am going to use a lifeline to help anchor the interview and am wondering if you would like to write on it or would you prefer me to do so? Could you please show me on this lifeline, how you got to be where you are today with regard to your career?

4) How have the changes you discussed affected your career life? (Probe as needed: Please tell me more.)

5) Let’s look at some of the things that were helpful and not so helpful along the way. What were something(s) that you found helpful to you in being where you are today? (Probe as need: What led up to the incident? How did it help you? Can you tell me how (this factor) was helpful to you? What was it like? What was your experience of it? What was the outcome?)

6) What were some of the thing(s) that you found to be not helpful to you in your journey to where you are today with regard to your career? (Probe as needed: What as the incident? How did it impact you? Can you give me a specific example of how? (this factor) helped you?

7) Are there any things that would help you to continue doing well in the future?

The first interview took place at the environment deemed most “safe” by the participant, my supervisor, and myself, at the participant’s home. Interviews were anticipated to last between one to two hours and would continue until the participants could not recall any new incidents. The interview began by establishing rapport, making sure the participant felt safe and at ease, and going over the purpose of the research. I then reviewed the Informed Consent Forms and ensured that the participant knew that
she/he could withdraw from the process at any time and confirming the confidentiality of any people involved in the study via information from the interview as well as the confidentiality of the participants themselves. Both the participant and I then signed the Informed Consent. I then gave one copy to the participant for the purposes of them having my contact number, as well as the numbers of my supervisor and the Office of Research Services at UBC. I then proceeded to give an overview of the questions (Butterfield, 2001). I went over the purpose of audiotaping the interviews and asked permission to take notes during the interview in case this might interfere with the “oral traditions” and cultural sensitivities of First Nations participants. I also provided the participants with my email and telephone numbers should they wish to contact me, and I offered to provide any referral counselling resources (both First Nations and non-First Nations) should the interview have caused the participant unexpected duress at any time post interview. I arranged with the participant as to when might be a propitious time to contact them after the data had been transcribed, and notified the participant that it may take a couple of months before I got back to them. At this time I also assured the participant that if they would like to contact me at any time in the interim with any other additional helpful information they would be welcome to do so. Following this orientation the interview proceeded. The first interview took approximately two hours to complete and gave me a good basis to judge the time line needed for following interviews.

*The Second Interview*

The second interview was undertaken after transcriptions of tapes and data analysis have been done between the period of Dec 1, 2005 and Jan 10th, 2006. Of the 8
original participants, 7 were able to be contacted, a participant rate of 87.5%. The second interview occurred between three and six months after the initial interview, with the exception of the final interview which only took one month before follow-up contact. This second interview served as a participant cross-check of the themes that I had found and give the participants voice with regard to changing, adjusting or removing themes that they felt did not fit with their own perceptions and understandings. This was one of the forms of credibility for the categorization of themes and also an important means of empowering the participants in this study.

The second interview was done either via telephone or via email, depending upon the cultural expectations of the individual. I made initial contact with the participants via telephone and asked them which their preferred means of doing the second interview was. Only two of the eight asked for telephone interviews, the remainder requested to do the crosscheck via email. This initial contact phone-call was also a time to readdress the participant’s concerns or questions and provide options as to what they would like to be done with their own personal data once I had finished my thesis. Most participants wanted a copy of the finished thesis but none asked for a transcribed copy of their interviews, or a copy of their individual tapes. At this point it is expected that the tapes will be kept in a safe and confidential place until 5 years have elapsed, at which point the tapes will be erased unless the various participants want them returned to them. Again, participants were asked to contact me should they have any questions until the completion of the thesis.

The second interview took the form of discussing the current status of the research, and brought the participants up to date with the timeline for completion as well
as providing an opportunity for the participants to update me on any possible new occurrences that had occurred to them in the intervening time period. These initial conversations took place over the phone. I asked the participants if they would like me to do the crosscheck with them over the telephone or if they had any other preference, informing them that the crosscheck would take in the vicinity of thirty minutes. Five of the eight participants preferred for me to email the transcribed incidents to them and they forwarded them back to me with either spelling or small wording changes, or deletion of items that they felt were not relevant to their story. Two participants preferred to have telephone interviews and of these, only one was able to do so due to telephone problems. After attempting to contact this participant at her best time options five times, (including times when she was to return my calls) I was unable to reach her or to have the interview. At that point it was decided by myself to email the document to her and suggested that if it was possible, due to the many difficulties we had had connecting via telephone, that she could withdraw at any time and I thanked her for her participation. The participant in fact ended up responding via email as her telephone was not in working order. She then followed up and made some minor wording changes but did not withdraw from the study. The participant said she was happy with the incidents although expressing some concern over the story seeming to not make sense given that it was separated into various incidents with little background. The other telephone participant also stated that concern but none of the remaining participants voiced this problem. I explained to both telephone participants that due to the nature of the study being exploratory these incidents may seem “out of place” however moving the items into the categories in the finished results section would help to show how such categories would help to make the story seem to be
more complete. These explanations seemed to satisfy the participants, and seemed to clarify their confusion as they stated that they were happy with the process and were looking forward to seeing the finished product. Due to the fact that not all tapes had been transcribed at the time of the second interview, and in fact, I had yet to complete my final interview, I could not inform the participant of the total incidents extracted, so instead I just told them how many incidents had been extracted from their individual interviews. The participants seemed satisfied with the extraction of incidents and the placement into helpful and hindering or wish list items. Only one participant added a wish list item.

For the participants that chose to do the second interview via email they were informed that their tapes had been transcribed and I had extracted helping incidents, hindering incidents and wish list items. I asked them to add/change or remove any items that they felt were not a true indication of their story and to email it back to me. I also let them know that at any time prior to my thesis defense they could email me should something “pop up”. Participants were also invited to make any comments or suggestions regarding the process and to contact me should any questions arise after they had received the data. Of the five second email interviews, two made no changes and were happy with the results; three made minor spelling/wording changes, but were generally happy with the categorization. I was unable to contact one of the participants as they had moved on from their job and their telephone contact was no longer in service. To maintain confidentiality I did not request a forwarding address or email of that participant so no crosscheck was done with regard to that one interview. The final participant did not have access to email at the time of the interview but requested that the
incidents be forwarded to her email address so she could look at them at a later date. This was done and I have not heard from her.

Data Analysis

Flanagan (1954) and Woolsey (1986) describe the purpose of data analysis to be a summarizing and descriptive stage so that the data may be seen efficiently, and used practically. Three suggested steps are recommended: 1) selecting the frame of reference, 2) category formation and 3) gauging the level of specificity or generality that would lead to appropriate reporting of the data (Flanagan, 1954, & Woolsey, 1986). This method has been used by a number of researchers in the analysis of data by qualitative researchers (Angelides, 2001; McCormick, 1995; Butterfield, 2001; Fly, van Bark, Weinman, Kitchener & Lang, 1997; Carney, 2001; Farr, 2003). This method was used to analyze my data and included data coding schemes, a description of the categories that emerged, as well as counting how many times a particular response occurred. After extracting events from the transcriptions and grouping them into categories (if possible), some measures of validity were employed to assess the accuracy of these categories.

Extracting Critical Incident Items

All interviews were recorded, transcribed and number-coded with random participant numbers. After receiving the transcripts I extracted the events through careful reading of each one, and using a highlighter to identify them. Using Alfonso’s (1987) and Angelides (2001) methods I used the following criteria to identify these incidents:

1) Did the participant’s tell a complete story?

2) Did the participant clearly identify the incident(s)?

3) Is the incident related to the purpose of this study?
4) Did this incident cause a period of reflection?

After extracting the incidents I endeavoured to form categories in which to fit them. I relied upon supervision and assistance from my supervisor for these purposes, as well as using my previous experience as a teacher and research assistant. After arriving at categories and fitting certain incidents into those categories, I then did a number of validation techniques to ensure the accuracy of these items. I understood that some of the incidents did not fit into certain categories but these incidents were not eliminated because they did fit within the abovementioned question areas for identifying incidents for the purposes of my study.

The critical incidents were divided into parts: a) a contextual component that gave the background or circumstances surrounding the event (e.g., “being in a private school being in that mentality but you are definitely in a school with students who in all of their classes are going somewhere. They are all graduating and then they are going to university”); b) an internal desire for survival or success (e.g., “just going onto post secondary I guess there’s not a huge rate of going onto post secondary. So I feel successful in that way”); and c) cultural/community based resources/connection (e.g., “there’s a lot of little bands around so a large proportion of the kids that I went to school with were aboriginal. It’s probably like 10% of the kids compared to like 3% of the entire population in Canada is aboriginal”). This rudimentary process of categorization helped to make the formation of the categories more straightforward.

**Forming the categories**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the ways in which indigenous young adults successfully manoeuvred through the transition from high school to post secondary
life. Therefore the frame of reference for organizing the incidents that were extracted into groups was centred on this concept of factors that assisted in the transition. With regards to the wish list items the incidents were the expressed wishes of the participants for those items that would help them to continue to do well. The focus of finding out factors that helped or hindered participants along their career journey through transitions was the basis for forming categories. The categories seemed to emerge from the data in a natural manner, and the categories were sorted into helpful, hindering and wish list items, although there was often an intersection between the categories.

The extraction of the critical incidents followed Flanagan’s (1954) criterion as what constitutes a critical incident, he suggests that it is any observable activity that was sufficiently complete in itself and from which inferences and predictions could be made. In addition, Woolsey’s (1986) criterion was added in that an incident could be extracted if it included the source of the event, what actually happened and the outcome of that incident. While some incidents did not fit within these criteria they were not excluded as a result of the need to incorporate the fullest embodiment of the experiences offered to the researcher by the participant. The incidents that were excluded were those that did not completely cover an incident in sufficient means to derive an inference or prediction or from which I could not establish a clear outcome.

Examining the Credibility of the Categories

Six methods of checking the credibility of my research were employed: independent rater technique, exhaustiveness, independent judgement of the interviewing style, cross-checking with the participant, participation rate and literature verification. I used an independent rater technique. The independent rater (a fellow Masters of
Counselling Psychology student) took 25 percent of the incidents and placed them into category headings. The independent rater was sent the entire list of helping and hindering items from all of the interview and then randomly picked 25 percent of the incidents and put them into categories. I then compared those categorizations with my own. As recommended by Andersson and Nilsson (1994) an inter-rater reliability of .75 is required for the final categories to be established. The final rate was .77 and thereby proved sufficient for the study. In some particular instances the match rate for individual interviews ranged from .50 to 1.00. This match rate determined whether the categories were sufficient, and from the rating the independent rater felt that they were sufficient for the purposes of the study. After receiving the independent rater’s categories we discussed the differences and found that for many of the categories, where we disagreed over the categorization it was actually due to the need to add another category something along the lines of self-esteem or self-efficacy. I preferred the use of self-esteem as it used the words of the participants and on this point we agreed that if the purpose of the study was to give voice to the participants using their words would add interpretive credibility to the study. Both she and I were then satisfied with the discrepancies and either agreed to disagree on some items or moved them into the newly formed category. During the initial forming of categories I consulted my supervisor, and he suggested a new category which we ended up agreeing on as “Achieving a new level of self understanding” and it was thought that those incidents that did not fit the established categories would work under a category called “self-esteem”.

A second method of credibility was to have an independent expert judge my interviewing style to ensure that I was not leading the interview and to suggest any
changes that may improve the nature of my interviewing technique so as to ensure
gathering the best possible data. My supervisor listened to my pilot interview and made
some suggestions with regard to the introduction, the contextual component and how to
deal with the difficulties that had arisen with the introduction of the timeline. He was
generally satisfied with the questions I had used and suggested that the pilot interview
had valuable data that should be included in the study.

Another method of credibility used was exhaustiveness so that the information
was comprehensible enough to include all types of incidents. Exhaustiveness is defined
by Andersson and Nilsson (1964) as whether enough data has been collected to be
sufficiently comprehensive to include all types of behaviours that the critical incident
technique could be expected to cover. After conducting three of the interviews some
categories tended to emerge naturally and led to the rudimentary system of categorization
that was later refined into ten helpful categories, ten not helpful categories and eleven
wish list categories. In the seventh interview it was determined that another category was
needed to encapsulate the different connotations of the participant’s experiences. As
mentioned above, after going through all of the interviews, and having an independent
rater check the categories, it was decided that exhaustiveness had not been achieved and
that a new category, self-esteem, needed to be added. After the eighth interview, with the
new category added, all of the incidents could be placed into the divisions. It is important
to note however, that the entire categorization scheme in terms of the range of
experiences of the participants is just a beginning. This is partially due to the exploratory
nature of the study and the distinction between the exhaustiveness of the method versus
the exhaustiveness of the participant’s experiences. The categories are discussed and
described within each group in Chapter 5 and examples of participant statements will be
given to show how the statements fell within each of the categories. This section is
devoted to telling the stories of the participants and how satisfied they were with their
current position in life as well as their hopes for the future. This chapter will also discuss
the credibility procedures used in this study.

Participation rate was also employed to determine credibility. This was achieved
by adding the number of participants who reported incidents in each category and
calculating the percentage of participation. According to Borgen & Amundson, (1984,
1987) it is suggested that 25% is sufficient to prove validity. For the 25% rate to be
achieved two participants out of eight would be required for validation. In all categories
except for three there were two or more participants who reported incidents in each
category. In the three that only had one participant it was decided that due to the
exploratory nature of this study, that these incidents were important and should be
included. Those three categories were: Family division finances, Aboriginality division
Programs and Activities offered, and Spirituality division Prayer. As these items did not
show up for all participants but were important to the participants that they did show up
for it was deemed necessary to include them for the purpose of providing complete
coverage of the story of the participants as well as honouring the stories of the
participants.

A fifth method of checking credibility that I employed was theoretical agreement.
This is discussed in Chapter 5 of the paper. Due to the fact that there is limited available
literature in the field and that research is difficult to find, theoretical agreement was
difficult for some validation purposes. Literature that is specific to the young adult
population of First Nations is very scarce. This study found that there is a paucity of research in the area of First Nations young people from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. I found relevant literature that supported some specific categories but due to the exploratory nature of this research and the fact that little research in this area has been done, in fact, there was none that I could find on First Nations young adults career and transitions. In the case of “unsupported” categories, I have judged them in light of the participant’s opinions themselves.

The final method of credibility I used was participant cross-checking to make sure that participants agreed or if not, to modify their categories so that they fit more appropriately with their own perceptions of how their stories should be interpreted. This was an important component of reassuring participants of their role in guiding the process and their power in asserting change or agreement as they see fit. Of all the participants, three made some spelling and wording changes and one asked me to remove a reference that might have been misinterpreted had it been read by the family. Apart from those changes the other participants were content with the categories and found the process quite interesting. All of the participants expressed an interest in receiving a copy of the thesis upon completion and all participants have been interested in keeping in contact. As a result of the history often associated with research done in this population and the personal need I felt to prevent that from happening in this instance, I have tried to maintain contact and intend to continue my association with the community. This may inherently endanger my participant’s confidentiality but at the same time is an important part of building trust in my view.
The critical incident technique uses the number of critical incidents as the basis of its sample size, not the number of participants, according to Woolsey, (1986). Angelides, (2001) also states that the critical incident technique is an appropriate technique for making sense of the role of culture in the experiences of minority groups, and this is a suitable description of part of the aim of this statement. The credibility and reliability of the critical incident technique can be found using several means to test the validity of the categorization system. Andersson and Nilsson (1964) suggest that using exhaustiveness of the categories and using independent raters to sort the incidents into the category system is a reliable method of testing validity. According to Maxwell (1992) and Butterfield (2001) it is important that researchers in a qualitative study use a variety of tests for validity to aid in the process of reporting upon interesting phenomena that may arise in the research data.

Qualitative research typically uses three types of validity: descriptive validity, interpretive validity and theoretical validity. This study used tape-recorded interviews and transcripts of those interviews that were accurate reproductions of the participants' words. Any blurry or unclear information from the tape-recorded interviews was excluded from the results of the study. The participant cross-check of the incidents extracted and the input of the participants with regard to the accuracy of these statements was a secondary check in terms of descriptive validity also. As a result of the participants being able to confirm the accuracy of the statements and to comment upon these results, any distortion by the researcher was ruled out. Thus the study can be said to fulfill the requirements of descriptive validity, or the accuracy of the accounts rendered. The second type of validity commonly utilized in qualitative research is interpretive
validity. This is a means of giving "voice" to the participants and acknowledging the perspectives of each participant. As this was a central aim of the study, to empower the participants and ensure that "truthful stories be told" it was of great significance that the study would be grounded in the participant's language. In order to ensure this occurred, I asked probing and clarifying questions in both the first and second interviews to ensure that I clearly understood what the participant was saying, and that I had indeed captured the essence of each incident that they identified. Questions such as "How was this (factor) helpful or not helpful to you?" and "Can you tell me more about how this (factor) was helpful or not helpful to you?" were able to elucidate the incidents and clarify any misconceptions or misunderstandings with regard to the message the participant wanted to relay.

The final commonly used means of validity for qualitative research is theoretical agreement. Theoretical agreement refers to how other research in the field explains the phenomenon under study and how this research is related to the assumptions of the study. As this was an exploratory study, with very little research previously done with this population and with this particular age group, the literature and research used to validate the assumptions are based on ideas that have been discussed in multicultural and minority groups' literature and research with indigenous populations. Theoretical validity will be further discussed in Chapter 5 of this paper. Assumptions underlying this study were few at the outset, but included such ideas as the following: individuals with strong family and community ties tend to be more resilient and experience greater "success" than those who are from dysfunctional families or communities; school experiences involving the environment, peers, teachers and expectations for success are all factors that can help a
youth to succeed or suffer; higher socio-economic status and freedom of access to educational or extracurricular programs help to create successful and strong communities; mentoring and role models for people are important elements of a successful individual; spirituality and connection to culture/ethnicity are important for individual self-confidence and acceptance; creativity and sporting outlets are helpful in creating a sense of identity; and low rates of self-esteem can negatively impact individual success. These assumptions are based on existing multicultural counselling theory, minority populations research and at-risk youth research. The findings of this study do not attempt to fit helpful and not helpful categories for these young aboriginal adults under existent research as there is little literature under which to fit it, however it does attempt to align findings with research that indicates successful outcomes and current counselling theory. This study also hopes that the critical incidents elicited here will expand upon the existent literature and further our understanding of what needs are not being met currently for indigenous youth as well as providing insight into factors that positively impacted the lives of these eight participants as well as possibly many more similar individuals from this population.

This study encapsulated the stated idea of understanding the lived experience of successful young First Nations’ adults in their journey from school to post secondary school life with regard to career. The aim of understanding what factors helped and hindered individuals meant that the categories and interpretations should accurately capture and closely adhere to the participant’s individual experiences. In order to ensure that researcher bias was limited I checked with my supervisor, an expert in the field of career and transitions, to see if he felt that the emerging categories seemed suitable and
consistent with previous research and other experts. He suggested that the categories seemed to be sufficient for the purposes of the study with the suggestions (as mentioned previously) of adding one category called “Achieving a new level of self understanding” and also adding a category “other”. Also I had an independent rater (a Ph.D. student in Counselling Psychology) take the first complete transcription and code the critical incidents into helpful, not helpful and wish list items. This extra independent analysis was only done with one transcribed interview due to the time constraints of both me and the Ph.D. student. Finally the participant cross check allowed for the participants themselves to see the data and give their input as to whether it was an accurate reflection of the data that they had given to me. All of these measures were taken to ensure consistency with the methodology of Andersson & Nilsson, (1964) and Alfonso (1997), as well as others who have used this method.

Conclusion

Thus, the six methods I employed to test for credibility in this critical incident study were: a) independent rater; b) participation rate; c) theoretical agreement; d) exhaustiveness; e) independent judgement of interview style; and f) participant cross-checking. From these checks for validity it was found that the critical incident technique proved justified as a means of methodology for this study. In summary, the category system that was developed appears to be valid. Independent rater agreement and participant cross-checking were high and contribute to the robustness of the study. New categories did not emerge after the test for exhaustiveness and participation rates in all of the categories were over 25% thus providing support for the soundness of the category system. Of the eight helpful, five hindering and six wish list categories, three achieved
100% participation rate at the helpful category level, thus supporting the robustness of those categories. The spread of the other results and participation rates will also be discussed in the discussions section of Chapter 5, as will theoretical agreement.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter will outline the various results found in the study from the first and second interviews and the validating procedures. The definitions of the categories are followed by various findings that are presented in tables and written examples of the statements made by the participants.

The eight participants in this study identified a total of 503 critical incidents and “wish list” items. After the first three interviews some major themes began to emerge and for many categories by the end of the fourth interview redundancy had been achieved. The first seven interviews were all completed within a two month time period over July and August 2005, the last interview was completed December 27/2006. After these interviews were transcribed a total of 473 critical incidents were extracted and 30 wish list items were found. The criteria used for extracting the critical incidents fell under Alfonso’s (1997) methodology including the following concepts: a) that the participant told the account in a complete manner; b) the incident was clearly identified and c) the incident was related to the purpose of the study. Given that the study was exploratory in nature many incidents were included in an effort to capture as holistic a picture of the factors that helped and hindered these eight First Nations young adults in their transition between school and post secondary life with regard to career. These 503 incidents were divided into helpful, not helpful (hindering), and wish list items, or hopes that the participants expressed. One new wish list item was added when the participant cross-checking occurred, but no new helpful or hindering incidents were added.
Therefore, a total of 308 helpful incidents, 165 not helpful and 30 wish list items were identified in this study.

**Table 1: Critical incident totals by group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Not Helpful</th>
<th>Wish List</th>
<th>Totals by Participant #</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>308</strong></td>
<td><strong>165</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>503</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These incidents were then sorted into eight helpful categories, five not helpful categories and seven wish list categories. This chapter describes the categories within each group and gives examples of the participants’ statements with regard to each category. A discussion of how these categories may have helped or not helped each participant is reserved for the discussion section of this study. Finally this chapter describes the theoretical validation procedures used in this study.
Category Descriptions

The categories described in this section are separated into three groups: helpful critical incidents, not helpful/hindering incidents and wish list items (those things that participants feel would help them to continue to do well in the future). Each group is presented in descending order of participation rate. The categories were divided into divisions in three of the categories to provide for greater specificity and to provide a better picture of the participant’s stories. Due to the division within the larger categories there are no categories of equal representation and therefore the categories represent highest representation to lowest representation, with the subcategories following the same pattern of descending order of participation rate. The critical incidents are further elaborated upon by providing examples of statements made by the participants for the categories within each group and sub-grouping. Random participant numbers were assigned to the participants but in no way reflect the order in which the interviews occurred, and the example statements are used to present illustrations of how the categories were formed. Due to the limitations of the scope of this paper while in some cases there are multiple examples of statements made by the participants for many of the categories and sub-categories only a maximum of five examples (one per participant) will be used. Tables which summarize the critical incident categories, their participation rates and frequencies are presented at the beginning of each group or sub-group.

Table # 2 below represents a summary of the eight helpful critical incident categories, participation rates for each and the frequencies which occurred within each category.
Helpful Critical Incidents

Table 2: List of helpful categories, participation rates and respective frequencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participation rate (Percentage of participants providing incidents under these categories) N=8</th>
<th>Frequency (Total number of Incidents cited for each Category and percentage)</th>
<th>Total for category and subcategory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A- Role Models</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>52 (17%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B- Environment/ Support</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>37 (12%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family = 89 (29%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A- Alcohol &amp; Drugs</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>15 (5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B- Spirituality/ritual/Creativity</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>14 (4.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C- Self Esteem</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td>11 (4%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D- Maintaining Physical Health</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>10 (3%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wellness = 50 (16.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A- Expectations for Success</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>31 (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B- Teachers</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>7 (2.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C- Peers</td>
<td>5 (62.5%)</td>
<td>4 (1%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUBTOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School = 46 (15%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aboriginality = 32 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving a new level of Self-Understanding</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>28 (9%)</td>
<td>Achieving a New Level of Self-Understanding = 28 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Work Experience = 28 (9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy Relationships = 18 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Community = 16 (5.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of critical incidents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>308 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Category 1: Family

This category was comprised of incidents that are reflective of the influence which family wielded over the participants, and the divisions more clearly specify the distinctions between those various elements over which family exerted the most influence. Family is defined as the group of people most closely aligned by blood relations to the participant, including the nuclear family, extended family including aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents. While this is a more specific category than the healthy relationships one, it was meant to specify the different factors which helped the participants in terms of the people they regarded as family. The helpfulness of family was seen by the participants as an integral component of their success in being where they are today. With a total of 89 incidents this category comprised 29% of the helpful critical incidents. Family was divided into four sub-divisions.

1A: Role Models.

This category was the most frequently cited helpful factor in the study. "Role models" is a term which covers the idea of people in the participant’s lives who had either been a role model for them, or for whom they had been a role model. These role models were indicated to be very helpful through a variety of means, either by showing the participant how to succeed, or by modeling specific behaviours that the participant either wanted to emulate or conversely wanted to avoid. Participants also indicated that the responsibility of being a role model for a sibling due to the absence of such figures in the immediate families of the individuals was helpful in the sense that it made the participant feel a duty or an obligation and thereby forced upon them a role that embodied being successful so the sibling could also be successful. Role models gave the
participants a variety of skills including how to operate a business, how to fix things, or do things “correctly”, how to avoid the problems associated with drugs and alcohol, as well as skills in standing up for oneself and being assertive. Critical incidents that emerged in this category are: a) providing a useful model with which to copy from (running a business, operating a fishing boat, skills in employment, the responsibility of managing time and organizational skills, academic skill attainment, and respecting the environment/community); b) accepting responsibility for others and wishing to prove a good role model for family members whom they could influence; c) providing support and encouragement, including financial support, and hope and d) providing inspiration.

EXAMPLE 1

Dad number one helped me in so many ways in learning how to do anything along the lines in the fishing industry and more, I mean he's taught me mechanics, like I said, he's taught me fishing, he's taught me to how to run a boat, how to run machinery around the yard.

EXAMPLE 2

...started when I was young like with my parents. And a lot of the values that they have that I have now are kind of reflection of what they have so just growing up in terms of my parents were always progressive in terms of this social and environmental stuff. So my mum was always had a big garden and she was the first to institute recycling up in, recycling stuff up in our town...
EXAMPLE 3

...seeing my mum raise a family of 3 kids and managing to put them in all the sports they wanted to do, especially figure skating, but that is an expensive sport especially when you get to the higher levels it’s... you know a lot of families cannot afford to put their children in figure skating so I mean seeing that has definitely been inspiring.. It’s definitely driven me to want to become something to get somewhere in life.

EXAMPLE 4

...he’s [father] also a teacher with years and years and years of experience. We can talk about things—experiences I’ve had in my practicum or we can talk about education in general. We have kind of a friendship side of our relationship, where we talk about education and what not. And then we have a parental side where he now is—he tries everything he can to get me to do well, like offering us a down payment for a house and he’s always coming through—like he replaced the engine in our truck. So financially, from a dad perspective he’s there. But he’s also there as a friend to talk about schooling and people and it’s nice to—I can always phone him or e-mail him. Like it’s safe. He’s always there. ... It takes a worry away.

Category 1: Family

1B: Supportive environment/Stability

This category was derived from the many comments given by the participants about how a supportive and positive environment within the family was helpful to them in being where they are today and in being successful. The term covers the idea of
having a stable person or environment and the positive support systems within the family. Examples of this took the form of positive support, care, being able to participate in activities and do things with family members, as well as just having a strong, functional family unit as support. Specifically mentioned as helpful factors were stability, and the feeling of being “backed up” by a parent or parental figure.

EXAMPLE 1

…it's very helpful cause you are learning from somebody who loves you and you love them as well and so you've already,... you know their language and they know your language and so you are just going and going and going and we make such an awesome like there is nobody that can fish like we can, we were on the ball you know it's just like a perfect work environment.

EXAMPLE 2

…my mom, during that period, never getting mad at me for being late, or for skipping or for anything – it kind of let me figure out on my own exactly which behaviours were bad. And it was more about me trying to become better. Not about me trying to avoid getting in trouble.

EXAMPLE 3

…my parents really support me in terms of what I do...How is that helpful? Makes me feel, I guess it gives me some confidence in what I'm doing and it makes me feel that no matter what I'm doing there’s always somebody out there that’s going to support me.
EXAMPLE 4

I think my dad was definitely a huge support... he just took a huge stand in being the single parent and father and he was just always, he was always there... I don’t want to say that I couldn’t have done what I’m doing without him, but it definitely impacted the reason why I’ve done what I’ve done. Just him being there for me has given me motivation and confidence and just made me realize in myself that I can do what I’m doing.

EXAMPLE 5

... my mother was a stay at home mom... like this beautiful woman who.. was there everyday after school, made all of our lunches, did all of our dinners, just she was always our friend, always... it was the only sense of stability in all the moving and everything was the fact that my mom was always the same mom, always a stay at home mom.

Category 2: Wellness

This category emerged in the first interview and was revisited in some measure by all participants, but was specifically cited by seven participants for a total of 50 incidents. This category is defined as the participant’s internal feelings of being healthy physically, emotionally, spiritually and connected to others in positive relationships as well as to their culture and traditions. It included such terms as spirituality, rituals, physical and emotional health and well-being as well as connections to creativity through expressions of art and writing or cultural activities such as dance. Alcohol and drugs were mentioned
with regard to wellness but were determined to be significant enough to warrant a division in this category.

2A: Alcohol & Drugs

This category emerged as a helpful category in that the participants saw this as a necessary phase of becoming more successful in life and experiencing the affects of substance use personally, yet being able to escape the cycle, and to understand that usage of substances had aided them through difficult times but was not a component of a life that engendered positive thoughts and success.

EXAMPLE 1

I did drugs—crystal meth. And I did it for about six months when I was 17... So I tried it and I liked it. And I was chubby, chubby, chubby back then. Like really chubby. And I..., I lost weight. I lost a lot of weight. So I did it for about six months... it's helpful—that experience was helpful because I was at the point where if I would have kept doing it I would have become a drug addict.

EXAMPLE 2

...not being caught up with drugs and alcohol and the wrong... It makes me feel good that I'm not involved with that, and that I don't know people who are doing that... Helped me to want to stay away from it.[addiction] It's helped me realize that it's not the path that I want for myself. Helped me to realize how much the importance of
When that addiction takes away or takes over a parent and leaves that child abandoned...

EXAMPLE 3

Probably the biggest one is when I found out that I was pregnant. And at that point I had not had any drugs for, I think, two years. I hadn’t smoked for a year. And I had stopped drinking, I think, two months before that. So at that point I was clean. I’d been clean for a couple of months. So it kind of sunk in at that point that if I was doing any of those things being pregnant—it would be awful for the baby but I was—I had a healthy body for the baby—and that—it just made me feel good. It made me feel good that I had made those changes. It felt like, I don’t know, kind of like it’s like a little reward for having made positive physical changes for myself. So that was probably the biggest.

Category 2: Wellness

2B: Spirituality/Rituals/Creativity

For three participants the inclusion of some form of spirituality or ritual added a dimension of wellness to their lives. This division is defined as incorporating prayer, ritual, creative expression or religious experiences into the participant’s life. Specific reference was made to prayer and rites of passage into adulthood, as well as the helpfulness of creative expression and tapping into inner dimensions of knowledge.
EXAMPLE 1

I guess if anything bad happened I wouldn’t act out on it happening at the time. I would keep it inside and then I would write her, like, ten to sometimes even like 14, 15 page letters, like back to back, just spilling everything. And sometimes I’d mail it or sometimes I wouldn’t mail it. And she’d write me long letters as well. So, I don’t know, I always had somewhere to turn to.

EXAMPLE 2

...as far as praying goes, I've tried to incorporate that into like absolutely everything I do right. I'll say you know Lord come join me let's have a great day you know like that kind of thing. I'm trying to put it in absolutely everything that I do and..., it works. It's amazing... I think I've always been a pretty good prayer practiced at it but I think in the past 6 months I've been trying to put it more and more into everything that I do.

EXAMPLE 3

About 5 months, 4 months [ago] we had a ceremony through the KAYA (Knowledge of Aboriginal Youth Association). They did a ceremony called rites of passage. Which essentially marks youths transition from youth to adulthood. I find this interesting because it has helped me to identify myself more professionally.
EXAMPLE 4

I’ve always been drawing and sketching and creating since I can remember. So it was something that was really natural for me…

Drawing and art. I remember doing a lot of that. I would do a lot of colouring drawings, umm and umm just doing anything with my hands. Like I’d always do all the girls hair and we’d have hair days where all the girls in my community would come to my place and I’d do all their hair in french braids and yeah, just stuff like that and do fashion design. [doing stuff with your hands, drawing]

I think it has to do with spiritual connection, that’s what I think, creativity is more spiritual… I was happy, yeah happy.

EXAMPLE 5

Spirituality. I smudge all the time and pray and I do as much as I can when it comes to ceremonies, because there’s dates you can make, you always have prayer… I think the smudging is more or less just cleansing the negative.

Category 2: Wellness

2C: Maintaining Physical Health

The acknowledgement by five of the participants that physical and emotional health was an important facet of doing well represented a significant component of this subcategory. Such factors as eating well, vegetarianism, exercise and other elements of physical health all indicated the need to include this as a subcategory. Overall ten helpful incidents were cited in this category.
EXAMPLE 1

I wouldn’t say it was most important but it definitely led to, I mean if I wasn’t diagnosed with diabetes I wouldn’t have spent so much time in hospital dealing with nurses and doctors.

EXAMPLE 2

I grew up with juicing you know in my life and I am vegetarian from birth which is very different from Aboriginal young people, well people period.

EXAMPLE 3

...not only basketball, but running and cycling and swimming allows me to I guess focus because if I’ve had a frustrating day and sort of negative things that aren’t positive to me, that they are, I can focus my energies doing those sort of activities that tire me out physically and emotionally so at the end I’m kind of drained and those feelings aren’t really bothering me anymore.

EXAMPLE 4

...think it just did because physically it did, like I never got hurt umm, I think mentally it made me stronger because as I grew up I was very much physically strong as well as mentally like book and street smarts.
Category 2: Wellness

2D: Self-esteem

The importance of feelings of self-worth, self-efficacy and generally feeling good about oneself or building up one's self-confidence emerged as an important category for the participants. This division covers the ideas of self-esteem and the associated feelings of wellness that tended to create feelings of positivity and hope for the future for the seven participants who cited this category in their interviews. The fact that some ideas of self-esteem also are tied to new understandings of oneself did not escape my attention but it seemed pertinent to include this subcategory to exemplify the importance of feelings of self-worth and self-esteem that the participants mentioned.

EXAMPLE 1

I think it's empowering to have someone think you're good no matter what you do. And to recognize that sometimes you behave in ways that maybe aren't appropriate but that your behaviour doesn't necessarily mean that's who you are. That showed me that they knew me as a person, which—it felt like no one else—either they didn't bother to learn, or—I don't know. It just made me feel valuable.

EXAMPLE 2

Basically it's the classic somebody believing in you and you took it seriously. I think as a teenager you are very affected by your peers and by you know whoever you decide to let affect you, to people you look up to.
EXAMPLE 3

... even though I lived that day everyday, seeing abuse and hearing my parents fighting. I just knew there was something better for me...

I knew I was smart.

EXAMPLE 4

...it’s helpful for me because now I can see that and I can work on that. Like some people don’t realize that until they’re forty years old and their life’s half—you know. I don’t want to be that person. I don’t want to be sitting on my couch or living with my boyfriend and having him paying the rent. Like I need to do things for myself and I finally realized...

Category 3: School

This category is reflective of the profound influence which school had in the lives of the participants, particularly in high school, but also at the elementary level. In this category, the belief in capability to succeed academically for themselves was highlighted, as was the individual influence of specific teachers and the actual feeling of being able to achieve good grades, or the feelings of success that good grades engendered within each participant that mentioned this category.

3A: Expectations for success

Expectations for success is defined as the participant’s beliefs that they could improve, do well or succeed in the setting of school, either due to their own knowledge or because they achieved good grades, or teachers and peers or others made them feel valuable regardless of grade level and ability.
EXAMPLE 1

…it was the next year after that that I got full-time fine Arts. And I took like 5 classes and I got really good marks and I knew right then that that was what I wanted to do..

EXAMPLE 2

I graduated at the top of my class in high school, gave me scholarships both in my undergrad and my Masters program umm it allowed me to pursue a lot of things.

EXAMPLE 3

…it just feels so good when you get an A or a B+... I did really well in the course I got like 86 or 90 percent and I felt like I was really good at Spanish and felt I did really well. I felt very competent with school work.

EXAMPLE 4

…the fact that [private school] the teacher’s are rooting for you to go somewhere with your life and you can feel it. That support is it is a big influence.

EXAMPLE 5

I was always top of my class, always won awards always got recognition for whatever I was involved in at the time...I was winning the awards for creative writing, getting like 98%...And out of [Native school]I got a lot of my work published from doing my papers there.
Category 3: School

As mentioned above, schooling was seen to be an important factor in leading to the future success of the participants, as well as experiencing moments of success or feeling valued during the actual period of time in school, one factor that six of the eight participants focused upon was the teacher.

3B: Teachers

In this subcategory such factors as teachers providing inspiration, validation and being treated with respect and relating to the participants were all significant in their impact upon their individual lives at the time of schooling.

EXAMPLE 1

I loved writing, in his writing class, his creative writing class, between that and my English class I just loved writing.

EXAMPLE 2

And the teachers who did care, like I had one English 10 teacher who—she told me that I was a really good writer and that she thought that I was really creative, and she let me hand in all my assignments. They were late but she let me hand everything in. And that, again, it makes you feel like you are a valuable person.

EXAMPLE 3

she [high school teacher] actually took a huge interest in me and my younger sister because she knew about my mom not being there and stuff...She would just listen and she actually recommended a counsellor to talk to if I wanted to. So she helped me out with that.
She gives me and my sister hugs and kisses on the cheek all the time and she says I love you.

Category 3: School

As mentioned previously the school category was the second highest participation category of the study. The division regarding peers includes reference to schools as being private, and public as well as post secondary schools. This “peer” division mentioned such factors as peers as role models, peers as support and peers as guides in terms of helping because the participants did not want to be like some of their peers. Clear reference was also made to sports and the ability of being part of a team to help with social networking and a feeling of pride. As can be seen with most of these categories, an underlying theme is support and connections.

3C: Peers

From the stories of the participants the existence of a social network was very important to the feelings of belonging and inclusion, as well as just general support and enjoyment of life. The specificity of a category related to school peers was relevant for the purposes of how these peers differed from the participants current peers and also how the “school peers” were a vital component of doing well in the environment of the school, not necessarily in terms of academic success.

EXAMPLE 1

She was really good. She was just a really good girl, all her homework was done and she was very straightforward, very kind of square (laughs). And so we’d hang out and stuff. And I met other
girls more so in grade 12...11 and 12 just different girls that were into different things.

EXAMPLE 2

...when I was in university I met a lot of friends that identified with a lot more than the friends that I had in high school, that I had a lot more similarities with me and had a lot of common beliefs and stuff... Umm it’s good it kind of gives you a sense of community, a sense of belonging and without that you kind of feel alone.

EXAMPLE 3

I started playing basketball competitively when I was in gr. 6. So I played until I was in high school so in Gr. 12 I was playing and was competitive at that..., it helped in a number of ways. Like just physically it gave me a lot of exercise umm and it’s nice to be part of a team to have that sort of bonding with other people in the school kind of friends that way and it was nice I guess outlet for frustration and stuff like that so kind of frustrations from school and then it was kind of like a social benefit. Like being on the basketball team was kind of a big plus for the social realms of school.

Category 4: Aboriginality

As this study was based on telling stories from First Nations young adults, the category of aboriginality was not surprising. The definition of this category includes the
factors of a growing sense of identity as an aboriginal combined with the ever present need for contact with people and rituals/programs associated with the aboriginal culture from which the individual came. Support from the aboriginal community was important not only in terms of a sense of pride in oneself and being Native, but also valuable in terms of financial assistance and achieving a sense of aboriginal identity. Being able to work with or see Native people in positions of authority, or being able to connect with other First Nations and enjoy programs or activities within the community were all important to the various participants who related incidents in this category. While no First Nations community is the same as another across Canada, the differences were not accentuated in this category, rather it was the need for connections with people who identified themselves as First Nations.

EXAMPLE 1

...to know I could go where there’s lots of us all going to school together with Native teachers and that sort of thing. So that got me really excited.

EXAMPLE 2

I went to [school], which is all native school.. And that’s when it was the BEST year... So it was really good for me to go to an all Native school.

EXAMPLE 3

...now I just go by [my Native surname]. So...After my dad died.... helped me realize it’s a beautiful last name and why should I be ashamed of where I am or who I am? Just because of my last name.
So even though—and it changed me too—the reason why I changed it is after my dad died.... I get a really good feeling, though, when people are like—because it’s an obvious Native name. It’s not a Caucasian or a German, or anything ..—it’s just—it’s Native. It’s just a good feeling I get because every time I hear it or I’m at the bank or I’m paying a bill or something like that. Somebody always says something about it and it’s never bad. It’s always good, and it’s almost like a boost of confidence. And even today I just got one—or yesterday—and it’s ... because in the Native culture ... when it’s like Running Horse, when the baby was born they’d seen a running horse. So it’s like when I was—or not when I was born but when somebody in my family—my great-great grandmother or whatever, it’s that [ my Native surname] is just ... a good image... in my mind.

And ...it suits me. I think it suits me.

EXAMPLE 4

...in the Cree culture, more so than out here, having long hair and having braids is pretty standard ....because I’m quite light and what not I represented you know everyone knew that I was half native, especially because everyone there is Cree and we all look alike kind of, our features. So it kind of represented being Native.

Category 5: Work Experience (including volunteering and paid work)

Work experience, both paid and volunteer, emerged as a significant category for helping individuals to succeed. Such variables as exposure to previously unknown jobs,
the networking opportunities, the increased feelings of self-worth and new abilities derived from being in a job were all considered to be important helping factors for the participants. Work fell into many different categories but a predominant theme was feeling competent and confident about one’s ability to do a good job or to feel valued.

EXAMPLE 1

...then I started as my Dad's deck hand, mostly playing on the boat but trying to help out at ten and then thirteen I am his deck hand. His one and only on the boat soon I was dealing with the people that you sell fish to so like I'm in that market. I'm in the marketing area as well and you know fixing engines. ... That led me to be interested and I guess good at that trade right.

EXAMPLE 2

...when I was volunteering at (a high school). I think it was helpful in that I got out of the university frame of mind where we’re talking about people as a general populace, and it made me realize sitting in the classroom with these kids, one of them—I wasn’t allowed to let her go to the bathroom because she’s such a risk for suicide. I never realized how real the problems that most First Nations kids are experiencing are. It was really helpful because I saw how the kids reacted to teachers who were doing everything wrong to them and how the kids reacted towards teachers who seemed to be doing the right things. Or better things than the other ones were.
Category 6: Achieving a New Level of self-understanding

This category was an interesting development in the study. It reflected the participant’s growing knowledge of themselves at varying points in their lives, as well as at certain epiphanous moments. This category is defined as a time when the participants were reflecting upon themselves, and using previous experiences, or the relationships within which they found themselves to be was both edifying and elucidating for the participants in their knowledge about themselves. This category included such things as maturation, building self-confidence, increased awareness of individual needs, self-awareness or personal acceptance and skill development. Means by which this new level of self-understanding varied but journaling was mentioned as a good reflective tool, as well as doing independent reading and research.

EXAMPLE 1

I think even though I was irresponsible for some amount of years, in the end, it's taught me so much responsibility cause now you can look back over those years and say okay that's exactly where I messed up right there. I won't do that again.

EXAMPLE 2

It was the best and the worst experience ever. I was living with him at the time and to everybody else around us there was nothing wrong. But to me we just had deep differences in our values and it was really hard because we weren’t breaking up because I didn’t love him. And he didn’t want to break up. He didn’t even know there was anything wrong. So it was hard for that and—but it was
the best thing to happen, because he kind of represented the person that I used to be and didn’t want to be anymore. So it was the best experience because I think that was kind of the start of me changing and it was the worst experience just because we were together for years and it was a very emotional, passionate relationship.

EXAMPLE 3

I needed to learn how to stand up for myself and take care of myself. And how I wanted to be treated when I’m going to accept, what kind of treatment I am going to accept and that’s what I had to learn at that point in my life too. And so I don’t know what it was, well it was a lot of things that built up and I one day realized that I don’t want to be with him anymore and I don’t need to live like that and then move out.

EXAMPLE 4

I’m always just writing memories down to kind of analyze how I acted in that situation. And when I think about some of the choices I’ve made like that—when you write it down or when you tell someone about it, you really look back and see it for what it actually is. Not for the need or the desire you had at that time. Being able to look back on it? I think it’s helpful because it makes me conscious of the choices I make every day, now. And it makes me think about how my actions now will affect how I feel about
myself or people around me, or how it will affect people around me, either in the near future or the distant future, or—I kind of—it makes me think like can I justify what I’m doing now in an hour after I’ve done it or in a week when someone asks me “Why did you do that?” Like, can I tell them, “Here’s the set of reasons why I chose to do this.” It helps me be less angry with myself for having made bad decisions. It helps me be a little bit—it helps me be more proud of the things I’ve done.

Category 7: Healthy relationships

In order for the participants to see themselves as doing well a factor that was important was the existence in their lives of healthy relationships. A healthy relationship was defined as the relationships outside of blood relatives that were influential upon the participants. These relationships could take the form of friendship, role models and partnerships. The feeling of having such people in their lives was one of fulfillment, connectivity and also feeling there was someone with whom they could connect to be more successful.

EXAMPLE 1

I think my friends. I had two really good friends at that time..... We were just like the three amigos, we were always together and I think that helped just having such a close knit little circle between us... It just made me feel secure. I had these two girls that I could call whenever I want I can tell whatever I need to tell them I can ask them for help.
EXAMPLE 2

I think she [friend] gave me internal strength. So it kind of gave you strength to either finish your day or finish your week or finish the month or whatever it was. And if something was really bad, just not to dwell on it, like, she kind of helped me displace blame from myself to just the world or to whatever.

EXAMPLE 3

...[my partner] is very supportive like my parents...she’s also very kind of creative and fun and spontaneous whereas I was always a lot more serious. Especially when I was growing up so she kind of helped me kind of explore that whole side of myself....she’s really good at laughing at herself and I was never very good at laughing at myself and with her it took a long time, but now I’m able to laugh at myself a lot more and take things in a bit... not so serious.

Category 8: Community

This category emerged as a significant contribution to the success of the individuals in the study. The community that is discussed here, refers not only to the aboriginal community, but the wider community which wielded a sphere of influence over the lives of each participant. Such factors as support from within the various elements of the community including Caucasian and multicultural populations, and the actual Native band community also, the socioeconomics of the surrounding neighbourhoods and schools, the various sporting, educational and extracurricular
programs offered on a communal basis and the general feeling of safety within a community were all significant components in the success of the participants.

EXAMPLE 1

I feel successful because I have a home that's my own I feel like it's in a pretty good neighbourhood... being involved in the community, like being able to create an environment that I can, some people are struggling, single mothers where they are just working and they are just surviving and I don't feel I'm in that place.

EXAMPLE 2

...when I was in university I met a lot of friends that identified with a lot more than the friends that I had in high school, that I had a lot more similarities with me and had a lot of common beliefs and stuff... Umm it's good it kind of gives you a sense of community, a sense of belonging and without that you kind of feel alone.

EXAMPLE 3

I went to a women's workshop for 4 months it was really helpful.... It's helpful to know that you don’t have to be ashamed of what happened and you know you don’t have to hide it...I also wanted to mention that being here at the Centre also it's like umm being involved in the community.
EXAMPLE 4

I just went to this woman’s entrepreneur conference, and I found out that women in general have a time asking for what they deserve compared to what men, men are just very much over the table, it’s helpful because it’s just dealing with the fact that I never know what to charge for what I’m doing and it’s like ok, well if I can charge double what I think I’m worth and I can get away with it, then that will really pay the bills!”.

Summary of Helpful Incidents categorization

The incidents and statements made by the participants allowed me to gain an insight into many factors that helped each participant to do well with regard to career and transitioning from school to post secondary life, in the many different forms that their young lives had taken. In grouping the incidents into eight helpful categories it became apparent that many of the incidents were related to connections and support, however that very connection and support was different for each person and while some similarities could be seen, the individual insight and experience always added depth to my understanding of how each category was relevant to each participant.

Hindering Categories

Table 3 below illustrates the hindering critical incidents, their participation rates and frequencies.
Table 3: List of hindering critical incident categories, participation rates and respective frequencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Participation Rate</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. School</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>47 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Wellness</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td>44 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Family</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>38 (23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Community</td>
<td>7 (87.5%)</td>
<td>24 (14.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Work Experience</td>
<td>4 (50%)</td>
<td>12 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of hindering critical incidents</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>165 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those items identified by the participants as not being helpful (hindering) had considerable overlap with the categories identified as helpful. Hindering items included family factors such as the lack of positive role models and negative environment/ or lack of support, as well as school factors that were similar to those identified previously. Peers that were negative in outlook or behaviours were also viewed as not helpful and a high report was found to occur within the category of self-esteem. Negative work places and stressful environments were also found to be not helpful but on the whole the hindering items were 165 in total or approximately 33% of the total number of incidents identified. The smaller amount of hindering items is not unusual given that the participants self-identified as “doing well”. Table 3 shows the categories, the participation rate for each category and the frequency of those categories. For the
hindering categories five emerged but were not divided into divisions as it was felt that the broad definitions encapsulated the intricacies of the unhelpful incidents.

It should be noted that in this category of all the participants the male was the participant who cited the least hindering incidents and one of the females cited more hindering critical incidents than helpful critical incidents. Both of these results indicate a need for further research, which will be discussed below in Chapter 5 in the implications for future research section.

Category 1: School

This category was not broken down into the divisions as in the helpfulness section because the incidents cited predominantly fell in the lack of expectations for success, as shown in Table 2. The presence of teachers and peers as well as the distinction between public and private school settings fell more within the umbrella heading of expectations for success, and thereby did not require subcategories.

EXAMPLE 1

First, one thing in the school area would be teachers who interpreted my behaviour as me just being a bad kid.... That is something that didn’t help. It’s an alternate school in [suburb of Vancouver]. It was a good experience. I’m glad I had it but if that teacher had just not dismissed me as just a bad seed, and let the counselor try and get to the root of the problem, that I would have—I would have avoided getting thrown out of school.
EXAMPLE 2

I ended up in [private school] it was pilot school very fancy private school and, uh, there was very few children that attended this school but it was just the worst school because it was so slack... Too much leniency... It led me to believe I guess that I could do, I could slack off in every area in life because you can get away with it, you can manipulate, and do these kind of things....You can get by of not so good, I mean there is nothing good about anything that I learned in that school... I didn't really didn't want to do anything at all except to be a slack off.

EXAMPLE 3

Their science teacher at the time was very young, well off, petite blond woman. And she was—it seemed to me she was actually scared of the kids, because she wouldn’t look them in the eye. She would always look down at the ground when she was trying to discipline them. And they acted up—they were crazy for her, and she was teaching in—it was set up in a lab, because it’s science, so everything was sitting forward and she didn’t have any—she was the only science teacher for the aboriginal kids and she didn’t have anything that said that she had anything to do with aboriginal kids up in the room.
EXAMPLE 4

It was a big school, a lot of students and I didn’t feel like still I was getting the attention that I needed in class like I asked for help and I don’t know I didn’t feel like I, I didn’t feel comfortable... maybe it was the size too but I don’t remember ever connecting or talking to one of my teachers.

Category 2: Wellness

The significant aspect of wellness in the hindering category was the predominance of low self-esteem or feelings of lack of value and self-worth. Spirituality and rituals were noticeable for their absence from the hindering category. Ill health within the immediate family, as well as on an individual basis for the participant was also deemed a factor which hindered success. As with the helpful category, the incidence of drug and alcohol usage arose as a hindering factor but the most significant hindrance, in terms of wellness, was self-esteem with 20 incidents cited. As a result of the overlap this category was not broken down into divisions. In the hindering section it was felt that the usage of drugs and alcohol should be included in this category as was done in the helpful section, but without any subdivision due to the close link between wellness and substance usage.

EXAMPLE 1

I think if I’m in an emergency situation as a nurse you know what if I pass out on my patient maybe? This isn’t something I should be doing. You know if I can’t guarantee to provide the service that I’m there for maybe I should reconsider my career choice
EXAMPLE 2

...one of the major battles is, well there’s lots of them. Alcohol is one of the major battles.

EXAMPLE 3

I’m my worst critic. I criticize myself constantly in my mind.... It’s not helpful to me because I’m so down on myself... the self criticism. It really affects me. It’s the only thing that brings me down.

EXAMPLE 4

...she’s like ‘[participant] looks like she’s getting a bit pudgy’.
And that stuck with me and it still sticks with me today Well it was a huge blow to my self esteem, and being so young, and starting at that age where physical looks are such a big deal I was just like ‘woah’ and became so self conscious...

Category 3: Family

Again for this category it was not deemed necessary to subdivide the hindering incidents any further than the generalization of the family. The specifics of lack of role models, poverty, the physical and emotional environment of the familial home and instability, including moving or separation, all fell under the broader category of the family environment and support. This section also mentioned foster family situations and the various difficulties associated with moving.
EXAMPLE 1

...at the time it was really important, especially because we were trying to make sense of who broke up with who and why dad left and I don't—you know I don't think, aside from good memories, I don't think that any influence on me now, because as soon as he moved in with his wife, it was like night and day. He changed completely and there were years and years where I hated him. And, like we just hated each other, and we have a good relationship now but it was—yeah—it was really unhealthy for years. We hated each other.

EXAMPLE 2

...there was abuse in the family. Well abusive relationships with my mum and with her husbands... I grew up with that...

EXAMPLE 3

....it was bad because I think we just kind of took off, we just kind of uprooted and left because I think it was the summer so I didn't really get to say goodbye to my friends. ...But my best friend who I left I think she was away and I just left and she was really pissed off so we lost contact for ....well we just recently started talking again. So that kind of affected me

EXAMPLE 4

We were very poor. I grew up on welfare. My dad never really worked...... we were even more poor because we didn’t have
anything when we moved out here. We moved in like a transition house for like a couple of days and then that’s when we moved to [suburb].

Category 4: Community

The factors that participants cited as being not helpful in this category included the lack of role models, the lack of community support and also the presence of racism within the community, racism from the native community towards members of mixed races, and racism from the mainstream community, as well as the more general issue of negative influences of friends within the community, especially after high school. The negative environment was seen to be a hindrance in a variety of ways but these three situations were the most commonly cited. It was decided that this category should not be broken down into two subdivisions. This was due to the existence of the general ideas of role models, racism, and negative influences as well as the reference to alcohol and drugs by five participants, within the broader context of the community as a whole, as hindering factors in participants lives. This category specifically looked at racism, from the Native community and the wider community, as well as socioeconomic variables, violent neighbourhoods, and the negative feeling of neighbourhoods that were not necessarily violent, but hostile.

EXAMPLE 1

I have light eyes it’s very obvious that I’m half non-native. And that tends to, sometimes I can not be taken as seriously because of that and I actually have to prove myself so the more Native... I’m ashamed like “sorry guys I’m half white” like that sort of feeling
comes out. You almost feel like you, like you’ve sold out to people or something and I didn’t have anything to do with my father’s background. I don’t look Native to BC.

EXAMPLE 2

My parents were drug users. I lived with my step mom and my dad...we lived in [suburb], which is a low income area. However, where we lived it was right in [suburb] but it was nice. It was really, really nice. Everyone who was there was pretty—was middle class right but nice houses, nice families. And then there’s us. Okay. And we don’t have a vehicle. We don’t have anything. Nothing! We have nothing!

EXAMPLE 3

...because there is a lot of violence, first of all there’s people who get jumped, you know gang violence like there’s a lot of guys that just follow you round, a lot. And it’s just umm I don’t know how many times we’ve experienced people following us... scary when you can’t go out by yourself!

EXAMPLE 4

It’s a small community everybody knows your business and everybody gossips and some people are feeling negative so they kind of bring you down. Just the addiction and stuff like that there.
Category 5: Work Experience

In terms of employment, both volunteer and paid, the significant hindering factors were grouped into being overwhelmed by the enormity of tasks, the lack of challenge or progress in a job, the failure to provide support training for new positions and the downturn in an industry due to environmental and economic factors. Also mentioned was the need for provision of finances for training and the frustration with getting certificates in terms of education but being unable to find positions that were related to the desired position.

EXAMPLE 1
I feel like after the rites of passage that I felt like we do so much work, we do so much volunteer work umm, we’re just so, we see so many gaps that and we’re capable umm to fill them but we’re constantly jumping around, juggling a lot of different contracts and sometimes we are paid sometimes we are not.

EXAMPLE 2
There was nothing developing, nothing really progressing so I wanted, was just getting bored with my work and bogged down in all these issues that I didn’t see as being positive so I decided to go back to school.

EXAMPLE 3
…it was hard like, I dunno! I guess four years ago maybe, yeah it should be around four years ago, just the fish stopped coming and you know there is also the price lowered so much which is
ridiculous because you would think that there being so little fish – you would be able to sell it for so much more right but no it didn't work out that way. So you’re catching little fish and you are selling it for little amounts of money, and it's just like you know you’re not working, and you’re putting money, and everybody is taking money out so it didn't work but it just over those four years it got worse and worse and worse every year.

EXAMPLE 4

I was working at [a] Café ..., And it was my first or second day. I only worked there two days. But I didn’t understand like when he told me that this place is really busy that it was really busy. And... meaning, there needs to be working at all times at least like six people in the little cafe. I worked and it started to become really busy, so I have to...they were trying to train me and it’s busy. Like how are you going to train me on the till if it’s really busy? And so the girl’s just okay... well I’ll do it. You go over there and you do whatever else you’re supposed to do. I’ll do it..., and so I got in trouble because I was supposed to be on the till and they’re [saying] she’s supposed to be trained, and so because of the pressure of it being so busy and then having a customer ..., “Hurry up,” you know or I’m not doing it right, or I did the order wrong. I quit. I just didn’t go... the pressure of...the people, the customers, the time and stuff. I quit. I couldn’t. I hated it
working there. It’s very nerve-wracking. Nerve-wracking. I get really scared, almost. Stupid, if I can’t do it.

Summary of Hindering Incidents categorization

As can be seen from the above examples and explanations of the categories there is considerable overlap between the hindering factors and those that were cited as helpful. Table 3 illustrates the participant ratios for all the categories, including the wish list items which will be discussed below. The emergence of the general categories of lack of support, familial dysfunction, failure of the school environment, the overall sense of holes existing in the wellness of the personal systems of the participants and the stress associated with some work place environments clearly identified the gaps in the participants lives, but also showed their strengths and resilience in overcoming what could sometimes be seen as overwhelming obstacles.

Wish List Categories

The wish list categories are comprised of responses to the question “Are there any things that would help you to continue doing well in the future?” This is a very different conception than the discussion section which follows in Chapter 5 as it is directly responsive to the expressed desires and hopes of the participants, rather than observances about themes, patterns, gaps and possible future directions for counseling theory and impacts upon practice. This section only provides information on what the participants felt would be helpful to them in continuing to be successful on the path they have chosen. As was seen with the overlap between the helpful and hindering categories, there is some overlap between the wish list categories also.
Category 1: Familial support/Healthy relationships

The participants mentioned as their most frequently cited helpful factor the support, or continuing support of their family and/or current partner in life. This was an indication of the significance that this support had had upon the success they had experienced in their lives. The key to continued success for seven participants was the same factor as had been most helpful in their current situation, familial support and healthy relationships.

EXAMPLE 1
continuous support from the family

EXAMPLE 2
having my parents, having them support me and kind of love me and give me respect kind of keeps me going.

Category 2: Challenges/Focus/Motivation

Participants mentioned the need for focus, motivation, results and the perception of success through as a means of motivation to continue to do well as important factors to help them to continue to succeed in life and career aspirations. Aligned to expectations for success this category is specific in that it looks directly at internal and external factors of motivation rather than imposed standards of expectation for success as was seen in the schooling system.

EXAMPLE 1
...success! I’m definitely driven by doing well.

EXAMPLE 2
...having a challenge.

Category 3: Community Support and Giving back

This category emerged as something that both helped the participants in terms of support for the participant and also as a means of feeling self worth and value through returning something they could personally give to the community as a way of thanking them for the help they had received. While this category bears some similarity to the helpful category it has an expanded definition of giving back to the community as well as receiving from it.

EXAMPLE 1

...giving back to the community

EXAMPLE 2

...continued support from the community at large

Category 4: Financial support

This category emerged from three participants who were thankful for the financial support their band had provided for them, and who could not see continuing in education without that support being there for them. It was an important factor for continued success. It is not the same as the socioeconomic incidents as found in the helpful and hindering sections but is more specifically related to funding opportunities from bands and the support of government for the purposes of further education.

EXAMPLE 1

...my band... They are sponsoring me to go to school. So I feel like I need their support, like financially and when I call and talk to them about what I’m up to they are happy to hear it.
EXAMPLE 2

So financial assistance if I ever did try and do like a master’s program. That would be great.

Category 5: Self-confidence

This category was referred to in terms of the participant trying to maintain a sense of hope and not letting others affect her negatively. It is in the same sense as seen in both the helpful and hindering categories but not as in self-esteem so much as in building up self-confidence in specific abilities. The main difference in this category is that the participant had gained self-esteem over her life and wanted to build herself up with regard to standing up for herself and asserting herself with friends.

EXAMPLE 1

Don’t let other people bring you down.

Category 6: Further Education

Although somewhat different to the “school” category of both the helpful and not helpful categories, education was defined in terms of post secondary opportunities for the participants. A recognition of the benefits of continued education was evident in many participants but only one expressed the need for it on a continuing basis as being relevant to her continued success. Simply put in the words of a participant “Education!”

Category 7: Spirituality

This category is defined in the same manner as in the helpful incident category and showed the importance with which one participant viewed spirituality and connections to ritual as important to her current success and necessary for her continued
well being in life. She merely stated that “spirituality” would be helpful to her to continue to do well.

Summary of the Wish List items

The wish list category was an important component of the study. It allowed participants to reflect upon their interview and suggest items that they believed would help them to continue along their current paths of success. Discussion of these items will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the results of the study. Background data, data about the significance of the factors that have helped and hindered the participants and wish list items has been described. The category system of helpful and hindering incidents, as well as wish list items addressing the questions “Are there any things that would help you to continue doing well in the future?” have also been addressed. Results in terms of participation rates and validity of results have been examined. This has resulted in an in-depth understanding of the factors that have helped these eight First Nations young adults in their journey from secondary school to post-secondary life with regards to career. In the next chapter these results will be discussed in light of current literature as well as with regard to the limitations of the study and implications for future practice and research in this field.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion

This chapter discusses the results that were found in this study in light of previous and current literature. An attempt to draw some conclusions about similarities and differences in perceptions of First Nations young adults and the factors that have helped and hindered them along their different journeys from secondary school to post secondary life with regard to career will be made. Firstly this chapter will look at the 61% representation of helpful factors in the lives of the participants as compared with the 33% representation of hindering factors and the 6% representation of wish list factors. The category system that was derived from the interviews will then be discussed in light of the literature available. This constitutes the final credibility check for the study; theoretical validation. The purpose of this study was to identify those factors which First Nations young adults felt were most helpful and those not helpful to them in their journey through the transition between life in high school to the life after high school. Thus, the main discussion will look at these perceptions in the light of the extant literature in this field. Similarities and differences in those perceptions will be examined as well as the importance of those events in the lives of the participants. A reflection on the possible conclusions for this study will conclude this chapter.

The interviews produced 503 critical incidents and wish list items discussing factors the participants deemed to have been helpful, not helpful or would be of benefit if available on a continuing basis. These incidents were placed into the following 13 categories:
1) Family - Division (a) role models; (b) Support/Environment and Stability; 2) Wellness - Division (a) Alcohol & Drugs; (b) Spirituality/Rituals/Creativity; (c) Maintaining Physical Health; (d) Self Esteem; (3) School – Division (a) Expectations for Success; (b) Teachers; (c) Peers; (4) Aboriginality; (5) Work Experience; (6) Achieving a new level of Self-Understanding; (7) Healthy Relationships; (8) Community; (9) Challenge/Focus/Motivation; (10) Community support and giving Back; (11) Financial Support; (12) Self-confidence; and (13) Further Education.

It would not be fair to the participants of this study if a backdrop to the current status of aboriginal society was not provided. This will be brief as the main points have been addressed in Chapter 2. Historically the First Nations community has been subject to a number of challenging events. The stereotypes associated with this population are well-documented and were acknowledged by many of the participants in this study. Yet few people are aware of the resiliency and strength which resides in this population and are contingent upon factors such as cultural connections and affiliations, strong role models within the First Nations’ community and a commitment to wellness in a holistic sense. Much of the literature that was found referred to the need for a return to Native ways of knowing and understanding the world and an acknowledgement of cultural traditions (Paulsen, 2003). Current statistics with regard to the First Nations population reinforce the notions that the young people are suffering, and suffering immensely. High rates of unemployment, suicide and low levels of graduation from high school are indicative of the problems which are seen to plague the aboriginal peoples of Canada (BC Ministry of Education, BC Statistics, 2001). Health Canada reports from 2003 add further evidence of the tragic circumstances which face many young aboriginal adults.
However, there is little evidence of a growing trend toward success. More recently, the research done by First Nations people within their own population, has shown that increasing examples of successful First Nations adults have started to emerge. This study is a testament to those untold stories.

One of the categories that emerged from this study was the influence of school. The issues that are associated with education go back to times of residential schooling and maltreatment of the Native population. Today the deficits are trying to be redressed. With many school Districts in the lower Mainland actively looking at positive means to help address the deficits felt by their aboriginal students it is hoped that the future will continue to show emerging stories of success. The North Vancouver School District has a committee established for looking into the gaps and future directions that could address these issues and many other British Columbian school districts have drawn up agreements invoking the participation of the community as a whole, Native, non-Native, educator and parent to try to bridge the gaps between the lived in world of First Nations youth and the majority of mainstream people surrounding the Aboriginal populations (BC Ministry of Education, 2005). It is with interest to note that the deficits in school still need addressing and looking to current models of success within the education system could be a starting point for positive change in that direction.

The life of an aboriginal person bridges two very distinctive worlds, the world of family, language, culture, connections and strong relations to the earth and the world of the mainstream population of Canada. The two worlds are not an easy mix. Different priorities, different ways of viewing the world, different histories, different languages and different ways of knowing are hard to reconcile in a country where the original inhabitant
is often viewed as the interloper and exile. Many Aboriginals live lives that are unknown and misunderstood by the majority of the population. Reservation life with such factors as exclusion from mainstream society on the bases of lack of education, loss of culture, lack of connections and low life expectancy, combined with many deficits such as substance abuse, unemployment and low socioeconomic status can exist side by side with wealthy indigenous or mainstream populations across the road. The path forward and toward a better life is strewn with many obstacles but the stories that can be seen emerging from this study are indicative of the future hope that young aboriginal people can look forward to. Acknowledging that there is success and that it can be achieved may be one of the first steps to implementing a brighter, more cooperative and communal future together.

Understanding Helpful and Hindering Critical Incidents

After looking at the various categories there is clear indication of the overlap between the helpful and not helpful categories identified by the participants. As a result the discussion of the these categories will be done in a more holistic manner, looking at both the positive helpful side of the category and then doing an examination of the not helpful side of the category that overlaps with it. This is done for two purposes: firstly to lend clarity to the paper in terms of not being repetitive and secondly to pay tribute to the holistic nature of Aboriginal culture.

Table 1 in Chapter 4 above illustrates the distribution of the critical incidents outlined in this study, and shows the difference in the number of helpful incidents cited as compared with hindering incidents. 61% of the incidents were of a helpful nature. In order to understand this trend toward the identification of helpful incidents it is necessary
to acknowledge the participants in the study. The participants self-identified as “doing well” and thereby deem themselves to be successful. This commonality is also underlined by the many participants who suffered from long periods of time in their lives when circumstances were not conducive toward success, yet the participants overcame these obstacles anyway. As one participant stated, it is important not to be brought down by those around you and to maintain a positive outlook. Such factors as family substance usage and addiction, traumatic experiences including child physical, sexual and emotional abuse, instability and lack of role models within the community were all attenuating circumstances that could make success a difficult feat to achieve. However the study showed that those participants who self-identify as successful have less tendency to identify hindering events in their lives.

Family

Of the helpful incidents identified the striking characteristic for 100% of the participants was the family. Much literature addresses the need for healthy, functioning families. Family has many definitions for many people but for this study it was seen as a system of connected components that interact in an effort to maintain balance and a sense of equilibrium leading to a healthy functioning unit and individual. All elements are seen as dependent upon other elements within that system. It is therefore, no surprise that a healthy system was seen as integral to the success of the participants. This category is often referred to in counselling literature and the initial category seems to be supported. Family and role models are mentioned in the relatively scarce literature available with regard to First Nations people, as well as with regard to minority groups. Kurtz et al. (2000) showed in their study on homeless and runaway youth, the role that family had
upon their choices and how much concrete assistance from the family and being confronted by their families were of integral components of getting out of the negative cycle, or at least escaping it for a time. With regard to the literature on First Nations, the importance of family cannot be underestimated as it is an integral component of the system within which youth begin to identify themselves. Studies that look at the influence of healthy systems include McCormick (1995), Young (2003), Jones (2003), Dickson & Green (2001) and Somers & Piliawsky, (2004). These studies, with both minority groups and First Nations people, are just a few examples of extant literature which help to support this category and provide further insight into the role that healthy families have upon individuals.

The helpful category of family was broken down into three subdivisions to more accurately reflect the various systems that were helpful to the participants, and this shall be discussed first. The first subdivision was “role models” and was recorded as having 58 critical incidents mentioned by eight of a possible maximum eight participants. Dickson & Green, (2001) in their study also make specific reference to the role that aboriginal grandmothers play in the lives of the communal wellness and the need for incorporating their input into general systems of wellness for aboriginal elders. The impact of such people as grandmothers, aunts, parents and siblings in the capacity of providing helpful role models was a key finding from my study. All participants made reference to the need for such strong relationships and the inspiration that such role models within the family provided. The role models were not necessarily inspirational in terms of being leaders in their communities, or excelling at their chosen professions, rather it was the stability or guidance these role models provided or the encouragement to
excel that was noted as being most helpful. Some participants cited their family role models as “saviours”, or “an inspiration”. Others cited the fact that they had no role models as an incentive to become one and thus driving them toward a successful outcome rather than succumbing to the many possible failures that surrounded them.

The existence of role models and the need for them is well supported throughout the literature. Karunanayake & Nauta (2004) identify this factor in their study regarding the relationship between race and role models and found that while there may be few role models from the particular race that a person is from, the fact that there were existent role models sufficed. The sample population used was college students and it was found that role models of one’s own race serve a different function than those models from a different race or ethnicity. This study yields some credence to my own study in that the need for intra race role models was identified and my study expanded upon that by adding the idea of family as a role model. Crofoot Graham’s 2002 study further investigated the pivotal role of role modeling within the family and it was found that family is a central component of relational worldview for Native American families. Families and relatives were found to be a source of strength for adolescents and gave them the means with which to cope with differences in heritage and the dynamics of oppression. This study was also qualitative in nature and while it was American aboriginal adolescents that were studied these findings seem to provide support for the current study in terms of the significance of familial and same race role models as helpful factors.

The second subdivision of support/environment/stability yielded 38 helpful
incidents and was derived from the need for specificity. As contrasted with the role model category, this category was based upon the identification of a supportive and positive environment within the family combined with the existence of "stability" or a solid point of reference for the participants, even if they were constantly moving from place to place a central figure that remained the same could provide stability and support. The literature with regard to First Nations is scarce in this regard, however there are many references to stable, supportive and positive environments within multicultural and minority group literature, and it is addressed in literature with regard to at-risk youth. One possible explanation for the lack of research in terms of First Nations communities and stability could be the historic component of many First Nations plains cultures being nomadic in nature. With specific reference to that element of Cree culture, one participant mentioned the history of picking up camp and moving on, and in fact in her interview she saw the stability of having her mother consistently there for her in spite of the nomadic lifestyle they lived as being an important factor in her success. Stability or supportive environments is a well-recognized factor and is referred to in counselling theory as an aid in creating healthy functioning individuals. It can be seen from the literature that the role of the family as a significant helping factor for the participants that theoretical agreement has been reached, and thus supports this category.

From the not helpful category side, family ranked as the second ranked category item. From the literature surrounding the nature of dysfunctional families it is clearly recognized that family environment, role models and support are significant factors in creating a negative cycle for children that is hard to escape (Bhalalusesa, (1998); Lang-Gould, (2001); Karunanayake, & Nauta,(2004). The existence of many unsupportive
factors in the family were identified by the participants, most significantly these included the nature of the environment, ranging from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, to instability and lack of parental figures at all. Other hindering factors included poverty and lack of social networks caused by continuous moves from place to place leaving the individuals feeling lost and alone, or having to escape via moving in with boyfriends, or other extended family members. These factors are discussed in the literature but further research into this is indicated from the results of this study. The significance of family in the lives of all people, not just First Nations youth, is supported by the literature and thereby gives theoretical validity to this category.

Wellness

The second category to emerge in the helpful incidents was wellness. It emerged as the third category on the hindering side. Wellness and the holistic world view that many indigenous populations around the world subscribe to is well-known in theory and research. My study looked at many different research projects with regard specifically to First Nations populations and found that spirituality, self-esteem, physical health and the ability to avoid the temptations of substance abuse were all integrally intertwined. While the study deliberately broke this category down into 4 subdivisions: i) Spirituality/rituals/Creativity; (ii) Alcohol & Drugs; (iii) Physical Health and (iv) Self Esteem it is important to note that one category could have sufficed as an overall umbrella for the notion of wellness from the perspective of the Medicine wheel, and for the not helpful category I left it as one category as many of the factors that were mentioned in the helpful category were absent in the hindering category, specifically spirituality/rituals/creativity. However, this was not the case for the helpful category. Therefore, I chose to break this
category into the more specific subdivisions to bring clarity and awareness of the various parts of wellness as seen by the participants. Also, as this was an exploratory study and I felt it important to delineate between the various factors that participants identified as contributing to overall wellness and continued wellness. As a basis for comparison, McCormick’s (1995) study shall be examined.

There are three main reasons that McCormick’s (1995) study is useful for my research. Firstly, McCormick is an Aboriginal and this study specifically looks at First Nations wellness. Secondly, the sample population is British Columbian aboriginals, (and while some of my participants are not originally from B.C., they all now live here), and finally, McCormick also used a Critical Incident Technique to conduct his research. McCormick looks at wellness from the perspective of not only physical health and healing capacity (a subdivision in my study) but also from the perspective of belonging, balance, and feelings of being loved and connected. This represents the four elements of the category in my study of wellness. As I am studying First Nations people I believe it is important to include a more holistic concept of health and thereby I used the term “wellness”. McCormick’s definition also supports this reasoning. His study looked at a number of factors that helped to facilitate healing and results indicated the need for rituals, a sense of belonging, empowerment and balance. All of these elements were revealed in the current study as factors that helped the participants to do well and while this study is not focused upon “healing” it could be said that healthy and successful adults are adults who have focused on the healing themselves or balancing their lives so that they can focus on the things that will help them to continue to do well. McCormick’s study revealed a number of interesting findings and the idea of connectivity, support
networks, strong community and familial ties as well as the need for a connection to
culture and ritual were all identified as factors that facilitated the healing of the
participants in his study. The absence of the factors of spirituality, connections,
community and culture were found to be not helpful and this tended to fit with the
findings in my study. However one interesting finding from my study was the
helpfulness of the use of drugs and alcohol to the extent that they were used as a coping
mechanism, but far short of addiction. While this was an interesting finding that merits
further analysis, this will be discussed below in the implications for further research
section. For the majority of the reasons outlined above, the literature supports the
category of family and ratifies the categories that were generated in my study.

Self-esteem is a widely recognized factor in counselling literature that has great
significance upon healthy lifestyles. The category emerged as a result of repeated
statements regarding self-efficacy and the knowledge that despite many negative factors
around the participants, knowing that “I was smart”, or that “I had a better life in store”
was helpful to them in that it instilled them with a sense of hope and self-confidence.
Many of the abovementioned studies also made reference to the importance of feelings of
self-worth and thereby lend support to the inclusion of this category. The findings of this
study indicate that further examination of what actually constitutes self-esteem to First
Nations youth would be helpful in understanding the role it plays in their lives.

School

The second highest category in the helpful incidents was school, yet it was the highest
ranked category in the hindering incidents. For the helpful categorization, school was
broken down into three subdivisions in order to assist with the analysis and in order to
provide a clearer picture of the various elements of school that were found to be helpful to the participants. As with the overall category of family however, the breakdown of school into subdivisions for the hindering section was deemed unnecessary as a clear message from the incidents cited was that the lack of expectations for success in education affected all aspects of the school system. The predominant factor that arose in the helpful category was also the expectations for success that the participants felt they had in school. This was experienced in a variety of means from actually doing well academically ("I was a 98% student") to feeling as though they were a valued person and thereby contributing to their willingness to stay in school. The actual environment was of considerable importance also. Thus, physical attributes such as size and population composition, as well as environmental aspects in terms of issues of safety and the existence or non-existence of racism were cited in this category. The existence of sporting programs or the ability to connect with others who were from the same culture were factors that helped. In contrast, for one participant who attended a private school, dominated by successful, wealthy families, cultural attachment and affiliation was not mentioned as a helpful factor, and was actually seen as a possible hindrance. However, for four of the participants, having the ability to be with fellow First Nations students (and even teachers) was a considerable help to their success. Private schooling versus public schooling was also cited but the results were varied. One participant felt lucky to be in an environment that generally "expected you to go to university" whereas two other participants felt overwhelmed, or out of place or as if they did not have to do anything in order to succeed thereby creating incongruence, or making them feel out of step with their lived in reality upon reflection of the time period.
The importance of school upon success is well reflected in literature. As cited in Chapter 1 the statistics related to First Nations youth show the failure of the education system to clearly address the needs of its aboriginal students in many schools. Those schools that are successful in regard to this population are shown to be aware of the need for inclusion and education of the entire community, of respecting and welcoming aboriginal students and traditions and also of placing respect and understanding as the foundations of relationships with the education system, rather than blame. Somers & Piliawsky, (2004) also found with regard to an African American population many factors that put students at risk for dropping out. These findings were similar to some of the results that came up in my study, not least of which were teacher expectations for student success and teacher expressions of care and concern. Class size, student confidence and parental expectations also were found to be important. These results are repeated in my study. School, and the expectations that students should succeed equally, are important components of a successful, healthy community system. This factor was cited by 100% of the participants and resulted in 33 incidents in the helpful category. For the hindering category, 46 incidents were cited by seven of the participants, and noticeable for its absence as a hindering factor was the existence of sporting programs. This would suggest that such things as sports were deemed helpful and not seen as a hindrance, and again, this suggestion will be discussed in the implications for further research section.

Aboriginal people have long held the desire to succeed in the educational sphere. Many today are doing just that, but the true indictment of the system as it currently exists resides in such statistics as released by the B.C. Ministry of Education. In one of its most
recent reports featuring SD 44, North Vancouver, September 2005 a huge disparity is shown between the success rates of Aboriginal students versus non-Aboriginal students in schools, particularly in the secondary schools with regard to the sciences and mathematics arena. For example of a possible 240 students in the district enrolled in Physics, none were Aboriginal, similar statistics exist for Calculus and Chemistry. As regards the actual number of students to graduate from High School with a Dogwood Diploma, in 2003-2004 North Vancouver had 28 Aboriginal students succeed. This is almost double the previous year’s statistics, yet falls far short of an 82% completion rate for the non-Aboriginal population. These statistics reveal the huge gaps in success experienced by Native and Non-Native participant in the school system. It is with these types of statistics in mind that one must look at the almost 15% frequency rate in this category as a factor helping these individuals to succeed versus the 28.5% frequency rate in the hindering incidents. This finding is supported in the literature in many respects. One such study was completed by Jones, (2003) in Manitoulin Island, Ontario with M'Chigeeng First Nations, exploring factors that helped their students to succeed in an academic setting. As mentioned in the category above it was found that a four pronged approach that incorporated the spiritual, mental, physical and emotional needs of the students was important to help students achieve success educationally. It is interesting to note that these four elements are integral not only to the success of First Nations learners as specified in Jones, (2003) study but also with all learners.

The Jones study showed that for the participants the various factors such as support, connections to culture, respect and connections with teachers as well as peers, all helped to improve their educational experience. While some participants did not
graduate from the traditional school setting it was also apparent that alternative settings that provided for their mental, spiritual and emotional well-being could alleviate the lack of a Native population. The influence of teachers as a direct helping source in the form of taking care of the participant, or making them feel valued as a person, was significant enough to warrant this category as being included in the form of a subcategory. Seven out of eight participants had specific recollections of a teacher who had proved helpful in their schooling and without whom they feel their development and success may have been different. In clear contrast, on the hindering side, participants reflected upon the lack of connections with teachers, and the low expectations or level of respect for their capabilities. Similar findings have been reported in research regarding many different populations but particularly with those groups identified as at risk, or minority (Arthur, 2000; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2002; Curwen-Doige, 2003; van der Woerd, & Cox, 2003). The literature is seen to support the creation of this category and thus strengthens the theoretical validity of this study.

Aboriginality

The fourth category that emerged from the study in terms of helpfulness was Aboriginality. While aboriginality was mentioned in the hindering category it was more with regard to the racism experienced and thus did not merit its own individual category as this was subsumed under the broader hindering category of community. The Aboriginality helpful category covered such ideas as identity, connections with and to culture, tradition and language, and the support of the wider Aboriginal community as well as specifically bands and financial assistance. Also included in this category was the Aboriginal community itself and the programs or activities that were offered in a strong
community. There is some overlap with family and with spirituality but the need for a separate category is indicated by the 32 incidents cited in this category as well as the participation rate wherein six out of eight participants made mention of their aboriginality. From the incidents that were cited the most significant number were related to connections within the aboriginal community and the helpfulness of finding an aboriginal identity.

The literature also supports this category. Connections with culture, reclaiming identity and knowing one's own language, traditions and rituals have been widely recognized as important elements of indigenous populations. In Young, (2003) a narrative story is told which embodies the need of Native people to “maintain...my language, my identity, who I am, where I came from and my view of the world...” (p.101). Connections with language and Native culture were referred to by three participants and embodied the concept of recognizing the uniqueness of their spirit, and identity as one complete entity rather than the sum of its different parts. Young, (2003) also recognizes this concept as do Canales (1997); Crofoot Graham, (2002); Hernandez-Avila, (1996); Juntunen, et al. 2001; and Kirmayer, et al. (2000). All of these studies made connections between the need for recognition and validation of culture, language and tradition as a necessary component for a system to maintain health. Furthermore, Borgen, Amundson & Tench, (1996) asserted that identity formation is an essential component of achieving a healthy adult psychological state. The clear message from the participants who cited aboriginality (six out of eight participants) was that through being validated and accepted as an aboriginal, rather than being stereotyped, they felt they were more successful, and thereby less victim to the degradations of state they frequently
witnessed around themselves both in and outside the Aboriginal population. In addition, the recognition by themselves as Aboriginals of the negative stereotypes, made four of the participants strongly motivated to buck the stereotype and change the image the world has painted. The literature can thus be seen to support the category of Aboriginality.

*Work Experience*

Of significance in the study and being cited 28 times by seven participants out of eight as being helpful was work experience. This also emerged as a hindering category by five participants and contributed a total of twelve items or 7% of the total. The types of significant helping factors in the work environment were positive volunteering experiences which validated the participants either through giving them personal recognition or skills or by verifying that a career choice was indeed “right” for them to pursue. On the hindering side, the factors that were deemed to be not helpful included the failure of the fishing industry and the loss of financial stability as a result, unnecessary stress and tension in the workplace, lack of training and support and the lack of role models as a result of poverty. Arthur, (2000) and Bhalelusesa, (1998) look at the need for work experience or some career training as integral to the gaining of meaningful employment. Of particular relevance to this category is a study completed by Leventhal, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, (2001), with regard to adolescent transitions to adulthood and the consequences of adolescent employment. From the study it was found that entering the workforce during school years had positive outcomes for the African American youth in the sample population. The findings of this study suggested a positive association with early entry into the workforce and higher rates of high school completion than those of the same population base but who did not enter the workforce. This longitudinal study is
of relevance for my study in that while the participants for my study did not necessarily enter the workforce at an early stage in school, the entry into the workforce either voluntarily or by paid employment, generally led to positive outcomes. This study lends support to the category of work experience as both a hindering and a helpful category.

Achieving a New Level of Self Understanding

This category only emerged in the helpfulness section of the study. All eight participants cited this as an important element in their success and 27 incidents emerged in the helpful category. The category emerged in response to participants’ identification of epiphanies that had occurred either seemingly spontaneously after an event or over a long period of time when they finally came to understand themselves more completely.

Maturation, personal relationships, pregnancy, separation or just a new period in the lives of the participants were all indicative of various new forms of understandings that they started to learn. This idea permeated many of the categories and was indicative of periods of reflection over their lives or an understanding of what worked and what didn’t work for them. Counselling theory refers to this growth in many areas and as such lends support to the creation of this category.

Healthy Relationships

While this category overlaps those categories previously cited such as family, role models, peers and partners, it was felt that the incidents cited were of a different enough nature to warrant inclusion in a separate category, even though healthy relationships were a significant helping factor in other categories. The nature of certain friendships outside of the school environment and the importance of partner relationships stood separately to those previously cited relationships that were connected to family as in blood relations,
and school peers or mentors. The significance of this category lies in the 22 incidents cited and the participation of six participants. Also significant is the absence of the category in hindering items. This would seem to be self-explanatory, healthy relationships, in and of themselves, are not deemed to be a hindrance. The interesting facet of this category was the repeated notion of a need for a reliable, honest social network that could be seen to be independent of any family issues. Also mentioned was the need for having a network of people with similar interests, perhaps not all the same interests, but bound by feelings of mutual respect and care, these relationships added significantly to the feelings of self-worth and belonging of the participants. Kirmayer, et al. (2000) examined the nature of distress and its impact on mental health in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. This study found that the disconnect between culture, pride in oneself and one’s culture brought about through oppression and the deliberate attempt to break down communal ties and family had led to profound disruption and alteration of traditional ways of life. The ongoing changes experienced in some communities and the connections with identity, community and social networks have helped some communities to do well, while in others these factors have failed and great trauma has been experienced. McCormick, (1995) also makes reference to the need for healthy systems and connections to be in place for the facilitation of healing. Many of the participants shared stories that told of overwhelming obstacles and trauma, and yet in the face of such histories these participants identified themselves as doing well. The need for continued support and healthy relationships was also apparent in the wish list items. Thus the category of healthy relationships is supported by literature and thereby strengthens its inclusion as a category.
Community

As mentioned above this category could have been subsumed under previous categories but again the high participation rate for this category on both the helpful and not helpful sides indicated a need for separate categorization. In both sides six out of eight participants cited incidents. This equaled a total of 16 helpful and 14 not helpful incidents, or 6% of the total number of critical incidents and wish list items. These items were inclusive of the socioeconomic environment as well as the existence/nonexistence of racism, general support within the wider community, not just the aboriginal community and also the programs and recreational opportunities available to the general population. As mentioned above the community is an integral component of a system of wellness for any individual, not just First Nations people, but it is also very important that First Nations people feel safe, welcome and respected within the community in order to promote feelings of belonging, self-worth and hope for the future. McCormick, (1995); Wing, Crow, & Thompson, (1995); Weaver, (2002); and Vega, Lhoury, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, (1995); all address the need for reinforcement and higher levels of self-esteem as components of a healthy, meaningful life. The literature can be seen to support this category. This section has shown that there is agreement with the literature in most categories and those that have little support should be studied further.

Wish List Items

The wish list items were gathered in response to a question asking participants to reflect upon things that would help them to continue on their current path of doing well. A number of items overlapped with those already mentioned. This led to a total of seven wish list categories. One new category emerged as distinct from the helpful and
hindering categories, and that was the need for challenges, motivation and focus. This category gave voice to the need of all people, not only First Nations, to have some hope for future growth, a need for the space to focus on that growth and also challenge so as stagnancy and feelings of boredom or lack of progress do not arise. The idea of being motivated by these challenges was central to this category. The final categories in this section were: 1) Familial support/Healthy relationships; 2) Challenges/Focus/Motivation; 3) Community support and giving back to the community; 4) financial support; 5) Self-Confidence; 6) Further Education; and 7) Spirituality. These items were all related to the idea of being a member of a wider purpose, not just the success of First Nations people, but also as a member of the global community. The expression of doing well for both Natives and also within the wider community suggests that the bridge between cultures is not as wide as is often implied.

Patterns emerging from the Participants

At this point it is important to acknowledge the participants reactions to the process and study. During the interview many participants expressed surprise and genuine pleasure at how interesting the process was for them. One participant had thought the interview would probably last only twenty minutes, despite having been told by me that it could last anywhere up to two hours. Two hours later she was amazed that she probably could have talked for another two hours! Another participant expressed a similar change in feelings toward the process after the interview was completed by saying that originally he was just doing this to help out but now he was genuinely interested in finding out what came out of the study. Of the eight participants, six reflected upon how telling their story had been a great tool for reflection over their lives and how this had
helped them. For five participants some of the personal items and dearly held secrets or thoughts they had had came out and great emotion was experienced both by the interviewee and the interviewer as I was privy to stories of great hardship and extreme resilience in overcoming huge obstacles. This suggests that there was a buildup of unreleased emotions for the participants and while the helpful incidents comprise the majority of incidents cited it should in no way decrease the importance of the emotions elicited when discussing the hindering incidents in their lives, (Butterfield, 2001). While pride and happiness was a keynote of some of the helpful incidents cited, sadness, anger, heightened states of emotion were expressed in other non-helpful incidents.

Another significant pattern that emerged from the study was the predominance of successful First Nations young women who participated. As mentioned before, this was a limitation of the study in the sense that minimal voice was given to young First Nations males, however, it was an interesting development that of all the respondents to the letters of introduction, only one male responded and eight females did, although one was excluded due to not being out of high school for the period of three years and not being able to commit to the time period involved. This pattern is interesting in view of the lack of literature involving the research of young indigenous women and also because of the high rates of suicide and other dysfunctional patterns in this particular population. This pattern is extremely interesting in that conversely only one male participated and his voice is the singular voice thus far in any literature, to shed light on indigenous young males’ experiences of success. These two patterns are indicative of a need for further research and highlights the huge volume of work that needs to yet be done with regard to this population.
Also noted above and interesting is the stark contrast between the number of hindering incidents cited by the male participant in the study (only 6) as compared with the females. One very interesting result in particular was the one female participant who cited more hindering incidents in her story, than helpful ones, yet she still self-identified as successful. As mentioned above, this study is an exploratory one and the need to hear more male voices as well as to understand the resiliency of such participants as the female who suffered great trauma and dysfunction in her life, but still managed to circle above the waters rather than sinking, seems to be an important result from this study. The implications for further research are clear with regard to these intriguing results.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by a number of factors. First, the participants were primarily female, seven out of eight, therefore making this study primarily female in its scope of experience. While this high percentage of female participants limits the understanding of First Nations young adult males, the study could not change the makeup of the participant population because only one male responded positively to the study. I did attempt to gather more males for the study but found resistance from the two males contacted in the form of not having enough time to participate, and also as a rejection of a white person conducting research with a First Nations population. As this was my only negative experience with regard to working with and being involved with First Nations people, I was surprised but not offended given the history of research conducted upon the population, rather than with the population. This limitation however, remains as a facet of this study. As mentioned above, the implications regarding this finding involve the need for further research.
Secondly, the very nature of the critical incident methodology is the large amounts of data that are produced. This data was at first overwhelming. The large volume of data could be interpreted in a number of ways, and some incidents could have been placed in two or three different categories (as mentioned in the results section). One example of this is the incident “if I see that I’m successful in what I’m doing it’s heavily encouraging. It’s encouraging me to keep going and to keep striving...” could go under the expectations for success category, or the self-esteem category. This problem was addressed by incorporating a participant cross-check designed to give participants an opportunity to view their categories and then either confirm or change the category, (Butterfield, 2001).

The next limitation is referred to in the first section that being cross-cultural research study being done from the perspective a Caucasian female working with an indigenous population. This was addressed from the outset and was discussed with all participants particularly before the interview began and after the process of both interviews was completed. I specifically asked each participant to comment on how the process worked for them and to make any suggestions that they felt could address any power imbalance they may have perceived. From the input of the participants it seemed that they were satisfied with their opportunities to speak and tell their stories and they did not express any sense of being mistreated or misunderstood. With the exception of the one person I contacted who was adamant that research upon First Nations populations should be done by First Nations individuals; there were no other people who reacted in this manner in my experience. I worked with a number of people and personally met with them to ask permission as well as to pay respect to the communities. I believe my
deep respect for the individuals and culture was trusted and allowed me to proceed with this study. It is also my intent to maintain ongoing contact with these communities and in so doing, some of the participants should they so desire.

A fourth limitation on the study is the self-report nature of critical incidents rather than observed incidents. In 1954, Flanagan addressed this concern by comparing reports done on a daily basis with those done daily memory. He found that memory, or recalled incidents, provided adequate data. Woolsey confirmed this in his 1986 study. A second design of this study that attempted to minimize the fallibility of recall, was the invitation to participants to email me or telephone me with any incidents they may recall, as well as a participant cross-check interview (the second one). This interview was done no more than six months after the first interview and provided participants with an opportunity to clarify incidents, add to them or delete those that were recalled. No incidents were deleted from that cross-check although four participants made minor wording changes to some of them. One new wish list item was added to the pool at the second interview.

This second interview gave the participants an opportunity to confirm that their stories had been told in an accurate manner and that the language used to categorize them fit with their experiences. The introduction of the second interview helped to minimize the limitations above. The second interview and the open-ended format of the questions also addressed a limitation in terms of the cross-cultural nature of this research. As mentioned in the bracketing section and at various points throughout this paper, I am a non-Aboriginal female conducting research with an Aboriginal population. Despite being closely affiliated with that population there are limitations due to this fact. I am not from the population and thereby can be considered as “other” and not privy to the
intricacies of the experience of being First Nations. This was partially addressed via the
discussion with the participants as to respect and the purpose of my study to tell their
stories and give voice to their narratives, but it was also addressed by the open-ended
questions in the interview which were intended to give open opportunities for response,
free from researcher bias. This was also addressed via the means of an independent judge
of my interviewing style to see if I had asked leading questions or had a negative impact
on the information gathering phase of the study. A third manner in which this was
addressed was the participant cross-check which gave the participants an opportunity to
review the incidents and make changes as they deemed necessary.

The qualitative nature of this study also means that the results cannot be
generalized. The intent of this study was to provide an opportunity for First Nations
young adults to tell their stories and to expand upon the scant body of literature about this
phenomenon and population. I hoped to shed light on stories of positive lives and
experiences in the career journey between high school and post secondary school for a
population not traditionally viewed as successful. This intent was to perhaps provide a
starting point for theory with regard to career, transitions and Aboriginal young adults, as
well as perhaps providing some directions for future study.

As mentioned previously in the discussion of the results a final limitation of the
study is the very nature of the participants who self-identify as successful or “doing
well”. This indicates a predisposition of looking at life in a positive manner and perhaps
contributed to the high number of helping incidents versus hindering incidents
(Butterfield, 2001). One participant in particular did not want to discuss her relationship
with her mother or previous boyfriends and this could have been for a number of reasons,
but perhaps out of fear that the published results would reveal her true thoughts and be read by the people of concern. Another participant also expressed concern over a similar matter but did not hold back from expressing her feelings over the relationship of concern and to honour her concerns I did not use that information as part of the examples in this paper. Despite the possible bias toward a "rosy" outlook on life that these participants may have introduced in this study, the categories and results that emerged are supported in the literature and are also consistent with my own personal and professional experience.

Implications for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Communities

The results of this study are varied. The diverse results are indications of the wide variety of experiences within Aboriginal communities, as well as individuals and wider society in general. The aim of this study was to look at factors that helped and hindered young First Nations adults in their transition between school and post secondary school with regard to career. This complex time is further complicated by the intricacies surrounding transitions in general, and the maturation of individuals often experienced around the time of school leaving and jumping into the world of employment or post-secondary education. Therefore it is not surprising that determining factors of helpfulness and unhelpfulness is quite involved.

A second complexity involves the existence of double standards by not only the mainstream community towards Natives, but also of some Aboriginal communities towards Natives of mixed heritage. As one participant said it was like having a cowboy and Indian fight going on within. In order for all members of the communities to do well it would seem that an acceptance of all members of the community is necessary from all
people. Many participants mentioned the reverse racism of Aboriginal people toward people of mixed heritage, and for success to be achieved; total acceptance regardless of blood heritage could be very helpful to achieve that end.

The inherent belief from many non-Aboriginals that all Aboriginals are the same is also an issue that needs to be dealt with by all the different members of the Aboriginal mosaic. With financial input from the government for each aboriginal student in the school system, it would seem appropriate that aboriginal communities step up to advise their educational institutions and schools, not only of their needs, but also of their uniqueness and their cultural and traditional mores. With reciprocal education coming from the Aboriginal communities and with leadership from within the Aboriginal communities toward the end of better understanding not only of their needs within the broader community, but also of their culture, all members of the community stand to benefit. Participants in this study indicated the need for a bridge between conflict rather than a chasm. Part of that bridge was the existence of Aboriginal programs that were open to all people, not just Aboriginals. This reciprocity of cultures would seem to be an ideal means of bridging the gap and helping to curb stereotypes and racism from the ground up. It would seem that that this study indicates a healthy community, inclusive of both Western and Native elements is a positive and helpful factor for the success of both individuals within the Aboriginal community and those who are judged as partially members due to their mixed heritage. This inclusive community should in no way diminish the uniqueness of the indigenous culture however.

The results of this study are by no means an indictment of either non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal cultures, but the major implications point to a more peaceful coexistence
with both sides feeling empowered and both sides learning positives from each other. It is an ideal situation but the support of the community as a whole was a wish list item for half of the participants and was acknowledged as a helpful factor for six out of eight participants. This result seems to be of significance for the future well being of this population.

Implications for Practitioners

Career and multicultural counsellors may or may not be trained counsellors. Many counsellors are not trained in the field of multiculturalism and many are also not trained with regard to the specific needs of Aboriginal young adults. The results of this study indicate the need for counsellors to view all clients as not being representative of any stereotype and to view each client in light of their own individual experiences. Furthermore, from this study it would seem that more training with regard to working with Aboriginals and to have Aboriginals working with Aboriginals would be beneficial to this population. Many participants made reference to lack of connection with counsellors and teachers in school and this indicates a need for professionals in the field to develop skills with regard to working with this population and at the very least, to make an attempt to connect with any client who walks into their sphere of influence regardless of cultural affiliation. The existence of stereotyping unfortunately occurs in the professional world and implications from this study include the need to put aside such stereotypes and work in the first place on valuing the individual from a non-judgmental point of view. In addition, the need for role models from the same racial heritage as potential client populations is well documented and this study showed similar results in terms of the need for role models within the Aboriginal community. One participant
clearly recalled connecting well with one of her counsellors who was Native in heritage, and who used art therapy as part of her counselling practice. Another participant recalled the lack of any strong female role model in her life and the need she felt to fill this void for her sister. This study suggests that such role models are helpful for the population studied but more research is needed into this factor, as some participants also indicated that connections with any professional, teacher or counsellor, was helpful regardless of the ethnicity of the professional.

One missing element in this picture is also the availability of resources or knowledge regarding resources in the general Aboriginal population. Specific reference to the availability of programs in Vancouver was identified as a wish list item by one of the participants and resources at the community level was a wish list item for two participants. The prohibitive cost of counselling and the inability to connect with some non-Aboriginal counsellors or teachers was seen as being a hindrance to success. Thus it would seem that education for Aboriginal populations regarding possible resources and access to counselling at a reasonable or subsidized level, from people with some connections to the community is important for the success of Aboriginal young adults as seen in this study.

As mentioned above, the significance of creativity for Aboriginal populations and the high participation rate in the ritual, spiritual and creativity category suggests that for counselling practice to be effective, some form of creativity within the sessions could be helpful. Art was mentioned as being very important to three participants and journalling was specifically cited as a helpful factor by two. This suggests that practitioners in the field could incorporate such methods into their counseling practice to ensure that First
Nations clients can use that creative, spiritual side as a means of healing. This was studied by McCormick in 1995 and the continued reference to such self-expression would seem to be tentatively borne out through the data collected in this study and many other studies into wellness.

The other helpful factor cited by three participants was the ability to participate in some form of ritual. It was seen as both validating and giving permission to step away from childhood into a more responsible adulthood. If we are to accept these self-reports then the significance for practitioners in the field would be to utilize such rituals in some form or to connect clients with such rituals that are available in the community. The one ritual mentioned by two different participants was the rites of passage ritual. Both participants indicated how helpful this had been in their transition from the young, unsure woman they had been into a more confident, responsible woman.

A surprising feature of the stories of five participants was the helpful role that alcohol and drugs had upon their lives. This bears looking into. Current statistics show high usage of drugs and alcohol in the general population at a very young age. Statistics from the B.C. Ministry of Education, (2005), indicate that seven out of ten Grade 9 students have tried marijuana. If we are to acknowledge that many indigenous cultures have used mind-altering substances as part of their traditional healing and spirituality for millennia (Hernandez-Avila, 1996), then perhaps we need to rethink the usage of drugs in this population. Many questions are raised with this surprising finding but at the very least looking into what purpose drugs have in the lives of young people in general, as well as young First Nations peoples could yield some insight into the phenomenon of the attraction of drugs. In my professional experience, youth appreciate information and
open discussion about drugs and alcohol usage, rather than demonization. As such I feel that treating the use of drugs as a choice, not necessarily healthy, is far more beneficial than merely stating that "they are bad". From the participants this finding suggests more research into this phenomenon is justified.

Also, the literature regarding transitions for any population is scant, and the literature regarding transitions for First Nations young adults is rare indeed. This would indicate the need for more research to be done in the field of career counselling for Aboriginal youth. Future research by practitioners in the field could help to improve and strengthen current practice, and future practice.

One final pattern that needs to be addressed that emerged from the literature was the comments by all participants on the helpfulness of the actual interview process wherein they could narrate their own stories. The many current research projects into narratives combined with those such as Canales (1997); Rossiter, (2002); Lang-Gould (2001); and Paulsen, (2003) are indicative of the power and healing capacity which narrating personal stories can embody. As mentioned in a recent study done by Hirikata & Buchanan-Arvay, (2005), the emphasis on telling stories can be challenging, but these eight participants, without exception, indicated that although some of the telling of their story was difficult, it was helpful. One participant (who is currently receiving counselling) mentioned how much she liked the interview in terms of the fact that "it is kind of like counselling". Another commented on how it was helpful to be able to reflect over the events that came up and see that perhaps she really was on the right path. The interesting facet of these comments was also that they occurred sometimes at the end of both interviews, or sometimes only at the end of the second. Also two participants
mentioned the programs that involved story telling and dramatic enactment as very helpful. In the Hirikata & Buchanan-Arvay (2005) study it was revealed that sometimes therapeutic enactment could bridge that challenge in such counseling but only if used in conjunction with other means of therapy, so as to combine both the non-verbal component of counselling with the verbal. The use of narrative alongside such counselling as therapeutic enactment is suggested. This would seem to ratify the findings in this study, and suggests that professionals in the field employ a number of different counselling techniques, such as art therapy, journalling, narrative therapy and therapeutic enactment to fit with the individual client’s needs.

On a personal note it was surprising to me that although seven out of eight participants mentioned traumatic events in their lives, only two participants mentioned counselling they had received at some point (or were receiving currently) as being helpful to them. Also it was surprising to me that being able to receive counselling was noticeably absent from the wish list. In a broader sense, two participants referred to the need for “more resources” but only one included the need for those resources to include such things as counselling. This hints at a failure of counselling with regard to the young adult First Nations population. Many reasons could be found for this but perhaps the most salient would be the lack of representation of First Nations role models who achieve successful outcomes in a counselling setting, or perhaps it is just another service viewed by many Aboriginals, as with many non-Aboriginals, as indicating mental health issues, rather than being seen as a resource for current and future wellness.

This surprising finding indicates that perhaps as professionals we need to look at different ways of presenting the benefits of counselling and making them more available
with more attention to the abovementioned factors so, in future, counselling will be seen as a resource rather than as an imposition, or an indication that something is terribly wrong. It should be noted that the complex issue of gaining trust and respect for the benefits of counselling is not just an issue with Aboriginal populations but is also apparent in the wider non-Aboriginal population. Perhaps there is a need for counsellors and professionals in the field to work in a more holistic manner with Aboriginal communities, working in collaboration with Aboriginals to set up programs and help to perform rituals or as a conduit for better relationships between Aboriginal community, school, broader community and the government. With this observable participation in the community and the positive activities involved perhaps a more positive perception of counselling could be attained. This study suggests that traditional means of counselling may not be enough for the Aboriginal community, nor the community as a whole and thus new avenues of utilizing counselling prowess seem to be needed.

Implications for Future Research

As mentioned above a number of implications for future research arose from this study. Firstly the issue of narratives and narrative therapy as being helpful to First Nations young adults with regard to transitions needs further examination. The personal observations of how interesting and how helpful the telling of their stories was during the data collection component of this study indicated further study is needed in this area so as to understand whether Native oral traditions are respected and fulfilled more positively by the opportunity to present personal stories. As indicated above current research suggests this is so, but little research has been done with regard to this specific population and therefore more study is needed in this arena.
Secondly, the failure of such institutions as education and counselling to provide safe environments and nurture feelings of success or at least offer success, hints at the need to examine whether or not counseling is an effective tool to help this population, or if in fact broader, healthy communities and families would be of more assistance. If this is so, then more research is needed to look into this possibility. Also as mentioned above, both educational and counselling programs seem to be failing these young people. From this study, and from previous research efforts, the hindering incidents clearly indict the education system. This result combined with the relative absence of counselling as a helpful factor, seems to indicate that more study is needed into what works for the young Aboriginal population. When all participants in my study indicated how this reflective opportunity to tell their stories was helpful to them, it becomes clear that perhaps in their past they have not had such opportunity. Therefore, research into this concept seems warranted.

A third area of study that needs to be examined further is the concept of self-esteem and resiliency in this population. Noticeably absent from the literature at the outset of the study, there is still a huge gap in the research with regard to how First Nations youth identify themselves, gain self-esteem, live through trauma and succeed. This study sheds some light on some of the factors that helped young people to navigate the sometimes stormy waters of the transition from being part of a family to establishing their own family and doing well in the process, but it is only a sliver of light onto this phenomenon. The spark of hope that is embodied here needs to be expanded upon. The purpose of this study was to bring to light positive stories from a population often viewed as problematic and troubled. While this has been done it is only a tiny sample of eight
participant's views and therefore more research is needed into the complex phenomenon of resiliency and strength, leading to self-esteem and self-efficacy in the diverse population of indigenous youth.

A further area for research indicated from this study is the role of ritual, creative expression and spirituality in the lives of young Aboriginals. With a total of 14 incidents cited by five participants, more research is needed into the effect that such factors have upon the lives of indigenous youth. While much literature addresses adult spirituality, and the need for such things as prayer, creative expression (either art or journalling), and rituals as being helpful for these participants; there is scant literature available for the young population with regard to this phenomenon. Further study is needed to shed more light on this as a factor which could help many more young Aboriginals succeed.

As mentioned above the that 87.5% of the participants were female bears further investigation, both from the viewpoint of answering questions as to female success as indigenous youth, and also from the viewpoint of answering questions as to why males did not participate and what constitutes their views of success or factors that help them to do well. This outcome of the study which should be investigated further and is one of the more interesting results of this study in that it brings forward more questions that need to addressed with regard to young First Nations people.

Also a tiny insight that came out of this study from one participant was the role of language in his formation of Aboriginal identity. Even though the participant could not speak the language of his grandmother, he specifically recalled how listening to her and his father speak in it was helpful to him. While six out of eight participants mentioned connections to culture and Aboriginality as a helping factor, only one mentioned the role
of his family’s language. This interesting fact suggests that more research be done into the role of language upon identity formation and also as a factor in helping Aboriginals succeed. Current and previous research has referred to the distinctive differences which language plays upon understanding of the world and expressing viewpoints, Keeshig-Tobias, (2003) discussed her hatred of the English language because of the history of oppression associated with it, and McLeod, (2003) also discussed the empowerment achieved through use of language and culture in schools. Yet this concept still needs further research in terms of identity formation and as a factor of helping to form self-esteem.

A sixth area where research is generally lacking is tied to the implications for practitioners in the previous section and is somewhat obscure but interesting to note nonetheless. The gap between best practice literature and literature with regard to counseling First Nations youth is astounding. While it is not clear how to best address this phenomenon, given the relative scarcity of research in this field, it seems salient to recognize that further research needs to be done to address this issue. As mentioned above, the current methods employed by practitioners in both the education system and the counselling profession as a whole, seem to be failing with regard at least to the small segment of the population studied in my research, but also in view of the statistics with regard to education. To my knowledge there is scant research done with regard to positive outcomes for First Nations youth with regard to the implementation of counselling both in the school system and outside it. Thus it would seem to be a very important crack in the current status of the literature, and this should be addressed through research.
Finally, in general there is a lack of available information on the role of transitions with regard to many populations but most significantly young indigenous people. Working with and studying First Nations populations, while rampant with a history of oppression and disrespect of traditions, does not necessarily need to be so invasive. If a fair, reciprocal relationship is used with a foundation of respect from both sides, then it should be possible to conduct research with indigenous peoples and thereby expand our body of knowledge for the purposes of bettering the current situation. As mentioned throughout this study, there are many deficits and problems occurring in indigenous populations around the world, not just here in Canada, however, there are also many positive things happening and as one participant said it brings hope to see that the next generation may not have to suffer in the way that the current and previous generations have. In order to achieve this though, there has to be concessions on both the part of the non-Aboriginal population and the Aboriginal population. Forgiveness and acceptance can perhaps allow a new relationship to be forged, based on equality and a shared vision of hope for the future. Young Aboriginals, as seen in this study, expressed the hope for a continued bright existence, despite the many obstacles lying in their path. If we are to continue to aid and abet the bright futures of this population it is important that we work together to achieve this. The study indicated that all participants in the young First Nations' peoples' lives played a role in their success, family, Aboriginal community, the Aboriginal connections and culture/traditions/language, and the broader community inclusive of non-Aboriginals in terms of school, programs and support. If this circle of influence was an integral component of these young people's success stories then more research needs to be done which looks holistically at this concept. To achieve
this, there is a need for research into the needs of the Aboriginal community with regard to counseling, best practice, education and healthy communities, and such research should be conducted in collaboration with the various Aboriginal bands and communities. Also, any research should not only be collaborative, it should be empowering, thereby redressing the stigma long associated with research conducted by non-Aboriginals upon the Aboriginal population. Hopefully with research that models the concepts of inclusion, community involvement and respect that has been a keynote of best research practice with regard to cross-cultural counseling and research, a new history of hope and empowerment could be realized.

Personal Reflection

Here it is salient to note the struggle I have experienced within myself with regard to the reporting of these findings. I embarked upon this study in the hopes of providing voice to the participants through telling their stories of what has helped and hindered them and in paying honour and respect to their culture I am aware of the oral nature of their storytelling traditions. While I have audio-recorded their individual narratives in this format, the written presentation of their stories has fallen into the trap of the scientific jargon and I fear is somewhat guilty of not respecting the need for a story, but is rather respecting the need for a proven research paper. I was very much aware of this dilemma as I wrote this paper and believe that this awareness will forever tinge my experience in this regard. I do hope that my participants understand and forgive me for what I consider to be the single most important transgression of the honour they bestowed upon me by sharing their stories with me.
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to listen to the voices of First Nations’ youth in order to understand the lived experiences of transition between adolescence and adulthood in terms of career development. This study has addressed and met that purpose. Thirteen categories emerged from the critical incident technique including items that were helpful, not helpful and wish list items for those factors which participants believed would help them to continue doing well. Six methods of validation were employed to assess the credibility of the categories used and theoretical validity was supported. Also important for the purpose of this study was to give voice to positive stories of success and this study gave participants an opportunity to tell their narratives about the transitions they experienced in journeying from secondary school to post secondary school life with regard to their careers. From the data that was collected final hypotheses were formulated and examined in light of the research question.

This study contributes to the field of counselling psychology in a number of ways, but particularly with regard to First Nations counselling. This study was done without pre-existing categorizations, and emphasis was given to the descriptions the participants recalled about their individual experiences throughout their lives that had led them to a place of success currently. The participants gave full voice to those incidents that were deemed helpful, not helpful or in general, meaningful to their experiences. Given the noticeable gap in the literature with regard to this population, the notion of transitions and career in general, this study contributed to the literature. Furthermore, results from this study include the need to readdress current perspectives on counselling services and best practice for counsellors, for all clients in general, and specifically with regard to First
Nations youth. A second result was the need for further research to be done in the field of First Nations research as a gap was highlighted between current literature and current services. The influence of school and the current failure of the system for youth were also highlighted in the study. A major finding reiterated the importance of family, culture, traditions and community, in the lives of the young people studied. The wish list items that arose can be used to provide a guideline for future programs and options for indigenous youth by organizations and communities who are servicing these people. Lastly, these results indicate the need for a change in direction and a model of inclusion for a new and positive relationship with the Aboriginal communities and the non-Aboriginal communities also.

The importance of Aboriginal youth cannot be underestimated. They are the future and the present. It goes without saying that I am indebted, honoured and completely in awe of the individuals who participated in this study. I cannot express how much I was touched by the honesty, integrity and sheer resilience of these people who shared their experiences for the data, and I do hope that their stories will create a difference. Through sharing great hardship, difficulty and tremendous stories of success, the insights gathered will provide a learning opportunity and a light for those who follow in their footsteps. I still feel very privileged to have been witness to these stories of courage, determination, strength and persistence in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds. I am also inspired by the achievements of these participants and hope that their stories will provide inspiration to others within the community so that a circle of success is continued until the communities of Aboriginals can all enjoy similar stories. On a personal level perhaps I am guilty of taking from these people more than I can personally
give back, as I feel that their stories helped me and motivated me to continue this arduous task of completing my thesis. It seemed to me that the small sacrifices I had to make in my life were insignificant compared to the very real sacrifices and courage these young people had displayed in their lives. Still, I truly hope that the stories told here can in some measure provide inspiration for future generations and the current population to achieve success in life in whatever ways they feel meaningful. Again, it is with honour and respect I close.

v Wi-cah-ca-la kin he-ya pe lo ma-ka kin le-ca la te-han yun-ke-lo e-ha pe-lo e-han-ke-con wi-ca-ya-ka pe-lo!
v The old men say the earth only endures. You spoke truly. You are right. 
All my relations!
References

incident analysis (Doctoral dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1997).
Dissertation Abstracts International-B, 59(02), AAT NQ25008.

Angelides, P. (2001). The development of an efficient technique for collecting and
analyzing qualitative data: The analysis of critical incidents. Journal of
Qualitative Studies in Education, 14(3), 429-442.


Canadian Journal of Counselling 34(3 ), 204-217.

Bhalalusesa, E.(1998). Women’s career and professional development: Experiences and
challenges. Gender and Education, 10(1), 21-34.

Scarborough, Ontario: Nelson.


throughout the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The Career
Development Quarterly, 45, 189-199.

Addison-Wesley.

British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2002). How are we doing? Demographics and


Preventing School Failure, 48(3), 17-22.


Family community Health, 18(2), p. 52-64.

Woolsey, L. (1986). The critical incident technique: An innovative method of research

 Canadian Journal of Counselling, 20, 242-254.


identity. Canadian Journal of Native Education. 27(1), 101-107.
APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology,
And Special Education,
Faculty of Education
2125 Main Mall,
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Lianne Britten and I am investigating the experience of indigenous young adults who are doing well in the transition from adolescence to adulthood with regard to their career development.

I am seeking young adult volunteers, aged between 19 and 29 years who have been out of the High School system for a minimum of three years and who identify themselves as doing well. Participants will be asked to talk about their experience since leaving high school – with a focus on what helped them and what hindered them regarding their career development. There will be an initial face-to-face interview up to two (2) hours in length, followed by a second 30-minute interview, which may be conducted in person or by telephone. Both interviews will be audiotaped or electronically recorded. The tapes will later be transcribed and given a code number. The information will be kept confidential. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials.

The main purpose of these interviews is to collect information about your transitions from adolescence into adulthood with regard to your career development and the incidents that helped or hindered you in that experience. The purpose of the second interview is to have you review the way in which the information collected has been organized to ensure it properly reflects your words and experience. It is my intention that this research will give a voice to indigenous young adults who are doing well and that the information, and stories told in this study will shed light on the factors that would be most effective in helping indigenous youth to make a successful transition form adolescence to adulthood in terms of their career development.

Your involvement in this study is entirely voluntary and you may decide to withdraw at any time.

This letter is being forwarded to you in confidence by a member of your community who has not shared with the names and addresses of people receiving this letter. Only those individuals who contact me for more information or to indicate interest in participating in this study will become known to me. Your professional colleague will not be provided with the names of individuals who participate in this study.
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT
Consent
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice of any kind.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.

________________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                        Date

________________________________________________________________________
Printed name of the Participant signing above

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

February 20, 2005