From Knowledge to Wisdom: Indigenous Women's Narratives of Doing Well With Career Decision Making

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Abstract

Indigenous women in Canada are outperforming other Canadians in the labour market (DePratto, 2015). However, we currently have limited understanding about how Indigenous women decide on their choice of career. We sought to understand Indigenous women's narratives of doing well in making career decisions. Ten women volunteered to tell their stories of how they made career decisions that resulted in positive outcomes. Using a narrative research design, in-depth interviews were recorded and narrative accounts were generated that illuminated the ways in which women in this study overcame life circumstances in their quest to establish a career. Verbatim transcriptions and individual narrative accounts were constructed. The narratives were then analyzed using a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All participants confirmed the following five main themes: (1) focusing on a career direction, (2) pursuing further education and training, (3) overcoming and learning from adversity, (4) relational experiences that influenced career decisions and (5) connection to Aboriginal community as part of career decision-making. Implications for future research, career theory development and education as well as career counselling practice are discussed.

Indigenous peoples and settlers have been living in one another's presence since the onset of colonialism and throughout centuries of environmental dispossession and cultural upheaval (Richmond, 2015; Richmond & Ross, 2009). The changes Indigenous communities have endured over the past 150 years have transformed their relationships with the land, their way of life, and modes of survival. "Loss of land is the precise cause of Indigenous impoverishment" wrote the late Secwepemc leader Art Manual (Manual & Derrickson, 2015, p.18). The overall percentage of Indigenous lands today in Canada is 0.2 per cent, with the settler share being 99.8 percent (Manual & Derrickson, 2015). In this era of reconciliation, it is essential to recognize our historical truths as a nation in our efforts to undo colonial harms such as the poverty imposed on Indigenous ways of life.

The National Aboriginal Economic Development Board (Fiscal Realities Economists, 2016) asserts several bold findings and recommendations for closing the gap economically and socially for Indigenous peoples. They write: (a) the poverty rate for Indigenous peoples in Canada is 11% higher than the non-Indigenous population; (b) closing this gap means that 173,234 fewer Indigenous people will be living in poverty, and an estimated increase in Gross Domestic Product of 27.7 billion annually; (c) the number of Indigenous people of working age (25-64) increased 21% between 2006 and 2011 compared with only 5% growth among the non-Indigenous population; and (d) the implications for improving equity in education and training for Indigenous peoples could result in an additional 8.5 billion in income earned annually by the estimated Indigenous workforce.

Indigenous women specifically have lower employment and labour force participation rates than Indigenous men yet have been outperforming both Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women in labour market growth (Employment and Social Development Canada [ESDC], 2015). In 2014, Indigenous women comprised over one third of the Indigenous self-employed workforce becoming entrepreneurs at twice the rate of non-Indigenous women (ESDC, 2015). Among Indigenous peoples in Canada, women have higher levels of education, greater access to employment in growth sectors such as the service and knowledge industries, and greater entrepreneurship (DePratto, 2015). There is a wealth of knowledge held by Indigenous women and many untold stories to illustrate how they are doing well with their career-decision making in spite of centuries of environmental dispossession and cultural loss.

Literature Review

Landscape of Indigenous Women's Careers

There is a lack of research that focuses on the career experiences of Indigenous women, and a lack of research concerning Indigenous women who have done well. It is well documented in the literature that Indigenous peoples in Canada have experienced a legacy of acculturation imposed on them by the Canadian government (Gerber, 2014; Halseth, 2013). Discriminative government policies embedded in the Indian Act have targeted Indigenous women as a group and terminated their "Indian Status" thus excluding them from their Indigenous rights (Lawrence, 2003). This often rendered Indigenous women less successful in achieving economic and sociopolitical freedom than non-Indigenous women and men in Canada (Bourassa, McKay-McNabb, & Hampton, 2004). In Todd's (2012) focus group research with Indigenous and Non-Indigenous entrepreneurial young women whose businesses were predominantly in creative and cultural industries, the author identified some important trends. For Indigenous women, support for those seeking self-employment was found through a number of government-supported programs. Social networks have important roles within Indigenous communities with an emphasis on giving back to their respective communities through their businesses. Positive orientations to self-employment were developed through family, business, and educational networks. Transitions towards self-employment were identified as complex, involving educational, occupational, and family careers. The social-structural circumstances of urban Indigenous communities in particular were the focus of Todd's work, excluding the experiences of rural or northern Indigenous women/communities.

In her critical engagement with Statistics Canada data from 2001 and 2006, Gerber (2014) scrutinized the extent of social inequality in terms of education, employment, and income between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations and among the three distinct groups among Indigenous peoples: The First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. Métis (who are the most urban) are closest to non-Indigenous peoples in education, employment, and income. On all accounts, First Nations and Inuit women "remain the lowest ranks" in Canada. Suffering both physical and social isolation (i.e., living on reserve lands designated Crown Lands which comprise 0.2% of the National land base and set apart for the use and benefit of a band), Aboriginal people have had inferior education, limited or non-existent employment opportunities, and lack of access to credit/capital to prevent free-market competition by communities, businesses, or individuals (Gerber, 2014). In overcoming physical and social isolation, some steps may involve acculturation and assimilation (Gerber, 2014). Pursuing post-secondary education and/or acquiring full-time employment/higher salaries means moving away from community, unless they are second or third generation urbanites (Gerber, 2014).

For Indigenous women who work in rural, resource-based economies, work experiences can be precarious and seasonal (Morgan, 2015). In her case study, Morgan identified ten key experiences amongst 20 Indigenous women cannery workers in Prince Rupert, BC: (a) on-call working conditions; (b) economic downturns closing employment generating industries; (c) income insecurity; (d) the closure of affordable grocery stores; (e) high job competition in the service sector; (f) reliance on social assistance, food banks, and high barriers to accessing employment insurance; (g) lack of affordable formal childcare; (h) lack of affordable training programs that would lift them into full-time work; (i) discrimination based on race and ageism; and (j) lack of public transportation that accommodates insecure work schedules. One stereotype affecting Indigenous women workers was the perception of Indigenous people as being limited by culture and traditions, such as traditional forms of preserving salmon being viewed synonymously with manufacturing labour in a salmon cannery (Morgan, 2015).

These stereotypes may cause Indigenous peoples to be occupationally limited as well (Knight, 1996).

Career Decision-making

In order to frame the study, we provide a review of theories used in the field of vocational psychology in the conceptualization of career decision-making. There is recognition in the literature that traditional career theories are not readily applicable to the experience of Indigenous young adults (Young, Marshall, & Valach, 2007). Also, there are very few career counselling models for application with Indigenous populations (Neumann, McCormick, Amundson, & McLean, 2000). Career development literature and career decision making literature, including Indigenous career development/career decision making literature has only minimally acknowledged the contribution of contextual factors in both theory and practice. McCormick and Amundson's (1997) Career/ Life Planning Model was developed specifically for use with Indigenous clients and Indigenous youth (Neumann, McCormick, Amundson, & McLean, 2000). In recognition of traditional values and processes of many Indigenous peoples, this model emphasizes the importance of including family and community members in the counselling process in an effort to provide support and encouragement (Neumann et al., 2000). It also shares some similarities with the tenets of Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which is a contemporary model for career counselling that views career counselling as a holistic process and considers multiple aspects of the client's context (Lent & Brown, 2013). The SCCT framework has been used to examine adolescent career development, including career decision-making, but with limited attention to cultural dimensions (Rogers & Creed, 2011). We felt the need to position our research using theory that recognizes aspects of cultural diversity, plurality of worldviews, and experiences that are uniquely associated with Indigenous ways of living. Some of these experiences include the increased emphasis on community in the decision-making process, the role of relationships in career planning, and the reliance on meaning-making through spirituality in setting life/career goals. These realities are often seen to be at odds with the priorities of the dominant culture, which adds to the extent of marginalization that Indigenous people experience.

Purpose of the Study and Research Question

It has been argued that poverty eradication is the most important determinant of health to address Indigenous peoples of Canada (Reading, 2009). Despite the myriad socioeconomic and political challenges faced by Indigenous people of Canada, many attain career success. However, there is little research that investigates the experiences of Indigenous people who do attain career success. In particular there is very limited empirical research on the qualitative experiences of Indigenous women's successful career decision making. Thus, the aim of the current study was to gain further insight into the contextual and personal issues related to career decision making among this understudied population. Our research team sought to understand the benefits and challenges faced by Indigenous women during their career decision-making experiences over time. We asked ten Indigenous women the following research question: "What stories do Indigenous women narrate about doing well with career decision making?" A narrative research design was employed to answer this question.

Method

Indigenous perspectives specifically privilege research practices that begin from Indigenous experiences (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999 & 2005). One of the authors (Goodwill) is an Indigenous woman engaged with this research, and is able to "claim [to] a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 12) granting an emic perspective on this collaborative effort. We chose a narrative research design because it complements the oral traditions of storytelling. Narrative methodology is compatible with Indigenous epistemology that is formed through oral narratives, storytelling and art. It encourages multiple ways of knowing (Barton, 2004). Narratives are viewed as active processes of meaning-making for those who create and share their stories (Hiles et al., 2017). Narrative construction also lends chronological, sequential structure and order to events and actions, highlighting individual and communal perspectives on these events (Hiles, et al., 2017; Riessman, 2008; Sarbin, 1986). By investigating the individual narratives of Indigenous women we are able to see how culture is at work in the construction of their narrative accounts.

Recruitment Procedures and Participant Descriptions

Ten young adult Indigenous women volunteered for this study. Once The University of British

Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board approved the research ethics for this study, we began the recruitment process. Recruitment posters were distributed at universities, colleges and Indigenous community centres within the lower mainland of British Columbia. Snowball sampling was also employed through word of mouth. The inclusion criteria for the study were: (a) English speaker, (b) Indigenous woman between the age of 25 to 35 years; and (c) self-reporting as doing well in career decision-making. Informed consent was obtained once the study was described to the volunteer participants. It is important to note that since the participants were recruited as individuals we are not able to provide their First Nations affiliations. We did not work with any specific First Nations however we are able to indicate that participants came from a range of Indigenous Nations situated in Western Canada. Demographic information was gathered at the end of the narrative interview. The ten participants were between the ages of 26 to 33 years, earned an average income of $0 (student) to $150,000. Seven of the women had bachelor's degrees and two were pursing graduate degrees. Only one woman remained in her native community to pursue her career as an early childhood educator; all others attended educational institutions outside their communities. Examples of the careers described in the study were: Aboriginal student support worker; coordinator of an Aboriginal sport organization; massage therapist, actor, dancer, Aboriginal educator, Aboriginal health board member; entrepreneur, university/college student and law student.

Data Collection

Open-ended audio-recorded interviews were held at the University of British Columbia in (co-author's name) research lab. The interviews commenced after all participants gave informed consent. The interviews ranged in length from 40 minutes to 1 hour. All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Data was managed through the use of Atlas-ti, a computer software program designed to analyze qualitative data. All data was stored securely in (co-author's name) research lab and all participant files were encrypted and pseudonyms were assigned to each participant in this study.

Data Analysis

Once the transcripts were completed, the research team created a narrative account from each of the ten transcripts. In this process, the content was placed in sequential order and all details that answered the research question were included in the participants' stories about doing well in their career decision-making. The narratives were transferred into the Atlas-ti program in preparation for the thematic analysis. The ten narrative accounts were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-step guide for thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke describe the process of coding and theme development as "organic, exploratory and inherently subjective, involving active, creative and reflexive research" (p. 741). Thematic analysis involved the following stages: (a) becoming familiar with the data through the process of transcription and reading and rereading the participants' stories; (b) coding the data to identify important information that addresses the research question; (c) reviewing the codes that were generated and

collating them into possible overarching categories of themes and subthemes using a mind map to look for potential relationships or patterns between codes; (d) reviewing these themes in order to rework and refine them until they accurately represent the data set; (e) defining, refining and naming themes, as well as any sub-themes, in order to describe how the themes were an essential part of the data; (f) writing up the findings using evidence from the data to demonstrate how each theme was a vital part of the stories told by the participants in the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Trustworthiness and Rigor

As this study was part of a larger Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) research project involving the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique, trustworthiness was ascertained through nine credibility checks for the overall study. Parts of the nine credibility checks that pertain to the narrative portion of this study were: (1) cross-checking final themes with participants through member checking process; (2) expert opinions by two outside experts in the field; (3) theoretical agreement—themes were considered within the realm of both the existing literature and the researchers' assumptions; (4) descriptive validity—accuracy of the findings must reasonably represent the participants' experiences; (5) interview fidelity to check the consistency in interviewing.

Findings

Through an in-depth narrative analysis, five main themes emerged from the narrative accounts. The themes were endorsed by all participants and are as follows: (1) Focusing on a Career

Direction; (2) Pursuing Further Education and Training; (3) Overcoming and Learning from Adversity; (4) Relational Experiences that Influenced Career Decisions; and (5) Connection to Aboriginal Community as Part of Career Decision Making. All the participants were asked an evaluative scaling question about how they would rate their career decision-making on a scale from 1 (doing poorly) to 10 (doing very well). All ten participants scored their response between 8 and 9 on the scale. In the description of the five main themes in this section, participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and provide confidentiality.

Focusing on a Career Direction

All of the women in this study discussed focusing on a career direction during childhood and pursuing a career direction throughout their lives. Several had early career opportunities that influenced their career direction. Within this theme, participants spoke about identifying career interests and then investigating how to obtain that career and exploring the career opportunities available in their fields of interest. They also described work experiences that they assessed as not having a future or not meeting their long-term career goals. Marianne provides an excellent example of focusing on a career direction early in her life:

I've always wanted to be a lawyer. From a fairly young age I kind of had an idea of what I wanted my job to be. When I became an adult I felt like I always kind of built towards that one goal. . . . I worked a few jobs and still remembered my long-term goal of what I wanted to do.

Many had interruptions to their career pursuits due to life circumstances such as financial issues, family obligations, and pregnancy. However, there was persistence in their narratives in terms of learning how to navigate systems, how to network within organizations, and making important connections to further their career goals. As Jenna summarizes her learning process:

Everything really led me to where I am now. I really see everything kind of taught me a different lesson and that what I liked and what I didn't like and gave me different skills . That was an amazing opportunity . . . to get those skills I needed for networking. . . . This internship is my first step on a career path because it's successful, it's good pay and it's something that I'm kind of proud to tell people about.

Also implicit in this theme was a discussion about clarifying personal values in terms of their career decision-making. Self-knowledge and self-exploration for many was the means through which they clarified their values in terms of discerning a career path. For example, Carol stated: "I learned that what I had to say was valuable and so it allowed me to recognize that within myself that I could do a variety of things." Emma discussed how she determined what she valued in a career through experiences within stressful workplaces where she learned that a positive work environment was very important to her to maintain her health over time. All the participants who were mothers spoke about parenting as a precedence that had career implications (i.e., postponing educational opportunities; moving back to their home communities; seeking support from family

members; taking temporary employment as examples).

In summary, focusing on a career direction from childhood to young adulthood, exploring personal values, and having persistence in terms of pursuing career goals appear to be important factors in their success in making future career decisions.

Pursing Further Education and Training

In this theme, many women described having family members who went to university and felt encouraged to follow in their footsteps. However, some family members discouraged women in this study from their non-academic choices. For example, as a teen Marianne told her father she wanted to become a mechanic but

He completely shut me down saying: 'You can't do that; you're too smart to be a mechanic. Look where I got being a mechanic!' . . . I highly respected my parents and I knew from then on that that wasn't a good choice for me.

Many experienced difficulty at university or college because there was no support for Aboriginal students. Carol explained:

I was completely lost. I came from an isolated northern community; I didn't know anybody; I didn't know how to write a paper. So I just had to learn about how to live and how to manage schooling and manage studying. . . . When I got pregnant in my second year, that's when I realized I really needed my education and I needed to start being serious about school.

Indigenous Women's Narratives on Career Decision-Making

40

CANADIAN
JOURNAL OF
CAREER
DEVELOPMENT

REVUE
CANADIENNE DE
DÉVELOPPEMENT
DE CARRIÈRE

Later Carol states: "I feel like education is the one thing that can help change our communities and it's kind of what I've been trying to focus on." Carol's career path eventually led to a position with a university as an Aboriginal Student Support Provider.

Several women stated that pursuing an education was a catalyst in meeting their career goals. Cheryl describes her experience this way:

I started taking some women's studies classes . . . and I would say that was like a big turning point . . . learning more about the systems and oppression and how the world works in a deeper way as I was putting words to experiences I've had all through my life. . . . It was quite a big moment in my life. . . . I was like, okay how do I translate this to real life? And then the social service worker diploma translated it for me.

Cheryl eventually achieved a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and is now considering a Master's degree in Social Work.

All of the women sought further education and qualifications/certification as a way to advance their career goals. These choices were not easy for almost all of the women in this study but again their perseverance and their ability to seek support from others helped them to succeed in their career decision-making.

Overcoming and Learning from Adversity in Career Decision-Making

This theme garnered the largest support from the women in this study. Several women described feeling lost after high school especially if they moved to the city to go to college or university. They also felt unprepared for university and shared that they did not have all the skills they needed to succeed. A few participants had to make career decisions when they became pregnant at university/college and had to quit for a few years to raise their children. All of these women spoke about needing to continue or finish their education, as it was important to their future career goals.

Six of the participants chose a career in Aboriginal support services, Aboriginal sport, Aboriginal health services and Ministry of Education in Aboriginal Education. One participant chose a career in Indigenous student support services after getting her degree due to the adverse experiences she had to overcome as a university student without financial support. Alicia describes her application for financial support when Bill C 3 made a college education a possibility. Bill C 3 is entitled the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act. It passed in 2010 and included clauses that provide "that any person born prior to 17 April 1985 and is a direct descendant of a person registered or entitled to be registered under the Indian Act may also be entitled registration" (p. 153, Hurley & Simeone, 2014). During her first year of college she discovered her application was not successful because it was determined that she didn't have Aboriginal status. This created a serious financial situation where she struggled to finish her college degree with more student loans and more debt. However, she found the stamina to complete her degree and continue on with her career goals. Emma explains that she had to go on welfare for a period of time when she lost her job. She states:

That was a bad experience because it taught me to be lazy. I got into this mentality of not really having to work for my money and just blow my time away doing nothing. . . . I finally learned that I don't want to be dependent on other people [for money] cause that's very stressful.

All the participants in the study described the experience of career barriers as a learning experience, as a motivator and as a struggle but also part of the process of finally succeeding in their career goals. All of the women related how the adversity they experienced served as a catalyst for their career path. Sherry spoke about receiving career-limiting advice. "At that time there was deficit thinking about focusing on a degree in Indigenous education or culture. It wasn't seen as a good degree to pursue." She explained that other people just assumed that because you were First Nations that you should be doing studies in First Nations or working toward a social work degree. Karen also spoke about other's assumptions. "Oh, you're First Nations. You must be doing a degree in First Nations studies." I'm like, "Well no, I'm interested in other things." It appears that these assumptions from others, influenced by ideas of race/ethnicity, contributed to feelings of oppression and exposure to racist comments.

Perseverance was a major factor in overcoming adversity. An example of perseverance is Natasha's experience of being given a position above her level of training and finding that she quickly had to figure it out on her own:

It was kind of like throwing me in the deep end and making me learn how to swim. I was managing the

entire admissions department for the most part on my own . . . I felt like the work I was doing and the students I was connecting with was worth all the trouble that I had to go through.

Several participants described feeling lost and missing home when they left their small, rural communities to pursue a career or education. Carol stated that she felt completely lost when she went to university because she came from a small isolated community in northern Canada. She didn't feel prepared and had to learn how to live in the big city. For most of the participants in the study, there were no supports in place for Aboriginal students. Several women had to leave their home communities to pursue further education and employment. All felt a loss of home community as an adverse experience.

In a few narratives, the participants' long-term family struggles with the justice system and family services influenced their career choice. Natasha, who grew up in foster care and was a high-risk teen, in trouble with the law and finally placed in a group home for troubled teens, explained a potent example of the "Legacy of Being in Care". For Natasha getting a career was a catalyst for getting her children back and eventually led to her career choice of working with youth at-risk in the healthcare system. Another example is provided in Marianne's narrative where she describes her family's struggle with the justice system in which her brother's children were apprehended and how this struggle led to her decision to pursue a law degree at an early age.

A few of the women in the study became mothers when they were first pursuing an education.

They described experiencing difficulty in pursuing their career goals due to financial and family/child rearing reasons. Often the relationships with the father did not last and they found themselves returning to their communities for support as single mothers. They stated that their career goals were put on hold. Marianne's abusive relationship with her partner was described as the motivator for her to return to college to get a degree and complete her original career plan now as a single mother. However, other women in the study who struggled with achieving their career goals described feeling useless during their early child rearing experiences because they were not productive members of society and they felt they were a burden on their families and communities. Often support from family and community assisted these women to continue to look at their options and find ways to move forward. Every woman who had a child while pursuing an education described being a parent as the most valued part of her life. Community support and family support were key aspects of persevering onward toward their career goals.

Relational Experiences That Influence Career Decision-Making

The most prominent thread in this theme was connection with family and family support while pursuing a career path. Marianne for example described how her family sent her money and supported her so she could return home and get out of an abusive relationship. They supported her as a young mother and helped her to return to her career aspirations to be a lawyer. Janet's dedication to her children fostered a career path in parenting education: "I guess you could call it

a career because you learn a lot of things just being a parent and you learn a lot of things being a parent on your own." Janet was highly esteemed in her community for her contributions to supporting new parents. The women in the study also described situations where knowing a family member in the field where they sought work or education was an asset and helped them by supporting them in a new setting away from home.

Another aspect of this theme was being mentored or having a role model. Jenna described her experience of being mentored in an Aboriginal Youth Internship Program where she worked with an Indigenous supervisor during her internship. She states: "I was one of the few interns who actually had a mentor who was Indigenous. She provided a really safe space for me in that internship where I could really be myself." Marianne described her parents and her aunts and uncles as her role models. "They were well respected in our community and that meant a lot to me." She described how they gave her a sense of direction in her life. Almost all the participants experienced having a mentor or role model that influenced and supported their career choices.

Connection to Indigenous Community as Part of Career Decision-Making

Almost all the participants in this study ended up in careers in the fields of Indigenous education, Indigenous health organizations and Indigenous sport organizations. Almost all participants returned to their home communities to receive support or to provide support to their communities through their career choices. All of the women

Indigenous Women's Narratives on Career Decision-Making

42

CANADIAN
JOURNAL OF
CAREER
DEVELOPMENT

REVUE
CANADIENNE DE
DÉVELOPPEMENT
DE CARRIÈRE

mentioned the importance of connecting to their Indigenous communities and families and often these connections influenced their final career goals. Cheryl provides an exemplary example of reconnecting to family:

I went to our original ancestral home two years ago with my Mom. It was awesome. . . . I've got tons of family that I never really knew when I was growing up. . . . It was a time in my life where I felt I really wanted to connect with family. I want to know more about who I am. It's kind of a coming of age thing.

Alicia describes how connecting to Indigenous values and ancestry helped her clarify her own career goals. She wanted her children to always know who they are and where they are from and how they would identify being Indigenous and participate in traditional ceremonies and other cultural events. She states: "It is always something that I have been focused on and helped me to continue pushing this path as a career."

Almost all the women spoke to some aspect of being involved in Indigenous knowledge opportunities such as being an Indigenous family lawyer, working to support Indigenous communities, and seeking careers in Indigenous education program. The women provided many examples of teaching Indigenous knowledge within their own communities as a career focus.

Discussion

The results of this study bear several implications for theory, practice, and future research pertaining to Indigenous women and career decision-making and career development theory. To our knowledge, there is a paucity of studies that explore the career decision-making experiences of Indigenous women and how these experiences relate to contemporary career theory and the practice of career counselling with Indigenous women. Ideally, the themes inherent to this study will serve as a basis for the development of enhanced theory and practice for Indigenous women who are soon to be, or currently are in, the process of making career decisions

Implications for Career Theory

As with all theory within vocational psychology, there is no essential paradigm that encapsulates the lived experiences of all people, including Indigenous women, and which proposes to explain how they made and arrived at certain career decisions. However, the themes that were identified by our participants complement the tenets of several established theories of career decision-making, adding a relevance to the experiences of our participants within accepted theoretical frameworks. In applying our study's themes to current models of career decision-making, the need for more developed theories of career with minority groups in general, and Indigenous women in particular, was highlighted

Many of the experiences and themes described by our participants align with developmental models of career decision-making, which underscore the life-long nature of the career process. Developmental theories, such as Super's (1953) theory of career choice and development, and Super, Savickas and Super's (1996) Life-Span, Life-space Model, emphasize the importance of a variety of contextual and circumstantial factors that influence career over the course of an individual's life. These include psychosocial roles such as motherhood (Super et al., 1996). Our participant's narratives spoke strongly to the effect that parenthood, family roles, expectations, and community support had in shaping career decision-making processes. Further, the constructionist component of Super et al.'s (1996) theory suggests that people's self-concepts are shaped by their experiences, of which they make meaning and which influence career decisions in turn. Our participant's narratives supported these fundamental notions. Many of our participants described their experiences of oppression and systemic struggles as catalysts for their decisions, and for some participants their family's conceptualizations of them were described as motivating factors in attaining a certain level of education that would eventually lead to a desired career.

More recently developed models of career decision-making often adopt a post-modern stance (Betz, 2008), and underscore the influencing forces of continuous change in the workforce. These models suggest that relying on a blend of intuition and rational thinking, or capitalizing on learning experiences, are fundamental processes that are involved in career change (Bright & Pryor, 2011; Gelatt, 1989; Krumboltz, 2009). Again, our participants' narratives were congruent with many of the assumptions within these theories. Participants described rewarding and challenging experiences in the workforce from which new opportunities emerged and which shaped the desires they had in terms of pursuing certain career choices. This is particularly evident in the theme of overcoming and learning from adversity.

CANADIAN
JOURNAL OF
CAREER
DEVELOPMENT

REVUE
CANADIENNE DE
DÉVELOPPEMENT
DE CARRIÈRE

Indigenous Women's Narratives on Career Decision-Making

43

However, while these theories can be applied to the narrative themes to a degree, they do not account for how our participants were able to make decisions regarding their education and career journeys despite facing substantial adversity, such as domestic abuse and serious financial limitations.

One of the most prolific theories of career, Lent, Brown and Hackett's (1994) Social-Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), suggests that career decisions are made according to a person's beliefs about their own ability to attain a desired outcome (self-efficacy beliefs), outcome expectations (the imagined outcomes of a specific behaviour), and goals, which serve to organize behaviour in the service of obtaining a particular outcome. SCCT fits with virtually all of the themes that were garnered in this study, as this model incorporates not only practical and contextual influences on career (e.g., financial constraints, child-rearing duties, opportunities for work), but also the importance of envisioning a specific path or outcome for one's career. Many of our participants did this in an ongoing process that could be viewed as either a positive or negative experience depending on the situation at a particular time. While SCCT is effective at capturing the importance of belief in oneself and one's abilities as well as external constraints on the outcomes of one's efforts that our participants spoke to, it is our view that it does not fully address how or why many of our participants overcame exceptionally challenging life circumstances to make career decisions that they felt ultimately benefitted them.

In considering these career theories, several implications for the development of career theory emerged. The themes that arose in our study suggested that many Indigenous women have experienced significant systemic and non-systemic barriers in making career decisions that are unique to being an Indigenous woman. Yet they navigated these circumstances in such a way that they were able to achieve remarkable success and satisfaction with their work life. There is a dearth of available literature that conceptualizes how people - minority groups in particular - are able to bridge this gap. Future career theory could benefit from exploring and theorizing as to how Indigenous women address barriers, including financial, location, time, and practical constraints such as raising children and accessing resources, with the goal of achieving career satisfaction and/or success.

Implications for Career Counselling Practice

A central aim of this study involved collecting information from Indigenous women who have done well in making career decisions, with the goal of considering their strengths and perspectives to create and enhance counselling practice for Indigenous women who are pursuing career counselling. In reviewing the themes that emerged from our participant narratives, a prominent refrain involves the importance of developing career goals and elucidating steps towards the attainment of these goals. Our participants spoke to this in the themes of focusing on career direction, pursuing education and training, and connecting to Indigenous communities. It is apparent that goal clarification and identifying interests at a relatively young age were experiences that aided participants in pursuing their career decisions. With this in mind, counselling interventions that involve goal-setting and the exploration of personal values might be helpful in working with Indigenous women and career, regardless of the phase of life that they are currently experiencing.

Participants also described themes of persistence and resilience with regard to pursuing career, including lack of financial and practical supports, interruptions to career pursuits due to life circumstances, and feeling supported (or unsupported) as Indigenous students in academic settings. Counsellors who are working with Indigenous women within the context of career might explore processes and techniques for drawing on strengths, reframing negative experiences, and problem-solving with regard to systemic and institutional barriers. Ideally, this would occur without ignoring the deleterious impact that negative encounters and systemic issues can cause.

As is evident from the emergent themes of our study, one of the most potent sources of strength and support for Indigenous women who have done well in making career decisions came from their communities, mentors, and families. For example, while children and child-rearing were described as posing interruptions to career advancements, participants also stressed how their children were motivating factors in their persistence and pursuit of further education and career advancement. The findings regarding loyalty to one's community, as well as participants' personal values and cultural beliefs were integral factors that were described as contributing to participants' career decision-making processes. With this in mind, counsellors who are working with this population could benefit from using interventions that invite clients to explore how their personal

values align with their cultural values, as well as how their community ties might contribute to their personal values and goals with respect to career. It is also our hope that the themes that emerged in this study could form the basis for further research and counselling groups or workshops that explore each theme in turn, applying them to client's lives on an individual level.

Recommendations for Future Research

Scholarship needs to evolve to include the multiple positions Indigenous women occupy (i.e., race, class, gender, Indigeneity, mobility, geography). The implications of this work produce a message that future research should focus on Indigenous women and their work-family strategies in specific contexts, especially among Indigenous women who are doing well. These narratives articulate stories embedded in intersectionality, and our participants spoke into the voids of understanding Indigenous women's career decision-making. While the literature is now able to report measurable improvements in Indigenous women's levels of education, access to employment in growth sectors, and greater entrepreneurship (dePratto, 2015) we were able to identify practices of career decision-making nested within the life-roles of Indigenous women during this era of reconciliation. Aboriginal education promulgation that protects languages and culture and closes the education gap (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015) needs research evidencing the strategies Indigenous peoples employ to negotiate geographic displacement, mobility challenges, and structural racism in our schools and institutions. The career decision-making revealed here

demonstrated that Indigenous women are working harder at reconciling a relationship with the shifting Canadian economic landscape situated on their traditional lands (eg. Moving away from their lands to find work, access centralized educational and training resources, endure separation from cultural supports in favour of adjusting to training and employment expectations). Finally, future research extending the results of this study, with a larger sample of women from a larger number of occupational fields and life circumstance, could lead to new policies and practices to support Indigenous people in their career pursuits.

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