MAKING SENSE OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT:
A HERMENEUTIC-NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF CAREER COUNSELLORS' AND PRACTITIONERS' RETROSPECTIVE VIEWS OF THEIR EARLY EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES

by

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Making Sense of Youth Employment: A Hermeneutic-Narrative Analysis of Career Counsellors' and Practitioners' Retrospective Views of Their Early Employment Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Youth employment is common in North America and has been widely studied. Overall, research results have been varied and inconclusive and there have been relatively few studies that have examined the subjective experience of early work. This study used a hermeneutic-narrative approach and focused on the subjective experience of youth work, as described retrospectively in narratives of adults. Participants were youth employment counsellors and narratives were gathered using a focus group methodology.

The three questions guiding this study were: 1) What themes are prevalent in the narratives individuals construct to make sense of early employment experiences?, 2) How and when did they come to understand their early employment experiences in this way? and, 3) Have these early employment experiences influenced their current practice as career counsellors or practitioners; and, if so, how?

Themes common to participants' narratives were: early employment as an investment (in career and character development), as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization, for immediate financial gain, in relation to contextual variables (family, school and the socioeconomic context), and for the benefits of volunteering.

Making sense of early employment was found to be a long-term process that began prior to entry into the workforce and continued in retrospect. Parental messages and comparison of early employment experiences with more recent career events were major factors that influenced narrative development.

Most participants recognized a connection between their early work experiences and professional practice. Overall, participants tended to emphasize themes of

investment, self-discovery/self-actualization and volunteering in their counselling practices.

An interpretation that relates these findings to the wider sociocultural and historical context is included and early work themes of the participants are compared to widespread North American beliefs about career. The role of youth employment counselling in perpetuating career beliefs also is discussed.

Implications for theory, research, practice and counsellor education, and the generalizability and limitations of these findings are considered, and suggestions are made for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PREFACE

Personal Reflections

I became interested in the effects of early employment experiences (which are, in North America, primarily part-time or seasonal jobs for high-school students) three years ago. Initially, as I thought about my own adolescent work experiences (cleaning stalls at a barn, teaching horseback riding lessons, waitressing at a banquet hall, and working in the records department at the police station), I was aware of a few ways in which these work experiences had influenced my personal development (e.g., taught me responsibility and the value of money). However, I could see no clear way in which these jobs had influenced my career development, and the primary benefit I seemed to have remembered obtaining from these jobs was money to finance my extracurricular activities. Informally, I began asking other people about their early work experiences and telling them about mine. Most of those with whom I spoke could name at least one way that their early jobs had influenced their career path or personal character. As a result of these conversations, the way in which I thought about my own part-time work experiences changed. I became increasingly aware, for example, of how I had learned to value hard work and all aspects of a business cleaning horse stalls; how I learned to teach and to communicate instructions clearly when I worked as a riding instructor; how I learned social skills working as a waitress; and how my experience of working at the police station gave me a dislike of repetitive tasks and strict schedules. Not all conversations were equally influential in this process of making sense of my entry into the world of work. The discussions that were the most important in enlarging my perspective were with people I

trusted and perceived to be knowledgeable about employment (namely, my parents, a professor and a co-facilitator of a career group).

My initial review of the youth employment literature revealed a considerable body of empirical, mostly quantitative, research that seemed to me to be contradictory and inconclusive. As a result of my own reflections and informal conversations, I began to think about adolescent employment in terms of the stories people tell about their jobs rather than in terms of empirical research findings that deal with particular quantifiable aspects of this topic. This shift in my thinking prompted me to search for a different way (i.e., different from the majority of studies that have been done thus far) of investigating the effects of early employment. As a result, I decided to look at this research problem from a hermeneutic-narrative approach and to investigate the "stories" about adolescent part-time work that exist in North American culture.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Hermeneutic-Narrative Approach to Career Development

In the past two decades, a hermeneutic approach has been proposed as a viable

theoretical framework for conceptualizing career development (Collin & Young, 1988;

Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Young & Collin, 1988, 1992). This approach places importance

on individuals' subjective career experiences (i.e., how people make sense or give

meaning to their career) and on interpreting and understanding individuals' career

development in context. As Mkhize and Frizelle describe more specifically:

> Applied to career research, the aim of hermeneutics [is] to understand the
> complex process of career development in its sociocultural context, and to
> grasp the definition of this process as given by the social actors involved.
> As a result, the complex meanings attached to the process of career
> development will be opened up for exploration. The emphasis is on how
> people make sense/meaning of their own lives. (p. 6)

Much of career theory and research has developed to fit the modern worldview of "the

individual [as] a free autonomous agent engaging with the world against very few (if any)

external constraints" (Mkhize & Frizelle, p. 2). In contrast, a hermeneutic approach to

career development views the individual as "[living] at the dynamic intersection of

society, culture, and economy" (Young & Collin, 1992, p. 2). Thus, career development

research from a hermeneutic approach focuses on individuals' lived experiences of career

within sociocultural and historical context.

In light of a hermeneutic perspective, access to the lived experience of career is

through narrative (Young & Collin, 1992). We can understand people's subjective

experiences and the meaning they attribute to various career events and experiences

through the stories they tell. According to Cochran (1997), "composing a narrative is our primary way of making meaning" (p. 4). Narrative composition is the way that we make sense of our past experiences, present circumstances and future expectations. Taylor (1989) describes the importance of this process:

> Making sense of one's life as a story is . . . not an optional extra; . . . our lives exist in this space of questions which only a coherent narrative can answer. In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and where we are going. (as cited in Young & Collin, 1992, p. 7)

Career is particularly appropriate to be understood in narrative form given that "career, in the sense of occupation or profession is the framework for constructing one's life story in [modern Western] culture" (Young & Collin, 1992, p. 8). Think of meeting someone new at a party. Often the first question we ask, or they ask us, is "What do you do?" The stories we tell about our work provide a context of meaning for our lives and it is within this context that behaviours and decisions are interpreted by ourselves and others.

Career narratives are not merely individual constructions. Although a person's career narrative may describe the unique experiences of his or her career, the themes that are present in that story can be understood as being reflective of the cultural context in which he or she lives. A narrative is not constructed in a vacuum; rather, it "is built from history, culture, society, relationships, and language [and] embodies context" (Young & Collin, 1992, p. 8). The language we speak and the traditions, social practices and social institutions that predate us, affect the way we make sense of our lives and the world and, consequently, the narratives we compose. This does not mean that the cultural context in which we find ourselves is deterministic. Humans are agentic beings, able to imagine

possible futures and, to a degree, shape their cultural context (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). However, Kingwell (2000) states, "we are social and cultural creatures through and through . . .[and] we can never wholly transcend our social contexts, can never fully pass beyond the limits and strictures and distortions of the cultural medium in which we exist" (p. 73). Thus, the narratives we use to make sense of our career histories can be considered representative of the cultural texts (or narratives) that constitute our worldviews. However, this does not mean that everyone has the same story. Individuals have different histories and interact with the narrative possibilities that exist in their context in different ways. Thus, although thematic elements are the same, each individual has his or her own personal career narrative.

The process of making sense of one's career in the North American context is complicated by the fact that cultural texts pertaining to working life are varied and often incomplete and inconsistent (Cochran, 1997). As a result, individuals have to enter into a dialogue with a multiplicity of potentially conflicting "voices" in order to emerge with a coherent career narrative (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). Although some degree of variation in narrative possibilities is likely to exist in all contexts, this diversity has been identified as a defining feature of contemporary Western society given the changes in workplaces and patterns of career development that have occurred over the past 50 years (see Young & Collin, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) have called for researchers to "experiment with the [hermeneutic] method by investigating the career development of people in various

stages in life . . .[in hopes that], in the long run this will contribute toward the development of a meaning-based, career development theory" (p. 8). The study undertaken in this thesis was based on a hermeneutic-narrative approach and focused on the early stage of the career development process; specifically, on the youth employment experiences that, for many, are an important part of this stage. The characteristics of the narratives individuals use to make sense of early jobs and the process by which these narratives are adopted were examined by asking participants to discuss their youth employment in retrospect. These stories were assumed to represent some of the ways individuals make sense of early work in modern Western culture.

The narratives were gathered in focus group settings held at four different locations in and around Vancouver, British Columbia. Participants were individuals who have worked with youth in the employment field. This selection criterion was used for several reasons. First, it was anticipated that individuals working with youth in the employment field would be interested in discussing their own employment experiences and be able to describe clearly these experiences. Second, I was interested in whether participants' understandings of their own early employment experiences have shaped their practices with youth. A final reason for this selection criterion was the potential for those in the counselling profession to influence the career narratives of their young clients. According to Woolfolk (1998), counselling "most immediately and directly is involved in the construction of many individual realities" (p. 6).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this investigation:

1. What themes are prevalent in the narratives individuals construct to make sense of their early employment experiences?

2. How and when did they come to understand their early employment experiences in this way?

   a. Did they always make sense of their early work experiences in the same way? If not, when did they come to understand these experiences as they do now?

   b. Did anyone or anything influence this process?

3. Have these early employment experiences influenced their current practice as a career counsellor or practitioner; and, if so, how?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Youth Employment

Youth is an ambiguous concept. Its parameters, to a large extent, depend on the historical and cultural context in which it is being applied. In the Western world, the adolescent period of transition has been prolonged in relation to previous eras and other cultures (this is further discussed later in this chapter). In countries such as Canada and the United States, indicators of the transition to adulthood (e.g., finishing school, finding a stable job, moving away from home and getting married) are occurring at older ages, if at all. According to Mortimer and Larson (2002), this delay in the transition to adulthood has necessitated that the concept of youth be broadened to include those in their 20s that are in a phase of "postadolescence" (p. 11).

As the meaning of "youth" has shifted, it has become difficult to get a clear picture of the numbers and characteristics of those in this category who are employed. For example, in Canada, statistics on youth employment vary. The longitudinal Youth in Transition Survey measures the percentage of "youth" that are employed between the ages of 15 and 20 (Bushnik, 2003). Other employment data collected by Statistics Canada (1999) focuses on "youth" under the age of 19. Historical data on labour force participation looks at the percentages of working "youth" between the ages of 15 and 24 (Statistics Canada, 1977). To add to the complexity, Human Resources Development Canada offers "youth" employment services to people between the ages of 15 and 30 whereas most provincial youth employment strategies target "youth" between the ages of 15 and 24.

The minimum legal age of employment and conditions of employment for youth also vary considerably. In Canada, each province has its own legislation on youth employment. For example, in B.C., youth can begin to work at the age of 12 (with parental consent), and there are no additional restrictions owing to age that limit the maximum number of hours worked, types of jobs, or when the child can work. In contrast, most other provinces require employers to apply for permits and/or written parental consent if they wish to hire someone under the age of 16. As well, most provinces limit the type and hours that youth can work (Richards, 2003).

Another factor that contributes to a lack of clarity on youth employment is that the type of work in which young people participate varies. Even though legislation limits the minimum age of employment for youth in every province in Canada and state in America, teenagers often work informally before they reach these ages. Many young people are self-employed (e.g., babysitting, mowing lawns, taking care of pets) as pre-teens. Data collected for census purposes often does not take into account informal work arrangements, and self-report data often does not ask teens to describe the nature of their work arrangements. Thus, it is unclear if informal as well as formal jobs are being reported. Not only do types of jobs vary for youth of the same age, the types of jobs in which a high-school youth is involved and the types of jobs that a 24 year old youth holds are likely to be very different.

In this study, the term "youth employment" was used broadly. "Youth" was not defined by age. Rather, the term was meant to indicate the phase of career development between entering the labour market (either formally or informally) and beginning to work in the profession of one's choosing (in other words, a career-related job). It is assumed

that the boundaries of this life-stage are fuzzy for most and that the beginning and end of this stage of life will occur at different ages for different people. Despite these differences, this study operated on the assumption that for most people this stage would occur between early teenage years and the early to mid 20s.

Youth Employment Statistics

Despite the lack of clearly defined boundaries around the concept of youth employment, it is clear from the statistical data collected in both Canada and the United States that early work is a common experience. Statistics Canada survey data from 1999 shows that over 75% of youth (ages 15 to 19) have had some work experience. Adolescents work both during the school year (32% of full-time students aged 15 to 19) and in the summers (38% of 15 and 16-year olds and 66% of 17 to 19-year olds). In the United States, estimates of the youth employment rate are even higher. Recent American surveys by Pergamit (1995) have found the rate of early labour market participation to be as high as 64% for high school juniors and 73% for high school seniors (as cited in Stone & Mortimer, 1998).

The present study focused on retrospective accounts of youth employment counsellors. The narratives about early work experiences described by participants occurred from 5 to 40 years ago. However, although there has been a change in the nature of work over the past 50 years, the percentage of youth that are employed has not changed dramatically.

Labour Force Statistics published by Statistics Canada (1977) that cover the years 1966 to 1976 indicate that in 1966, 56% (average per month) of young people between

the ages of 15 and 24 were employed. In 1977, this percentage had increased to 63%. This data makes it appear as though the rate of youth employment is increasing. In fact, this level of employment parallels the increasing adult employment rates over this same period of time and these youth employment rates are higher than youth employment percentages provided by Statistics Canada in 1999.

Youth employment rates have been shown to be closely related to economic conditions. When there is a surplus of jobs and adult unemployment rates are low, more jobs are available to youth. Canadian youth employment statistics indicate that "a higher proportion of both male and female students worked in the provinces with lower unemployment rates [Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta]"(Bushnik, 2003, p. 9) whereas a smaller proportion of students were employed in provinces with high unemployment rates (Quebec and Newfoundland). Over the past 50 years, youth employment rates have increased and decreased along with changes in the economy but, on the whole, have remained relatively constant.

American statistics taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) compare percentages of young workers who were enrolled in school in 1979 to a similar group in 1997. In 1979, the percentage of young workers was 25% for 15 year olds and 36% for 16 year olds. In 1997, the percentages of 15 and 16 year old workers were 26% and 38%, respectively. These data indicate that in the United States, youth employment levels for the past 25 years also have remained relatively stable (Rothstein, 2001). The NLSY also has found that although boys were more likely than girls to hold jobs and work longer hours in 1979, there was no difference between boys and girls in percentage employed or hours worked in 1997 (Rothstein).

With respect to the hours worked by teenagers now and in the past, there appears to be little change. Aronson, Mortimer, Zierman and Hacker (1996) compared the work experiences of youth to those of their parents (who would have experienced adolescence between the 1950s and late 1960s) and reported that the hours worked both in formal and informal jobs was comparable between generations. Youth (high school students in grade 11) in the study reported working, on average, slightly longer hours than their parents in informal jobs in the home (e.g., chores and taking care of younger siblings) (girls, 14 hours/week; boys, 12 hours/week; mothers, 10 hours/week, and fathers; 7 hours/week). On the other hand, parents reported working slightly longer hours on average at formal jobs when they were in high school (girls, 19 hours/week; boys, 22 hours/week; mothers, 21 hours/week; and fathers, 26 hours/week). An interesting trend indicated by these data is that over the past 50 years boys have tended to hold jobs outside of the home whereas girls have tended to work in the home.

There has been a change in the type of work held by youth over the past 60 years. American statistical data that break down youth employment by industry indicate that between 1940 and 1980 youth increasingly have worked in the retail industry (this includes gas stations and eating and drinking establishments) (Aronson et al., 1996). In 1940, 13.9% of males and 12.5% of females that worked were employed in retail as compared to 54% of males and 59.1% of females in 1980. For young males, the largest drop in employment was in the agricultural industry (61.1% of males in 1940; 6.9% in 1980). For young females, the largest drop was in private households (42.2% in 1940; 3% in 1980). Currently, most youth in Canada work in retail in the service sector (nearly

80%). The other 20% are primarily employed in the goods-producing sector (Statistics Canada, 1999).

History of Youth Employment in North America

Statistics on youth employment provide a snapshot of this phenomenon in North America. However, what statistical data fail to reveal are the numerous social and economic factors that have contributed to the prevalence of youth employment in North America. As noted by Greenberger and Steinberg (1986), employment for youth who are also pursuing education is not a worldwide phenomenon:

> Relatively few families in developing countries are economically fortunate enough to be able to keep their youngsters out of the labor force once they reach an age where their labor would make a significant contribution to the family's well-being: children in such families leave school at that time. Those few families who can afford to keep their youngster in school have no reason to encourage or allow their participation in the labor force. (p. 22)

The negative correlation between the familial financial situation and youth employment that exists elsewhere in the world is not found in North America. In Canada and the United States, youth employment rates are highest amongst youth from upper-middle class families (average annual income in the $45,000 to $70,000 range) (Rothstein, 2001).

Despite the high percentage of youth employment in North America it is not a practice that is endorsed by all. As is revealed in the research literature (reviewed later in this chapter), opinions concerning the value of early work experience vary. Mortimer and Finch (1996) simplify the debate surrounding youth employment into three "camps": the "work is good for youth" camp, the "work is bad for youth" camp, and the camp which

proposes that the effect of work on youth is dependent on the qualities of the job and worker. A historical perspective on youth employment helps to reveal some of the social and economic factors that have contributed to all sides of the debate.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution and urbanization, children helped their parents on the farm as soon as they were able (Danesi, 1994). Once the economy shifted from being agriculturally based to being based on urban industry, children worked alongside their parents in the cities. During this time period, "some employers would hire an experienced man only if he had a few low-paid, unskilled children to offer" (Hine, 1999, p. 170). At this time, children and adolescents worked because their employment was a financial necessity for their families.

Towards the end of the 19th century, youth employment began to be questioned and limited, first by the middle class and later amongst the working class. Parents realized that education was becoming a necessity for financial attainment and that early work could interfere with academic achievement. However, it was not until the Depression era, that policies restricting youth work and increasing the period of compulsory education were adopted in the United States (Aronson et al., 1996; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Hine, 1999).

The push for legislation that limited youth employment had several motivating factors. First, as machines replaced workers, a result of the Industrial Revolution, the adult unemployment rate increased and wages decreased. Unions responded by pressing for child labour laws and education for all children in order to remove a source of competition for jobs (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Humanitarian as well as practical concerns motivated this union action. During the latter half of the 19th century and the

early part of the 20th, the cultural view of children became increasingly sentimental. Rather than being "economically useful," children were considered to be "emotionally priceless" (Aronson et al., 1996, p. 28). Thus, both economic and sentimental factors came together as parents recognized that "only through education could [they] hope to better the life chances of their children, and only by making education both obligatory and free could they protect their own jobs and earnings" (Greenberger & Steinberg, p. 12). Employers also began to realize that the training they provided workers improved business profits as it helped reap the benefits of new technology. As a result, hiring un-skilled youth who were short-term workers was a bad investment (Hine, 1999).

Legislation restricting youth employment and extending the period of compulsory schooling was adopted in the United States in the 1930s (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). This new legislation helped to popularize in North America the belief that education was the best preparation for adulthood (Hine, 1999). However, these policies have, on occasion, been violated since their adoption, most notably as young people went to work during World War II when "some child labor restrictions were waived or relaxed because of manpower shortages" (Hine, p. 228).

Life in America changed in many ways after the war; however, the belief in the value of education was still dominant (Hine, 1999). Erikson's psychosocial theory, which introduced the idea that the ideal developmental condition for teenagers was a moratorium period, lent credence to those who sought to limit teens' involvement in the workforce. Nonetheless, as indicated by the statistical data cited above, a large percentage of youth worked in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, although their work was often in informal agricultural or household settings.

In the late 1960s, society in general and the government specifically became concerned with teenagers' challenge to authority. The social and political climate of the time contributed to the shift in public opinion about youth employment. Rather than hindering teenagers' development, work came to be considered an important part of such and was recommended. Government commissioned panels in the United States concluded that adolescents needed better preparation for transition to adulthood and that early employment would achieve this goal (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Thus, the "distinctively American phenomenon" of the part-time student worker began (Greenberger & Steinberg, p. 22).

While the social and political climate of the 1960s contributed to the development of part-time work among youth in North America, the growth of certain industries allowed for its continuation. Opportunities for part-time work are "typically most abundant in the service sector of the economy; and countries with the earliest and greatest development of service-sector employment – namely, the United States and Canada – now have the largest proportion of student workers" (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986, p. 24).

History of Adolescence and Teenagerhood

A discussion of the history of youth employment is not complete without mention of the identification of youth as a distinct category of workers. Along with restrictions to youth employment, the 1930s gave rise to policies that, for the first time, recognized "'youth' as a special period of the life cycle between thirteen and eighteen years of age" in the law (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986, p. 12). Over the past 100 years, the effects of

early employment have been debated based on the perceived help or hindrance of work on adolescent development. Therefore, in order to understand the various positions on youth employment in North America, it is necessary to understand Western culture's conception of "healthy" adolescent development.

Adolescence (from the Latin *adolescere*, which means "to grow up") refers to "the psychosocial behaviours that are characteristic of all primates at puberty" (Danesi, 1994, p. 6). Although this term is associated with the onset of puberty (a biological event) adolescence is a culturally (as opposed to biologically) defined stage of life (Danesi). There is evidence that cultures have long identified this life stage: " . . . it would appear that at least among the affluent upper classes of late Hellenic and Hellenistic Greece, a defined category of youth, if not an actual 'adolescent' class, was recognized" (Esman, 1990, p. 7).

Throughout history, the adolescent life stage has not always had the same connotations: "the term *adolescens* ('adolescent') was used as far back as the Middle Ages to refer to any boy, irrespective of age, who began to work independently" (Shahar 1992 as cited in Danesi, 1994, p. 6). The defining factor in being classified as an adolescent during this time period was economic independence. From the Middle Ages until the Industrial Revolution, the adolescent life-stage and psychosocial changes we associate with it, were not recognized (Danesi; Esman, 1990). In fact, during this period of history, neither was a distinct period of childhood recognized, and "children, barely out of infancy were expected to help with the farm" (Danesi, p. 136).

The meaning of adolescence also is understood differently in different cultural groups. Although "there appears to be no culture that does not in some way recognize and

deal institutionally with . . . the 'sexual component of puberty'" (Gadpaille, n.d. as cited

in Esman, 1990, p. 12) how this change is recognized and expressed is culturally-bound.

For example, in Australian Aboriginal culture the "emphasis of these rites [of passage] is

on separation from the mother and symbolic rebirth into the world of men" (Esman, p.

13). Greenberger and Steinberg (1986), explain the presence of a prolonged adolescent

stage of development (such as in past Greek and current Western cultures) as being a

function of the prosperity of society:

> . . . adolescence itself may be considered an 'invention' of prosperous
> societies. In many societies children acquired adult status as soon as they
> were able to do the work of adults. Only in societies that are sufficiently
> prosperous and productive has an interim period been introduced between
> childhood and adulthood that delays youngsters' transition to adulthood. In
> such societies youngsters typically are excused from full participation in the
> labor force and, in highly industrialized nations, provided with an extended
> period of education. (p. 11)

Thus, it appears that while puberty is universal, our particular view of adolescence

"is our own cultural property and is by no means intrinsic to human biological nature or

necessary for adaptation across the broad span of human social organization" (Esman,

1990, p. 17). The prototypical Western view of an adolescent, "[an] experimentalist

struggling toward the achievement of a sense of personal autonomy and individuation and

a sexual relationship based on romantic love" (Esman, p. 40) is a cultural invention. As

stated by Baumrind (1975), "personal autonomy and individuation are not universally

accepted defining characteristics of the mature person, a fact that American behavioral

scientists are prone to overlook" (as cited in Esman, p. 40).

It is important to differentiate between our culture's understanding of adolescence

and the universal event of puberty. Both Hine (1999) and Danesi (1994) differentiate

between these by referring to the North American conception of adolescence as

"teenagerhood." Teenagerhood "refers to a socially constructed category superimposed on the life continuum by modern consumeristic culture" (Danesi, p. 6). Although the terms adolescent and teenager often are used interchangeably, differentiating between the two is a helpful reminder that our view of this stage of life is not universal. As Danesi states:

> Adolescence is a transitional developmental phase which entails culture-specific responses to the physical and emotional changes that characterize it. In our culture these responses have been allowed to cohere into the symbology of teenagerhood. (p. 126)

Teenagerhood

Although "most of us treat the teenager as a self-evident phenomenon, an unavoidable stage of life" (Hine, 1999, p. 15), teenagerhood is actually a relatively recent concept. The word "teenager" appeared for the first time in the 1943-45 issue of the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature (Danesi, 1994). Interestingly, the word "teen," for seven centuries past, referred to "a source of anger, irritation, or anxiety" (Hine, p. 9). In the mid-twentieth century, as the advertising industry grew, individuals were increasingly grouped together and identified by a single characteristic (such as life-stage or age). It was during this time that young people became know as teens or teenagers (Hine). The teenage subculture continued to evolve and although the first generation of teenagers were from affluent, white, middle class families, teenagerhood soon became a classless phenomenon.

Danesi (1994) describes teenagerhood as cultural mythology. All myths, including those that help make sense of the human lifespan, have a narrative structure:

> Once cultures segment the life cycle into such categories there is a tendency to associate idealized, prototypical characteristics with those

> whom the categories are meant to represent. These cohere into
> mythologies, each with themes and motifs that are felt to express
> significant truths about human life. Periods in life are, in fact, perceived
> to constitute stories . . . It would be no exaggeration, in fact, to say that the
> mind seems to have 'narrative' structure that manifests itself extrinsically
> in the form of stories, myths, and mythologies that all individuals and
> cultures invariable create. (p. 134)

As a result of the teenage mythology, teenagers in our culture are assumed to act, think,

and behave in certain ways (Danesi). This being said, Western culture does not present

one single narrative about teenagerhood; rather, varied and conflicting social narratives

exist. As Hine (1999) notes:

> Our beliefs about teenagers are deeply contradictory: They should be free
> to become themselves. They need many years of training and study. They
> know more about the future than adults do. They know hardly anything at
> all. They ought to know the value of a dollar. They should be protected
> from the world of work. They are frail, vulnerable creatures. They are
> children. They are sex fiends. They are the death of culture. They are the
> hope of us all. (p. 11)

Teenagerhood and its associated social narratives have been included in this

discussion of youth employment because research on this topic has focused on the effects

of work on various aspects of adolescent development. What is missing from this

research literature is recognition of the assumptions about adolescence that have

influenced the design of the studies, the research questions posed, and the interpretations

of findings. For example, autonomy and independence often are assumed to be worthy

end goals. Thus, if early work is found to contribute to the development of culturally-

valued traits such as independence, responsibility or autonomy, it is deemed to be good

for healthy adolescent development. Youth employment thus becomes inextricably linked

to adolescent development when work is brought into the discussion of optimal

conditions for healthy development. Recognizing the cultural mythology of teenagerhood

helps to make sense of the various findings in research on youth employment.

Economic Explanations of Youth Employment

In the past 50 years, teenagers have become a vital part of the North American

economy. Teenage spending amounts to billions of dollars a year and is the driving force

behind industries such as fast food, movies, popular music, casual clothes and footwear

(Danesi, 1994; Hine, 1999). Several authors have explained the policies surrounding

youth employment in terms of teenagers' contribution to the economy (Danesi; Esman,

1990; Hine). They argue that while youth employment needs to exist to give teenagers

money to spend, the amount of money and responsibility that they have also needs to be

limited to maintain their status as a distinct market. As Hine contends:

> Because youth culture is, in essence, a series of decisions about personal
> appearance and entertainment, it can scarcely exist if its members don't
> have money they can spend as they see fit in ways wholly distinct from
> how their parents would spend it . . . But youth culture also depends on
> young people's isolation from the adult world. If young people had access
> to adult jobs and responsibilities, they would have more money, but they
> would become a less distinct market. (p. 226)

Esman (1990) suggests that in a capitalist society such as North America, the

primary role of any adult citizen is as a consumer, and adolescence functions as a training

period for the life of consumption characteristic of North American adulthood. Part-time

work gives teenagers the income necessary to be able to acquire a taste for consumption.

Is it possible that despite researchers', theorists' and youth advocates' best of intentions,

dominant cultural beliefs about youth employment depend, ultimately on the degree to

which youth work is seen to contribute to the economy? The negative correlation

between rates of youth employment and the rate of adult unemployment certainly seems to support this explanation (Bushnik, 2003). Hine (1999) argues that "the idea of the teenager – and that of the adolescent on which it is based – are inventions. They emerged as useful ways of explaining and controlling youthful behavior" (p. 27).

The Influence of Psychological Theories on Youth Employment

Theories are developed in a sociocultural context, therefore they undoubtedly are influenced by the beliefs of the culture of their originator(s). However, theoretical propositions often are presented as universal facts and, as a result, serve to further entrench certain underlying beliefs in a particular culture.

Cultural beliefs about adolescence are present in theories of adolescent and career development that are referred to in the literature on youth employment. An example of a basic underlying belief that has influenced theories and assumptions about teenagerhood is the individualistic understanding of the self pervasive in Western cultures. In relation to debates about the effects of youth employment, individualism comes up on both sides of the argument. On the one hand, theories of adolescent development that consider early work to be an impediment to the development of individual identities has been used to support the position that youth employment should be restricted. On the other hand, theories of career development that consider early work to be in aid of developing a young person's vocational identity have been used to endorse youth employment. Examples of theories of adolescent and career development used in the debate about youth employment are summarized below.

Theories of Adolescent Development

Adolescence first was proposed as a specific field of study by Stanley G. Hall in

1904. Other theorists that focused on adolescent development early in the 20th century

were Sigmund and Anna Freud. However, the theorist that undoubtedly has had the

largest influence on the Western conceptualization of adolescent development is Erik

Erikson. Erikson is described as "the most lastingly influential of the psychoanalytic

thinkers on adolescence" (Hine, 1999, p. 39) and as "one of the leading researchers on the

psychosocial features of adolescence since mid century" (Danesi, 1994, p. 8). His theory

differs from classical psychoanalytic theory in that it takes into account society's

changing role expectations of youth as they make the transition from childhood to

adulthood (Esman, 1990).

Erikson's "psychosocial model [emphasizes] the consolidation of a sense of

'identity' as the nuclear development issue of adolescence in any cultural setting"

(Esman, 1990, p. 4). Accordingly, the achievement of an identity (in occupation, gender

roles, religion and politics) is the primary task for every individual to resolve at the

adolescent stage. In Erikson's view, adolescents that are in the midst of struggling with

these choices of identity should experience a moratorium: "a delay in the adolescent's

commitment to personal and occupational choices . . . [this is] very common, and

probably healthy, for modern adolescents" (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 1998, p. 69). The

concept of moratorium is central to Erikson's theory. In fact, "Erikson defined

adolescence as a period of moratorium, a time for young people to integrate their skills,

their knowledge of themselves, the judgment of their contemporaries and their elders"

(Hine, 1999, p. 39). Erikson's psychosocial theory of adolescence has had a very large

impact on our culture's understanding of young people's development, as evidenced by the common use of the term "identity crisis." This theory could feasibly be used to either support or oppose youth employment. If youth work is thought to detract from moratorium, employment for young people is discouraged. On the other hand, if jobs are considered to be a healthy part of moratorium, Erikson's theory could be used to support early work. The latter position is expressed by Cooper (1998 as cited in Woolfolk et al.) who believes that "community service, real-world work, internships and mentoring foster identity formation" (p. 67).

Theories of Career Development

Frank Parsons, can be credited with the first basic model of career development (developed early in the 20th century). His model, which later became known as the trait and factor theory, was based on three basic premises: 1) understand yourself, 2) learn about different types of work, and 3) based on this information, choose an appropriate career (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Parsons argued that if people were active in their career search they would be "more satisfied with their careers, employers' costs [would] decrease, and employees' efficiency [would] increase" (Brown & Brooks, p. 2). These steps were further refined and developed by other theorists (such as Holland) and this approach of matching people to jobs dominated thought and practice in the career counselling field for the first half of the 20th century. It became the means by which people were helped to find work after the two world wars and the Great Depression (Brown & Brooks). Although the practice of matching people to jobs based on their traits remains common to this day, numerous other theories of career development have

emerged which have broadened the way career development is viewed (e.g., Brown's value-based model of career decision-making, Gottfredson's theory of occupational aspirations, Krumboltz' social learning theory, Lofquist and Dawis' work adjustment theory, and Super's life-space life-span theory).

Most career theories are psychologically based and assume an individualistic view of the self. This assumption and its effect on the career development field is explained by Young and Collin (1992):

> The development of society's current understanding of career has been based, implicitly or explicitly, on a modern, Westernized version of the self. . .While there is explicit reference to the self in career theory (for example, Super's 1957 self-concept theory of career), much of the modern view of the self is implicitly contained in many significant career approaches that take a personality or developmental perspective. (p. 4)

As a result, the process of career decision-making in the context of Western society is viewed as a task for each individual to accomplish by deciding which career is best for him or her.

The definition of the term "career" also has evolved over the past century. In the early 1900s, career, vocation, and occupation were used interchangeably. The word "vocation" has been all but dropped from ordinary vocabulary (perhaps because of its religious connotations) and "occupation" now refers to specific types of work. The term "career" has become part of everyday vernacular; however, academics continue to debate the best way of defining it (Patton & McMahon, 1999). For the first half of the 20th century, theorists commonly accepted that career meant progressive advancement in professional working life. As the political implications of this definition were recognized (for example, only certain types of work were deemed to be careers), more inclusive definitions were proposed. For example, Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) have

proposed that career be defined as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (as cited in Patton & McMahon, p. 3). Sharf (2002) has proposed an alternate definition that reflects the subjective aspect of career. He defines this concept as "how individuals see themselves in relationship to what they do" (p. 3). Consensus regarding the best way of defining career has not been reached. For the purpose of this thesis, I will combine these definitions and suggest that career be understood as individuals' perceptions of their work experiences over time. This definition incorporates both the subjective and objective elements of a career (i.e., both an individual's perception of working life, and the sequence and characteristics of work experiences that are recognizable by others in one's particular context, are taken into account).

There are numerous career development theories. However more than any other theory, Super's Life-Space, Life-Span theory has focused on career development during the adolescent life-stage. According to this theory "the process of career development is [defined as being] essentially that of developing and implementing occupational self-concepts" (Super, Savickas & Super, 1996, p. 125). A career pattern, although potentially influenced by external factors such as parents' socioeconomic status, opportunities, and/or education, is essentially an individual event: "A career can be viewed as the life course of a person encountering a series of developmental tasks and attempting to handle them in such a way as to become the kind of person he or she wants to be" (Super et al., p. 140). As well, "the degree of satisfaction people attain from work is [thought to be] proportional to the degree to which they have been able to implement self-concepts" (Super et al., p. 125). Adolescence is an important period in this process of career. According to Super, between the ages of 14 to 24, individuals are involved in

the exploration stage during which "they encounter the career development tasks of crystallizing, specifying, and implementing an occupational choice" (Super et al., p. 132). As adolescents translate their occupational daydreams into a "publicly recognized vocational identity" (Super et al., p. 132) they become increasingly ready to make vocational choices (an indication of career maturity). Based on this theory, early employment experiences have been considered to be signs of career maturity and useful in terms of helping a young person crystallize his or her occupational identity.

Effects of Early Employment on Adolescent Development: Quantitative Research

The sociocultural and historical influences on youth employment reviewed above are intended to provide a context for the extant research on this topic. It is assumed that the context influences the questions investigated, the results presented, and the interpretations of results proffered by researchers.

As mentioned previously, debate surrounding youth employment has been divided into three "camps" based on its perceived effects on adolescent and career development (Mortimer & Finch, 1996). This review of the quantitative research is further delineated in terms of whether the reported effects of youth employment are described as having an effect on the career, social/psychological, or academic development of adolescents. The effects of part-time work have been widely studied, and both positive and negative effects have been reported on each of these aspects of adolescent development (Kablaoui & Pautler, 1991; Stone & Mortimer, 1998). An overview of the quantitative research is provided in Table 1.

In terms of the positive effects of part-time work on adolescents' career (or economic) development, research has shown that adolescents that work part-time in high school have increased earning power (Gottfredson, 1984), and show lowered unemployment rates as adults (Lewis, Gardner & Seita, 1983 as cited in Kablaoui & Pautler, 1991). Skorikov and Vondracek (1997) looked at how part-time work affects two aspects of career development: career decision-making and work values. They found early work experiences had no impact on adolescent career decision-making status (i.e., undecided or decided) over a one-year period. However, they did report a decrease in the importance granted "peripheral" work values (e.g., co-workers, prestige, altruism and surroundings) in those adolescents who worked during the year. The authors interpreted this change in values as a positive step in the career development process. They report that adolescents who work develop "a more meaningful pattern of values associated with work" (p. 230). As a result of the decrease in some values, the relative value placed on "central" aspects such as independence, self-development, money, lifestyle, and detachment increased. From a critical perspective, an interesting feature of the study is the way in which the authors classified work values as either "central" or "peripheral." This study offers a glimpse of ideological underpinnings in its research design and interpretation, appearing to reflect an economic bias in the perspective it promotes on youth employment. This interpretation contrasts with that of Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) who concluded that adolescents that work are more likely to develop cynical attitudes towards work.

The reported effects of part-time work for adolescents' social and psychological development also are varied. For example, on the positive side, Greenberger and

Steinberg (1986) report that early employment experiences help teenagers develop social skills, responsibility and dependability. However, Steinberg, Fegley and Dornbusch (1993) report that adolescent work experiences increase delinquent behaviour (such as smoking, drinking and stealing), weaken ties with family and diminish self-reliance. Also, Bachman and Schulenberg (1993) report that high work intensity reduces the likelihood of adolescents getting sufficient sleep, eating breakfast, exercising, and having a satisfactory amount of leisure time.

The reported effects on academic achievement also are inconclusive. Gottfredson (1984) concludes that working in high school is positively correlated with higher grades, attendance and participation. Greenberger and Steinberg (1986), on the other hand, report that working in high school is negatively correlated with grades, time spent on homework, and participation in extracurricular activities.

More recently, researchers have proposed that the effects of part-time work are contingent on characteristics of the particular job and adolescent, and have investigated how particular teenagers, working at particular jobs with particular job qualities, are affected. For example, findings indicate that the number of hours worked can affect girls' self-esteem (Steitz & Owen, 1992); the effect of certain job qualities on mastery orientation can be gender dependent (Finch, Shanahan, Mortimer & Ryu, 1991); jobs that have less role conflict between school and work can increase motivation (Stern, Stone, Hopkins, & McMillion, 1990); jobs in a family business are associated with a greater perception of family support and less drug and alcohol use in males (Hansen & Jarvis, 2000); and jobs that have high skill utilization can increase job success, motivation, and inhibit cynical attitudes (Stern et al.).

There has been considerable focus on the number of hours worked as a determinant of the effects on workers. For example, Mihalic and Elliott (1997) accounted for the variation in research findings related to academic achievement by suggesting that there is a curvilinear relationship between hours worked and grades. Barling, Rogers and Kelloway (1995) proposed that the negative effects of working long hours are moderated by the quality of the job. A recent large scale study of the effects of youth employment on the long-term mental health of young people also found that effects were dependent on the quality of the job (Mortimer, Harley & Staff, 2002a). Although the researchers in this study found some results that supported both the "work is good" position and "work is bad" positions (e.g., youth work was found to have positive effects on mental health if the job gave the teenager money so that they could go out with friends, whereas stressful and demanding work was found to increase the likelihood of experiencing poor mental health four years later), on the whole they found no connection between various characteristics of the jobs they investigated and mental health of the workers.

After more than two decades of quantitative research on this topic, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the effects of part-time work on any aspect of adolescent development. Numerous factors contribute to this lack of clarity. First of all, this is a research topic that has always been complex and does not lend itself to simple, causal analyses. The characteristics of each adolescent, of his or her job, and the way these characteristics interact, influence the outcomes. The recent move towards studying characteristics of jobs and workers (e.g., Barling et al., 1995; Finch et al., 1991; Mihalic & Elliott,1997; Mortimer & Finch, 1996; Steitz & Owen, 1992; Stern et al., 1990) that mediate the findings is, in my opinion, a good one. This approach recognizes the

variation in experiences of youth who work. Secondly, a major limitation of most studies of adolescent work has been that they use a cross-sectional design that does not control for pre-selection factors. As a result, it is unclear in many cases whether there is a considerable difference between the study and control groups. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, since many authors do not articulate the underlying theories of adolescent development and career that influence their interpretations of results, it is likely that varied findings in the quantitative literature are a reflection of different ideologies and represent different cultural "themes" about youth employment that have been passed down and circulate in the historical and sociocultural context. Without clarification and explanation of authors' commitments to particular ideals it seems likely that the research will continue to be inconclusive.

According to Mortimer and Finch (1996), effects of adolescent work experiences depend on quality of the job, meaning placed on the job, and context of the work. In reviewing the literature, these authors conclude that although objective characteristics of jobs can affect adolescent development, subjective experiences also need to be taken into account: "what happens on the job coupled with the meaning and significance of that work experience for both the self and significant others are the things that matter for adolescent health and positive developmental outcomes" (p. 18).

Table 1. Summary of Quantitative Research of the Effects of Youth Employment

	Academic Development	Social/Personal Development	Career/Economic Development
Positive Outcome	• higher grades • better attendance • higher school participation (Gottfredson, 1984).	• improved social skills • punctual • responsible • dependable (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).	• increased earning power later on in life (Gottfredson, 1984) • lowered unemployment rates as adults (Kablaoui & Paulter, 1991) • value central aspects of work as opposed to peripheral work values (Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997)
Negative Outcome	• lower grades • less time spent on homework • less participation in extra-curricular activities (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).	• increase in delinquent behaviour (smoking, drinking, and stealing) • weakens ties with family • diminishes self-reliance (Steinberg et al., 1993) • less likely to get sufficient sleep • less likely to eat breakfast • less likely to exercise • less likely to have a satisfactory amount of leisure time (Bachman & Schulenberg, 1993).	• cynical attitudes towards work (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).
Outcome is Contingent on Characteristics of the Job or Individual Worker	• curvilinear relationship between number of hours worked and grades (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997) • increase in motivation when jobs have less role conflict between school and work (Stern et al., 1990).	• number of hours worked affects girls' self-esteem (Steitz & Owen, 1992) • effects of job qualities on mastery orientation is gender dependent (Finch et al., 1991) • immediate/long-term effects of working on mental health depend on the quality of the job (Mortimer et al., 2002a) • jobs in the family's business increase the perception of family support • males who work in a family job are less likely to use drugs or alcohol (Hansen & Jarvis, 2000)	• jobs that require high skill utilization increase job success, motivation and inhibit cynical attitudes (Stern et al., 1990)

Investigating the Meaning and Context of Youth Work

Despite repeated calls for research that focuses on the subjective experiences of young workers (Hamilton & Crouter, 1980; Mortimer & Finch, 1996; Stone & Mortimer, 1998), there are relatively few studies that investigate youth employment from this perspective.

Green (1990) asked 35 high school seniors to relate their jobs, or their decision not to work, to the social contexts of their lives (family, social life, school, extracurricular activities, interests and hobbies, the marketplace and their future goals) during in-depth interviews. Students who worked felt that there were numerous social and material benefits to working and said that they chose to work because it is an important part of the transition from school to work, helps them carry their weight in the family economy, enables them to gain experience in the real world, offers discipline and responsibility, helps them to structure their busy schedules, and provides them with a basis for social exploration. Students who were not employed at the time of the interview provided the following rationales for their non-work status: they worked seasonally so that employment did not interfere with their efforts to balance academic and extracurricular activities, they did not want to grow up too fast and take on too much financial responsibility too soon, they wanted to take advantage of opportunities such as sports and extracurricular activities at school, and they were wary of sacrificing educational achievement or outside interests for material gain. Green concluded that the negative stereotype of the high school student-worker (as suggested by Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986) was not justified and that "these students appear to be capable of regulating their work experience in accordance with their personal, familial, educational, and social

priorities and have developed a variety of positive interpretations of the work ethic in doing so" (p. 427).

Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes and Shanahan (2002b), as part of a longitudinal study (mixed quantitative and qualitative methodologies), interviewed 69 participants and asked them to discuss their early career development. All of the participants were 26 or 27 years old at the time of the interview. The authors were interested in examining how recent social changes have affected vocational decision making. The interviews were nondirective and analysis sought to discover themes that appeared in participants' narratives that reflect the changing reality of late adolescence and transition to adulthood. Although the aims of this study are not directly related to the topic of early work experiences, the approach to the research question and findings are of interest. Themes discovered include: unfulfilled expectations of age-related career achievement norms, postponement of career-related decisions, key turning points in career decision making, and resources and obstacles (such as, parents, friends, teachers and work experiences). Participants felt that early work had a positive impact on their career development. They noted that the jobs they held as teenagers and in their early 20s helped them to learn to be responsible and relate to others, increased their confidence, gave them the opportunity to explore possible career choices and helped them rule out what they did *not* want to do later on in life.

Aronson et al. (1996) compared parents' and teenagers' views of early work. Both sample groups were asked to complete a questionnaire about their youth employment experiences (job descriptions and estimates of hours worked per week in both formal work arrangements and informal jobs at home). Parents also were asked open-ended

questions about the perceived benefits and costs of their early work. Parental responses were compared to adolescents' views of work (as indicated on a questionnaire with a forced choice format). Parents' assessments of early work were overwhelmingly positive regardless of the age or gender of the respondent or the characteristics of his or her jobs. The benefits noted most frequently by those in the parent group include: responsibility, money management, spending money, social skills, work experience and skill development, confidence, work ethics, nurturing skills, independence and time management.

Adolescents in the study also emphasized the benefits over the costs of their jobs. Although the teens in this study were given closed rather than open-ended questions, the questionnaire items chosen most often were similar to parents' responses: responsibility, social skills, independence, time and money management, work experience and skill development, and development of work ethics. The costs of work were reported by the adolescent sample more often than by the parent sample. These include: less leisure time, fatigue, less time for homework and lower grades. However, as with the parent sample, adolescents emphasized the positive aspects of work far more than the costs. The researchers concluded that perceptions about early work experiences have remained relatively constant over the past 50 years. Parents and children were found to have similar views of early work and both groups emphasized the benefits over the costs regardless of hours worked or type of job held.

Bills, Helms, and Ozcan (1995) investigated teachers' perceptions of youth employment. The researchers hypothesized that teachers' attitudes towards youth employment had the potential to influence student performance by influencing teachers'

behaviour in the classroom towards student workers and nonworkers. Teachers from small or medium-sized urban areas in the United States were mailed a survey asking them to respond to statements (some positive, some negative) about the effects of youth employment on students' academic achievement and about the way they treated student workers and nonworkers in the classes they taught. Teachers also were asked to provide information about the school at which they worked, their years of experience, subject areas they taught, personal youth employment experiences, employment experiences of their children, and estimates of the percentage of student workers in their schools.

Findings from this study indicated that teachers' perceptions of youth employment were negative, but that they treated students equally, regardless of work status. Teachers indicated that students who worked suffered from fatigue, had trouble completing assignments, were more likely to be absent, displayed lower effort, had lower levels of participation, had lower academic expectations and were more likely to be materialistic. Teachers with more years of experience were more likely to have a negative view of youth employment whereas teachers who had children of their own that worked had less negative perceptions. The only factor that was a statistically reliable predictor of behaviour in the classroom was teachers' personal employment experiences. Teachers who had worked when they were young indicated that they were less likely to treat students who worked differently from nonworking students (e.g., assign less homework, have less authority or make exceptions for late assignments).

Although none of the studies described above focused specifically on identifying themes in youth employment narratives, all offer glimpses of narrative themes people use to make sense of early employment experiences in the North American culture. Many

individuals consider youth employment to be beneficial in terms of helping young people learn to be responsible, independent, good at money and time management, and socially skilled. Others, including teachers, see youth employment as a detriment to academic achievement. The present investigation will focus directly on themes in youth employment narratives as well as the process by which narratives are developed and will consider views of youth work from the perspective of youth employment counsellors.

Youth Employment Counselling

The participants in this study were all youth employment counsellors or practitioners. The investigation sought to discover the characteristics of participants' personal youth employment narratives, the process by which they adopted these narratives and to determine how, if at all, they thought their personal experiences influenced their employment counselling practice. The remainder of this chapter focuses on reviewing the literature surrounding the third research question; that is, do the early employment experiences of career counsellors or practitioners influence their professional practice; and, if so, how?

Efforts to connect people with appropriate employment can be traced as far back as the 15th century; however, employment counselling did not become commonplace until the 20th century (Brown & Brooks, 1996). In Canada, employment counselling services for adults grew following World War II both as a government service and in the non-profit sector. However, youth employment services were not offered until 1968; first by the YMCA, and then, shortly after, by the government in the form of Canada Manpower Centres for Students (Counselling Foundation of Canada, 2002).

Government-run centres were created as a way to "channel the energy and exuberance of the country's youth, [while] at the same time helping them develop some of the skills they would need to manage their working lives" in response to the social unrest of the 1960s (Counselling Foundation of Canada, p. 79). These centres have been upgraded continually and expanded as the need for more employment services for young people has increased. In the 1970s the government also began providing funding for youth employment services in the non-profit sector as a complement to government agencies (Counselling Foundation of Canada).

Work Futures BC reports that 1660 people worked in the employment industry in B.C. in 1998 and that the number of workers in this industry has increased by over 60% in the past decade. Health and social service agencies are reported to be the biggest employer of workers in this field (Work Futures BC, n.d.). These agencies receive funding from a variety of sources: the federal and provincial governments, private sources, and through fundraising efforts (Netwercc, n.d.). Netwercc (Networking, Education and Training for Workers in Employment, Rehabilitation and Career Counselling) lists 44 agencies on its website that offer employment services for youth in the lower mainland. Since inclusion on the website is voluntary this is likely a conservative estimate of the actual number of employment services available for youth in this region. Youth employment services are offered to people up to the age of 29 or 30 by the majority of agencies (Netwerrc, n.d.).

Youth employment counsellors, given the nature of their work, are one group of people whose perspective on employment could influence the narratives of young people entering the workforce. Obviously not all employment counsellors will have the same

view of youth employment, nor do all youth seek the help of an employment service as they enter the workforce. Even if young people do go to a youth employment counsellor for help, they may not choose to incorporate the counsellor's perspective into their own career narratives. Nonetheless, youth employment counsellors are in a position to both influence young people's career narratives and, as is argued by Woolfolk (1998) and Cushman (1995), shape the youth employment narratives that exist in our sociocultural context (the case presented by these authors for this claim is discussed in chapter four). There is no information available at this time on the opinions of youth employment counsellors regarding early employment.

Personal Experience and Reflections in Counselling

It is commonly accepted that a counsellor's personal experiences can influence their practice in a variety of ways. Counselling theories have been described as reflections of their authors' life experiences (Brammer, Shostrom & Abrego, 1989; Drapela, 1990). Drapela offers Viktor Frankl, Karen Horney, Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers as examples of theorists who explicitly linked their theories of psychotherapy to their personal experiences. Similarly, counsellors' personal lives can impact the direction of a session in numerous ways, including influencing a session subtly by providing fodder for therapeutic metaphors (Kottler, 1986). Kottler suggests that " . . . all our personal experiences, our travels, learnings, conversations, readings, or intimate dealings with life's joys and sorrows provide the foundation for everything we do in our therapy sessions" (p. 25).

The impact of a counsellor's personal experience in counselling can be either a valuable resource or an undesirable intrusion into the counselling process. A therapist's background can enable him or her to understand, connect and empathize with clients. According to Gadamer (as cited in Richardson, Fowers, & Guignon, 1999), our prior life experiences enable us to understand and act in intelligible ways. Kottler and Parr (2000) state: " . . . we not only have permission to combine the personal and professional dimensions of our lives; but some also suggest that we have a mandate to do so" (p. 2). On the other hand, an illogical reaction to a particular client "may represent . . . issues in our own lives which we have not worked through" (Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Downing, 1987, p. 228). These "blind spots" in the counsellor's life can have negative effects on therapeutic outcomes: "We may infuse our 'unfinished business' into their stories, and we may fail to join with them in any meaningful way, thus leaving their stories unchanged or at least not improved" (Kottler & Parr, p. 3). For this reason, counsellor trainees are encouraged to engage in self-reflective practices in supervision, and in some programs, as clients in therapy (Brammer, et al., 1989; Ivey et al.; Kottler, 1986).

The impact of the counsellor's life on his or her practice is most often discussed within the context of personal or family counselling. Kottler and Parr (2000) state:

> Perhaps more than any other profession the practice of family therapy affords us numerous opportunities to integrate what we do professionally with our personal lives. Similarly, so much of what we have learned in our own families while growing up provides the basis for much of what we do as practitioners. (pp. 1-2)

Rarely, if at all, is the impact of career counsellors' or practitioners' personal experiences (vocational or otherwise) on their practice considered. The lack of research in this area provided impetus for the third question in this study.

Summary

The empirical research on youth employment as well as theories of adolescent and career development provide varied accounts of the effects of early work on adolescent psychological, social, academic and career development. The present study is conceptualized within a hermeneutic-narrative framework and seeks to reveal the narrative themes existing in our culture that help people make sense of early employment experiences. Consequently, the literature review on this topic extended beyond the research findings and theoretical descriptions and examined the sociocultural and historical context of youth employment and adolescence. The cultural beliefs pertaining to adolescence, career and the history of youth employment all offer possible thematic strands that could be incorporated into individuals' personal narratives about youth work.

Literature relating to the practice of youth employment counselling and the role of counsellors' personal experiences in practice was reviewed. Although youth employment is a growing industry, no information was available on the way in which those who work in this field view youth work. As well, nothing has been written about the effect of counsellors' career histories on professional practice, although the role of personal life events have been described as an influential factor in personal and family counselling.

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

Approach

The methodology chosen for this research project was guided by a hermeneutic-narrative approach. An approach is "the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105) and, according to Guba and Lincoln, questions of method are always secondary to questions of paradigm or approach. The choice of a hermeneutic-narrative approach influenced all aspects of this study, including the formulation of research questions, choice and application of method, interpretation of data, and evaluation of interpretation.

According to Bleicher (1980), hermeneutics can be defined loosely as "the theory or philosophy of the interpretation of meaning" (p. 1). A more detailed definition of hermeneutics is harder to work out as the understanding of this discipline has evolved and been subject to reconceptualization over at least the past three hundred years (Richardson et al., 1999). Originally, hermeneutics was used to help achieve a correct understanding of the language of texts, particularly religious texts and legal jurisdiction (Bleicher). In its early incarnation, hermeneutics emphasized the importance of understanding specific passages of text or verses in context. The first major shift to hermeneutics as a more general approach to understanding occurred in the mid-1800s. Rather than seeing different subject matters as requiring distinct types of hermeneutic approaches, a more

general hermeneutics was deemed applicable to all forms of human communication (Richardson et al.).

A second major shift was instigated by Heidegger's writings early in the 20th century which redirected hermeneutic inquiry toward ontological matters. At this point the focus of hermeneutics changed from "How do we understand?" to "What is the mode of being of the entity who understands?" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 207). Central to Heidegger's hermeneutics is his concept of humans as "being-in-the-world." Heidegger argued that we understand the world not as isolated individuals but from our vantage within a sociocultural and historical context. As such, "things show up for us directly as already value-laden and as having significance . . . there is no reason to think that meanings exist only in our minds" (Richardson et al., p. 209).

Gadamer's further development of Heidegger's ideas is referred to as philosophical hermeneutics. Philosophical hermeneutics addresses the epistemological question of "How is it we understand" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 221). Gadamer was critical of the pervasive influence of methodologism (the assumption that rigid adherence to a method of inquiry is the only way to discover truth) in the social sciences. In contrast to positivist and post-positivist approaches which rely on a method to help the researcher achieve a supposedly neutral and objective position in order to achieve valid findings, Gadamer emphasized that knowledge and interpretation outside of history and culture was impossible:

> In Gadamer's view, interpretation and reflection are always guided by a
> background of prejudgments, drawn from the shared understandings
> deposited in our historical culture, which give us a frame of reference for
> identifying things, posing questions, and knowing what sorts of answers
> make sense. Understood in this way, prejudices are not external impositions
> that constrain our ability to be free and rational subjects. On the contrary,

having a "horizon" or framework of prejudgments is what first makes it
possible for us to think and act in intelligible ways. (Richardson et al., pp.
229-230)

The pre-understandings (or prejudices) we inherit from our historical and cultural

backgrounds help to determine what we think is worth inquiring about, the research

questions we ask, the types of answers that make sense to us, and our interpretations of

findings. To separate ourselves from these prejudices is an impossibility and to pretend

that we have done so is to ignore the conditions of understanding. Rather, Gadamer

(1989) suggests one should "be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself

in all its otherness, and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings" (as

cited in Richardson et al., p. 231).

Although historically hermeneutics was concerned with the interpretation of texts,

Ricoeur, by drawing analogies between expressed human phenomena and texts,

broadened the research applications of this approach (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). As a

result of this development, philosophical hermeneutics fits nicely with the study of

narratives. As Mkhize and Frizelle describe:

The fact that human action could be conceptualised as text makes it possible
for us to study human phenomena in a meaningful way, provided they have
been captured or recorded in some form. For our purposes, meaningful human
action can be captured in the stories or narratives people tell about their lives.
(p. 7)

It is often one individual that recounts a narrative in the context of research, however

Mkhize and Frizelle point out that "narratives are socioculturally and historically

embedded" (p. 6) and that an individual's narrative is a result of sorting through and

incorporating the various messages and possible explanations offered by his or her

culture.

The extent to which narratives are a part of our lives is often taken for granted and overlooked. Berger (1997) describes the degree to which human life is immersed in narrative:

> We seldom think about it, but we spend our lives immersed in narratives. Every day, we swim in a sea of stories and tales that we hear or read or listen to or see (or some combination of all of these), from our earliest days to our deaths. And our deaths are recorded in narratives, also – for that's what obituaries are. (p. 1)

Increasingly, social science researchers have been using narratives to access the meaningful experience of a phenomenon. For example, narratives often are sought in research studies informed by a constructivist approach: "Leading constructivists (Cox & Lyddon, 1997; Gonclaves, 1997; Hermans, 1995; Mahoney & Moes, 1997; Neimeyer & Stewar, 1996; Neimeyer, Kesee, & Fortner, 2000) are advocating a narrative turn in constructivist research and praxis" (as cited in Arvay, 1997, p. 216). Although narrative research as guided by both hermeneutic and constructive philosophy aims to uncover the subjective, lived experience of an event as expressed in the life story of an individual, there are differences between a hermeneutic-narrative approach and a constructivist-narrative approach.

Constructivism is closely related to postmodern philosophy and thus assumes that "knowledge and truth are not discovered but are created or invented" and that "the nature of reality is formulated in both individual and collective constructions" (Arvay, 1997, pp. 215-216). A constructivist paradigm is also relativistic: "Constructions are not more or less 'true,' in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed and/or sophisticated" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111).

Hermeneutics, on the other hand, considers truth to be a possibility. However, a hermeneutic view of truth and reality must take into account the embeddedness of all knowledge in context. Since understanding of reality is informed by sociocultural and historic context, truth is not considered to be a picture of independent reality ("being true of") but rather a "faithful presenting of aspects of reality – a being true to – which is open to change . . .[This] conception of truth lets us see how accounts of human phenomena can be subject to revision without thereby being relativistic or 'merely subjective' " (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 228).

In summary, the assumptions that underlie a hermeneutic-narrative approach are: 1) our access to learning about lived experience is through narrative; 2) narratives are embedded in history and culture, and an individual's personal narrative is constituted by this context; 3) humans are agents within a particular historical and cultural context; 4) knowledge and interpretation are embedded in history and culture, and the prejudices we inherit are a necessary pre-condition of understanding; 5) our understanding is bound within a hermeneutic circle such that " . . . interpretation occurs within a circle in which parts are always interpreted within some understanding of the whole, which in turn is understood by coming to understand constituent parts" (Woolfolk, Sass & Messer, 1988, p. 7); and 6) a research account should endeavor to be true to the text or entity being studied and faithfully represent aspects of reality while, at the same time, remain open to the possibility of a different understanding of the same phenomenon.

Qualitative Methods

Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor and Tindall (1994) define qualitative research as:

> a) an attempt to capture the sense that lies within, and that structures what we say about what we do; b) an exploration, elaboration and systematization of the significance of an identified phenomenon; c) the illuminative representation of the meaning of a delimited issue or problem. (p. 3)

Given this study's focus on the process of meaning making, qualitative research was considered to be the best choice. Various qualitative methods were considered and focus groups were chosen because this method seemed to reflect the underlying assumptions of the hermeneutic-narrative approach. Madriz (2000) describes focus groups as being "a collectivist rather than an individualistic research method that focuses on the multivocality of participants' attitudes, experiences, and beliefs" (p. 836). Focus groups were used to gather narrative data of the participants' early employment experiences and to explore how participants think these experiences have influenced their career development and professional practice.

Focus Groups

The earliest published work in the social sciences on focus groups occurred in the 1940s by Merton and his colleagues in their study of wartime propaganda (Morgan, 1988). Focus groups have since been largely ignored and neglected as a qualitative method, and they continue to be "underdeveloped in the social sciences" (Morgan, p. 12).

In contrast, focus group research has been used extensively by marketing researchers and developed for marketing purposes (Morgan). In the past two decades, focus groups have been re-introduced as a useful qualitative method in the social sciences.

Focus group research involves gathering data (transcripts) from a group discussion. The number of participants in each group and the number of groups that are formed depend upon the purpose of the research study (for example, if different population subgroups are being compared, more groups will be needed). Homogeneity amongst participants is encouraged in order to make analysis of the data easier and to increase participants' comfort level in the group (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

The unique features of the focus group method offer researchers a means of collecting data in a remarkable way. One of the advantages of this method is that it provides an environment in which participants influence and are influenced by each other, just as they are in life (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Albrecht, Johnson and Walther (1993) state:

> One of the advantages of the opinions generated through focus group interaction (over the opinions elicited from individual respondents) has to do with the isomorphism of group opinions to those of individuals in the population at large . . . From a communication perspective, focus group methodology has a degree of external validity based on the fact that focus groups are grounded in the 'human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups' (Sink, 1991, p. 197) . . . Opinions about a variety of issues are generally determined not by individual information gathering and deliberation but through communication with others. (pp. 53-54)

A second advantage of focus group methodology is that the group process can promote self-disclosure resulting in richer and fuller descriptive accounts from the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000). For example, Morgan and Krueger (1993) describe the interaction in focus groups as having "cuing phenomena" that helps to extract

information from participants that they may not have been aware of or able to articulate

at the outset of the study:

> At the beginning of a focus group, [some] participants [may] not be
> immediately able to express all their feelings or motivations on a topic. As
> they hear others talk, however, they can easily identify the degree to which
> what they are hearing fits their situation. By comparing and contrasting,
> they can become more explicit about their own views. In addition, as they
> do express their own feelings and experiences, they may find that
> answering questions from the moderator and other participants makes
> them aware of things that they had not thought about before. (p. 17)

Hearing the different experiences and opinions of others also can help participants

to clarify the sets of circumstances or contingency factors on which their beliefs are

dependent (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Focus group research also has been described as

being less directive and as having more of an emphasis on participants' points of view

than some other qualitative methods since participants are encouraged to interact with

one another, and only need participate when they have something to say (Krueger &

Casey; Morgan, 1988). As such, this method has become popular amongst feminist

researchers working in a deliberate attempt to counter the power differential that can be

present in one-on-one interviews and to give voice to groups (such as women of colour)

who may feel intimidated in an individual interview situation (Madriz, 2000). A final

advantage of this method is that it offers the researcher the opportunity to observe a large

amount of interaction in a relatively limited time period (Morgan; Krueger & Casey).

This method is a better choice for some research questions than others. Focus

groups are appropriate means of data collection when the aim of research is to learn about

participants' personal experiences, to study the formation of opinions, to identify a range

of ideas or feelings that people have about something, to understand differences between

groups or categories of people, to gather information to help shed light on quantitative

data already collected, and in order to access the comments or language used by the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan, 1988). Focus groups are not an appropriate choice if the necessary composition of the group reduces the likelihood of participants sharing (e.g., if supervisors and employees are in the same group), if participants are insufficiently involved or interested in the topic and have little to share, if assembling participants in groups is not feasible, and when statistical data is required (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). Although focus groups have been used successfully with some sensitive topics (e.g., AIDS research), this method may not be the best way to collect sensitive information given that confidentiality by participants outside of the group cannot be assured (Morgan & Krueger). None of these caveats apply to the current study.

Ideally, focus groups should "[resemble] a lively conversation among friends or neighbors" (Morgan, 1988, p. 22). The facilitator can contribute to a positive group dynamic by emphasizing at the outset that the goal is to find out as much as possible about participants' experiences, that there are no right or wrong answers, and that all participants' contributions are valued (Morgan & Krueger, 1993).

As with any method, there are some problems that can arise in focus group research that can contaminate the data. For example, some participants may be stifled rather than stimulated by the group process, interpersonal conflict within the group can impede the responsiveness of members, tangential and irrelevant discussion topics may arise, "posturing" by group members may occur leading to an inaccurate portrayal of their experience and the group discussion can be inappropriately biased by the facilitator (Frey & Fontana, 1993). These potential problems can be identified and averted by a

skilled moderator. Because the collection of quality data is dependent, to a large degree, on the moderator's awareness of group dynamics and on his or her ability to skillfully facilitate the discussion, focus group research can be particularly challenging. Frey and Fontana state that "only a few researchers will have the sensitivity to group processes that will make them eligible to conduct group interviews since social scientists are not routinely 'trained' in interviewing in their graduate school experience" (p. 33). Since the researcher's training in counselling included training in group facilitation, this was not considered to be a problem in this study.

Some of the problems or weaknesses often associated with focus groups are, according to Morgan and Krueger (1993), myths. For example, they identify the following misconceptions: focus groups must consist of strangers, the focus group process tends to produce conformity, and focus group research is always exploratory and must be validated by other methods. Morgan and Krueger counter these concerns by pointing out that, pragmatically, groups often must consist of people who know or work with each other and that the collection of data from a number of groups ensures that the experiences and perspectives of one group of people do not dominate the research findings. Regarding the second "myth," it should be pointed out that focus groups are very different from decision-making groups in which participants strive to achieve consensus. In focus groups, the moderator encourages the sharing of a wide range of experiences and consensus is not a goal. Lastly, the claim that focus group results need to be validated is "part of a general myth that relegates all qualitative methods to a preliminary, exploratory role that prepares the way for 'real research'" (Morgan & Krueger, p. 9). The implication behind this statement is that "real research" is

quantitative. The positivist belief that truth is only achieved through method has been countered by those seeking to validate subjective experiences as a source of knowledge (see, for example, Richardson et al., 1999). A contributing factor to the propagation of myths about focus groups may be the tendency of some to extend the use of the term to groups whose primary purpose is not the collection of qualitative data. Groups whose purpose is to resolve conflicts, build consensus, increase communication, change attitudes, and/or make decisions are not focus groups although, at times, they have been mistakenly labelled as such (Morgan & Krueger).

Participants

Participants are people who have worked as employment counsellors or practitioners with youth. Further information about participants is provided in chapter four.

Selection Process

A purposeful sampling design was used to select individuals who were likely to be "information-rich" with respect to the purposes of this study (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Youth employment counsellors and practitioners were chosen for several reasons. First, it was assumed that they were likely to be well versed and interested in the topic of youth employment. It is suggested that researchers using focus groups "concentrate on those population segments that are going to provide the most meaningful information" (Axelrod, 1975 as cited by Morgan, 1988, p. 45). Second, individuals working in this field were of particular interest because, not only can they recount their personal career

narratives, they also have the potential to influence how young people they work with make sense of early work experiences.

Individuals working in this field were recruited at Netwercc's (Networking, Education and Training for Workers in Employment, Rehabilition and Career Counselling) monthly meetings in the B.C. lower mainland, notices posted in the UBC and SFU Counselling Psychology Departments, e-mail distribution over the SFU counselling psychology listserv and notices distributed to youth employment centres in the lower mainland. A copy of the notices is included in Appendix B. Prospective participants were asked to contact the researcher for further information regarding the study.

Pre-Group Questionnaire and Activity

Once individuals expressed interest in being a part of a focus group and were determined to have met the selection criteria, they were e-mailed copies of the participant information letter (Appendix C), consent form (Appendix D), pre-group questionnaire and career lifeline activity (Appendix E). Participants were asked to complete the questionnaire and activity ahead of time. Both Krueger and Casey (2000) and Albrecht, et al. (1993) suggest that pre-group activities help participants prepare for the focus group discussion and increase the quality of the discussion. It also has been suggested that writing things down before the group begins increases participants' commitment to sharing in the group, even if it appears that other group members will disapprove of what is to be said (Greenbaum, 1987; Templeton, 1987 as cited in Morgan, 1988).

Focus Group Procedure

Participants met together in small groups (three to five people in each group) for approximately an hour and a half. As the topic of the focus group required each participant to share his or her youth employment story in detail the decision was made to keep the focus groups small. Small numbers can be advantageous as the necessity for each participant to contribute "often produces a dynamic of higher involvement in the life of the group" (Morgan, 1988, p. 43). Refreshments were available to help make the atmosphere comfortable.

The researcher moderated all of the groups and each focus group discussion was audio taped. Krueger and Casey (2000) describe the role of the moderator:

> The moderator is not in a position of power or influence and encourages comments of all types – positive and negative. The interviewer is careful not to make judgments about the responses and to control body language that might communicate approval or disapproval. The role of the moderator is to ask questions, listen, keep the conversation on track, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. (p. 9)

During the discussion, the moderator kept brief notes detailing impressions of initial themes that emerged during the course of the discussion and at the end of the group, shared these notes with participants and asked for feedback as to their accuracy.

Morgan (1988) suggests forming the minimum number of groups required "to provide an adequate answer to the research question, because there are few economies of scale to doing many groups" (p. 43). Therefore, initially four groups were conducted and, at this point, the data was reviewed. Since the themes that emerged from the four groups were similar, it was determined that theoretical saturation had been reached and further focus groups would prove redundant (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Introduction

As participants arrived, they were given the information sheet and the informed

consent form to read. At this time, the pre-group questionnaire was collected and

participants were asked if they had a chance to complete the career lifeline activity (if

not, they were given the opportunity to complete this before the group began). Once all

participants arrived the moderator began each group with a standard introduction (see

Appendix F) that was intended to serve as a welcome, overview of the topic and outline

of the discussion rules.

Questions

The same questions were used in each focus group (see Appendix G). Krueger

and Casey (2000) suggest that the number of questions asked in a focus group that runs

for two hours should be limited to 12. Focus group questions should sound

conversational, use words that participants would use when talking about the issue, be

easy to say, clear, short, and open-ended (Krueger & Casey). Five questions and a

number of prompts were developed ahead of time and these were used to provide focus

and structure to the group discussion. Limiting the number of questions allowed time for

extended discussion of each topic and for tangential discussions.

Data Collection

Three of the groups were hosted by different youth employment agencies located

in the greater Vancouver area. One group was held at Simon Fraser University in

Burnaby, B.C.. All of the focus group discussions were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

In each group the discussion was lively and participants seemed to enjoy sharing stories of their early employment experiences. The moderator kept her participation to a minimum, interjecting to clarify responses, ask questions and sometimes refocus the discussion.

At the end of each group, participants were given a brief post-group handout that presented an opportunity to comment on the group process and add further comments (Appendix H). The standardized university subject feedback form also was distributed (Appendix I). Six of the fifteen participants returned the post-group handout at the end of the group and, as well as requesting a summary of the research results, provided feedback on the group process. In response to the question "Was there any way I could have made it easier for you to share your experiences and opinions on youth employment with the group?" participants replied, "Well done," "I found that the forum was a perfect compliment to each participants' thoughts and feelings and life paths," "No, good chairing," "No, I really appreciated how you let the conversation/discussion follow the themes people raised on their own," "It was great," "This was great Erin. Good luck in your research," and "No, it was great! I feel really comfortable with my co-workers so it was easy to share." In response to the question "Is there anything that you did not get a chance to share during the group and would like to add?" all of those that returned the form indicated that they had nothing further to add. Those that did not return the form indicated to me verbally that they had nothing further to share.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

Hermeneutic research places primary importance on interpretation. According to Packer and Addison (1989) the initial steps of setting up a research project (e.g., forming a point of view, working out a relationship with the participants, choosing the manner of inquiry) should be performed deliberately and carefully to set up the interpretation of the results. The interpretation "articulates possibilities that are laid out in the researcher's preliminary understanding . . . and is far from being an undisciplined guess" (Packer & Addison, p. 277).

The process of interpretation is described metaphorically as traveling around the circumference of the hermeneutic circle (Packer & Addison, 1989). Interpretation starts on the forward arc of the hermeneutic circle and the topic of investigation is at first understood within the context of the researcher's background knowledge. However, this initial understanding should not lead to a "self-fulfilling prophecy" as the researcher takes care to "show the entity, or more precisely, let it show itself . . . in a way that respects the way it shows itself" (Packer & Addison, p. 278). To this end, the researcher should seek to become aware of his or her bias and should deliberately seek out evidence that is counter to his or her initial understanding of the phenomenon in order to be "true-to" the entity being studied. As the researcher evaluates his or her pre-understandings in light of what has been shown by the entity of itself, he or she embarks on the reverse arc of evaluation of the hermeneutic circle (Packer & Addison). As the researcher travels around the circumference of the hermeneutic circle an interpretation emerges.

The metaphor of the hermeneutic circle is helpful in describing the process that was used in the present study to render the interpretation. Analysis of the transcripts occurred on the forward arc and "making sense," or the interpretation, of the results occurred on the reverse arc of the circle. Each aspect of this "circumvolution" will be described in turn.

Prior to interpreting the findings of any empirical study, the researcher must first collect and analyze the data. Several methods of qualitative analysis were considered and modified in order to suit this research study. The majority of writing about focus groups deals with facilitating the sessions as opposed to analyzing data (Knodel, 1993). What has been written about the analysis of focus group generated data suggests that researchers read through the transcripts and code participants' comments thematically (Knodel, 1993). Silverman (2000) offers an alternative approach to analysis and suggests that researchers treat "interview data as accessing various stories or narratives through which people describe their worlds" (p. 823). In this approach, researchers read participants' responses as "cultural stories" that are used "to make their actions explainable and understandable" (Miller & Glassner, 1997 as cited in Silverman, p. 824). Silverman's approach informed the data analysis in this study. Commonalities in participants' narratives were considered to be reflective of cultural "themes" that were incorporated into personal employment narratives in order to make sense of early work experiences.

Silverman's (2000) suggestion that the transcripts be read as cultural stories was proceduralized using Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, and Argyris (1989) and Mkhize and Frizelle's (2000) "sequence of readings" approach to data analysis. In the sequence

of readings method of analysis the researcher reads the transcript of an interview several

times and, with each reading, focuses on a particular dimension of the transcript (e.g.,

each of the three research questions). The sequence of readings method articulates a

hermeneutic approach to analysis: the parts are understood in light of the whole and the

whole in light of the parts. From each reading the researcher is able to approach the focus

group transcript from a different angle and add to an understanding of the whole.

Looking at the interview through these various "lenses" enables the reader to bring

various aspects of the group discussion into focus (Brown et al.). The reader documents

the relevant pieces of text and makes observations and interpretive remarks on a

worksheet. According to Brown et al.:

> The worksheets are designed to highlight the critical move from the
> narrator's actual words to the reader's interpretation or summary of them,
> since they require the reader to substantiate his or her interpretation with
> quotes from the interview text itself. As such, the worksheets stand
> between the Reading Guide (and the reader) and the interview text; hence
> they provide the tool with which the hermeneutic circle is built. (p. 149)

Each transcript was read four times. During the first reading, the researcher

sought to achieve a general understanding of each participant's story. After this reading,

general themes were named and examples that either confirmed or disconfirmed these

thematic groupings were sought. During the second reading, the researcher focused on

themes prevalent in the narratives that participants shared about their early employment

experiences (i.e., first research question). During the third reading, the researcher focused

on the shifts in narrative that participants described (i.e., second research question). For

the final reading, the researcher focused on participants' descriptions of practice (i.e.,

third research question). Examples of the worksheets that were used are provided in

Appendices J, K and L. After the second, third, and fourth reading, the themes that were

designated initially were confirmed, modified or dropped, depending on the specific examples and nonexamples that were found upon closer examination.

The second half, or reverse arc, of the hermeneutic circle involves making sense of the findings and forming an interpretation. The division between the data analysis and interpretive aspect of the study is indistinct since, in actuality, the process of making sense of the topic begins before the data are collected or analyzed (Packer & Addison, 1989). However, whereas the focus of the data analysis portion (or forward arc of the hermeneutic circle) is letting the entity under investigation show itself, the focus of the interpretation portion of the study is to make sense of the results by relating these to "the wider ideological, social, economic, cultural, and historical contexts" (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 9).

The process of developing an interpretive account is difficult to detail in the same way that one might describe the methodological procedure of a quantitative research study. Rather than following prescribed steps, an interpretation involves adequate preparation (i.e., examining the sociocultural and historical context in advance) and much contemplation. The researcher must go back and forth between the results of the study and the wider context, considering how they fit together. Given that the information shared by participants in this study was considered to reflect "cultural stories," the interpretive process concentrated on examining how the results garnered from the data analysis could be explained by looking to the ideas about youth employment, adolescence and career that have been passed down through history and that circulate in our sociocultural context.

Evaluation

Hermeneutic philosophy has been critical of methodologism. Methodologism refers to the assumption that evaluation of results can be limited to evaluating the application of method (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). Hermeneutics recognizes that it is not possible to use a methodology, distinct from interpretation and theory, which will ensure the validity of the account (Martin & Sugarman).

Although contemporary hermeneuts assert that there is no method that can determine infallibly the truthfulness of an account, a hermeneutic worldview considers truth to be a possibility. However, it is important to clarify how truth is defined from this position. Hermeneutics considers truth to be "a faithful presenting of aspects of reality – a being true to- which is open to change" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 228). Such a view stands in contrast to a positivist approach which evaluates the truthfulness of a research account based on the success of the researcher in applying methods that promise the kind of objectivity guaranteeing discovery of "what really happened" or "the way things really are" (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 280). This argument is further elaborated in chapter four.

From a hermeneutic perspective on social scientific inquiry, although method does not provide validation for an interpretation, it is the researcher's responsibility to report both the manner of inquiry and the interpretive process in sufficient detail to allow both to be subject to evaluation. In order to distinguish method from interpretation, the method used in this study and the interpretative account that results will be evaluated separately. The first evaluation focuses on the quality of the data collection process (i.e., How well did the focus groups go?) and will use criteria suggested in the focus group

literature. The second evaluation focuses on the quality of the interpretation and is based on a hermeneutic approach to evaluation suggested by Packer and Addison (1989) (included at the end of chapter four).

Evaluation of Focus Groups

Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1956 as cited in Morgan, 1988) propose four criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a focus group interview:

> it should cover a maximum range of relevant topics, it should provide data that is as specific as possible, it should foster interaction that explores the participants' feelings in some depth, and it should take into account the personal context that participants use in generating their responses to the topic. (p. 54)

In other words, successful focus groups should produce group discussions that have range, specificity, and depth, and reveal personal context. Other writers have suggested that the quality of focus group research also can be enhanced if the same moderator is used in every group and if that moderator is involved in the analysis of the data (Albrecht et al., 1993; Knodel, 1993).

Albrecht et al. (1993) identify participant compliance with the moderator and identification with other members of the focus group (either with the first person to speak or with a respected or admired participant) as potential threats to the quality of the focus group session. The impact of compliance can be minimized if the moderator is careful not to reward (through verbal or nonverbal cues) certain types of responses (Albrecht et al.). The formation of the group can help to reduce the risk of identification. For example, identification is less likely to hinder the quality of the group if the participants are homogenous in terms of status (Albrecht et al.). As well, the likelihood of accessing

internalized opinions or perspectives is increased if participants engage in a writing exercise at the beginning of the group (Albrecht et al.). To check for identification and compliance effects, which could interfere with the quality of discussions, researchers should compare participants' statements within and across groups (Knodel, 1993).

Measures were taken to ensure the quality of the method of data collection in the initial planning stage of the present research project. The researcher facilitated all of the groups and analyzed the data. Participants all worked in the same field which reduced the chance of differences in perceived status within groups. The number of participants per group was kept low intentionally in order to allow individuals to have more time to share their stories and thus increase the depth of their responses. Participants were asked to complete the career lifeline activity ahead of time to reduce the chance of being overly influenced by the responses of other group members. Questions were designed to cover a range of relevant topics.

Steps also were taken to ensure the quality of the data collection process during the focus groups. The facilitator used a standard introduction in all groups which was designed to make participants feel at ease about sharing experiences and to minimize group compliance. The facilitator asked the same questions in all groups but allowed the discussion to move in unanticipated directions. For example, numerous participants discussed volunteer activities during the focus groups. The inclusion of volunteering in participants' early work narratives was not anticipated, nor was it asked about directly. In these cases the facilitator did not limit the topic of discussion. In order to increase specificity of the responses, the facilitator followed up on comments that were vague and asked participants to provide further clarification. At the end of every group, the

facilitator summarized some of the themes in the discussion and asked the participants for

feedback and further comments. Participants also were given the opportunity to provide

further comments on the post-group questionnaire.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What themes are prevalent in the narratives individuals construct to make sense of early employment experiences?

2. How and when did they come to understand their early employment experiences in this way?

   a. Did they always make sense of their early work experiences in the same way? If not, when did they come to understand these experiences as they do now?

   b. Did anyone or anything influence this process?

3. Have these early employment experiences influenced their current practice as career counsellors/practitioners; and, if so, how?

Early employment narratives were collected during focus groups and were analyzed using a modified version of Brown et al.'s (1989) sequence of reading method of analysis. Results from each question are presented below. The interpretation, in which the results are related to the wider sociocultural and historical context, is included at the end of this chapter.

Participant Demographics

15 participants participated in this research study (13 females and 2 males). Their ages ranged from 23 to 52 and the number of years working with youth as an employment counsellor or practitioner ranged from 1.5 to 29. Participants primarily worked with clients age 14 to 30.

13 of the 15 participants were Caucasian, 1 participant was South Asian and 1 participant had a Middle Eastern background. 12 participants had grown up in Canada and 3 of the participants had immigrated to Canada as youth. These participants (i.e., immigrants) spent at least part of their adolescence in their home countries (England, Australia and Iran). Information on ethnic background and country of origin was collected during the focus group discussions.

All of the participants worked in British Columbia. 14 participants worked in the city of Vancouver or in the surrounding cities, 1 participant lived and worked in a small community in B.C outside of the lower mainland.

The demographic information that was collected on the pre-group questionnaire is summarized in the following table. Client names have been changed for confidentiality.

Table 2. Demographic Information for Focus Group Participants

G	Participant	Age	Gender	Job Description	NY	PCAR
		~50	M	Career Counsellor, Post-Secondary Institution	29	18-30
1	Barbara	45-	F	Personal and Career Counsellor, High School	5	14-19
1	Chris	45 50*	M	Employment Counsellor, Program Coordinator	10	20-29
1	Deanna	29	F	Youth Employment Counsellor	3	20-30
2			F	Employment Counsellor	5	20-24
2			F	Employment Counsellor	5	20-30
2	Geena	34	F	Employment Counsellor	6	20-24
2	Helen	31	F	Employment Counsellor	8	20-24
2	Isabelle	26	F	Employment Counsellor	3	20-30
3	Jill	28	F	Youth Employment Program Coordinator	3	14-19
3	Kara	25	F	Employment Counsellor	3	14-19
3	Linda	26	F	Personal and Career Counsellor, Post-Secondary Institution	2	18-30
4	Miriam	28	F	Youth Employment Program Coordinator	10	14-19
4	Nicole	23	F	Personal and Career Counsellor, Post-Secondary Institution	2	20-24
4	Olivia	30-35*	F	Supervisor of Boys and Girls Club	1.5	14-19

G# = Focus group number.

* = If a participant did not indicate their age on the questionnaire their age range was approximated based on the information provided about their lives during the focus group discussion.

NY = Number of years working in an employment/career related job.

PCAR = Primary client age range.

Question #1 Themes in Narratives

The first research question guiding this investigation was "What themes are prevalent in the narratives individuals construct to make sense of their early employment experiences?" The themes present in the youth employment stories that participants shared in this research study are considered to reflect beliefs that exist in the dominant culture. Individuals incorporate these beliefs (or story themes) into their personal career narratives to make sense of early employment experiences.

The following themes appeared repeatedly in participants' narratives in all four focus groups:

1. Early employment as an investment

   a. In career development

   b. In character development

2. Early employment as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization

3. Early employment for immediate financial gain

4. Relationship between early employment and contextual variables

   a. Education

   b. Family

   c. The sociocultural and/or economic context

5. Volunteer experiences

All of the participants incorporated a number of themes into their narratives. However, individual stories generally were structured around one or two primary themes. Quotes taken from the transcripts will be used to illustrate each thematic category. Subsequently, a comparison of the primary themes in participants' narratives within and

across groups will be presented. Note that for every category there were numerous comments that could have been included as examples. For the sake of brevity only a few quotes that are representative of each theme have been included.

Early Employment as an Investment

Career Development

Participants discussed youth employment as being helpful in terms of furthering their career development. Although this may not have been their rationale for taking the jobs at the time, in retrospect, they discussed early work as having a positive effect on their careers by helping them develop work-related skills or by providing opportunities for advancement.

When describing early work experiences, participants made frequent mention of the skills they gained. For example, participants said that they learned "leadership skills" (Jill), "customer service skills" (Geena), and "people skills" (Linda). In the following quote, Helen explains how her job at a video rental store helped her to develop numerous skills: "Oh yeah, I learned tons of, dealing with customers and just really a sense of independence for sure. Dealing with co-workers, learning how to deal with managers and performance evaluations and all those really key things to work. Just major employability skills."

Further career opportunities also were identified as a benefit of early employment. Participants spoke of how their first jobs helped them to find work later on by "building" their résumés. For example, Ellie stated: "And the best thing about [working at

McDonalds] was that after that job, everywhere I went I could get a job just for having

that on my résumé." Jill, in describing her various jobs explained:

> The only way I got my next job was because I'd had all these other
> experiences. So, during an interview, I could easily talk about the different
> situations I'd been in, even though my previous jobs may not have been
> directly related to the next job. You know, even working in a group home,
> I hadn't really had experience working with people with disabilities but I,
> at camp, had one kid who I just loved who had Down Syndrome and so I
> could talk about that individual.

Some participants stated that they were later able to make use of the contacts they

had established at early jobs to further their careers. The following quote from Allan

provides an example of this type of payoff:

> I was a research assistant with the regional testing specialist . . . You
> know, stats and things. And it was down at Regional Headquarters where
> I'll tell you I was in schmooze heaven there boy! I got to know the
> Western Regional Manager, I got to know everybody right . . . 25 years
> [old] when I graduated with my Masters. And I came out and lo and
> behold, [X], the regional testing specialist I worked for in the summer,
> he's now a counsellor at VCC and [Y] . . . he's his boss. So I said, 'Hey
> guys, hi, long time, no see. How about a practicum placement?' (laughs)
> 'How about a part-time job after I'm finished?'

Character Development

Many participants discussed the outcome of their early work experiences in terms

of character development. They felt that their first jobs helped them to develop a work

ethic, assertiveness and confidence and that these characteristics had stayed with them.

For example, two participants described the benefit of working at McDonalds as

teenagers: "My first job was actually working at McDonalds. And I still believe it can

give you the best work ethic and can carry you through life" (Deanna) and "[working at

McDonalds] was a really perfect first job because the training that I got has really served

me my whole life. You know because they teach so much about work ethic" (Ellie).

Others spoke of how their jobs had given them confidence: "My confidence was built through my job, not through school. It was definitely through my job" (Linda).

Early Employment as a Journey Towards Self-Discovery and Self-Actualization

Participants' described early employment as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization. Early work experiences were often discussed in terms of their role in helping individuals discover and articulate interests, work preferences and values. These discoveries enabled participants to make well-informed and meaningful career choices. This process of discovery took time, with each different job being part of the journey.

One of the outcomes of participants' early work was that they learned about themselves. For example, Allan described how in his first evening of work at the Bay he sold "$800 worth of leather jackets" and discovered a talent for sales and working with people. As a result of her first job at McDonalds Deanna realized:

> I hate fast food, I'm not a food person. But it identified that I had great communication strengths. So I realized that I liked people. I liked that whole contact with people and that I needed to look at a job that worked with people.

Linda described three different jobs working for the same clothing company. The first job was stocking shelves which she did not enjoy. The second job was modeling clothes during fashion shows. She described this experience as being "horrible for me because I just hated being the centre of attention." The third job was assisting sales representatives at home parties. In contrast to the first two jobs, Linda really enjoyed this job because, like Allan, she enjoyed working with people and was good at sales:

> I really liked that. It was, I would help carry the bags and sort out the clothes and people would be trying on stuff all night and I would be getting the right size and putting them back, so lots of people interaction. And that's kind of what was the difference between stocking the shelves

and all that. I really enjoyed the people experience and I was actually really good at sales, you know.

Early jobs also helped participants recognize and articulate work values. Several participants described how, as a result of the jobs they held as adolescents, they were able to figure out that helping others was important to them. One clear example of this is provided by Miriam. She described her extensive early work history and then summed up these experiences by saying:

> And I think that what I took from all of that was, there was a bunch of activities and jobs that I participated in that I didn't enjoy. And the ones that I didn't enjoy were things that didn't have any value in terms of making someone's life better as far as I could see it. And the things that I most enjoyed were the things where I felt like people, something, was better for the work that I had done. Not just financially better but qualitatively better. So, that includes some of the paid work. I did a couple of things where I felt like, yes, this is really worthwhile thing for me to do but I think that experience of doing things that I didn't enjoy taught me a little bit about what direction I wanted to head.

Participants' early work experiences also gave them the opportunity to "test drive" a number of different careers. Sometimes they enjoyed these jobs and decided to pursue a particular area. For example, Linda described a job in an employment counselling firm she held for a year: "So, I loved it because it was like I was helping people every day and it felt really rewarding to me and I was convinced that I wanted to go into counselling after that." Sometimes participants did not enjoy their jobs and, thus, narrowed their career options. Allan said that his summer job as a financial assistance worker for the city with a transient population "taught me that I really liked working with people and I really didn't want to work with those people . . . That's one of the ways you learn. You try it on for size." Similarly, Nicole stated that as a result of her part-time job in the food industry "I did learn that I didn't want to do *that*."

Three metaphors that participants used during the focus group discussions help to illustrate the self-discovery/self-actualization theme. Kara described how early employment experiences related to self-discovery in this way:

> It's all about a weeding process and then suddenly you're picking all these weeds that don't fit for you and then you see this path that's there in front of you. And all that work you did before was so worth it because it was that weeding process of weeding out and figuring out what you are about and you can only do that by putting yourself out there and doing it.

Allan used a metaphor of a dropping marble to describe moving through a series of jobs and learning about himself and work until he ended up in his current career: "This is like dropping a steel marble on top of a tin roof and it goes bing, bang, bing, bang, bang, bang, bang, bonk, like that. This is career planning for me. (laughs, group laughs) Serendipity I guess."

Barbara compared early employment to "[a] funnel. You may not end up immediately from here to there but you are inextricably working towards where you need to end up."

Early Employment for Immediate Financial Gain

A common theme in all of the participants' narratives was money. Regardless of how they described their jobs in hindsight, most described their initial entry into the workforce as being financially motivated. The money was used for clothes, snacks, gas and insurance for cars, entertainment, travel and, in a few cases, education. For example, Helen stated, "well, you know, I needed to support the car. I had a little, my dad's old car, so I needed gas money and insurance money and spending money for clothes for school and so that was why I wanted a job." Nicole stated: "I started working at A&W when I

was in grade nine and it was for money I guess. I wanted to save up for a trip and to buy

clothes." Jill explained:

> For me, I grew up in a poor family and if I didn't get a job, I wasn't going
> to have the nice clothes that my friends had and I wasn't going to be able
> to go to movies and stuff like that so for me it was just out of necessity.
> Well of course I'm going to get a job. I'm going to make money.

Deanna's explained her decision to get a job in this way:

> My dad stopped giving me money. And I thought, well, that's not fair.
> And he goes, 'If you want money you have to work for it.' And so I went
> to McDonalds and I just kept going in and saying, 'you need to hire me,
> my dad's not giving me money.'

As well, many participants evaluated the quality of their early jobs in terms of the

level of pay. Kara explained that she began to work as a page in the library once a week

when she was in grade nine. She said:

> At that time I was paid 10 dollars an hour which was *huge*, you know,
> especially then. But it was union, that's why. All my friends were making
> like $4.50 an hour at McDonalds and I was making 10 dollars. So that was
> great.

Ellie described her summer employment in this way:

> I got this job at, my mom's a physiotherapist, I got this full-time job, so
> I'd work days with her and then I'd work some evenings at McDonalds
> but I was working full-time days with my mom as a physiotherapy aide...
> and I got paid like wicked money! I can't remember how much I was
> making but it was a lot money. Like, at McDonalds I was, for example, I
> can't remember but if I was making 5 bucks at McDonalds I was making
> like 12 bucks at this job for the summer.

Felicia's first job was at a "fine dining and dessert establishment that was European

based." She described this as "a great job" because "I made tips from day one so all my

friends were working in donut shops making minimum wage. They didn't start me at

minimum wage plus I made tips so the money was really good."

Relationship Between Early Employment and Contextual Variables

Participants referred to a number of contextual factors in their early employment narratives. Primarily they mentioned education, family and sociocultural and/or economic conditions. These references helped to "set the stage" for their stories and were used to explain their motivations for working, attitudes towards work, working conditions and level of pay, and types of jobs that were available.

Education

Participants discussed how their jobs related to school (both high school and post-secondary). Comments pertaining to education in participants' narratives were of three types. First, particular jobs were evaluated in terms of their influence on school life. For example, Kara considered her part-time job doing respite work positively in part because it was flexible and didn't interfere with school:

> It was great because it was really flexible. I didn't have to commit to a certain amount of hours. Families would just call me when they needed somebody and they would really work around our schedule which was great going through university so I was able to stay in the field doing work that I wanted to do and found really interesting and yet not have to tax my school time very much.

Second, participants contrasted their work experience to their school experience. Several participants said that their confidence came from being employed rather than from school. As well, jobs also were described as helping participants develop skills that were not taught in school. As Jill illustrates:

> Its interesting when I look at my schooling experience and I think the things that I've learned working in a job I feel that I have grown and learned so much more than I did in school. So much more. Because it's practical, it's hands-on, its everyday.

Third, some participants said that a goal of early work was to save money to go to school. For example, Allan said, "the first jobs I had were just like to save up for going to university, really. We lived in Vancouver but, still, fees and stuff."

Family

When asked to describe early work experiences, almost all of the participants alluded to the connection between their entry into the workforce and their family contexts. Participants discussed how they had been influenced by their parents' attitudes towards and messages about work (both explicit and/or implicit), as illustrated by the following quotes.

> Allan: Well, I guess I would start by saying that I think I am my father's son. Um, I've always known that but I think I recognize that even more since he passed away about two and half years ago. Um, and that applies to my personal life as well as, the whole ball of wax. Um, so, just a few words on my father. He joined the navy when he was 17 and served in the North Atlantic on the Corvettes in the Second World War. And he came out of that and he married my mother and they packed it in 1947 and moved to the West Coast. They were from the Prairies. I was born in Regina. I don't really remember this part, but he worked as a milkman when there was horse drawn, at Dairyland Dairy, up near the Kootenay loop, which was about half a mile from where we lived. And he did that for a few years. And then he did career planning, if you can believe it, in the mid-50s. He did career planning. I remember, I really remember, what I remember is waving goodbye to him when he got on this big airplane to go back to London, Ontario. Because he'd done this career planning and they said, you should be in the people business because, of course, well, not because of course, but you might not realize it, but a milkman goes door to door and its people business. And he ended up in life insurance and he sold life insurance for I don't know, from the mid-50s for at least 10 or 15 years. And then he went into wholesale china and crystal and stuff and that's what he sold. See, he was a salesman for most of his working life. And then his boss rubbed him the wrong way when he was 54 and he told him to stuff the job and he retires. (laughs) In 1981, so that was really quite cool – I kind of admire him for that. Um, his emphasis was always school, and I remember him, 'You don't want to end up on the idiot stick.' Which was his word for shovel, and school and working at

school, if you talk about work ethic. So, the first jobs I had were just like to save up for going to university, really.

Olivia: Well the advice I received was 'You're absolutely not going to work.' (group laughs) 'Until the day,' my dad said, 'I'm alive and I'm sending you money you're not going to work until your finish your degree.' And that was fine with me! I'll just go shopping. (group laughs)

Isabelle: My parents, they're offspring of working class British-Scottish-Irish immigrants so they have this thing instilled, and I grew up in a one-income family so we just, you just did work.

Some participants explained that their entry into the workforce was due to financial necessity in the family. For example, Chris explained that when he was in grade 10 his father (a logger) was injured and so Chris started working because he felt that his parents were having a hard time supporting him.

Family also entered into narratives because parents either provided or helped participants find their first jobs. For example, Geena reported that her first jobs were working with her dad selling clothes at a marketplace on the weekends, babysitting for her mom's friends and working in her parents' shop. She explains that these experiences were "like a job I was doing but I wasn't getting paid."

The Sociocultural and/or Economic Context

Another theme which appeared in participants' stories was reference to the influence of the sociocultural and economic milieu on the youth employment opportunities that were available. For example, Nicole worked at a fast food restaurant as a teenager. She explained that "there wasn't really much I could think of that I could do as a grade nine student that was something I was interested in. It was more like, 'Who

would hire me?'" The community that Chris grew up in had a large influence on his entry

into the workforce, as is evident in the subsequent passage.

> Chris: . . . I lived up in Yale, community of 300 people . . . jobs were easy
> to come by. Even though it was a small community, but you could get jobs
> as easy as you wanted. You just walked in and said you wanted to work
> and somebody would hire you . . . Lot of people had money I guess. It was
> end of the '70s. Everybody had two cars, two boats, two trailers, two
> cabins, two houses . . . they were always running around. I didn't have any
> problem. By the time I was 14 . . . I would work from seven in the
> morning 'til three in the afternoon at the garage and then I'd go work from
> four until closing at the restaurant doing kitchen work and that's
> eventually what I settled into for awhile, was kitchen work. I had, between
> 14 and 16, a small stint of self-employment. I ripped a muscle off my
> spine so I was picking up beer bottles and (inaudible). I'd already moved
> out of home at that time. You could still make a living at that even. So, . . .
> (pause)
>
> Group Facilitator: So, in your community, it was pretty common for
> young people to work at that time?
>
> Chris: Yeah, but most of them worked in the bush. And that's part of the,
> from Hope up, the problem that's coming back to haunt them now is
> nobody went to school. So when the bottom fell out of the mining and the
> logging there was a lot of angry people at home on the dole. So, there's a
> reason they have the highest liquor sales from Agassiz to Hope right now
> (group laughs). They make big money and uh, and I remember, my
> brother he started working at 16, I was about 11 then. And I think he was
> making about 12 dollars an hour . . .

Felicia, in looking back, also recognized the influence of the community context

on her early work experiences.

> Felicia: No pretty much all of my friends were working by the age of 13.
> We almost all worked at the greasy spoon under the table before the age of
> 13. And all of us started babysitting at about the age 9. I think it was just
> the community was . . . like, we had houses, but there wasn't extra money
> for parents to spend on children. So, if children wanted snacks in recess
> and clothes, you worked. The boys didn't work as young as the girls
> though, but all of the girls were working by age 12, babysitting by age 9
> and working by age 12.
>
> Group Facilitator: What do you think the difference was between the boys
> and the girls?

> Felicia: I think its possibly traditional European culture as well. Not that all the families were European but there was enough of an influence that boys were coddled a little bit more than girls.

Sometimes these references served to explain how and why one participant's experience was different than the experiences of others in the group. For example, cultural differences were used by one participant, who had moved from the Middle East to North America at the age of 16, to explain the differences in her experience to the other participants in her group who had been raised in Canada.

> Olivia: Well I'm trying to think about how to talk about my early years when I actually didn't work. I think it's a cultural thing. In my country basically parents take care of you until you have finished your highest degree and parents are very demanding. You know, highest degree means PhD, medical degree, something like that. So you're required, basically you're expected to go through high school and then go through university and then just keep going. Not come out and work in between. Get your education and then come out and work . . . My first experience as a youth was a professional job. So my experience was not a typical North American youth employment experience.

Volunteer Experiences

Although participants were asked to talk about their early jobs, many included volunteer activities as part of the same narrative. On the whole, volunteering seemed to provide participants with opportunities to engage in meaningful activities (as opposed to many jobs which were described as being only for money) and to give them experience in different areas in order to determine whether or not they wanted to pursue these as a career. For example:

> Jill: And, once I got out of university, at that point I thought that I wanted to work with people with eating disorders cause I had a lot of friends in university who struggled with them and a lot of my projects I did my essays on eating disorders and stuff. So what I decided to do was

volunteer. And it took me a long time to be able to get into a place to be able to volunteer. It's quite a closed circle. And so I started volunteering at St. Paul's hospital in the eating disorders clinic and I was basically there for their distraction time after their meals. So I planned crafts basically and you were just dialoguing with, mostly girls, so dialoguing with the girls and I did that for about six months I think and I just kind of realized that, it seemed like a really hopeless field. It was quite discouraging because some of the girls that came through, a lot of them, they had been in program after program after program and I mean I had such a heart for them but it was like, how do you really help them? There just doesn't seem to be any real healing for these girls. Some of them had come from the Montreux clinic in Victoria, I don't know if you guys have heard of it but they have 100% success rate, and here I am working with these girls, one of them who'd been a counsellor there. She was healed, and then became a counsellor and then ended up back in the hospital again. It was sort of like, what works here? You know. I think gradually my interests just sort of changed.

In some instances participants indicated that volunteer activities led to future employment opportunities. For example:

Kara: In the summers I started volunteering at a respite care home for children with disabilities and really started to love that work. I would volunteer in the summer and then they would always give me sort of a little honourary cheque at the end which was like hardly anything, like 300 dollars or something like that. But that, I really just loved the experience of working with these children and did that for a couple of summers but then they wanted to start paying me as a full-time staff member so I did that.

Interestingly, those that spoke of volunteer experiences were the six youngest participants in the study. For these individuals, their volunteer experiences seemed to be as, if not more, influential than early jobs.

Not only did this strong valuing of volunteer activities appear to be most prominent in the narratives of the younger cohort, it also appears to be particular to Western culture. This cultural component is recognized and discussed in the following

exchange between Olivia, a participant who moved to North America as a teenager, and the other members of her focus group who both grew up in Canada.

>Olivia: You know it's interesting thinking I do all this volunteer work and yet I haven't said anything about it and I'm thinking, 'Why haven't I said anything?' And I realized a lot of what I do is not so much considered volunteer work in [my] culture, it's just what you do. Mainly because it's not that I've joined an organization in order to do it. So, for example if I think back to immigrants that come into Canada. People that I don't know that I kind of take on as a role. You know, I just meet them at some party, realize that they're not fitting in, so it kind of becomes my thing and so for a year I talk to them two, three hours every other day and it takes a lot of time. And when that one is done, another one has already come along. So, there's a lot of things like that . . . .you see, for me, it's part of your social life, it's just part of your life, it's part of life. It's kind of what here they call 'random act of kindness.' You just happen to meet them, you don't really know them but they're from your culture, or they're in your field, or for some reason you have something in common with them and that's all that's necessary. But there's no organization that I join to do that . . . .So, I don't think of it as volunteer work but in a way it is. Cause it doesn't have to be there.

>Miriam: It's interesting in our culture, like, I hadn't really ever thought of this, but anything you do for somebody else you call it volunteer work. A lot of the time. And then you count it up and put it on your résumé. It's not something that everybody does. You have to have a specific orientation to what's important in life in order to be motivated to do it.

>Nicole: Isn't that sad!

>Olivia: Yeah. Yeah. That's probably true. Well I think it has to do with how volunteer work takes place in other countries. I mean, it happens in religious get-togethers . . . .But it's no longer volunteer work because it fits into your daily life and you've also become a support system for this person but it still fits into your daily life. And also there is no organization for you to be volunteering for. It just happens, again, to be part of your social environment.

>Nicole: I've always just been really amazed at that whole culture and here it's like, you know, so many people either don't do anything or else they do it so that they can get in to medical school, or they can put it on their résumé and have some sort of volunteer experience and their it's not about that.

Olivia: Yeah. But let me tell you. Then taking that and transferring it here. You know where the problem comes in. When I write my résumé. I have had to create names for organizations that don't exist because these are things that I do but they're not considered volunteer work in my life but now I have to call them that because that's what is done here.

Comparison of Themes Within and Across Groups

During analysis of the transcripts, primary and secondary themes in each participants' narratives were noted. Themes were determined to be primary or secondary based on their centrality (determined by frequency and emphasis placed on comments) in participant's narratives. Primary themes were central to the stories that participants told about early employment. For example, if the primary theme was "Early employment as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization" most of the participant's comments were concerned with explaining how his or her jobs helped reveal interests, work values, work preferences and/or meaning in working life. In some cases, there were two themes that were determined to be primary as participants either gave equal weight to both or spoke of them in combination. Secondary themes were mentioned in the narrative but did not occupy a central position.

During a discussion it is inevitable that members of the group will influence one another to some degree. A potential concern with this data collection method is that group members may influence one another to such a degree that the narratives recounted in the research study are disconnected from participants' actual lived experience and history, and from the narratives of participants in other focus groups. Efforts were made to reduce this possibility through the design of the focus group (e.g., the pre-group questionnaire, lifeline activity, and the introduction which emphasized that the aim was to

hear about each person's experience). Nonetheless, it is possible that participants in this study modified their narratives considerably to fit with what they were hearing from other group members. Although some overlap is expected between participants' narratives (since they all currently live in the same sociocultural context), had the primary themes all been the same in one focus group this would have been cause for concern.

An alternate possibility is that given the individualistic nature of North American culture (Taylor, 1991), participants may have been motivated to stand apart and tell a distinct story about their early work. In this case, there would have been little overlap in the narratives shared in each group (although there may have been shared characteristics between groups).

The following table (Table 3) allows for comparison among themes found to be prevalent in participants' narratives within and between groups. Note that some participants' stories included many thematic elements whereas other narratives were focused primarily on one or two themes. From this table, it is possible to see that although there is overlap amongst themes included in the narratives, the themes varied within and across groups. Thus, one can assume that participants' narratives were not unduly influenced by the group process. As well, since there were commonalities between the narratives shared within each group it seems as though the desire to tell a unique story was not a prevailing factor.

Table 3. Comparison of Primary and Secondary Themes in Participants' Narratives

Name	G#	Themes in Narratives							
		Investment		Journey towards S.D. and S.A.	F.G.	Contextual Variables			Volunteer
		Career	Char			Family	Educ	S.C./Econ	
Allan	1	S		P	S	S	S		
Barbara	1	S		S	S	P	S		
Chris	1			S	S	S		P	
Deanna	1		S	S	S	P	S		
Ellie	2	P	S		S	S	S		
Felicia	2				S			P	
Geena	2	P	S		S	P			
Helen	2	P			S		S		
Isabelle	2	S	S	P	S				S
Jill	3	P	P	S	S	S			S
Kara	3	S	S	P	S		S		S
Linda*	3	S	S	S	S	S	S		S
Miriam	4			P	S	S			P
Nicole*	4	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
Olivia	4			P		S	S	P	

G# = Focus group

Char = Character

Journey towards S.D. and S.A. = Journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization

F.G. = Financial Gain

Educ = Education

S.C./Econ = Sociocultural/Economic

P = Primary theme

S = Secondary theme

* = There was no primary theme in these participants narratives. These participants alluded to numerous aspects of their work experiences relatively equally.

Question #2 Process of Narrative Development

The second research question guiding this investigation was "How and when did participants come to understand their early employment experiences in this way?" This question was broken down further into three specific questions: 1) "Did they always make sense of their early work experiences in the same way?" 2) "If not, when did they come to understand these experiences as they do now?" and 3) "Did anyone or anything influence this process?"

In this study, participants discussed work experiences retrospectively. In order to investigate the process of narrative formation it was necessary to rely on participants' description of this process. Since narrative development is most apparent when there is a shift in the story, the third reading of the transcript focused on moments when participants described how their perspectives had changed. These changes were described as occurring prior to the experience (i.e., before they started to work at all or before they started a particular job), during the experience (i.e., while they were working at a job), and after the experience (i.e., retrospectively). Retrospective changes occurred both outside of the focus group and were observed during the focus group.

The factor that was reported to have instigated the shift also was noted. These factors were grouped into categories and are listed below.

1. Other Person

    a. Compare/contrast

    b. Persuasion/influence

2. Other Employment Experiences

3. The Employment Experience Causes the Shift in Perspective or Opinion

The following quotes illustrate the process of narrative formation (both in terms of time and influencing factor).

Prior to the Employment Experience

Participants gave many examples of how their understandings of early work experiences were influenced before they began to work. At this point, the shift in narrative is preliminary and is more aptly described as a shift towards thinking about work for the first time. Many participants' indicated that at this point their thoughts about employment were not conscious or well articulated. Nonetheless, a certain attitude towards work was present and influenced their behaviours, as is obvious in hindsight.

The only factor that was reported to have shaped this initial adoption of a perspective was other people. Participants reported that prior to their entry into the work world, their understanding of the value of work and of different types of jobs was largely influenced by their parents.

Other Person

Influence/persuasion.

Parental messages (whether implicit or explicit) were reported as being influential in determining participants' initial attitudes towards work. Although not all participants reported being consciously aware of the influence of these messages during adolescence, in retrospect, numerous participants acknowledged the key role their parents played in determining their entry into the workforce.

In many cases, parents' "voices" showed up in the story directly. For example, Allan described how his father's message of "You don't want to end up on the idiot stick

[shovel]" motivated him to get a job as a teenager in order to save up to go to university. In contrast, Olivia did not consider working while she was going to school because of her father's message: "I'm alive and I'm sending you money and you're not going to work until you're finished your degree."

For other participants, the messages received were more implicit. For example, Miriam described her mom's subtle influence on her attitude towards work and volunteering.

> My mother never told me anything specific about whether I should work or not work but I think she set an example for me by doing lots of volunteer work herself and being really committed to the organizations she worked with and I think I could see that there was something valuable in doing that because she wouldn't do it otherwise. So, I think that kind of had a message in it even though she didn't say, 'This is what you should do or not do.'

Nicole describes how the different messages she received from her parents (some explicit, some implicit) influenced her approach to work as a teenager. This quote is also illustrative of the process of internalizing others' messages (in this case those of her parents) into one's own story.

> My dad was very much, 'Work! Get responsibility and make some money and do that kind of stuff' and my mom was more 'What do you like to do? What are your values and volunteer.' So, I think I kind of did both. But neither of them wanted me to do much because I was also very involved in sports and that kind of stuff and school was number one important aspect and they did support me throughout my undergrad and everything so that I didn't have to work that much. But probably from my dad's push of 'Responsibility!' and 'Join the workforce!' I always felt that need to do something. Even if they were supporting me in school that I didn't have to ask them for money to buy clothes or to go out to watch a movie or something. But my mom very much pushed me in a direction of doing something that I enjoyed so while even though I was doing some stupid job it was 'Okay, what else do you want to do?' and really helped me get involved in those areas . . . I was also thinking about my mom in how I could see she felt and what she got out of her job and seeing the difference between that and other people that I knew who worked and going, 'Yeah,

okay. That's how I want to feel after a day's work. And that's what I want to get out of it.' And seeing her involved in a lot of volunteer things that she did, and really seeing the difference between that kind of work, she was a teacher and seeing how much enjoyment she got out of it and how much she loved her job as opposed to someone who I could see, you know, it was just a job. And, you know, going, 'Okay, that's what I want.'

During the Employment Experience

Participants also described shifts in their understanding of early employment that occurred during the experiences. In these cases, their perception of a specific job, of career development in general, and/or of their own interests or traits occurred during the period of employment. Shifts that occurred at this point in the timeline were described as being instigated by other people (either through a process of comparison or through the influence or persuasion of others) or as a result of gaining new understanding of that particular job. These shifts helped to determine participants' future employment decisions and career direction.

Other Person

Compare/contrast.

Participants often indicated that their concept of work or of themselves changed through a process of comparison with other people. The following quote, from Deanna, provides two examples of the effect of comparison. Her job at McDonalds motivated her to, first of all, compare the reality of her career prospects with her father's career history. Secondly, as she worked at this job she compared her life situation to that of her co-workers. These two comparisons caused her to change her ideas about career advancement.

My dad had a grade eight education and he's an engineer for a big company and the company paid for all his training . . . So, he instilled that the only way to get anywhere was to find a perfect employer who'll provide you with that perfect training, to pay for that perfect education, to get you into that perfect job. That's what I thought happened. I seriously thought employers paid for you to go to school and you got your education through that. When I got to McDonalds I realized that's just truly not going to happen, ever (group laughs). Um, ever. And I realized oh my goodness, I need to re-evaluate what my work goals are going to be because I had every intention of finding that employer to put me through school. So when I was 15 I had to re-evaluate my academics because I realized that those were going to get me to where I needed to be . . . Well, when I got out to McDonalds I realized, I had a lady working with me who was 35 and I was only 14 at the time, and she was a single parent and that was her job supporting her and her children. I started to see a lot more of those eye openers. Because she was making $3.50 an hour. And I was kind of a privileged kid, we always got what we needed. We never wanted for anything. So, you know, when I saw people going, 'I need money for rent' and I was included in more of the lower level of social structure, I guess, financial, I guess. Because most of the people that were working there needed to work there and I didn't. I just did it because you know, I needed some hairspray, or I needed some new clothes for that week or whatever. And those people who were there were doing it because they needed food on the table and to feed their kids. So it was a big eye opener for me. Cause I wasn't going to live on $3.50 an hour.

Influence/persuasion.

Participants' responses also revealed that other people helped them to make sense of their jobs. Once again, parents were influential in this process. For example:

Jill: My mom's friend set me up with a job in a doctor's office filing and I pretty much hated that from day one but my parents encouraged me to at least put in six months so that I had something on my résumé to show that I can commit to something. I agreed with them so I stuck with it for six months and at the end of the six months it was like (laughing), 'See ya later!' (group laughs)

The Employment Experience Causes the Shift in Perspective

Narrative shifts that occurred during employment often were explained as the result of exposure to the job. In some cases, participants began to work or volunteer at a

job with certain expectations and discovered that the nature of the work differed

dramatically from what they had anticipated. For example, Kara described how she

worked with at-risk youth in a group home for six months. In taking the job, she had

hoped to be able to provide guidance and help youth plan for their future. However, she

quickly came to the realization that the job required her to function primarily in the role

of a disciplinarian and, as a result, ended up leaving this job.

> I was becoming too much of a disciplinarian and I wasn't actually doing
> the work that I wanted to do with them. Because you just were surviving
> the day-to-day with them. And, you know, you have to really pick your
> battles, and getting them to strategize about their future plans was just not
> going to happen. So I really just started questioning what I was doing with
> them and realized that I didn't want to be in the role that I was forced to be
> in with them, in that setting.

After the Employment Experience

Participants were asked to describe their early employment experiences in

retrospect. It is therefore not surprising that changes in how they made sense of events

were largely retrospective in nature. Participants described how, in hindsight, they have

come to understand their actions and experiences. On a few occasions, the way in which

participants looked back on their early work shifted during the focus group discussion.

Granted, the lasting effect of these shifts is not known. Nonetheless, these exchanges

reveal some of the possible ways in which an individuals' career narratives can be

altered.

Other Employment Experiences

In this study, participants primarily made sense of their early employment by

relating these jobs to more current career events. For example, participants often

compared early jobs to their current employment situations or evaluated an early job in

terms of its effect on their career development (e.g., it was a good job if it helped them to

get more jobs after that or helped them decide on a career direction as a result of self-

discovery that occurred during the job).

The following quotes are examples of how participants connected their early work

to more recent career occurrences.

> Allan: I have one final comment. When I was trying to develop, well when
> I was using basically the serendipitous approach to developing a career
> without reflective self-awareness (laughs). Just surviving and making my
> parents minimally angry at me, that was a hit and miss process. I am at the
> moment, planning to retire in a year and a half. Now, that's a major life
> change, right. So, what I am doing when I say planning, I am not relying
> on serendipity so much. I'm thinking, 'Ok, my life is going to change.
> What can I do to keep the ingredients that I have now that are so satisfying
> and what opportunities exist to develop the things that I've been denying
> myself while I've been working 'cause I haven't had the time.' Options
> like go work for a couple days a week in the ski rental shop. Minimum
> wage, but its not like I'm going to need the money but I want to still meet
> people and I want to do something connected with probably the most
> important part of my life outside of, you know what I'm saying. So it's
> like planning a career, right, but now but I've got all of that stuff behind
> me. So I'm a lot more optimistic now then I was, now going into
> retirement than I was 17 going into (laughs) the world of work. Its kind of
> twisted. I hadn't thought of that, but its true.

> Miriam: I made the mistake up until last year of taking jobs that were in
> the domain that I knew I didn't enjoy thinking that I would find some
> enjoyable part of it and leaving them all realizing this is not what I wanted
> to be doing. So I guess, what I got to is that now I am involved in
> community development work. For my whole high school experience I
> think I was doing community development in different ways. I was
> leading a youth organization and I was organizing events at the Jewish
> Community Centre in the city where I lived so I was arranging to do
> activities with the children at the centre and with the seniors at the centre
> and bringing different age groups together to meet each other and
> organizing activities for the other youth who were similar to my age and at
> school I was helping to organize an underprivileged children's Christmas
> party and various things like that that I felt really good about. And at the
> same time I was doing things like volunteering to organize the fashion

show which I didn't really get that kind of internal sense of gratification from doing. And I think also what I found was that the things that I did for free often people seemed to appreciate and the things that I did if it was just a job I didn't feel like my time was spent in a way that other people appreciated, or at least they didn't tell me that they appreciated it. And that was really important to me and continues to be really important.

Group Facilitator: When did you realize these things? You seem to have divided them into two categories, jobs that people benefited from and jobs that people didn't. Is that a recent realization or did you realize that all the way along?

Miriam: I think that when I was about 25, 24 or 25, I moved from Toronto to, I had lived in other parts of Ontario, but I moved from Toronto to a small town in BC and I started looking for work and I had all kind of skills and an undergrad degree and I was a big hot commodity in this town and so I was immediately hired in this market where everybody said there wasn't any jobs. I was hired to work for a mall management company that ran the shopping mall and I was the administrative assistant there and within a week I started to hate it because my whole job was about making money for the company and making money in the easiest way whether that inconvenienced or made the lives of the store owners worse or better didn't matter. And I was really uncomfortable with sometimes having to be, to do things that I knew were going to be detrimental to these people that were working as hard as they could to keep their businesses afloat. So I left that and I took on another job that I thought would be better and in fact it wasn't better because it was still working for somebody who was trying to make money but under the guise of having a community newspaper. I thought, 'This is great. It's for the community.' But it wasn't for the community it was for him to have his financial gain and run his business well so again I didn't feel like I was doing something substantial that was contributing to the community and at that point I said, 'I can't do this anymore.' And then I started realizing all these distinctions that had existed all throughout my life that I hadn't really thought about all through my life.

Participants also discussed early jobs in terms of how helpful they were in providing them with skills and/or opportunities that benefited them in their careers. For example:

Geena: At home we would help my dad with his business and from that I learned a lot with when it comes to money. You know when you start working with money, the numbers, you get stronger with your numbers. And also customer service skills. Working with people from an early age.

Because later on I started doing telemarketing jobs and I was quite good at that.

Jill: I'd been waitressing and doing that and then I took on a job as a worker in a group home. And I *never* imagined I would work with people with disabilities. I had lots of friends who worked with people with disabilities and I said, 'I'm not cleaning up their poopy diapers. I cannot tolerate things like that, I'll gag.' You know, you always have these horror stories that your friends are telling you. They're laughing thinking this is so funny and I'm thinking, oh, I could never do that. And, I just kind of fell into it. My mom's friend was hiring and I thought oh, well, I'll give it a try. It can't hurt. And since then, that has totally opened up more avenues for me than I ever could have anticipated.

A couple of times during the focus groups, participants made reference to work situations they had considered to be negative at the time but that they now perceive as having a positive effect on their lives. In the following quotes, participants describe how they have turned these incidents to their advantage in the long run.

Isabelle: And I went and, so I was working in a deli. It was attached to the Port Moody Sportsman Pub. It was attached, it had a door, I was 14. And, there was a legion across the alley. And we also had a catering gig. I put it actually in the negative experience but there were good things that came out of it for sure . . . But there were some negative things which actually did help me out a lot. I experienced a lot of sexism there. A lot of, I mean, there was these older men hanging out in the bar. I mean, its so illegal, we could go across through the little doorway and give them their hot dogs and their burgers and their popcorn and actually I developed the desire to not eat meat as a result because I was working with meat all day and these, God love them, beer belly men would be like 'Make my burger extra-greasy sweetie' and then I'd turn around and I could just feel them looking up and down and I was like 'Ughh.' And so that in itself actually propelled me to, I ended up going to school and studying women's studies and communications and like its ironic that I now work for an employer that outright is about the empowerment of women. But that was pretty gross. Working there with those people . . . But it was good because I did develop a lot of, I worked there for about two and a half years and I gained so many how to do things on my own and just like, multi-tasking skills galore, and communication skills for sure because there came a point where I was sick of being asked, 'Where else do I have those freckles?' so I was like, I had to really be assertive. Which for a 14, 15 and a half year old girl was hard but I do feel grateful though that that experience happened . . . So, I did develop sort of a (snaps her fingers) snappy,

sarcastic bent which, I continued to stay in customer service for about ten years which I still carry with me. I was able to have this internal, sexist radar going on and I could be assertive when I felt something.

Jill: I've had a couple of negative experiences myself. I had an employer who totally belittled me from the get-go. And I went from one place where I was praised and acknowledged and then I went to this next place and it was just horrible. But how I responded to that was more important than the situation itself, right . . . I was only there about six months and my self-esteem just took a total dive because I was hostessing at the time and had transferred locations and so I went from one location which was fantastic to another location where the employer continued to tell me that I was stupid, and, 'Didn't you see that you couldn't seat this section.' Things like that that were just ridiculous . . . As soon as I walked in the door it was just this overwhelming nauseous feeling. And I think probably it is in looking back later on that I realized that it taught me to stand up for myself and to not be pushed around . . . and it showed me that, you know what, at some point you have to look out for yourself. You can't just allow yourself to be walked over . . . .It was good for me to have that experience because I had an experience with a manager, not too long ago, where I felt belittled in front of my co-workers and I thought, you know what, that was unfair. I went and spoke to him, explained the situation, he had totally had not intended to. He was able to apologize and we moved on and I think because I had grown from my previous experience . . . I could totally pinpoint that negative experience as being a contributing factor for me learning to just have confidence in myself.

Other Person

Compare/contrast.

Listening to another person's narrative can cause an individual to recognize and further specify the characteristics of his or her own story. According to Albrecht et al. (1993), this is one of the advantages of gathering data using the focus group method. The following examples are illustrative of how participants modified their perceptions of early employment through comparison with other group members:

Jill: . . . So, whereas I guess with my family it was just assumed . . . that you would work, yeah. Its just sort of part of life, you know.

Linda: And that's interesting because in my family it was like education foremost. That was a very clear message although you know even in my struggle of sciences in my first year of university what might have been beneficial would be to leave at that year. Like go through the first few months and then get a job. And think about what it is that I really wanted to do. But my parents believed that you could figure it out while you're there. Its ok, just stay in university and keep taking courses.

Jill: But it sounds like you did figure it out.

Linda: And I did. It all worked out in the end. So I don't know what's necessarily the best route.

Allan: Yeah, but I don't have that sort of, I'm realizing, I don't come, I'm unlike most counsellors. I do my own engine rebuilds and stuff. Most counsellors have, that I meet, are like you folks, they have some things that they worked through from their past that have given them this desire to really help people. And I mean this in the most positive way. Me, not really.

Influence/persuasion.

The following exchange is an example of how one participant (Nicole) was

influenced by the way another participant (Miriam) explained her early work experiences.

Although this quote is somewhat similar to instances in which participants contrasted

their stories to those of others, Miriam's response to Nicole has a persuasive quality to it.

Nicole: I like how you summed it up with the jobs that you did for money and that those experiences were just about, didn't do anything, and that was really the feeling I had working in A&W, being a waitress, at the end of it I was like 'I didn't do anything. I gave someone a burger.' Just that feeling, there's no point in this, I'm not doing anything.

Miriam: I imagine you probably learned quite a bit though from that even though it doesn't seem like that.

Nicole: Yeah. Exactly. Right, right. And I guess that that is an important thing for me to learn is that I did learn that I didn't want to do *that*.

Question #3 Influence of Early Employment Experiences on Practice

The third research question guiding this investigation was divided into two parts. First, participants were asked if they thought their early employment experiences had influenced their current practice as career counsellors or practitioners. If they replied affirmatively, they were asked how they thought their own career experience related to their work with clients.

Use of Personal Experience in Practice

Most participants (13 out of 15) thought that their early employment experiences related directly to their work with clients. However, the way in which they used their experience varied. Some participants referred to their personal experiences openly in their efforts to help clients make career choices. Others said that their personal work histories biased them in certain directions and that they purposefully sought to limit the effect of this bias in their counselling practice.

Explicit

The following quotes are examples of how participants use their personal experiences explicitly in their work with youth.

> Allan: I do self-disclose a little bit in career planning and in my career planning prep, but all I say is, 'Hey, I started out,' and I tell them, this is like 10 seconds, 'I started out to be a mechanical engineer, look what I'm doing here.' And that's just giving them permission not to have this perfect blinding light in the sky and I don't care whether they're 17 or 18 year olds or whether they're 45. I'm giving them permission not to, to realize, whether they like it or not, you get to a good place, but it may not be the place you started off at.

Geena: I come across a lot people that want to get into being an air stewardess when they're very young. Because when I was very young, when I was about 18, I think it was from the age of 15, 16, up until I was 22, 23 I wanted to be air hostess, or air stewardess. But then later on you realize its just a glorified waitress, right. I mean, it's a phase that you're going through. Its more the traveling that you're interested in. (Felicia: Get me out of the house!) Get me out of the house right. And the prestige [inaudible]. And, anyway I have quite a few people I've worked with and they're young and they say they want to do that and I say, 'I think you should research it more. When I was your age I also wanted to do that and then later on you come to find out its that stage that you're going through right.' And I find when you're that young you have so many dreams of what you want to do and its because a lot of the time, we haven't experienced enough jobs. When you experience, that's what I've found with myself, once you start experiencing jobs, then you start understanding where you going to fit, and what you're good at.

Ellie: I have had so many work experiences in so many different things. I mean I was all over the map for like 10, 15 years . . . and I think it influences me when I'm working with people . . . having all of those work experiences has really helped me as an employment counsellor because I've been on the job in a lot of those place and those kind of jobs and then volunteer experience. Its kind of like 'Oh, yeah I know what that job is like. Oh, yeah, I've done that. That part of the job sucks, or, that part of the job is really good.' So, that's, I think that that has made me, sort of, well-rounded.

Implicit

Other participants described using their experiences implicitly. That is to say,

although they are aware that their personal lives influence their practice to some degree,

they do not openly share this connection with their clients. For example, Nicole described

how she received different messages from her parents. Her dad encouraged her to work in

order to make money and learn responsibility whereas her mom encouraged her to pursue

jobs and volunteer opportunities that she was interested in and that she valued. The

influence of these messages is apparent in Nicole's opinion of adolescent work.

And I think that advice [that I received from my parents] is the same thing I think. You know, if you need to work then that's one thing but it's more

important, and if you can afford to, and if your parents can afford to support you to do something that you enjoy. If you need the money then you know, as much as it might be a great idea to go out and just do volunteer experience but if you need the money and if your parents can't support you then obviously that's not going to work. And, you know, if you are an at-risk teen and you don't really want to volunteer because why would you want to volunteer well then it's a good opportunity to work. There's two sides to it.

Limited

A few participants explained that they try to limit the degree to which their personal experiences influences their practice. For example:

> Linda: I think something that I know from my counselling experiences, it took me awhile but after I was able to find jobs that I found meaning in and was contributing in I think I have to be careful in that it somewhat biases my attitude. 'Well, you might want to find something that is meaningful.' There's all these programs available and I know that I have a bias towards health care professions so when students, or kids are choosing what area to take I need to really watch my own ideas about things and just listen to them and what's important to them because it could be entirely different from what's important to me. So, yeah, I think in that way it does influence how I work with students and youth but just in my own ideas. Things I need to be careful about.

> Isabelle: Yeah, I think, not having a lot growing up and having to work, being self-employed at the age of ten, I have to watch that when I'm working with someone, I'd say only clientele that maybe have experienced a certain affluence in their life and are now doing the whole leaving the nest and are having a lot of challenges around that. I have to watch that I'm not doing my own like 'Ughhh, like, come on. Just, get a grip.' But, it does help me bring out creativity. Like, 'Okay, well, what's the worse that could happen if you don't have your Suzuki Jeep that Daddy paid for? Lets work with that.' That's the piece that I have to watch, that I really have to try and meet them where they're at and don't go into my own, like, ughh . . .

No Perceived Connection

Two participants in the study did not think that their practice was directly related to their own early employment. Olivia, saw her personal employment history as being unrelated to her work with youth because of cultural differences.

> My first experience as a youth was a professional job. So my experience was not a typical North American youth employment experience . . . My experiences in my employment also wasn't such that it would help me . . . So there's really no connection between my personal youth experience and how I later worked with youth.

However, she indicated that the advice she would give to her clients was different than the advice she would give to younger family members who were from the same cultural background as her. The latter is the same advice she received from her family.

> Well I have cousins who came from my home country and I would kind of be guiding them along the way while they were trying to get through high school. And my suggestion to them was always, 'Your parents can afford it. Don't work, focus on your school.' Yeah. That's me. But again in my home country your high school degree is very demanding. You take 13 courses a year. You don't even have time to work. Here there's a whole, there's really a large, especially for kids who come from my country, suddenly they feel they have all this time on their hand. So, maybe that's not the best experience. But I think when you're in high school, if you can, don't work. Just take all the courses you can, do all the sports you can, whatever. That's the time when you have the time to learn things [but] . . . if I go with my counsellor role then . . .[flip tape] . . . in the North American culture getting a sense of value of the dollar really matters. And that's definitely a cultural things, so it is good. And you also learn how the world works, you learn how to relate to people, you learn how the businesses work. Yeah. There's definitely benefits to working early on.

Deanna also initially indicated that there was no connection between her personal career experience and her professional practice. However, at the end of the focus group she realized that, in fact, the message she had received from her dad about budgeting mirrors the message she gives to her clients. Early on in the group, Deanna shared how

she and her father were very different and how his focus was financial management. Midway through the group, when participants were asked if their early work experiences had any bearing on their professional practice with youth, Deanna said that her personal life had no effect on the way she worked in her job as a youth employment counsellor. If anything, she felt that she was very focused on her clients' emotions as a result of an upbringing in which emotions were not valued. At the very end of the group, when participants were given the opportunity to share final reflections, she said that she had just realized that there was a connection between her personal experience and her practice. Up to this point, this seemed to have been a blind spot for her.

> Deanna [early on in the focus group discussion]: So he always said to me, 'You're never going to get it. Financially you're going to bury yourself. Financially you're going to bury yourself.' And he would sit down with me. I remember this. Sitting down, my dad's a, when he first started out he was a millwright. I remember sitting down by the lake and him just sitting there pointing, 'You're going to go nowhere if you don't understand about budgets!' (group laughs) I'm like, 'Yes dad.' And he would talk about how he came to this country with nothing and now he has a home, and he has this. And I would always say to him even at 10 or 11, 'Yeah, but that was then and this is now and what you got then I'll never get today. It will never happen for me. Your dollar back then is worth is worth $40 today.' And to this day, I'll sit and have dinner at their house and we will still argue about this budget thing because he's just not in the same frame of mind that I'm at.

> Deanna [end of the focus group discussion]: I know for me to reflect quickly, I'm here, and its funny because as everyone is talking I'm starting to snicker inside my head and its because when I actually work with young kids I talk about budgets and their credit (group laughs). And, you know guys, I'm going oh my god! (group laughs, Barbara: Oh, no. It's your father!). Because you know I instill on them 'Credit is as important to you as those legs you're walking on.' (group laughs) And you know down I beat them down when it comes to,

> Allan: Oh, me thinks she doth protest too much here! (group laughs)

> Deanna: Ok, no one ever tell my dad!

Barbara: You know what I thought that . . .when you (points to Group
Facilitator) asked the question about 'What of your youth are you using?'
in the middle and you (referring to Deanna) said 'Well, I don't use it.'
Well, we really use it.

Deanna: Oh man, that's scary.

Chris: I think we use everything. Whether we like it or not.

Barbara: Oh yeah, it really influences our behaviour.

Chris: How many times in our lives do we go, 'Oh God, I'm my,'

Deanna: Well really, just sitting here, just as you were doing your reflections I
went 'Oh my goodness' I talk about budgets and credits and I really instill that
with kids cause they don't get it, they don't understand that credit is their life.

Themes in Professional Practice

In the second half of the focus group, participants were asked to describe their

approach to youth employment counselling. Participants' descriptions of their

professional practice were analyzed thematically.

The themes that were present in participants' personal narratives also were

present in their practice. Given that most participants indicated that they grasped a direct

connection between their own experiences and their approach to working with youth, this

finding is not surprising.

A positive view of early employment was characteristic of participants'

descriptions of their work with youth. Although not all employment opportunities were

seen as beneficial, for the most part, participants seemed to indicate that early work was a

good thing. Participants felt that jobs could help young people develop skills, career

opportunities, positive personal characteristics and learn about themselves and the world

of work. However, most participants did not have an unqualified view of the benefits of

youth employment and noted that the outcome depended on the characteristics of the job and, to some degree, on the characteristics of the young person. For example, participants' comments implied that jobs that helped other people or the community and that related to a young person's interest area were more likely to result in a positive outcome. As well, work was thought to be more beneficial for clients who were not actively involved in other activities (e.g., school, sport or other hobbies) and for "at-risk" youth.

Participants mentioned certain themes much more often than others (both in terms of frequency of comments related to a particular theme and emphasis that participants placed on these comments). The following themes were expressed most often: early employment as an investment (both in terms of career and character development), early employment as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization, and the benefits of engaging in volunteer work. It was less common for participants to describe an approach to counselling that took into account the financial aspect of early employment or the relationship between early work and contextual variables.

Early Employment as an Investment: Career and Character Development

Many participants indicated that they thought that part-time jobs and volunteering were good investments for youth. They encouraged clients to seek out possibilities to gain skills and career opportunities (e.g., through making contacts and getting good references to put on their résumés) and to help them develop a sense of commitment, work ethic and responsibility. For example:

> Jill: So I really, really stress to them, it doesn't matter what it is. It doesn't
> matter if its in your career field, because a lot of them have these things

that 'If I'm going to get a job then it better be in my field.' Well if you've got nothing to show an employer, how do you get that job? You know you have to start out at the entry level jobs. Whether its working at your local corner store, bagging groceries, or whatever it is. I totally believe that you have to do anything . . . It doesn't matter what the job is. What matters is the skills that you're acquiring, being able to work in a team, you know, all the things employers look for.

Felicia: Really, just work on that reference. You want to have a good reference out of your first job. Its going to go with you, right. It's key to moving on. Not to put pressure on them, like you have to do this amazing job, but just that it's really important to get a good reference from that first job.

Nicole: But I think that early work experience really, in whatever it is that you're doing, even if it is just A&W, for children, or youth who may be more at risk, I think it's a really good experience. It just teaches them that little bit of responsibility.

Early Employment as a Journey Towards Self-Discovery and Self-Actualization

The employment counsellors in this study indicated that they encouraged their clients to work because they felt that early jobs helped youth to learn about themselves. For example, Jill stated: "I would say that the most important thing for youth is just to take every opportunity they can, you know. Just to explore the world and by doing so they're finding out about themselves." Some participants stated that self-discovery was important for career decision-making. Kara describes this view of early work:

For me ideally, starting to get kids interested, because I think its unrealistic for kids to think that they're going to figure out what they're going to be when they're in grade eight. I think that's just 'psst.' But giving them space to roam around and take a job at a restaurant. Oh, maybe they like it maybe they don't, well then getting that experience, putting their feelers out there and gaining that glow in themselves which helps them figure out what they like, what they don't like.

Helping to develop self-esteem and self-confidence.

Many participants described support and encouragement as being key components

of their work with youth. Not only did participants think it was important to help clients

discover who they are, they also thought it was important to help clients develop self-

esteem and self-confidence. Boosting clients' self-esteem seemed to go hand-in-hand

with helping clients learn about themselves and self-actualize. For example:

> Deanna: But when I'm working with young people now I really try to take
> them holistically and know that they matter in this world, like, I use
> mattering huge in my office and so that they know that they have value
> and that with perseverance and with affirmations and skill, you can
> accomplish what you need to get done. And I think that self-esteem and
> self-worth is part of the thing that holds back youth today.

> Isabelle: I think probably 99%, of the work that I find that I do is self-
> esteem stuff. Résumé, you go to a workshop for that. Interviews, you go to
> a workshop for that. But the stuff that I found the most long-term, that I
> find I do is building up self-esteem or helping them unpack some of the
> gross stuff that happened or referring for that, so that would be . . . And I
> always have to remind them, 'Yeah, there is someone out there who is
> willing to pay you to do a job.' Yeah, there definitely is because I think
> most kids come in going, 'Well, I've got nothing to offer.' You totally
> have something that someone would be willing to pay for.

Volunteer Experiences

Many participants said that they recommended volunteering to their clients if

meaningful work options were not available, or as a supplement to paid employment. The

outcomes of volunteer activities were described in much the same way as positive

employment experiences. Participants named enhanced career opportunities, the

development of positive character traits, and opportunities to learn about self and work as

the benefits of volunteering. For example:

> Miriam: I advocate a lot for them to go and do volunteer work. Like, I tell them that, first of all I think if they have areas that interest them, if they do volunteer work then they'll get something out of it. Also, often that can lead to employment even if its just answering the phone but you're doing it at a place that really matters to you.

Early Employment for Immediate Financial Gain

Few participants indicated that they discussed money and financial management with their young clients. This was a minor theme. Only Deanna said that she emphasized financial matters with her clients (see passage of text under "No perceived connection between personal experience and professional practice"). Other participants indicated that they recognized money motivated people to seek work, but they did not dwell on financial needs or management with clients.

Relationship Between Early Employment and Contextual Variables

Education.

Discussion of the effect of school on work or vice versa was negligible. In one group, there was brief discussion of how involvement in school should be weighed when deciding whether or not to recommend employment to young people (e.g., working should not be a priority for those that are highly involved in school activities). In another group, one participant mentioned that she felt that work could provide youth with benefits (such as self-confidence and career opportunities) that they were unlikely to get through school.

Family.

Discussion of parental influence on the youth employment experiences was limited. Participants did not mention involving parents in youth employment counselling

practice. The potential influence of parental attitudes on the early work experiences of

youth was only discussed briefly in one group. The tenor of this discussion is summed up

in the following quote.

> Linda: I think parents play a big role in encouraging employment because
> talking about the CAPP program in high school and one thing that students
> have to do, I think it's grade 12, they go for a week for work experience
> somewhere and it can be anywhere that they choose. Just about anywhere.
> There's lots of sponsors. They don't get paid but it's part of their
> graduation requirement. And, someone that organizes CAPP in high
> school, he was saying that there's quite a few parents that really object to
> this. That, you know, 'my son or daughter should not be taken out of
> school for a week to get work experience. That's silly.' So they don't
> recognize the value, maybe of that kind of thing. Even though I would
> think that the school would have to be understanding, if the student's gone
> for a week to do work experience.

The sociocultural and/or economic context.

A few participants said that they are aware of the influence that the sociocultural

and economic context has on the work opportunities available to their clients. Those that

did mention the context spoke of the lack of quality employment experiences that are

available to youth today. For example:

> Chris: . . .the opportunities aren't there that were there when I was young.
> I could walk into any place and get a job when I was their age and I know
> that's just not a reality anymore unless you want to work for almost
> nothing, for six dollars an hour.

Although participants rarely mentioned the influence of the wider context, it is

conceivable that awareness of the lack of jobs that are "useful and worthwhile" and that

pay more than "almost nothing" is related to the tendency to recommend volunteer

activities to clients.

Interpretation

A hermeneutic approach places primary importance on the interpretation of results (Packer & Addison, 1989). The narrative themes discussed thus far were the result of analyzing transcripts from the focus groups (or, to return to the analogy, the forward arc of the hermeneutic circle). Although the process of analysis is important, making sense of findings by relating them to the larger context (the reverse arc of the circle) is a distinctively hermeneutic aspect of this research.

In this study, youth employment was considered from a hermeneutic-narrative approach. I was interested in the stories people tell about their early jobs and how they use narratives to make sense of these experiences. Since participants were youth employment counsellors, my interest extended to the relationship between counsellors' personal career narratives and their professional practice.

Prior to explaining my interpretation of the results, let me briefly reiterate the assumptions that underlie this research project and, ultimately, the account which follows. First, a hermeneutic approach, as implemented in this project, emphasizes the study of the lived experience of career in sociocultural context which, according to Young and Collin (1992), is accessed through its expression in narrative. Stories are considered to be central to human life. It is the primary way we make sense of our history, identity, and the world around us. Narratives help us make sense of past events, understand our present situations and guide future actions.

Second, although narratives are personal (i.e., they describe the unique events of a person's life) they are not merely individual constructions. For example, in relation to youth employment, although the sequence and types of jobs in a person's history may be

unique, the way in which he or she makes sense of these occurrences is intimately related to his or her social framework. Language, social structures and institutions form the foundation for the way one thinks and the narratives one constructs.

Third, humans are dialogical in nature and are involved continuously in conversations (with other people, messages from their surroundings and internally) in an attempt to ascribe meaning to life events (Taylor, 1991). As a result, the voices of others and the cultural context constitute individuals' narratives. Thus, an understanding of how an individual's narrative reflects his or her embeddedness in history and culture is essential. Cushman (1995) describes this process as "standing behind [people] and reading over their shoulder the cultural text from which they themselves are reading" (p. 23).

Fourth, hermeneutic philosophy accentuates humans' embeddedness in time. We live in the present, but our lives are informed by our understandings of the past and anticipations of the future. The narratives we compose, inevitably, reflect this tripartite temporal structure (Richardson et al., 1999). Ricoeur (1983) describes how, in the stories we tell, "past and present are woven together in the light of an anticipated completion" (as cited by Richardson et al., p. 213).

Most central to these suppositions is the importance placed on considering the sociocultural and historical context when investigating any phenomenon. Therefore, in order to interpret the youth employment narratives shared in this research project, it is necessary to comprehend the contextual landscape.

Ascertaining the characteristics and parameters of the context is not a straightforward task. This study was not intended to be an investigation into the youth

employment narratives of a specific regional or cultural group. Some variation in the way people from differing ethnic, cultural and regional backgrounds think and talk about youth employment is to be expected. However, studying these differences was not the focus of this inquiry. Indeed, there are certain characteristics of the participants in this study – occupational group, demographic cohort and cultural background – that may have influenced the results (this is further discussed in chapter five). Despite inevitable differences in narrative themes across sub-groups, there are features of modern Western culture that are pervasive and far-reaching. For example, individualism, humanism, consumerism, and secularism have been identified by many as quintessential qualities of the modern era (for example, see Cushman, 1995; Kingwell, 1998, 2000; Saul, 1995; Taylor, 1991; Woolfolk, 1998). Rather than focusing on the way a localized group makes sense of early work, I was interested in examining the effects of history and the broad, overarching qualities of modern North American culture on youth employment. This approach is similar to Kingwell's dialogical perspective of the sociocultural context.

According to Kingwell (2000), defining the parameters of a context often amounts to identifying and depicting the "pre-existing essences" or "clusters of in-groupers" that characterize a group (p. 22). Instead of trying to delineate these features, Kingwell suggests that the context be regarded as a discursive arrangement. Thus, a particular context is defined by the shared understandings that result from a common history, language, ideology and social institutions. Context, in this view, is dynamic and dialogical. Thus, the narratives shared in this study are considered to be part of the ongoing cultural and historical conversation on youth employment and illustrative of the

dynamic "cultural texts" (Cushman, 1995) that individuals use to make sense of early work in modern North American culture.

The interpretation that follows is presented in three parts and will focus on making sense of youth employment narratives by relating these stories to the wider sociocultural and historical context. First, I will argue that youth employment narratives are one part of more general career narratives. People make sense of early jobs by relating them to other career events and incorporating both early and later work experiences into a cohesive career story. Second, I will argue that themes prevalent in youth employment narratives reflect general career themes that exist in our culture. Historical developments that have shaped the way we think about career in contemporary Western culture also have influenced the way we make sense of youth employment. Third, I will suggest that youth employment counselling has the potential to shape the way our culture thinks about career. Thus, the tendency of youth employment counsellors to emphasize certain themes more than others in their practice is likely to have the effect of reinforcing certain career "texts" in our culture.

Youth Employment and Career Narratives

In examining the process by which participants made sense of youth employment, it was clear that the early work narratives they recounted had been developed over a period of time. These stories begin to take shape prior to entry into the workforce and are revised throughout adolescence and in hindsight. Participants' initial views of work were forged primarily by messages received from their families. However, participants'

retrospect accounts seemed to be cast primarily to the perceived impact of these jobs on more recent career developments.

Parental messages and attitudes regarding youth employment were a formative influence on adolescents' narratives. Parents' voices influenced participants' initial orientation towards work and, in some cases, were internalized and became lasting fixtures in explanations of early work. This finding is not surprising since the role of parents in early career development has been recognized in both theory (psychological, sociological and economic) and research (see for example, Dover, Matthes, Paproski, & Sankey, 1997; Mortimer et al., 2002b; Sankey & Young, 1996; Young, et al., 1997). The role of parental messages in the development of early work narratives is discussed further later on in this chapter. Although the influence of parental messages was significant early on in participants' working lives (e.g., during adolescent employment), later career experiences seemed to be predominant in instigating shifts in how early work is understood in adulthood.

In this study, participants' narratives revealed that one of the primary ways they made sense of early work was by relating these experiences to their current work situations. Adult career developments seemed to trigger a change in the way participants made sense of early work. Participants reinterpreted youth employment in light of these recent career events and incorporated early and later work into a cohesive career narrative.

Making sense of youth employment experiences by relating them to more recent work circumstances is not an unexpected phenomenon. According to Kingwell (1998), looking back and reinterpreting events is a usual part of life: "we are constantly involved

in a process of *bringing the story into line*: attempting, with greater or lesser degrees of success, to make the entire tale coherent by reconciling past with present, part with whole" (p. 316, author's italics). People make sense of life by integrating separate experiences into a narrative that has a tripartite temporal structure (Taylor, 1989). As Taylor states:

> We can only answer [the question of how experiences make sense in our lives] by seeing how they fit into our surrounding life, that is, what part they play in a narrative of this life. We have to move forward and back to make a real assessment. (p. 48)

Thus, it is to be expected that the process of making sense of past events will involve reference to present circumstances. However, the elements that are included in the narrative are unique to the historical and sociocultural context.

Although it seems logical to expect people to connect early work to later career events (after all, early jobs and adult career realities are both work related), the linking of work experiences across the lifespan is not universal. Although adolescents work all over the world, in developing nations, young people tend to work out of economic necessity, and, when required by their family's financial need, enter the workforce as soon as they are able. In countries that are not dominated by "Western" ideals (such as those outside of North America, Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand), families that can afford to keep their children out of the workforce are unlikely to encourage them to work while they are going to school (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). What is peculiar to the Western world (and, as is argued by Greenberger and Steinberg, most common in North America) is the belief that part-time work during high school is beneficial to adolescent development, regardless of the family's financial situation.

The primary way in which early work is expected to benefit youth is in terms of career development. This cultural expectation is reflected in the investment theme in youth employment narratives. Participants said that early jobs benefited them later in their careers as a result of the work ethic, responsibility and the employability skills they learned early on. This theme also is evident in stories about youth work that appear in the media and that are narrated by participants in other qualitative studies.

For example, consider an article that appeared in the *Globe and Mail* newspaper entitled "Lower-profile jobs offer life lessons" (Gallop, 2002, p. C1). In this piece, "people with impressive careers" were asked to describe first jobs and lessons learned from them. Their brief responses can be read as short stories that link their early work to later career accomplishments. For example, Elizabeth May (Sierra Club Executive Director) is quoted as saying: "I think my ability to understand and relate to people in all walks of life improved tremendously during my time working in the restaurant [as a waitress]." Trevor Ferguson (author) described his job tearing down and rebuilding a railroad bridge: " . . . it is very good experience for a novelist . . . I developed an understanding that as long as the work gets done day-by-day, the end result will come around at some point." Danielle Goyette (Olympic gold-winning hockey player) worked as a store clerk and explained, "At the store, the emphasis is on teamwork. If you do things by yourself, nothing works. This is also important in hockey."

Similarly, according to the folk wisdom disseminated by *Reader's Digest* magazine, the lessons learned in adolescent employment are key to successful careers. In an article entitled "My First Job" (Kiener, 1998) a number of renowned Canadians explain how the lessons learned in their first jobs have helped them succeed in their

careers. For example, Pamela Wallin (journalist, broadcaster, and Canada's Consul

General in New York) describes being reprimanded by the owner of a bakery she worked

for at the age of 13 and states:

> I learned an important lesson in the process: No matter how well you think
> you do your job, there is room for criticism. That lesson has served me
> well. During my 20-year career in front of the public, I've had my share of
> criticism, some deserved, some not, at least from my point of view. But
> my first job taught me that it comes with the territory. If you want to get
> ahead, you have to take the bad with the good. A working life isn't always
> smooth sailing. (p. 98)

Reader's Digest followed this article with a second on the same topic four years

later ("My First Job," 2002). As in the first, successful people were asked to describe how

their early work related to their later career achievements. For example, Marc Garneau

(astronaut) explains that his first job as a summer tour guide taught him how to "hold

[his] own speaking to a group of strangers" despite his initial fear of public speaking. He

links this to his current work requirements: "I've given hundreds of interviews, speeches

and presentations since then, and each time I get up on a stage, I'm thankful for what I

learned on my first job" (p. 18).

The expectation that youth work will contribute to career development has been

influenced by history and reinforced by psychological theory and research. Protestantism

has had a considerable influence on North American cultural consciousness and the

conception of work as a positive investment is closely related to a Calvinist view of work

(Meilaender, 2000; Weber, 1905/1958). For example, the axiom "work builds character"

is directly attributable to the Protestant work ethic. More recently, reports commissioned

by the U.S. government in the late 1960s concluded that youth employment should be

encouraged because early work helped prepare youth to be responsible adults and reliable

workers (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). These reports transformed governmental policy and spawned a host of school-to-work programs in the States. The valuation of youth employment as preparation for adulthood was paralleled in Canada. Youth employment services, intended to help young people find work to prepare them for later careers (and to put an end to the social unrest of the time), were established by the Canadian government in the late 1960s (Counselling Foundation of Canada, 2002). Undoubtedly, these events helped to reinforce the cultural belief that youth work is good training for later participation in the labour market. This belief has become part of North American cultural consciousness and, as is evident in the stories people tell about early jobs, adolescent work is now commonly considered to be related to adult employment.

Woolfolk (1998) describes the relationship between culture and psychological theory and research as "one of reciprocal influence" (p. 2). Indeed, the cultural expectation that youth work will contribute to career development has been influenced and confirmed by theories and research pertaining to youth employment. For example, Super's concept of career maturity has been considered to be a good predictor of career readiness and future career success (Sharf, 2002). Early participation in the labour market has been assumed to contribute to career maturity, which, in turn, is assumed to lead to occupational identity.

Similarly, research on youth employment both reflects and reinforces the belief that early work and career development are related. There is a considerable body of research that assumes an investment approach to youth employment and examines the relationship between early work and the cost or benefit to later career success. Some researchers have concluded that early participation in the labour force is likely to lead to

future career success (Gottfredson, 1984; Lewis et al., 1983; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997) whereas others have reached the opposite conclusion (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Steinberg et al., 1993). More recently, authors have attempted to tease out the factors that would differentiate a good investment from a bad one and have focused on hours of work (Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Stitz & Owen, 1992), the type of job (Hansen & Jarvis, 2000) and the quality of the job (Barling et al., 1995; Finch et al., 1991; Mortimer et al., 2002a; Stern et al., 1990). The investment approach to conceptualizing the merits of youth employment is present in the qualitative literature as well. For example, both contemporary youth and adults reporting on their adolescent employment in retrospect, name responsibility, work experience, skill development, and work ethic as benefits of early jobs (Aronson et al., 1996; Green, 1990; Mortimer et al., 2002b). Although there are differences in the outcomes of these studies, what ties them together is the underlying belief that youth employment is related to later career development. In other words, work experiences, regardless of whether they occurred during adolescence or later in life, are assumed to be part of the same narrative.

In sum, the process of making sense of early work begins prior to entering the workforce and continues to be revised long after these jobs have ended. During adolescence, parental messages seem to be an important source of influence in interpretations of early work. Later on, career events seem to be the primary cause of shifts in narrative understanding. Early work and adult work experiences are combined into a common career narrative. The perceived link between early work and later career events is apparent in this study, in media accounts of youth employment, and in participants' responses in other research. Given the historical events that have shaped our

cultural conceptions of youth work, along with theoretical propositions and research conclusions that reflect and reinforce these cultural beliefs, it is not surprising that youth employment is expected to contribute to the career development process in certain ways (e.g., by helping youth to acquire employability skills, gain work experience to put on their resume, learn to be responsible, dependable and manage money and time, and teach young people about work). People incorporate youth employment events into an overarching career story that gives meaning to their working lives rather than making sense of early jobs independent from other work experiences.

Contemporary Career Beliefs

Early employment narratives evolve as past work events are reinterpreted in relation to more recent career developments. Narratives that make sense of early work are not fully constructed during adolescence and early adulthood, stored in memory and recalled when necessary. Rather, these narratives undergo periodic revisions as past jobs are reinterpreted in light of present circumstances. The result is a career narrative that helps to connect various work incidents into a meaningful whole.

Career narratives are not purely individual constructions. Rather, they are informed by the cultural texts, or ideologies, that pertain to work in our culture. Every culture is permeated with ideas that help its inhabitants make sense of social reality. Cushman (1995) describes these underlying norms as the "cultural texts" that guide behaviour whereas Kingwell (1998) refers to "the ideas and prejudices that are contained in what appear to be the basic assumptions of normal life" as cultural ideologies (p. 173). According to Young and Collin (1992), career is one of the most important constructs in

North American culture – the framework used to interpret our lives and the lives of others. As with any ideology, Western notions about career, although pervasive, are often difficult to recognize because, by definition, ideologies exist below the level of consciousness, often masquerading as "common sense." Kingwell describes the effect of ideology on social life:

> Because they exist above all as structures that define whole arenas of social life, ideological biases and prejudices work to set the limits of what can be imagined or done; they envelop us in a circle of conceptual possibility. (p. 174)

Therefore, in order to understand any part of the career narrative (in this case, early employment) it is necessary to examine the ideologies that influence, often without our conscious awareness, the way we think about work. These career texts are best discerned by examining the history of career in our culture. In particular, America's religious heritage and the social forces that characterize Western modernity (e.g., secularism, individualism, capitalism and consumerism) have been influential in the evolution of the current North American notion of career.

Protestant theology, articulated by Luther and Calvin during the Reformation and imported by the Puritans, has had a lasting effect on the way we think about work in North America (Meilaender, 2000; Weber, 1905/1958). According to Weber, widespread acceptance of the belief that each individual has a specific calling and the resulting moral and religious emphasis placed on working life was one of the most significant outcomes of the Reformation. Prior to this point, Christian theology (as set out by the Catholic church) considered only those that devoted their lives to religious duties (such as monks, priests or nuns) to be called by God. Key to Luther's writings was the novel idea that all work was sanctified by God and could be considered a religious calling, whether that be a

priest serving the church or a farmer tending his fields. Although this affirmation of routine activity "had already existed in the Middle ages, and even in the late Hellenistic antiquity . . . [what] was unquestionably new [was] the valuation of the fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume" (Weber, p. 80). One's calling, as argued by Luther, was not to be done for one's own gain but rather as an "outward expression of brotherly love" (Weber, p. 81).

Although Luther initiated the moral justification of worldly labour, it was Calvin's theology that transmuted the belief of calling into what Weber (1905/1958) describes as the Protestant work ethic. According to Calvinist doctrine, every individual has a specific calling assigned to him or her by God and it is each person's duty to fulfill these daily tasks to the best of his or her ability (McNeill & Battles, 1960 as cited in Meilaender, 2000). Hard work serves two purposes. First, commitment to one's calling is linked to salvation inasmuch as work helps the individual develop Godly character. This view of work is described by Tawney (1954): "[Work] is a spiritual end, for in it alone can the soul find health, and it must be continued as an ethical duty long after it has ceased to be a material necessity" (p. 201). Second, Calvinist theology endorses work because of its contribution to the well-being of society. Since the social order is believed to have been instituted by God, work that serves the community also serves God.

One of the results of Calvinism was the transformation of moral standards related to making money. The acquisition of wealth, which had been considered a vice, became a virtue. Although Calvinism did not consider the accumulation of money to be a worthy end goal in and of itself, if one did attain financial wealth it was considered to be a sign of God's blessing (Weber). Money was reinvested in order to further serve society and

bring glory to God. Consequently, it became each person's ethical obligation to seek profit to serve their community and God. Thus, you have the genesis of the Protestant work ethic: a commitment to hard work and the propensity to make, save and reinvest money.

A few Puritan beliefs about work continue, relatively unabated, in modern culture. For example, work continues to be a valued activity in life. In fact, according to Taylor (1989), work is one of the arenas central to the definition of a full human life in Western society (the other being family) (as cited in Meilaender, 2000). Second, as discussed previously, the contemporary claim that "work builds character" (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986, p. 40) appears to have emanated from America's religious heritage. However, overall, Protestant beliefs about work have been altered due to the expanding influence of secularism and individualism, two defining qualities of modernity.

A central characteristic of the pre-modern era was the widespread belief in a higher power that provided a framework for understanding human life (Woolfolk, 1998). During this period, all aspects of life, including human identity and work, were understood in relation to something greater than the individual (e.g., as with Protestant theology). Although there were advantages to these "ready-made" belief systems, there were also limitations. The hierarchies of society were considered to be reflections of the hierarchy inherent in the spiritual realm and, therefore, unchangeable. As a result: "People were often locked into a given place, a role and station that was properly theirs and from which it was almost unthinkable to deviate" (Taylor, 1991, p. 3). Over time, in response to new ideas such as, for example, those offered by Descartes and Locke, and by the growing value placed on science, the content of beliefs used to make sense of the

world changed and became increasingly secular (Taylor). Secularism had the effect of providing individuals with unprecedented freedom: "In principle, people [were] no longer sacrificed to the demands of the supposedly sacred orders that transcend them" (Taylor, p. 2). Instead, each person was free to choose his or her way of life, convictions and occupation.

The second characteristic of modernity I would like to discuss is the individualistic view of humankind. Individualism and secularism are closely related. With secularization came a change in ontology. No longer did people think about themselves in primarily spiritual terms (i.e., closely linked to a metaphysical cosmic order). Instead, humans were considered to be self-determining, autonomous beings, each one free to decide how he or she would live. As with the development of secularism, individualism has various forebears including ideals passed down from the Enlightenment and Romantic periods. In particular, humanist ideals from the Romantic era have had a significant effect on the way we think about career in contemporary culture.

Humanist ideals, such as belief in the inherent goodness and morality of humankind, and the idea that each person had an original way of being human, helped to shape modern individualism and continues to have a significant influence on contemporary thought (Taylor, 1991). As a result of ideas articulated by writers such as Rousseau and Herder, the dominant beliefs about what it meant to be human changed (Taylor). Each person was considered to be free to choose his or her path and this path was assumed to be found by looking to the inner self (Taylor). Along with the notion of

the inner self came a focus on happiness and self-fulfillment. Kingwell (1998)

summarizes these ideas:

> This, then, is a world of predominantly personal projects: a world –
> especially in the Romantic version of individualism, with its ideals of
> authenticity – of finding one's true self. With this conception of the
> authentic individual life comes a historically unique focus on the idea of
> happiness as the point and privilege of every individual life. (p. 27)

Secularism and individualism have affected the Protestant view of work. The

concern with finding a calling continues but has been mutated to fit the modern era. No

longer is one's calling considered in relation to God or society. Instead, work is seen as a

calling to one's inner self and as a means to happiness. According to Meilaender (2000)

the belief that work is a calling "has been transmuted into an emphasis upon work as the

sphere in which one fulfills oneself" (p. 13). Cushman (1995) describes how in 20th

century North American culture "nearly all aspects of middle-class life, especially 'career

choice,' became thought of as opportunities for expressing one's core self and enhancing

one's life" (p. 155). Taylor (1991) explains that the importance placed on discovering and

realizing one's potential and "true self," and the pre-occupation with self-fulfillment is

"peculiar to our time" (p. 17). As stated by Taylor:

> It's not just that people sacrifice their love relationships, and the care of
> their children, to pursue their careers. Something like this has perhaps
> always existed. The point is that today many people feel *called* to do this,
> feel they ought to do this, feel their lives would be somehow wasted or
> unfulfilled if they didn't do it. (p. 17) (italics in original)

Just as secularism and individualism altered the Protestant conception of work, so

too have capitalism and consumerism. Weber (1905/1958) argues that Calvinist theology,

and the attitude towards work and money it encouraged, facilitated the development of

capitalism. However, Weber concludes that capitalist values have overtaken the original

religious ideals that facilitated the development of this economic structure in the first place. Modern capitalism has become "dominant and emancipated from its old [religious] supports" (Weber, p. 72) and has taken on a life of its own. Commitment to a calling ordained by God has been replaced by "devotion to the calling of making money" (Weber, p. 54) and an attitude of frugality has been replaced by "an orgy of materialism" (Tawney, 1958, p. 3). Weber describes modern society as an "iron cage" in which "material goods have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history" (p. 181).

Other writers also have drawn attention to the pervasiveness of consumerism in modern North American society. Cushman (1995) describes consumerism as "one of the most powerful political/economic forces of the post-World War II era" (p. 207). Kingwell (1998) suggests that consumerism is so firmly rooted in North American cultural consciousness that it has become "part of a set of background assumptions and ideas concerning life and work, even concerning what it means to be human, that we no longer pause to question" (p. 171). The Calvinist notion of gaining profit seems to have continued whereas the frugal habits of consumption that used to be associated with making money have not. No longer is profit from work to be saved and reinvested in the community. Instead, work has become a means to earn a wage in order to buy the material goods we are told we need by the advertising industry (Cushman, 1995; Kingwell, 1998).

In sum, contemporary career beliefs appear to be centred primarily around self-fulfillment and money. Although Protestantism has had a significant role in the historical development of modern Western culture, contemporary career texts owe as much to the

forces of secularism, individualism, capitalism and consumerism as they do to America's religious heritage. We continue to value work as an important part of life, and to some extent as a calling, but no longer in relation to a transcendental force or the common good. Instead we are "called" to work in order to achieve personal fulfillment and happiness, and to make money to buy material goods (which, as Kingwell, 1998, would argue, is ultimately an attempt to achieve happiness).

Youth Employment Themes and Cultural Career Beliefs

Participants in this study described their youth employment experiences as investments for career and character development, as part of their journeys towards self-discovery and self-actualization, as a means to financial gain, and in relation to contextual factors. As well, volunteer experiences were included as a principal theme in participants' narratives. This section will focus on relating these themes to the career ideologies that circulate in the North American historical and sociocultural context.

The first theme, youth employment as an investment, reveals both a characteristic of youth employment narratives and the process by which people develop these narratives. To use a literary analogy, the investment view of early employment serves a connective as well as a schematic purpose, functioning to link early chapters of career narratives to later chapters in the same story. For this reason, discussion of youth employment as an investment was used to support the argument that early work narratives are best understood in relation to more general career narratives. It seems to be the case that people in North American culture have come to expect early work to relate

to later career development and actively look for connections between first jobs and current employment.

The tendency to view early work as having future payoff is not a universal phenomenon. North America's historical context as well as contemporary theories and research have helped to develop the investment theme of youth employment. In particular, this theme relates to a Calvinist view of work. Puritan ideology continues to have some bearing on contemporary cultural texts, and the propensity to look back on early work as an investment is related to America's religious heritage (Taylor, 1991). Calvin encouraged people to work hard (at all stages of their working life, not just in adolescence) in order to be successful in their callings and develop Godly character. However, secularization, consumerism and individualism have transformed Puritan religious ideals. Early work, while still considered to be beneficial, is no longer considered to be merely an investment in eternal salvation, but rather, an investment in personal career development. In this study, participants stated that early jobs helped them develop skills, character traits and an appreciation for hard work that enabled them to get ahead in working life. As well, these jobs gave them opportunities to network and meet people who, again, could help further their careers.

A second theme that was prevalent in participants' early employment narratives was self-discovery and self-actualization. Participants described early jobs as being instrumental in helping them discover personal traits, values and interests. These comments reveal a tacit belief in an inner self waiting to be discovered and actualized. The individualistic ontological position revealed in this theme is reflective of the way the self is viewed in modern Western culture. This notion of self also has had a large effect

on our cultural conception of career. Beliefs about human identity passed down from the Romantic period (e.g., self-fulfillment is found by looking inward and everyone has an original way of being human) have transformed the way we think about career in our culture. No longer is one's "calling" found by looking to external sources such as God and society, as decreed by Luther and Calvin. Rather, determining one's career is a task that is accomplished by looking to one's inner self. Career choice has become one of the primary ways in which people express their individuality and personal identity. In light of cultural beliefs about the nature of self and the relationship between personal identity and career development that circulate in our culture, it is little wonder that early work is discussed in these terms. Participants spoke of youth employment as a time of personal discovery and of figuring out how they could realize their self-concept in the world of work.

Although self-discovery and actualization are important parts of individuals' youth employment stories, and these themes are embedded in theories of adolescent development (e.g., Erikson's psychosocial theory) and career development (e.g., Super's Life-Space, Life-Span theory), these theme do not appear to great extent in career research literature. There are several reasons for this omission. First, researchers who study career have, for the most part, "been schooled in the traditions of logical positivism" and principally use quantitative methods (Lee, Mitchell & Sablynski, 1999, p. 163). Therefore, existential themes are less likely to be the topic of investigation since it is difficult to assign a numeric value to constructs such as self-actualization and personal fulfillment. Second, references by participants to self-discovery and self-actualization in this study could be partly attributable to characteristics of the sample.

Participants were youth employment counsellors and the humanist influence on counselling has been profound (Cushman, 1995). Those who have been schooled or who work in this profession are likely to have been influenced by humanist philosophy and, therefore, to emphasize this perspective in the re-telling of their own narratives. However, although counsellors may be somewhat more likely to articulate humanist ideals, themes of self-discovery and self-actualization in career narratives certainly are not limited to those who work in this profession. As discussed earlier, the form of individualism passed down from the Romantic period has had a profound effect on modern Western culture, and the influence of humanist ideology is not limited to counsellors.

A third theme found to be prevalent in the narratives shared during this study was that of financial gain. Participants indicated that they worked to get money to spend on discretionary items such as clothes, travel, snacks, and entertainment, or worked to get money to go to school. As well, adolescent jobs were evaluated in terms of their level of pay.

As with the first two themes, mention of financial gain as an important aspect of youth employment is not unexpected given cultural career ideologies. In particular, this theme is closely related to consumerism which has influenced the way we think about work in North America. As suggested earlier, the positive valuation of accumulating wealth began with Calvinism (Weber, 1905/1958). However ideals that originally were linked with the notion of making money (such as frugality and the investment of financial gain back into the community) were dropped once a capitalist structure was firmly

established (Weber). Instead, the acquisition of material possessions, spurred on by the advertising industry, has become a trademark of contemporary Western culture.

Consumerism has been identified as one of the most pervasive and dominant influences on the North American psyche and is closely linked with humanist ideals of self-fulfillment. Both Cushman (1995) and Kingwell (1998) have argued that consumerism is associated with the focus on happiness in Western society. The feeling that we ought to be happy and, in fact, that it is our right to be happy, in combination with the lack of clear cultural ideas of how to go about achieving a lasting sense of contentment have resulted in an increase in consumerism as people internalize the messages disseminated by the advertising industry. These campaigns associate happiness with the acquisition of material products. Consumerism has affected the way we think about work because work gives us money to buy things that supposedly lead to happiness.

Youth employment is not impervious to the influence of consumerism in our culture. According to authors who have taken an economic perspective of youth employment, the value of young people's work in society always has been monetary. Jobs provide adolescents with enough money to spend in order to support major industries (e.g., clothing, makeup, magazine, movie and fast food industries), but not enough to bump them into adult market segments (Danesi, 1994; Esman, 1990; Hine, 1999).

The influence of consumerism and the importance of financial gain in youth employment are factors that have been considered in a few other studies. For example, Greenberger and Steinberg (1986) expressed concern that youth that work are more likely

to be materialistic. Finch et al. (1991) highlighted the importance of financial benefits in teens' evaluations of their jobs. He found that young people equated good pay with being appreciated and valued by their employer. Mortimer et al. (2002a) concluded that young people's perception that work enabled them to go out with friends was the only factor of adolescents' jobs that was significantly associated with improved mental health.

Thus far I have interpreted youth employment themes by showing how they are related to the wider sociocultural and historical context of career. The first three themes (youth employment as an investment, a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization, and means to financial gain) reveal the extent to which individualism and consumerism have influenced our shared understandings of career at all stages of working life. However, these are not the only themes that characterized youth employment narratives. Participants also made sense of early work by referring to contextual variables that affected their early participation in the labour market (e.g., family, education and the sociocultural and economic context) and spoke of their volunteer experiences (in some cases indicating that volunteering was of more value than working for money). These themes seem to run counter to the interpretive stance taken above. Rather than thinking about career development in purely individualistic terms, the participants in this study indicated that they recognized the role of at least some contextual variables in their lives and many indicated that they valued helping others as much, if not more, than making money. How does the inclusion of these themes in youth employment narratives fit with the career narratives in our culture?

There were three aspects of the social environment that participants incorporated into their stories of youth employment. Participants spoke of how their families,

schooling, and the socioeconomic context affected their early work. I will discuss each of these contextual components in turn.

Of the three subcategories included under the contextual heading, family was the one mentioned most often, and given the most emphasis in participants' stories. In particular, parental guidance appeared to be important in shaping the way participants made sense of early work. Interestingly, the messages participants received from their parents reflect career texts that circulate in our sociocultural context (e.g., "you should work to gain responsibility," "you should work to help figure out your interests and values," "if you want spending money you need to work to earn it"). In some cases, participants described how one parent would emphasize one perspective of career (e.g., "join the labour market so you can learn to be responsible and develop work ethic") whereas the other parent would emphasize a different career ideology (e.g., "it is most important to enjoy your job and to do work that fits with your values"). In these cases, participants described how they grappled with opposing messages and tried to accommodate both positions (e.g., they worked at a job to earn money and volunteered doing something they enjoyed in their spare time). Individuals, in many cases, internalized the opinions about youth work and career passed down in their families and attributed the origin of these messages to their parents.

Cushman (1995) has suggested that one of the results of individualism is an increase in the importance placed on the immediate family as an explanation for social reality. For example, personal success or failure is often attributed to one's family environment rather than to the larger cultural context. According to Cushman, we are "often unable to conceive of social interaction and the salience of cultural influence

beyond the rather isolated interactions contained within the couples dyad or the nuclear or at most extended family unit" (p. 240). This is not to say that parents do not play an important role in the career development process of their children. Clearly, as indicated by participants' narratives, family context and parents' messages about work and first jobs, were very important in shaping their children's outlook on working life. However, messages passed down from one generation to another are not unique to the immediate family context. Instead, they are representative of the career narratives that exist in our culture. Ascribing career messages to parents, rather than to the culture at large, is evidence of the degree to which the cultural context is limited to the immediate family unit in North American culture.

The second contextual factor that was included in participants' narratives was education. Education, like family, is a central part of life for youth. Since most young people are in school, interest in the relationship between education and work is to be expected. Indeed, the link between education and early work has been emphasized in the research literature. Youth work often has been evaluated in terms of its influence on academic achievement (Barling, et al., 1995; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Gottfredson, 1984; Mihalic & Elliott, 1997; Stern et al., 1990) and concern about the potentially negative effect on education has been one of the most persistent criticisms of youth employment (Bills et al., 1995; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). However, although education was mentioned as a part of the narratives shared in this study, the effect of work on school or vice versa was not emphasized. Participants treated school and work as two co-existing parts of life: they went to school during the day and worked in the evening, weekends and in the summers. A few participants expressed appreciation

for their employers' efforts to limit the degree to which their job interfered with school (e.g., limited work hours during the week, closing early on weeknights, flexible scheduling). However, no participant in this study indicated that work had interfered with their academic achievement, although some participants did mention that their parents cautioned them about this possibility and considered academic achievement a priority. Participants were more likely to indicate that they worked in order to finance their education and that work complemented their schooling by providing confidence and practical work experience. The effect of work on education did not seem to play a large part in helping participants make sense of early work.

Not only did participants refer to family and education, they also discussed the role of the sociocultural and economic context on early work. For example, some participants described how the vitality of the local economy had influenced the job opportunities that were available, and national or regional laws affected the age at which they began to work. For the most part, participants concentrated on the attributes of their immediate community or cultural background (e.g., "my parents are European immigrants so they expected all of their children to work") and how this affected their early employment. However, one of the focus group discussions explored how cultural norms affected the way participants thought about youth work. In this group, one of the members had spent part of her youth in the Middle East and compared the perspective of adolescent employment in her home country (not encouraged) to the view of adolescent employment in North America (encouraged). As participants compared stories and opinions of youth employment, members of the group who had grown up in Canada

identified the degree to which their understandings of youth work were informed by their cultural context.

The relationship between the sociocultural and economic context and youth employment has not been studied extensively. However, the influence of the context on youth work is apparent given the negative correlation between youth employment and adult employment rates (Bushnik, 2003). These statistics indicate that when there are jobs to be filled adolescents are hired, but when there is a shortage of jobs adolescents are kept out of the labour market. Popular opinions of youth work seem to follow suit. In times of economic recession (for example, during the Depression in the 1930s) government policy makers, youth advocates, parents and labour unions have extolled the virtues of education in adolescent development and suggested that youth should be kept out of the labour market for their own benefit. In times of economic prosperity (as in post-WW2), legislation limiting youth work has been ignored and government commissioned panels concluded that early employment was the best preparation for adulthood (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

The inclusion of family, education, and the sociocultural and economic context in youth employment narratives indicates that although there are strong individualistic leanings in the way career is thought of in North America, there is not complete unawareness of the role of context in people's lives. However, the extent to which contextual factors are recognized seems to depend on their proximity to the individual. Factors such as one's immediate family, schooling, or local community are more likely to be incorporated into career narratives than are sociocultural ideologies or the economic structure.

Gadamer's notion of cultural "horizons" is a helpful way of thinking about how different themes may be incorporated into sense-making narratives. Horizons are "the culture's particular way of perceiving. The placement of the horizon determines what there is 'room for' and what is precluded from view" (Cushman, 1995, p. 21). As a culture's horizon is shifted new things "show up" on the cultural landscape and, thus, reinforce this shift. If an idea or trend is beyond the horizon, it is, in that particular culture, as though that idea did not exist. Therefore, as the individual becomes more prominent on the cultural horizon in contemporary North America, and contextual factors fade from view, it is more likely that individualistic themes will be included in youth employment narratives and less likely that sociocultural, historical, or economic factors will be used to make sense of early work.

The final theme prevalent in this study is volunteer experiences. A number of participants included volunteer work in their early employment narratives although they were not asked to talk about these experiences. Notably, this theme was only expressed in the narratives of the younger participants in the study (all of those that emphasized volunteering were under the age of 30). For this group of participants, volunteer opportunities appeared to be equally, if not more, important than paid employment. The benefits of volunteering were similar to the benefits of paid work described by other participants. For example, volunteer work helped participants learn about themselves and different jobs, and gave them valuable experience that helped them gain further employment. There are several aspects of this theme that I would like to examine more closely.

First, although not asked to discuss these experiences, mention of volunteer work was spontaneously included in many participants' narratives. This may be attributable to characteristics of the sample. All of the individuals that took part in this research volunteered to participate. It is possible that these individuals are particularly civic-minded and are not representative of the population as a whole. Secondly, the participants all currently work in the helping profession. They have chosen a career path that values helping others. Thus, during the retelling of their early work narratives they may have chosen to highlight aspects of their histories (such as volunteering) that relate to their current work positions. However, neither of these propositions explain why volunteer experiences were included only by the younger participants.

This fact is better explained by examining features of the demographic group and sociocultural context. The focus on volunteering could very well be a reflection of the idealistic tendencies of the baby bust cohort (1967 to 1979), as noted by Foot and Stoffman in "Boom, Bust and Echo" (1996). The baby bust cohort is smaller than the preceding baby boom generation (due to the commercialization of the birth control pill in the early 1960s) and, unlike the back-end boomers, entitled Generation X, baby-busters have had more access to resources throughout their lives (e.g., school resources, summer camps, part-time jobs) thanks to the declining birth rate. The effect of abundant opportunities is a generation that is more idealistic than other cohort groups. According to Foot and Stoffman:

> the baby-busters have had a pretty good life so far, and when the world
> has treated you well, you have the luxury of being able to pay attention to
> social issues, such as peace, the environment, and AIDS, and therefore are
> more inclined to do so. (p. 23)

Idealistic tendencies may take the form of volunteering and thus, it is possible, that the emphasis on volunteering discussed by those under the age of 30 in this study is at least partly attributable to cohort effects.

Another contributing factor to this finding could be the declining variation in adolescent job types. Although the rates of youth employment have remained relatively constant over the past 50 years, types of jobs have become increasingly homogenous. The overwhelming majority of youth work opportunities are now in the service sector (Aronson et al., 1996). Therefore, although those born in the past 30 years would have had many jobs available to them, there was limited choice in the types of jobs. Indeed, older participants recognized that the youth work context had changed since they were young and some mentioned that many of the opportunities that were available to them are not available now. The propensity for volunteering, therefore, could have been a result of a desire to seek work opportunities that varied from the norm. The volunteer work described by participants (e.g., working in group homes, hospitals, or community centres) offered a higher degree of responsibility and meaning, as opposed to the paid employment opportunities that were available in the service sector.

Does the trend towards seeking out and emphasizing volunteer opportunities indicate a decline in consumerist forces in cultural career ideology? After all, it appears that youth in the younger cohort differentiated between jobs they did for money (which, for the most part, were not highly valued) and experiences that were meaningful to them (which were usually unpaid). Indeed, participants that emphasized volunteer work over paid employment during the focus groups indicated that helping others and contributing to the community was more important than making money. However, the following story

shared by Miriam indicates that the degree to which working for others without pay is

accepted in our culture is limited.

> An experience that I can add that is explicitly about employment and youth. I was a participant in an HRDC funded youth employment program when I was 26 . . . it was this program called Youth Service Canada where they funded groups of up to 12 youth age 18 to 29 to do community service work and at this same time to learn job skills and create a career plan and it was with the view to getting these people employed later and there was a mandate to include a certain number of at-risk youth and I was one of the odd ones . . . There were a few, I don't know, maybe 5 out of 12 who were on social assistance and didn't live with their parents anymore and hadn't continued after high school or hadn't even finished high school. I was the only person who had done any kind of post-secondary education. So we had to create this career plan to hand in at the end of six months and we were supposed to designate time to work on it and we would go for career counselling and we'd get computer workshops and all sorts of things, help making our resume and whatnot and then we had to hand them in to the HRDC supervisor for the program who would review them all and comment on them after our program coordinator looked at them. My career plan was that I was going to do volunteer work with the view to getting work in an area that I enjoyed. And, that was not an acceptable career plan for the HRDC. They wanted a job, an occupation and I, the only one I would commit to was that I wanted to work in a non-profit sector and that my plan was not to work. It was to deliberately not work in order to meet people and get experience and gain skills and get a better idea of what I wanted to do with the idea that I'd be more likely to keep a job after those kinds of experiences and enjoy it and know that I'm applying for something that is right for me. And I was astounded that they, I mean I knew I was taking a risk in writing this career plan, but they complained about it and criticized the coordinators of the program for choosing me as a participant in the first place because I was overqualified yet my career plan was not appropriate because it didn't involve going out and getting work and they weren't paying for people to go through the program in order to say that they weren't going to go and work. [group laughs] So, that's one story. And they followed up on us three months and six months after the program and I was employed and half of the other people weren't. So, it was interesting. I wonder if they thought twice about that afterwards . . . And many of the other people who were working were flipping burgers and whatnot and I was coordinating the youth program.

This story reveals that although volunteer work is encouraged for youth, choosing

to work without pay is not accepted as a "regular" adult career choice in our culture. As is

evident in this story, volunteering is especially not accepted as a career choice by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), whose goal is to move people into the workforce.

Volunteering, rather than being a career destination, is considered to be a path to employment. The possibility of working for a reason other than money goes against career ideology in North America and, as stated by Kingwell (1998): "[ideologies] envelop us in a circle of conceptual possibility, telling us that it is, for example, 'unthinkable' not to work for money" (p. 174). Thus, according to the participants in this study, although volunteer work is an important part of early career development, it is expected that youth eventually will move on and work for pay, as per the cultural norm.

In conclusion, the themes that characterize the youth employment narratives shared in this study are related to career ideologies that exist in contemporary North American culture. In other words, the ways that people look back on early work and make sense of these experiences are related to cultural beliefs about career that have historical origins and circulate in the sociocultural context. In particular, the themes that individuals employ to help them make sense of youth work can be traced to the history of Protestantism in North America, and to the effects of individualism, capitalism and consumerism on our shared understandings of life and work. The impact of these historical trends is particularly apparent in the following early work themes: youth employment as an investment, as a journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization and as a means to financial gain.

Two other themes found to be prevalent in participants' narratives (youth employment as related to contextual factors and volunteer experiences) add complexity to

the interpretation. These themes seem to dispute the claim that career and youth employment are considered primarily in an individualistic manner and in terms of money and personal fulfillment. The stories participants shared in this study indicate that they recognize the role of context in their lives and, in many cases, value the work they did for free more than the work they did for pay. However, the influences of individualism and consumerism are still apparent, to some degree, in these explanations of early employment. Participants were more likely to incorporate contextual factors that were immediate and local in their explanations of early work than they were to describe the influence of the wider context on their experiences. Although self-contained individualism is not all-encompassing, it has considerable power and focuses attention on the person and factors that are close to the individual rather than explaining the world in terms of broad societal and cultural trends.

The tendency to mention volunteering in early employment narratives amongst younger participants (under 30 years of age) likely is linked to the demographic characteristics of this group and trends in the labour market. The limited types of employment options that have been available to youth in the past 20 years, in combination with the idealistic tendencies that are characteristic of the baby bust cohort, may have both contributed to the value placed on volunteering. However, it appears that although youth are encouraged to volunteer, volunteering is not considered to be a long-term career choice and it is expected that eventually young people will find jobs that pay.

Youth Employment Counselling Practice

The third question of this study concerned the connection between early employment narratives of career counsellors and their work with youth.

The link between counsellors' personal lives and their professional practice (especially in personal and family counselling) has been well documented (Brammer et al., 1989; Ivey et al., 1987; Kottler, 1986; Kottler & Parr, 2000). The findings of this study indicate that this connection also applies to career counselling. Participants, with few exceptions, recognized a connection between their early employment experiences and their approach to youth employment counselling. However, the way in which participants used their personal experiences varied. Some said that they referred to their early work and shared the lessons they had learned explicitly. Others recognized the connection between their own career histories and their view of youth employment, but did not make explicit reference to personal experiences during sessions. A few participants said that their own early work had caused them to favour or disfavour certain jobs and they purposefully tried to limit the effect of this bias with their clients.

The themes in participants' personal youth employment narratives also appeared in descriptions of their work with clients. In many cases, themes that had been emphasized in a participant's personal narrative also were emphasized in his or her practice. For example, if a participant described his or her own work experience as a good investment, he or she was likely to encourage clients to "invest" in work at a young age in order to gain the same benefits. However, there was not complete overlap between themes emphasized in personal narratives and professional practice. Although participants used a variety of themes to make sense of their early work, they were much

more likely to emphasize certain themes (namely, youth employment as an investment, youth employment a process of self-discovery and self-actualization, and the importance of volunteer experiences) in their practice. Participants rarely mentioned the effect of context (family, education or sociocultural and economic factors) or financial matters in sessions with clients.

Participants' accentuation of certain themes in practice is significant and revealing of the way the counselling profession interacts with the wider context. The growth of the counselling profession in North America coincided with the development of the modern era. A number of authors (e.g., Cushman, 1995l; Woolfolk, 1998) argue that the forces that issued in modernity also affected the expansion of psychology and counselling. As a result of secularism, individualism, and scientism, old ways of making sense of life (e.g., religious worldviews) dropped beyond the cultural horizon and space was made for therapeutic services and language to appear and gain in prominence on the cultural landscape. However, the relationship between the context and counselling has not been unidirectional. Therapeutic services (whether that be psychotherapy, clinical psychology or counselling) stepped into the vacancy provided by pre-modern worldviews and, in turn, further shifted and reinforced the culture's horizon of intelligibility. As stated by Woolfolk: "The relation between psychotherapy and culture is one of reciprocal influence. Psychotherapy continually absorbs and reflects the culture of which it is a part, while at the same time placing its own distinctive imprint on that culture" (p. 2). The themes that counsellors emphasize both reflect the status quo and serve to reinforce certain ways of thinking about youth employment. Cushman describes how counselling can affect the sociocultural context:

> Social practices, especially intellectual discourse like psychotherapy,
> influence by being not the hammer that pounds, but the brush that paints.
> Scenes are brought into view through language, cultural metaphors, and
> habitual activities that set the parameters of what is possible; within a
> particular scene, certain things can then "show up," and others cannot.
> (p. 251)

Participants' focus on youth employment as an investment strengthens the belief

that youth work is related to later career development. As discussed earlier, there is a

cultural expectation that early jobs will benefit people in terms of career and character

development and stories of lessons learned in first jobs abound. This theme, closely

related to a positive valuation of work and a belief in self-determination (i.e., those who

work hard will reap the benefits), is rooted in North America's history and religious

heritage and is buttressed by counsellors' emphasis on working early for later payoffs.

A second theme prevalent in youth employment practice was that of youth work

as a journey of self-discovery and self-actualization. It is no surprise that this theme,

which reflects the pervasiveness of romantic individualism in Western culture, affects

counselling practice. In contemporary culture, the view of individuals as bounded,

autonomous, inherently good beings is ubiquitous. Cushman describes the pervasiveness

of individualism in North America:

> one of the prominent American traditions is a belief in the existence of the
> spiritual and moral "goodness" of the individual's interior, and the
> imperative of helping the inner self to grow, prosper, and be liberated by
> becoming more emotionally expressive and more valued in the
> individual's everyday decision-making process. Although the influence of
> this romantic idea has waxed and waned in the cultural landscape, it has
> on the whole been an influential idea, especially in the last 150 years. (p.
> 221)

Individualism is both a defining feature of modern life and a central component of the

majority of counselling theories. In fact, according to those who have traced the

development of both modernity and psychotherapy, psychological and counselling theories that incorporated ideals such as self-determining freedom and moral independence have played a large role in the construction and adaptation of the individualistic ontology dominant in Western culture (Cushman, 1995; Woolfolk, 1998). Therefore, participants' inclusion of humanist ideals in practice is not unanticipated; nor is the accompanying focus on clients' self-esteem a surprise.

Not only do themes emphasized in counselling help to shape cultural texts, so too do ideas that are not part of the discourse. The effect of including certain narrative themes and minimizing or ignoring others helps to shape the cultural landscape. An individualistic view of youth employment and career is likely further entrenched by the lack of reference to contextual variables by counsellors in their practice. Although participants made sense of early work by describing personal experiences in terms family, education, and the cultural and economic conditions of their communities, references to context rarely were included in discussion of professional practice. Eventually, certain notions drop beyond the horizon, shaping the shared understandings of a culture and limiting the way we look at life. In terms of youth employment, if counsellors consistently highlight certain cultural texts over others, the effect is to guide youth to think about work in specific ways.

I have argued above that personal fulfillment and happiness on the one hand, and consumerism on the other, influence the way we think about career in our culture. Although the focus on self-discovery and actualization and the minimal attention granted contextual factors in youth employment counselling support the notion of self-fulfillment in career, the lack of attention paid to financial gain in counselling sessions and the

tendency to recommend volunteering to youth are difficult to interpret in light of the individualistic and consumeristic characteristics of the wider context.

In particular, it is surprising that given the extent to which materialism and consumerism are postulated to be central components of North American culture, financial gain rarely was mentioned, and certainly not emphasized, in participants' work with young clients. Although the financial benefits of part-time work were raised repeatedly in participants' personal narratives, few said that they raised the topic of money and financial management with their clients. I believe there are several reasons for the lack of attention paid to this theme in participants' practices.

First, I think that the counselling profession tends to emphasize the self-fulfillment and actualization aspects of career over finances. This likely has something to do with counsellors' personal reasons for selecting this line of work, as well as the pervasive influence of humanism in counselling. Humanist philosophy would promote the view that people should "follow their heart" in choosing their career rather than choosing a career based on money.

Second, it is possible that the lack of reference to financial gain in participants' descriptions of their practice is, in fact, evidence of the pervasiveness of the ideology of consumerism in our culture. The power of every ideology is in its ability to exist and influence below the level of conscious awareness. As cited by Kingwell (1998):

> . . . ideology is troubling precisely because it can be difficult for even the
> most intelligent people to see. "Ideology by definition thrives beneath
> consciousness," according to the sociologist Dick Hebdige [1979], a critic
> of Marxist crude version. "It is here, at the level of 'normal common
> sense,' that ideological frames of reference are most firmly sedimented
> and most effective, because it is here that their ideological nature is most
> effectively concealed." (pp. 172-173)

Thus, although ideological beliefs shape all aspects of life, including the way we approach career development and youth employment, they are unrecognizable as a social force because they appear to be "just the way things are." With respect to our cultural conception of career, consumeristic ideology influences us to the point where it becomes " 'unthinkable' not to work for money" (Kingwell, p. 174). Therefore, although counsellors recognize that wanting money was part of their own motivations for working as adolescents, they may be less likely to purposefully raise the issue of finances or wages with their clients because getting paid for work is considered to be such a "natural" part of life.

The extent to which participants encouraged young clients to volunteer seems to run counter to both individualist and consumerist trends in modern culture (Cushman, 1995; Kingwell, 1998, 2000; Taylor, 1991). In part, the support for volunteer activities can be linked to the changing nature of youth employment. Participants were aware of the limited types of work available to youth and recognized that if young people wanted to get experience outside of the service sector they needed to seek out volunteer opportunities. However, participants' support for volunteering also may be indicative of a desire to do meaningful work and reconnect with community in our culture (in spite of the pervasive influence of individualism and consumerism). This shift in the cultural landscape is evident in the increase in writings that seek to reveal the underlying ideology of individualism and the long-term effects of this way of being on our culture (see Cushman, 1995; Kingwell, 1998, 2000; Saul, 1995; Taylor, 1991; Woolfolk, 1998). It is likely, if not conceivable, that as critiques of modern ideologies and a renewed interest in the common good enter the cultural discourse, the value placed on activities that serve the

community will increase. Granted, as mentioned previously, acceptance of volunteer work still is limited (i.e., volunteering may be suitable for youth, but it is not a long-term career choice encouraged for adults). Nonetheless, I tentatively suggest that the value placed on volunteering by the counsellors in this study may be indicative of an ancillary cultural text that influences the way people think about work in North America.

Summary

The interpretation of the findings is broken down into three arguments. First, youth employment narratives are described as being one part of a more general career narrative. People make sense of early work in relation to more recent career events and understand past jobs in light of present work situations. In fact, it appears that in North America, early work is expected to contribute to later career development. Second, and related to the first claim, I have suggested that in order to understand youth employment narratives it is necessary to examine the career texts that circulate in the contemporary sociocultural context. Protestant theology in combination with social forces such as secularism, individualism, capitalism, and consumerism have shaped the way we think about career in North America. In particular, work tends to be thought of as the sphere in which one finds self-fulfillment and makes money and, thus, the youth employment themes that were found to be prevalent in this study can be interpreted in light of these career ideologies. Third, although youth employment counsellors tend to highlight those themes that characterize their own personal narratives in their work with young clients (e.g., if one's own story is structured around the theme of youth employment as an investment, this theme is emphasized in one's professional practice), this overlap is

limited to certain themes. Namely, although a variety of themes were included in the personal narratives shared by participants, in practice counsellors focused on youth employment as an investment, as a process of self-discovery and self-actualization and on volunteer opportunities. I have argued that this selectivity both reflects the conception of career that exists in our context as well as reinforces the status quo.

Evaluation of the Interpretation

An essential component of any research project is the evaluation of results. The influence of positivism in the social sciences is considerable, and this influence extends to evaluation of the results in the majority of research. Since research used to study human phenomena traditionally has been modeled after methods used with success in the natural sciences (namely, the scientific method), the truthfulness of the account is determined by assessing the reliability and validity of the account (or, in the case of qualitative research, modified versions of the same criteria) (Richardson et al., 1999).

A central component of Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a critique of this approach to research in the human sciences. Gadamer argues that a positivist approach to research assumes that truth is determined by rigorous and careful application of method. Thus, research findings are determined to be "true" or "false" based on the extent to which the researcher has applied methods intended to remove subjectivity from the investigation and insure a neutral, objective stance. The elevation of method to determinant of truth is termed methodologism (Grondin, 1994).

In response to methodologism, Gadamer emphasizes that knowledge and interpretation are embedded in history and culture, and that the ideal of the objective,

neutral researcher is an impossibility. The background understandings the researcher

brings to any investigation are the necessary pre-conditions of inquiry and it is impossible

to eliminate the effects of context through method (Richardson et al., 1999). As well,

hermeneutic philosophy argues that truth should be considered to be a faithful

representation of the entity under investigation. As opposed to considering research a

process of discovering transhistorical representations of "the way things really are,"

hermeneutics recognizes that all research findings are situated in time and place

(Richardson et al.). Gadamer is critical of the tendency to equate method with truth,

pointing out that methodologies cannot validate theory, given that methods are

themselves based on theoretical beliefs. As stated by Richardson et al.:

> [Methods] presuppose a number of things about what the world is really
> like, what truth about the world would resemble, and what is worth
> knowing in the first place – without which we could not even know we
> needed methods in the first place, let alone which ones would serve our
> needs. Therefore, methods are hardly in a position to serve as an
> independent test of our theories or beliefs. (p. 178)

However, this critique is not meant to be a sweeping condemnation of the role of method

in the social sciences. Grondin (1994) states:

> [Gadamer] never intended any sharp opposition between truth and method.
> Certainly truth can be achieved by way of method. What he considered
> dubious was merely the claim on the part of modern methodological
> consciousness to a monopoly, its dogmatic assertion that there can be no
> truth outside of method. (p. 132)

Unlike postmodernist positions which have reacted against positivism and

methodologism by retreating to relativism and disavowing the notion of truth, "in the

hermeneutic world-view, an interpretive account can be true or false" (Packer & Addison,

1989, p. 275). Whilst acknowledging the inevitability of subjectivity in interpretation,

hermeneutics does not consider all accounts to be equally good and leaves open the possibility of applying evaluative criteria (apart from pragmatic criteria often utilized by constructivists). Hermeneutics "is a sort of 'middle-way' between objectivism and relativism" (Sass, 1988, p. 254) in which truth is viewed as "a faithful presenting of aspects of reality – a being true to – which is open to change" (Richardson et al., 1999, p. 228). According to Kingwell (1998) it is possible to evaluate an interpretation without sliding into positivism or relativism if one considers the context of the interpretation and evaluation. He states: ". . . objectivity is once more available in morals and epistemology . . . it is vindicated by, paradoxically, taking the limits of context seriously" (p. 310).

Packer and Addison (1989) have proposed four evaluative criteria which they suggest can be applied to hermeneutic research. A good interpretive account should be coherent (i.e., plausible and intelligible), related to external evidence (i.e., interpretation of people's words and actions should be related to what they actually meant), contribute to discussion amongst researchers, and increase understanding of reality (possibly, depending on the subject matter, so that reality might be transformed). According to Martin and Sugarman (2001), these criteria are "embedded in forms of persuasive reasoning developed over centuries" (p. 202). Rather than determining whether an account is timelessly and universally "true," this evaluative approach is similar to the type of criteria one might employ when considering another's position during a conversation or debate. Does the argument make sense? Is it an accurate description of reality? Does it add to what has been said so far? Will it change the way we understand and act in the world? An interpretation will not be valid for all times and in all places. Rather, an interpretation is a claim that accounts for the findings in a sensible and

convincing way and offers a solution to the question that motivated the inquiry in the first place.

The goal of hermeneutic research is to "[open] up new perspectives, rather than attempting an unattainable complete justification of perspectives that we currently hold" (Martin & Sugarman, 2001, p. 202). Thus a "true" interpretation is one that represents the entity being investigated as accurately as possible, elucidates the question by "[fostering] greater awareness of the role of cultural and historical factors in the constitution of experience and behaviour, as well as greater concern with action in the world" (Sass, 1988, p. 261), and contributes meaningfully to the ongoing cultural and historic dialogue on the issue.

This study was motivated by a desire to seek clarity on the matter of youth employment. The various opinions expressed by friends, family, and in the research literature stimulated me to seek out how views of early work related to the historical and sociocultural context. This was accomplished by taking a hermeneutic-narrative stance and collecting stories of youth employment that were analyzed for contextual themes. The findings were placed within time and place and were explained in relation to the wider context. Understanding the themes prevalent in narratives on youth employment and their cultural and historic origins helps to explain the disparate views on youth employment in contemporary Western culture. The specific contributions of the interpretation from this study to theory, research, practice and counsellor education are presented in chapter five.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study investigated themes in early work narratives, the process of narrative development, and the relationship between youth employment counsellors' personal narratives and professional practice. Results and interpretation were presented in chapter four. This chapter focuses on implications of the findings for theory, research, employment counselling practice and counsellor education, the generalizability and limitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

Implications for Career Development Theory

The present study is a response to the call of Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) for researchers to "experiment with the [hermeneutic] method by investigating the career development of people in various stages of life . . . [in the hope that], in the long run this will contribute toward the development of a meaning-based, career development theory" (p. 10).

This study focused on youth employment, one aspect of career development in Western societies. Despite the specific focus of this research, the findings have implications for a meaning-based, ecological theory of career. Themes used to make sense of early work are shown to be related to the cultural explanations of career that exist in North American society and culture. Understanding the lived experience of working life within sociocultural and historical context is the essence of a hermeneutic approach to career development.

A hermeneutic view of career focuses on the subjective experience of career within the wider context. Personal interpretations of working life take narrative form and are constituted by historical and cultural "voices." Although humans are agentic beings, they are constrained by context. People live within the bounds of language, social institutions, history, culture and ideology, all of which form the basis for their understandings of life and work. Career, at least in Western society, is one of the primary narrative frameworks that people use to give sense to life events.

Implications for Research

The focus and scope of this study differ from youth employment research that has been done thus far. In contrast to research focusing on one aspect of youth employment (e.g., effect of the number of hours worked on academic success, the influence of early employment on adolescents' perceived sense of mastery), the present study offers a framework that makes sense of the disparate conclusions presented in the literature by relating them to the historical and cultural views of early work.

The interpretation offered in this study helps to explain the various findings in the research literature on youth employment. Diverse themes have emerged as a result of the historical development of youth employment in North American culture. At various points in history, different interpretations have been emphasized by government policy makers, researchers, educators, youth advocates and the advertising industry. At times, early employment has been viewed as a good investment for youth and as a stepping stone to character and career development. At other times, early employment has been viewed as a detriment to educational achievement, identity formation and healthy

adolescent development. Youth employment also has given rise to a new market group that has been targeted by advertising firms and maintained industries. For these industries and the general economy, the most important aspect of early employment is financial. Researchers live in the same social world as the people they study. Just as the participants in this investigation implicitly and explicitly subscribe to sociocultural beliefs that provoke them to emphasize certain themes over others, researchers also, to great extent, instantiate sociocultural beliefs in their interpretations of findings.

As well, this research adds to an emerging interest in hermeneutically inspired psychological study (e.g., Cushman, 1995; Kingwell, 1998, 2000; Martin & Sugarman, 1999, 2001; Packer & Addison, 1989; Richardson et al., 1999) and to a small number of research studies that have applied hermeneutic philosophy to the study of career (Collin & Young, 1988; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Young & Collin, 1988, 1992).

Implications for Practice

Hermeneutic analyses of counselling have suggested that therapy is best conceptualized as a moral enterprise (Cushman, 1995; Richardson et al., 1999; Woolfolk, 1998). Although counselling has tended to be conceived as neutral and objective, along the same lines as the medical profession, historical study reveals that this conception is inaccurate. Messages about being human and living well are implicit in counselling theories, transmitted through practice, and have a bearing on the social milieu. Cushman states, "although therapy often presents itself as neutral, objective science, it not only reflects but also reproduces power relationships, cultural values, and the current configuration of the self" (p. 208). Although counselling can shape both individuals'

understandings of their lives and, over time, the cultural landscape, the counselling profession traditionally has been "uncomfortable with grappling with how therapy practices are unintentionally political and how they unknowingly reinforce the status quo" (Cushman, p. 248).

A hermeneutic perspective of counselling raises two important points. First, counsellors, whether they wish to be or not, are part of the moral discourse of society. The "voices" of counselling theories and practices are important, albeit, often unintentional parts of the ongoing debate about life and can have subtle but lasting effects on the social structure of society (Cushman, 1995). Second, hermeneutics recognizes that it is impossible for counsellors to be neutral. Neutrality is itself a moral position and so no matter what the counsellor says or does he or she is, in effect, taking a moral stand. The difficulty the counselling profession has in recognizing the morality inherent in the discipline can be, in part, attributed to the widespread liberal neutralism in North America which is reflected in counselling theories, ethics, and practices. The basic tenet of this moral ideal is that "a liberal society must be neutral on questions of what constitutes a good life" (Taylor, 1991, p. 17). What is problematic about this ideal is, of course, that it is, in fact, a moral position. This belief, although pervasive in contemporary culture, is difficult to recognize or debate given its very nature.

Findings from the present study reveal the lack of neutrality in professional practice. Participants were likely to discuss youth employment with their clients using the same themes that characterized their personal early employment narrative. As well, overall, participants tended to focus on certain themes of early work in their practice (youth employment as an investment, as a journey towards self-discovery and self-

actualization, and volunteering) and ignore or minimize other themes (youth employment as a means to financial gain and the relationship between youth employment and the broader social and historical context). Based on a hermeneutic reconceptualization of counselling and the findings from this study, I would like to offer the following recommendations for those working as youth employment counsellors or practitioners.

First, it is recommended that youth employment counsellors be cognizant of the way their work affects the lives of clients and the wider cultural context. Not only are they helping young people learn about working life and find jobs, they also have the potential to shape the way youth think about career and, ultimately, to shape the cultural ideologies of career. Career development theories and practices can either reinforce or challenge contemporary notions of career, and counsellors need to be intentional about the messages they convey about working life.

Second, a hermeneutic conceptualization of therapy would suggest that a central role of youth employment counsellors and practitioners is to help clients sort through the various career messages that circulate in the sociocultural and historical context in order to help them develop a coherent and cohesive personal narrative. Career is a central narrative framework in North America, and the career story being formed is essential to the lives of their clients (Young & Collin, 1992). However, career and youth employment are complex issues, and various themes can be used to make sense of working life. Thus, the job of the youth employment counsellor can be considered as helping young people to understand and critically evaluate the cultural "voices" that offer different and potentially conflicting opinions of youth work and career. Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) describe this approach to employment counselling:

counselling in general, including vocational counselling, should be re-conceptualized as a moral enterprise through which counsellor and client negotiate various possibilities of becoming in life, taking into account the multiple and often shifting meaning systems (including the indigenous) that have become, or are being appropriated into the self (Christopher, 1996; Peavy, 1997). In particular, career development could be reconceptualised as a writing and a re-writing of selves; an open-ended process in which individuals struggle with the various meanings and voices afforded them by their cultural and social contexts. (p. 8)

Third, youth employment counsellors need to think carefully about the type of stories they are helping clients develop. In contrast to liberal neutrality, a hermeneutic approach to counselling acknowledges that counsellors are bound to influence clients' lives. Further, a hermeneutic-narrative approach to counselling is not relativistic and recognizes that some life stories are better than others. So, what makes a good career narrative?

The value of any career story depends on its context. As stated by Kingwell (1998), determining the criteria of a good narrative is "a matter for the ongoing conversation in which any genuine human community partakes" (p. 310). Of course, there are bound to be disputes about what constitutes a worthy career. However, this debate is to be expected and encouraged, for "a healthy human community is also one in which challenges to value are constant" (p. 311). Several writers have suggested factors which characterize good career narratives in contemporary North American context. For example, Cochran (1997) has proposed that agency; balance of subjective and objective perspectives of career (i.e., balance between the personal value placed on the job and the characteristics of the job, such as value to society, level of pay, and prestige, recognized by others in one's context); and integration of past, present and future career events are narrative qualities that are the most effective in this context. In addition, Kingwell

suggests that good career narratives are those in which the work that one does is valuable and worthwhile. He defines work of this nature as jobs that contribute to the welfare of the community and "help us live more comfortably, more equitably, more joyfully and more beautifully" (p. 311). In sum, Cochran and Kingwell have suggested that good career narratives are those that display agency, place value on both personal opinions and the external characteristics of the job, integrate past and present career experiences with future career expectations, and evaluate jobs in terms of worthiness (i.e., the degree to which they contribute to the welfare of society).

Fourth, based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that youth employment counsellors be conscious of the messages about career and youth work they implicitly and explicitly communicate to their clients through the youth employment themes they include in their practice. Participants in this study tended to emphasize youth employment as an investment and as a journey towards self-actualization and self-discovery. They also emphasized the benefits of volunteering. Participants did not focus on the relationship between youth employment and contextual factors, or on the financial gain of early jobs.

Overlooking contextual influences and highlighting subjectivity in career indicates a continual reinforcement of North American individualism by career counsellors. Note that the type of individualism that permeates contemporary Western culture (and North America in particular) has been described by numerous authors as a deviation from individualistic ideals (such as personal freedom, respect for the individual, and self-fulfillment) which were promoted historically (Kingwell, 1998, 2000; Saul, 1995; Taylor, 1991). North American individualism tends to view each human being as

autonomous and separate from the social and historical context and, as a result, has been

described as a narcissistic and self-centred form of individualism (Taylor). This debased

form of individualism has been linked to such concerns as civic passivity, lack of care for

the environment, erosion of community, consumerism, and corporatism (Cushman, 1995;

Kingwell; Orr, 1994; Saul; Taylor). Therefore, the tendency of counsellors to reinforce

Western individualism is concerning. Specific to employment counselling, focus on the

subjective aspect of career, with a lack of attention granted contextual factors in career

development, may result in a disregard for the impact of one's vocational choices on the

wider context.

In order to counteract the tendency to propagate individualism in career

counselling it is suggested that those who work in this field actively seek to acknowledge

the relationship between individual career choices and the sociocultural context. This is

not to say that counsellors should abandon ideals such as self-discovery, self-

actualization, meaningful employment, and personal satisfaction in their work with

youth. However, as has been argued by Taylor (1991), these ideals can only be realized if

one recognizes his or her connection to the wider context (for further development of this

argument see Cushman, 1995, Kingwell, 1998, and Taylor). In order to help clients take

this perspective of career it is suggested that youth employment counsellors take some or

all of the following steps.

1. Discuss with clients how messages from their context influence their understandings

    (or stories) of early work and career in order to help them identify and name the

    "voices" that affect how they make sense of their lives (e.g., How does your decision

    to work at this stage of your life relate to the messages about work you have received

from your family?...from friends?...from teachers?... from other people in your life?...from the media?...from your culture? What messages have influenced you the most?).

2. Discuss the influence of contextual factors on career in employment counselling (e.g., How does your decision to work/not to work relate to the messages you have received from your family? How will having a job influence your educational goals? How will your schooling affect your job? How common is it for youth in your community to work? How do you think the types of jobs that are available to you relate to the characteristics of your community? What are the cultural expectations that motivate you to work/not to work?).

3. Invite parents to be a part of the youth employment counselling process. Discuss familial "mottos" and occupational, work value, and career patterns and explore how these are related to the wider cultural and historical context (e.g., What occupational, work value, and career patterns are evident in your immediate and extended family? How does this family heritage affect the way people in your family think about early employment and career? How does this heritage affect the messages passed on between generations? How do these messages relate to your cultural context? Do you think your family's perspective is reflective or different from the messages in the dominant culture about early work and career?).

4. Become involved in youth employment advocacy. In this study, participants indicated in their own narratives that it was important that early work was meaningful (i.e., a feeling of contributing to the welfare of society and helping others), complemented rather than interfered with school, and well paid. A number of participants recognized

that jobs with these characteristics were not as common now as in the past. Participants appeared to be responding to this changing reality by encouraging clients to seek out and engage in volunteer activities. However, I would also like to suggest that youth employment counsellors make it part of their practice to advocate on behalf of young workers in order to broaden the types and improve the quality of employment opportunities that are available to youth.

The findings of this study also have implications for career counsellors that work with adult clients. According to Cochran (1997), a good career narrative is one with a tripartite temporal structure (i.e., incorporates past and present events with future career goals). The themes identified in this study could be used to help clients enlarge and enrich their career narratives in retrospect by offering a variety of interpretations. This could benefit people who are looking for work and preparing for job interviews by helping them to consider and capitalize on the various ways in which their record of employment has helped them to build a constellation of skills and knowledge that makes them well suited or capable to assume particular positions.

Implication for Counsellor Education

The findings from this study reveal that participants (with few exceptions) are aware of the connection between personal career experiences and professional practice. Although counsellor training programs encourage students be self-reflective and aware of their life histories, there is a lack of recognition in the career literature of the connection between the personal and professional in career counselling. Based on the findings of this

study, career counsellors and practitioners are encouraged to increase awareness of their vocational development and to be alert for how their personal history influences their work with clients. The focus group method has potential to be used as a tool in counsellor education to increase self-awareness. The process of comparing stories with other people in a group can elucidate our personal and cultural biases.

As well as being conscious of the connection between personal narrative and practice, counsellors also should be aware of the potential for their profession to shape societal and cultural norms. However, as stated by Cushman (1995), "[most] therapists have not been trained in the kind of philosophical and political analysis that is required to understand the more subtle and complex ways that social practices invariably reproduce the status quo" (p. 248). Exposure to historical analyses of career and the counselling profession (e.g., Cushman, 1995; Weber, 1905/1958; Woolfolk, 1998) are recommended in order to help employment and career counsellors historically situate practice and theories.

Limitations and Generalizability

Given that participants' comments in the present study are assumed to represent dominant North American cultural texts that are incorporated into personal narratives, it follows that the findings are generalizable to the current North American context. Granted, these results are not assumed to be transhistorical truths. The findings are specific to contemporary North American culture and over time, as the context changes, it is expected that themes that characterize youth employment narratives also will evolve.

Hermeneutics recognizes research interpretations are embedded in historical and sociocultural context. Therefore:

> Not only does interpretive inquiry provide accounts that will not seem true to all people (because their concerns and their perspectives will differ), it provides accounts that will not remain true for all time. This is a phenomenon Heidegger calls "fallenness." Any elucidating account of a phenomenon has a tendency to lose its power and immediacy, to become a slogan and no longer be felt a moving description; to become a mere "assertion" – a hollow claim. (Packer & Addison, 1989, p. 289)

In addition to the context-specificity of the results of the present study, there are certain limitations concerning generalizability as a consequence of the design of the study.

As pointed out by Cochran (1997), contemporary Western culture provides a multiplicity of possible career narratives, and participants' narratives may not represent the totality of youth employment themes in North American culture. Participation in this study was limited to those who work or have worked with youth as employment counsellors or practitioners. Although there are advantages to this selection criterion, it also limits the generalizability of the results. For example, it is recognized that the endorsement of youth employment (as expressed by the participants in this study) is not universal among groups of people in North America. Specifically, teachers that have been surveyed have expressed concern that early work is a negative influence on adolescent development (Bills et al., 1995). As well, the emphasis on youth employment as a journey toward self-discovery and self-actualization also may be attributable to the professional background of the sample, given the influence of humanist ideals on the counselling profession (Cushman, 1995; Woolfolk, 1998).

These themes are representative of the dominant, Caucasian, European-influenced culture in North America. However, North America, and Vancouver in particular, is becoming increasingly multicultural. Participants were not screened for cultural background prior to their participation in the focus groups. It is suggested that future research on this topic account for this variable in the design of the study in order to assess cultural differences in narrative themes. Although three of the participants had immigrated to North America from other countries (Australia, Great Britain, and Iran) as teenagers, only the participant from the Middle East expressed a perspective of youth employment that was markedly different from others in the study. The disparate narrative of this one participant points to cultural variation in youth employment themes. As such, the findings from this study may not be generalizable to immigrant populations. There is no information currently available on views of youth employment amongst different cultural groups. Adolescents arriving in North America from other countries may be in a position of having to reconcile contradictory messages about youth employment that emanate from their original and new contexts. It also is possible that the themes currently common to North American narratives about youth employment may change as the dominant culture is influenced increasingly by multiculturalism.

Themes that exist in individuals' stories appear to have some cohort differences. Younger participants' inclusion of volunteer experiences in youth employment narratives was attributed, in part, to the demographic characteristics of the baby bust cohort. It was not an expressed goal of this study to determine demographic differences in early employment narratives, however, it appears that an individual's cohort may affect the way he or she makes sense of early work.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study gathered retrospective narratives of youth employment. However, it also would be helpful to look at the way in which young people who are currently working, or who have decided not to work, make sense of youth employment. Longitudinal research that follows youth through the early part of their career development and investigates the process of narrative formation would contribute to a further understanding of how people compose career stories over time. In particular, it would be interesting to examine how adolescent jobs affect future career aspirations (i.e., how adolescents' present work experiences affect their career expectations for the future).

The participants who took part in the focus groups all worked with youth in an employment-related capacity and, as a whole, expressed very positive views of youth work. The parents that took part in Aronson et al.'s (1996) study also were overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of youth work. However, there is some indication that not all who work with youth share this opinion. For example, the teachers surveyed by Bills et al. (1995) expressed primarily negative views of youth work. It would be helpful to replicate this study with different groups of people (e.g., parents of teens that work, parents of teens that do not work, teachers, and employers who hire youth) to compare similarities and differences in the themes emphasized by these groups. Teachers and youth employment counsellors may emphasize different historical themes in their assessments of youth employment.

It also would be helpful to examine gender differences. No gender differences in narrative structure or formation were noted in this study. However, there were only two males and so subtle variations would have been difficult to detect. Differences have been noted in the types of jobs adolescent boys and girls typically work and in the average number of hours worked by boys and girls (Aronson et al., 1996). As well, the effect of gender on career development has been well documented (Fitzgerald, Fassinger & Betz, 1994). It is conceivable that gender could influence narrative composition and formation. For example, the inclusion of particular kinds of themes may reflect traditional gender stereotypes. Men may be more likely to evaluate early jobs in terms of their effect on career advancement and earning potential, whereas women may be more likely to evaluate early work in terms of the degree to which jobs help others (McMahon & Patton, 1997). It would be worthwhile for future studies to focus specifically on similarities and differences in employment experiences and career development narratives of males and females and to examine thematic variation in men's and women's narratives in relation to cultural and historical gender roles.

One of the findings in this study was that participants who were under 30 years of age included volunteer experiences as part of their stories about early employment. Future studies could examine the influence of cohort on youth employment and career narratives and, specifically, the role of volunteering in career development. For example, the following questions could be addressed: 1) Do young people who seek out volunteer activities as part of their early career development develop different value orientations? and 2) If a young person is motivated to volunteer in order to gain extrinsic rewards that in the past have been associated with youth employment (e.g., in order to gain work

experience and to build his or her resume), does this diminish the intrinsic value of volunteering?

Future research should examine cross-cultural differences in youth employment experiences and career narrative structure. This research study investigated the themes that are present in the dominant cultural context in North America. Most other research on this topic also has focused on the early employment experiences of Caucasian youth. What is lacking is an understanding of the themes and employment narrative structures of youth from minority cultural groups. A particular area of interest would be to examine the process of career narrative formation of first or second generation immigrants to North America.

Finally, it is suggested that a hermeneutic-narrative approach to career research continue to be utilized in order to further clarify the influence of cultural beliefs about work on career development, decision-making, and behaviour. Research of this nature will benefit those who work in the career counselling profession and are involved in the important task of helping individuals negotiate how they will live in the world.

Summary

Youth employment is common in North America and has been widely studied. Overall, research results have been varied and inconclusive and there have been relatively few studies that have examined the subjective experience of early work. This study used a hermeneutic-narrative approach and focused on the subjective experience of youth

work, as described retrospectively in narratives of adults. Participants were youth

employment counsellors and narratives were gathered using a focus group methodology.

The three questions guiding this study were: 1) What themes are prevalent in the

narratives individuals construct to make sense of early employment experiences?, 2) How

and when did they come to understand their early employment experiences in this way?

and, 3) Have these early employment experiences influenced their current practice as

career counsellors or practitioners; and, if so, how?

Themes common to participants' narratives were: early employment as an

investment (in career and character development), as a journey towards self-discovery

and self-actualization, for immediate financial gain, in relation to contextual variables

(family, school and the socioeconomic context), and for the benefits of volunteering.

Making sense of early employment was found to be a long-term process that

began prior to entry into the workforce and continued in retrospect. Parental messages

and comparison of early employment experiences with more recent career events were

major factors that influenced narrative development.

Most participants recognized a connection between their early work experiences

and professional practice. Overall, participants tended to emphasize themes of

investment, self-discovery/self-actualization and volunteering in their counselling

practices.

An interpretation that relates these findings to the wider sociocultural and

historical context is included and early work themes of the participants are compared to

widespread North American beliefs about career. The role of youth employment

counselling in perpetuating career beliefs also is discussed.

Implications for theory, research, practice and counsellor education, and the generalizability and limitations of these findings are considered, and suggestions are made for future research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

SFU Ethics Approval Letter

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS

BURNABY, BRITISH COLUMBIA
CANADA V5A 1S6
Telephone: 604-291-4370
FAX: 604-291-4860

May 6, 2002

Ms. Erin Thrift
Graduate Student
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University

Dear Ms. Thrift:

Re: Making Sense of Adolescent Employment: A Hermeneutic-Narrative Analysis of Career Counsellors' and Practitioners' Retrospective View of the Early Employment Experiences

I am pleased to inform you that the above referenced Request for Ethical Approval of Research has been approved on behalf of the Research Ethics Board. This approval is in effect for twenty-four months from the above date. Any changes in the procedures affecting interaction with human subjects should be reported to the Research Ethics Board. Significant changes will require the submission of a revised Request for Ethical Approval of Research. This approval is in effect only while you are a registered SFU student.

Best wishes for success in this research.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hal Weinberg, Director
Office of Research Ethics
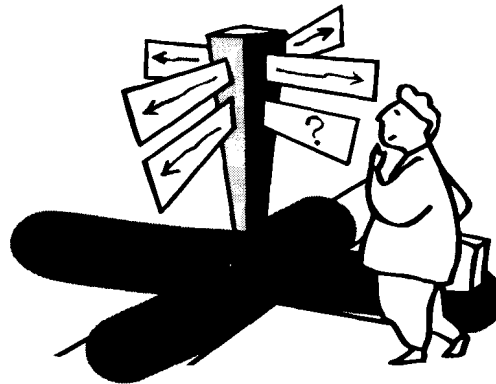
c: D. Paterson, Supervisor

/bjr

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Poster

Making Sense of Youth Employment

A hermeneutic-narrative analysis of career counsellors' and practitioners' retrospective view of their early employment experiences

Do you work with adolescents or young adults as a career counsellor,

practitioner or advisor?

- I am looking for volunteers who work with youth in the employment field to participate in focus groups that are part of a research project and master's thesis that is exploring the ways that individuals make sense of their early work experiences. The group facilitator and researcher is a Master of Arts candidate in Counselling Psychology at Simon Fraser University.
- Each group will be composed of 4 to 6 participants and will last for no longer than an hour and a half. Participants will have the opportunity to reflect on their own early work experiences and the impact of these on their career development and current practice with youth. Refreshments will be provided. The groups will begin in May 2002 and will be held on various dates and in various locations in the lower mainland.
- If you would be interested in participating in a group, would like more information about the study, or would like to host a group at your workplace please sign up on the following sheet or contact Erin Thrift by phone or e-mail.

PHONE   604-274-0148   E-MAIL   ejthrift@sfu.ca

APPENDIX C

Participant Information Letter

April 2002

Dear Participant:

As part of my work towards a Masters degree in Counselling Psychology at Simon Fraser University, I am working on a thesis entitled: *Making sense of youth employment: A hermeneutic-narrative analysis of career counsellors' and practitioners' retrospective view of their early employment experiences.* I am interested in exploring how career counsellors make sense of their early employment experiences and how this influences their opinions of youth employment and their work with youth.

I would like to hold several focus groups with 4 to 6 participants in each group. Participants will be career counsellors or practitioners who currently work or have worked with youth. Each focus group will go for a maximum of an hour and a half. Refreshments will be served during the group. The focus groups will begin in May 2002 and will be held at various locations in the lower mainland. The exact dates and locations have yet to be determined and attempts will be made to accommodate participants' schedules and to hold meetings at convenient locations.

During the focus group I will ask participants to reflect on and share their early employment experiences. Questions about these work experiences and participants' current work with youth will guide the discussion. Notes will be taken by a research assistant during the focus group and the discussion will be audio taped. Afterwards I will transcribe parts of the discussion in order to be able to analyze themes that arise. Please be aware that my supervisor, my research assistant and myself will be the only ones to listen to the tapes. These tapes will be kept in my home in a locked security box for the duration of the study and they will be destroyed upon completion of my thesis.

Participants' identities will remain confidential. In the write-up participants will be identified by a pseudonym and identifying details in direct quotes will be adjusted to ensure confidentiality. Please note that participants can withdraw from the study at *any point* in the research process (i.e., both during or after the focus group).

If you choose to participate in this study you will have the opportunity to reflect on your personal career experiences and participate in a small group discussion about youth employment with your colleagues. A copy of the results of the study will be available by request after completion.

Thank you for your interest in this study. If you have any further questions please contact me by phone or e-mail.

Sincerely,

Erin Thrift
Home phone number: (604) 274-0148
E-mail: ejthrift@sfu.ca

Attached: Simon Fraser University Consent Form

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

**INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECTS TO PARTICIPATE
IN A RESEARCH PROJECT OR EXPERIMENT**

The University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection at all times of the interests, comfort, and safety of subjects. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures. Your signature on this form will signify that you have received a document which describes the procedures, possible risks, and benefits of this research project, that you have received an adequate opportunity to consider the information in the document, and that you voluntarily agree to participate in the project.

Any information that is obtained during this study will be kept confidential to the full extent permitted by law. Knowledge of your identity is not required. You will not be required to write your name or any other identifying information on the research materials. Materials will be held in a secure location and will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

Having been asked by **Erin Thrift of the Counselling Psychology Department of Simon Fraser University** to participate in a research project experiment, I have read the information sheet provided.

I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this experiment at any time.

I also understand that I may register any complaint I might have about the experiment with the researcher named above or with **Robin Barrow, Dean of the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University**.

I may obtain copies of the results of this study, upon its completion, by contacting **Erin Thrift, c/o Simon Fraser University, Faculty of Education, Graduate Programs, 8888 Universtiy Dr., Burnaby BC, V5A 1S6.**

I have been informed that the research material will be held confidential by the Principal Investigator.

I agree to participate in one focus group on early employment experiences that will last for no longer than an hour and a half.

NAME (please print legibly): _____

ADDRESS: _____

_____

SIGNATURE: _____ **WITNESS:** _____

DATE: _____

ONCE SIGNED, A COPY OF THIS
CONSENT FORM AND A SUBJECT
FEEDBACK FORM SHOULD
BE PROVIDED TO THE SUBJECT.

APPENDIX E

Pre-group Questionnaire and Career Lifeline Activity

Pre-Group Questionnaire

Occupation: _____

Job Description: _____

_____

I spend most of my time working with . . . (Rank order, 1= work with the most, 4= work with the least)

                Adolescents (14-19) _____   Young adults (20-24) _____

                    Adults (25-54) _____   Older adults (55+) _____

**Number of years working in an employment/career related job:** _____

Age: _____

Career Lifeline Activity

On the following lifeline list important events in sequence that contributed to your career development (i.e., jobs, education, volunteer experiences, etc.). If the experience was positive list it on the right side of the line, if the experience was negative list it on the left side of the line. For the purposes of this study, I am particularly interested in your early career development and employment experiences.

        Negative Experience   Positive Experience

Present time
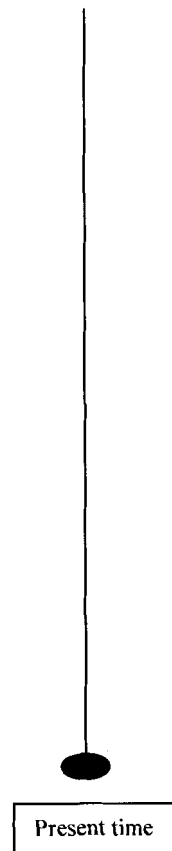
APPENDIX F

Standardized Focus Group Introduction

Focus Group Introduction

Welcome. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this discussion of youth employment. My name is Erin Thrift and I am doing this research project as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology at Simon Fraser University. I am interested in learning about how people make sense of their early employment experiences. I think individuals who work in the career field (which you all do) are particularly suited to discussing this topic. As well, I am curious about whether career counsellors' or practitioners' early employment experiences influence their opinions of youth employment and their practice.

There are no right or wrong answers. You have all had different experiences and will likely have different perspectives. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

I am tape recording the session because I don't want to miss any of your comments. No names will be included in my thesis write-up. Your comments are confidential. Any direct quotes that are included will not include comments or information that could identify you. The tapes will be erased once my project is finished. I would also like to remind you that you are free to withdraw from this study at any point.

The name tags will help all of us to remember each other's names. If you want to follow up on something that someone has said and have a conversation with one another about these questions feel free to do that. Don't feel like you have to respond to me all the time. I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. I'm interested in hearing from each of you. So if you're talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance. And if you aren't saying much, I may call on you. I just want to make sure I hear from all of you.

The session will last for no longer than an hour and a half. Please feel free to help yourself to the refreshments as we go along. Are there any questions before we begin?

Please read and sign the consent form.

(This introduction is based on the example of an introduction given by Krueger and Casey, 2000, p. 108).

APPENDIX G

Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Introduce yourself to the group.

2. You have all plotted your career experiences on the lifeline activity. Let's start the discussion by talking about your own experiences of early employment.

   Prompts for each person's story (to be used as probes if the participant does not cover these areas on their own):
   - How did you decide to take this job/these job(s)?
   - What were your reasons for working?
   - How old were you?
   - How did you decide to enter the workforce when you did? (i.e. not earlier or later)
   - What was this experience like?
   - Did you learn anything from this experience? Explain.
   - Was this a positive or negative experience? Explain.

3. Think back to when you were working at one of your first jobs. Was your perspective on this work experiences different then from now? In what ways?

4. If your perspective on these jobs has changed, how did this change come about? When did this happen?

5. Do you think that your personal early employment experiences impacts your practice as a career counsellor or practitioner working with youth? Explain.

   - If so, how?
   - If not, why not?
   - What is your opinion of youth employment?
   - What advice would you give to a young person today about working part-time in either high school or college/university?
   - Is this advice similar or different from the advice you received as a young person?

APPENDIX H

Post-group Questions and Feedback Form

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please take a few moments to

consider these final questions:

1. Was there anyway I could have made it easier for you to share your experiences and opinions on youth employment with the group?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Is there anything that you did not get a chance to share during the group and would like to add?

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. If you would like to receive a summary of the research results please fill in your mailing or e-mail address below.

_____

_____

APPENDIX I

Subject Feedback Form

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

SUBJECT FEEDBACK FORM

Completion of this form is **OPTIONAL**, and is not a requirement of participation in the project. However, if you have served as a subject in a project and would care to comment on the procedures involved, you may complete the following form and send it to the Chair, University Research Ethics Review Committee. All information received will be treated in a strictly confidential manner.

Name of Principal Investigator: **Erin Thrift**

Title of Project: *Making sense of youth employment: A hermeneutic-narrative analysis of career counsellors' and practitioners' retrospective view of their early employment experiences*

Dept./School/Faculty: Education, Counselling Psychology

Did you sign an Informed Consent Form before participating in the project? _____

Were there significant deviations from the originally stated procedures? _____
I wish to comment on my involvement in the above project which took place:

_____
(Date) (Place)   (Time)

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Completion of this section is optional

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: (w) _____   (h) _____

This form should be sent to the **Chair, University Research Ethics Review Committee, c/o Office of the Vice-President, Research, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, V5A 1S6.**

APPENDIX J

Data Analysis Reading Guide Worksheet I

Participant:

Focus Group:

Characteristic	Representative Quotes	Primary/ Secondary
1.a.i. investment – career – skills		
1.a.ii. investment – career – opportunities		
1. b. investment – character development		
2. journey towards self-discovery and self-actualization		
3. early employment and money		
3. early employment and education		
4. continuation of a family saga		
5. work related to sociocultural/economic factors		

Comments:

APPENDIX K

Data Analysis Reading Guide Worksheet II

Participant:

Focus Group:

Shift in Narrative: Representative Quote	Time of shift (before, during or after the experience)	Instigating factor

Comments:

APPENDIX L

Data Analysis Reading Guide Worksheet III

Participant:

Focus Group:

Quote from transcript	Theme	Connection to personal experience?	Nature of connection (i.e., used explicitly, implicitly, etc.)

Comments: