

**Psychosocial Characteristics and Successful Labour Market Attachment
Among Young Adults: The Internalization of Individual Inadequacy
as Explanations for Failures within the Labour Market**

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Abstract

This qualitative research sought to better understand how young adults perceived factors leading to labour market success. Respondents (n=36) identified two psychosocial characteristics that contributed to their successful labour market attachment: 1) personal behaviours can contribute to labour market outcomes; and 2) individual inadequacies contribute to unsuccessful labour market attachment. The internalization of individual inadequacies is only enhanced by labour market policy strategies that seek primarily to aid in the development of basic skills (such as computer use and literacy), when, due to labour market shifts, government programs and policies should be focusing instead on the development of professional and technical level skills (such as field specific knowledge and abilities to carry out a particular employment role). Implications for programs and policies aimed at supporting young adult employment are discussed.

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Introduction

Individual intrapersonal factors have been linked to labour market outcomes for some young adults. For instance, some who are not in employment or education situations, and lack a sense that they are included and accepted within society, have less awareness of their individual agency and less overall hope for the future (Rose et al., 2012). Similarly, ethnographic research on young adults in low-income urban communities has found that individuals internalize their lack of success with labour market attachment and upward social mobility; which can contribute to cyclical patterns of disengagement with the formal labour market and educational institutions (Bourgois, 2003; MacLeod, 1987).

Some research has argued that the effects of these situations can be alleviated in some regards through changes in community and peer relationships among young adults. For instance, Kaufman & Rosenbaum (1992) found that low-income African-American youth had better education and employment outcomes after moving from inner city low income African-American communities. However, the extent to which these neighborhood level variables act as causal agents for employment and educational success has been insufficiently (both methodologically and conceptually) supported by empirical evidence (Ellen & Turner, 1997). Instead, further research is needed to help better understand the ways in which young adults internalize success and failure and the subsequent implications this has on labour market and educational outcomes. A research trajectory with this focus can provide insight into the aspects of intrapersonal development that should be incorporated in programs and policies set up to help youth and young adults in the employment sector. Through their psycho-social limitations (developed through interaction with the social environment and possibly with employment programs themselves) we can get a sense of what employment serving organizations and

government policy should focus on to adequately address issues of young adult un- and under-employment.

Furthermore, since service utilization dealing with psycho-social issues experienced by individual members of vulnerable populations remains low, it is necessary to provide these types of services in multiple settings (including employment support service settings) to adequately reach the individuals in greatest need (Maulik et al., 2011). Some studies have found a statistical link between the utilization of cognitive-behavioral intervention in employment training programs and decreases in mental health symptoms (Tandon et al., 2011). And, there is some evidence that including tailored methods of intervention in employment support programs for specific sub-populations of young adults can contribute to positive labour market outcomes (Ferguson et al., 2012). Also, in employment support programs with an element targeting the psycho-social functioning of individuals (such as life skills training), previous research has demonstrated some positive personal outcomes for individuals (Graham, Jones, & Shier, 2010). However, further research is necessary to determine the extent to which these program types contribute to actual labour market attachment and the quality of job positions that are attained. Nonetheless, more effort is needed to determine the aspects of individual psycho-social functioning that contribute most to young adult labour market attachment difficulties to help better inform the focus of these programs.

This research was based on data collected through one to one interviews with young adults (n=36) engaged (presently or in the recent past) with community based employment support programs in one low-income community in Toronto, Canada. The research question was: What are the present barriers to young adult labour market attachment? This is an important

question, considering the continued high rates of young adult unemployment throughout developed nations (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2010).

One of the themes that emerged from the analysis, and the focus of this article, was characteristics of individuals' psychosocial framework that can impact labour market outcomes. Research participants identified their own inadequacies as possible explanations for their inability to secure employment. Likewise, they also described individual level factors or characteristics that would contribute to positive labour market outcomes. Understanding these perceptions could help social service delivery programs in structuring methods of intervention and aid in the development of programs that are linked to the frame of mind of the individuals they seek to aid in the transitioning process to full labour market integration.

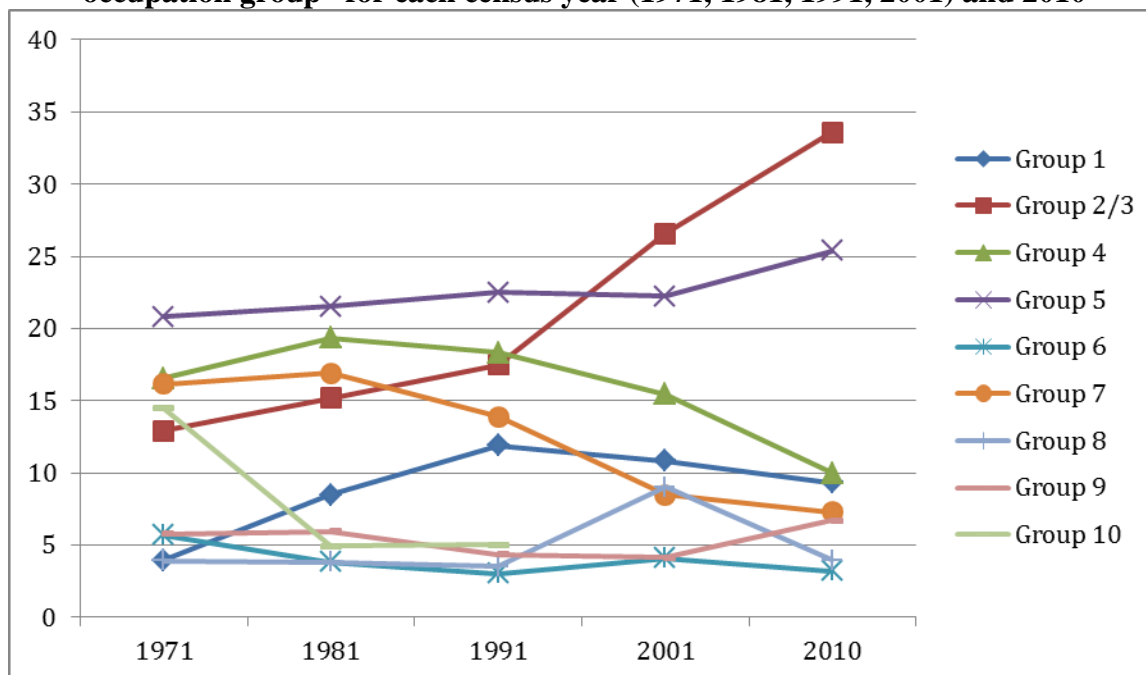
Literature Review

In Canada, the OECD country of this study, approximately 13 percent of young adults (those between the ages of 15 and 29) are neither employed nor enrolled in an educational program (Marshall, 2012). While this is lower than the OECD average for young adult unemployment, it remains significantly higher than the national unemployment rate in Canada; which is around 7.3 percent (Statistics Canada, 2012). In the United States, approximately 18 percent of young Americans are unemployed and in the European Union approximately one in five people under the age of 25 years old is unemployed (The Economist, 2011).

These age-based disparities are troubling. We took a closer look at the situation in Canada. As shown in Figure 1, opportunities within specific occupations in Canada have significantly changed over the last 40 years. The two dominant occupational classifications include: 1) professionals, associate professionals and technicians, and 2) service sector and sale

related employees. All other occupational classifications have declined considerably. Figure 1 demonstrates this increasing polarization between higher skill/higher pay and lower skill/lower pay employment within the Canadian labour market, highlighting the increasing trend of employment in the professional and service sector occupational classifications and a decreasing trend over the last two decades in all other occupational classifications.

Figure 1: Proportion of employed Canadians between 16 and 65 years old by occupation group* for each census year (1971, 1981, 1991, 2001) and 2010



Source: All data was extracted from the Canadian census for the years 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001 accessed through the Minnesota Population Centre at: <http://www.ipums.org/> and Statistics Canada. *Table 282-0010 - Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by National Occupational Classification for Statistics (NOC-S) and sex, annual (persons unless otherwise noted)*, CANSIM (database), Using E-STAT (distributor). http://estat.statcan.gc.ca/cgi-win/cnsmcgi.exe?Lang=E&EST-Fi=EStat/English/CII_1-eng.htm (accessed: December 15, 2012)

* Occupation groups are determined by the International Standard Classification of Occupations. Groups include: 1 – Legislators, senior officials, and managers; 2 – Professionals; 3 – Technicians and associate professionals; 4 – Clerks; 5 – Service workers and shop and market sales; 6 – Skilled agricultural and fishery workers; 7 – Crafts and related trades workers; 8 – Plant and machine operators and assemblers; 9 – Elementary occupations; 10 – other occupations, or not specified. Seeing as the professional categories only began being differentiated in 2001, Group 2 and 3 are combined in the graph to render the information under study during the 40 year period consistent throughout.

Note: Occupational categories 2 and 3 are presented together because occupational category 3 was only first introduced in the 2001 census.

This trend towards an increasingly polarized labour market between higher skill and pay and lower skill and pay labour market opportunities has had consequences for the labour market

attachment of young adult Canadians. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of occupational classification for young adults (aged 16 to 30) in Canada between 1971 and 2001. As Table 1 shows, as service sector jobs replace other occupational categories, young adults fill more and more of these positions and the polarization between those in this occupational category and those in the professional/technician category continues to grow.

**Table 1: Occupational group for people in Canada (ages 16 to 30)
for the census years 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001.**

Occupational Group	Year				Total
	1971	1981	1991	2001	
Legistators, senior officials, and managers	76,500	227,350	313,929	197,505	815,284
Professionals	547,300	709,400	693,396	838,460	2,788,556
Technicians and Associate Professionals	-*	-	-	159,780	159,780
Clerks	776,800	1,216,200	1,025,607	615,174	3,633,781
Service workers and shop and market sales	732,500	1,257,650	1,421,838	1,651,279	5,063,367
Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	168,100	193,750	163,878	211,868	737,596
Crafts and related trade workers	512,100	847,850	608,388	294,065	2,262,403
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	113,000	165,200	129,591	307,148	714,939
Elementary occupations	215,500	344,950	215,358	258,350	1,034,158
Other occupations	600,300	292,900	289,740	-	1,182,940

Source: All data was extracted from the Canadian census for the years 1971, 1981, 1991, and 2001 accessed through the Minnesota Population Centre at: <http://www.ipums.org/>

* Data boxes marked with '-' are years in which data for that occupational class was not available because the classification was not used for that census year.

Note: At the time of publication, the data for age and occupational classification from the 2011 census has not yet been made available by Statistics Canada.

For instance, there has been a 125 percent increase in the number of young adults filling service sector or retail sales related jobs between 1971 and 2001. However, there has only been a 53 percent increase in the number of young adults taking up positions in the professional occupational classification. This is an interesting finding, considering that the rates of post-secondary educational attainment in Canada have also increased during this time frame. However, young adults that can attain employment in Canada still find themselves in more precarious types of labour market opportunities.

In an effort to understand this situation of youth and young adult un- and under-employment, within current literature two dominant research trajectories have focused on young adult employment and education outcomes. These include youth cultural studies and youth transition studies (Furlong et al., 2010; MacDonald, 2010). Youth cultural studies have typically focused on the cultural factors related to being a youth and the subsequent impact on successfully securing employment in young adulthood (see for example, Devadason, 2008). Within this research trajectory, scholarship has traditionally focused on the cognitive and behavioral functioning of young adults and has supported policy and program directions that aim to address those culturally rooted factors that can create challenges for positive labour market and educational outcomes. For instance, Staff et al. (2010), find that the lack of youth career aspirations significantly impacts wage earning outcomes in young adulthood. Their research is premised on principles of youth development and achievement, and suggests the need to increase the socio-cultural phenomenon of “career aspirations” in young adults to increase success among this demographic in labour market attachment. Similarly, other researchers have discovered specific risk factors for unemployment linked to characteristics of the socio-cultural dynamics found in particular sub-groups of young adults – such as those experiencing homelessness

(Ferguson, et al., 2012), or those who were previously incarcerated (Arditti & Parkman, 2011). Others have highlighted a changing cultural perspective with regard to education and employment among young people as they navigate the present economy and labour market (Devadason, 2007).

The alternative study focus (i.e. research on the transitions of youth to adulthood) has primarily been pre-occupied with young adult transitions from education to employment (MacDonald, 2010), and the sociological and economic factors within society that have contributed to extending this transitional period from youth to adulthood. For instance, some researchers have argued that significant changes within the labour market since the 1970's have contributed to the evolution of youth transitions into adulthood, causing increasing pressure on families to help young adults longer in their successful transition from youth to adult lives (Danziger & Ratner, 2010; Settersten & Ray, 2010; Zeller et al., 2009). However, many young adults do not have these opportunities to rely on family members to aid in this prolonged transition (Abel & Fitzgerald, 2008). As a result, these studies can be insufficient in fully explaining the nature of transitions from youth to adulthood. As an alternative, some qualitative research, within this trajectory, has focused on the perceptions individuals have about the social and economic challenges of the present labour market and the perceived effects on their labour market attachment (Busetta & Milito, 2010).

It has been argued that having two distinct trajectories of youth studies research within the literature is problematic. For instance, MacDonald (2010) argues that youth transition and youth culture studies should seek to overlap conceptually to answer wider sociological questions facing youth presently. It is necessary to move beyond those questions that seek to understand (1) specific subpopulations of youth based on social class in the case of youth culture studies,

and (2) studies that seek to understand changing patterns of youth transitions without “including how youth cultural identities shape and are shaped by the transitions people make” (p. 438).

While MacDonald’s (2010) suggestion to meet this challenge is to conduct more research on mainstream youth – such as those of the middle class – we think it is also necessary to conduct more research on the experiences of young adults who are in the process of making this transition. Therefore, in an effort to align these two paths of research on young adulthood and labour market outcomes, the following research provides insight into the cognitive and behavioral functions of young adults who have already participated in employment and educational settings. An individual’s cognitive and behavioral functioning and cultural perspectives can change through interaction with the social environment. Insight, therefore, from those individuals who are presently engaged with the process of labour market attachment helps highlight how identities can be changed as people attempt these transitional periods of their lives.

Methods

Data were collected through one to one interviews (n=36) with young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 who were involved (presently or in the recent past) in some capacity with a community based organization providing employment supports to young adults in Toronto, Canada. These community based organizations provided basic skills training along with support with resume writing, employment searches, and interviewing. Of these 36 respondents, 25 are male and 11 are female. All respondents are members of a visible minority subpopulation. Twenty-nine reported being Black, 3 Latin American, 1 South Asian, 1 Middle Eastern, 1 West Asian, and 1 East Asian. The mean age of the respondents is 22 years old. The educational background of participants varied. Of the 36 respondents 15 have either graduated from a post-

secondary educational institution (n=6), are currently enrolled in one (n=5), or have completed some courses but are currently taking a leave of absence (n=4). Of the remaining respondents, 8 had not completed high school, one was presently enrolled in high school, 6 had just completed high school, and one was enrolled in a postsecondary institution in the upcoming academic year. No data were available on educational attainment for the remaining five respondents. This study received ethics certification from the University of Calgary Ethics Review Board.

Participant recruitment was done through a process of snowball sampling with the aid of six social service agencies (our community research partners) working with youth and young adults. The inclusion criteria for the study were that young adults lived in the Jane-Finch neighbourhood community of Toronto, Canada, they were between the ages of 18 and 29, and they fit into one of the following four categories: 1) Actively seeking employment (n=20); 2) employed but feeling frustrated (n=7); 3) not employed and not in school (n=6); or 4) employed and satisfied (n=3).

The Jane and Finch community is a low-income community within the city of Toronto. It has one of the highest rates of low-income/subsidized housing in all of Toronto's neighbourhoods and, in some census tracts within the community, the proportion of people living below Canada's low income cut-off (LICO) rate is four times greater than the metropolitan Toronto average (Strong Neighbourhoods, 2004; The United Way, 2004). The Jane and Finch community was selected as the site of data collection because there are a large number of young adults in the community seeking labour market attachment, and there remains a high unemployment rate in the community among this subpopulation in comparison to the metropolitan Toronto area (Strong Neighbourhoods, 2004). Also, because concentrated poverty within neighbourhoods can impact outcomes for young adults (Bourgeois, 2003; MacLeod, 1987),

focusing on young adults within a low-income community may provide distinct responses on social and psychological factors that can contribute to labour market success for this vulnerable population.

Data were collected through standard techniques of interviewing used in qualitative research (Fetterman, 1998, 2008; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991). Respondents were interviewed once; the interviews lasted approximately one hour. The interviews were in-depth and conducted in person by two members of the research team using a semi-structured, open-ended interview guide. Questions prompted respondents to describe their current and past experiences with employment and barriers that they experience when searching for and accessing employment opportunities. For instance, respondents were asked: Can you tell me about your experiences of employment; and Can you tell me about the experiences of employment in your family and your neighbourhood? The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data were then analyzed using qualitative methods of analytic induction and constant comparison strategies (see Goetz & Lecompte, 1984; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, emergent themes (see for example, Charmaz, 2000; Williams, 2008) and patterns (see for example, Creswell, 2009; Fetterman, 2008) were identified within the transcribed interviews with a focus on the factors that respondents identified as having an impact on their present employment situation. The first step in the coding process was to read through all the transcribed material with the objective of identifying common themes. The themes were coded and the data were searched for instances of the same or similar phenomena. Finally, the data were translated into more general categories that were refined until all instances of contradictions, similarities, and differences were explained, thus increasing the dependability and consistency of the

findings. The research team collaboratively worked on this stage of the research to maintain the credibility criteria of the study (i.e. discussing the rationale for determining particular codes that emerged).

Findings

Respondents identified two ways in which their psychosocial framework impacts labour market attachment. The first is aspects of their own perception of personal behaviours that will contribute to labour market success. The second is through their perspectives of individual level factors or characteristics that contribute to negative labour market outcomes. In this latter category it is evident that respondents have internalized their lack of labour market success, and reasons for inadequate labour market attachment are conceptualized as individually rooted issues. Together, these categories of responses provide a conceptual framework for understanding the perspectives young adults have in their pursuit of employment success after already engaging with the labour market and educational institutions.

Perceptions that Personal Behaviour will Contribute to Labour Market Success

The present labour market itself is inequitable and structured in such a way as to promote or maintain marginalization based on socio-economic class, ethnic background, and educational attainment (Galabuzi, 2006; Sawchuk, 2009; Vosko, 2006; Wallis & Kwok, 2008; Wilson et al, 2011). However, young adults from this study did not connect their labour market attachment difficulties to these problems inherent in the labour market. Instead, perceptions of their own success were based on perceptions of their own abilities and hard work. Respondents identified three dominant psycho-social characteristics that would contribute to successful labour market outcomes: 1) Perseverance; 2) Personal drive; and 3) Confidence.

Perseverance

Psychosocial Characteristics and Successful Labour Market Attachment

To achieve success within the labour market many respondents described how perseverance towards achieving goals was necessary. Individual motivation is believed, among respondents, to be an underlying aspect of a person's ability to achieve success. For instance, one respondent described:

I want to work in early childhood education. Currently I'm going back to high school, to upgrade on some courses, because my English marks were not so great. It is hard work and a lot of people tell me that I am not going to make that much money. But I like kids, and I think any career that you put your mind to is worth it and is achievable. (003)

Likewise, another respondent characterized his ability to achieve labour market success based on positivity and determination:

I think many successful people have been able to take challenges, and either see an opportunity within the challenge and work with it. I think most successful people are ones that have refused to kind of give up, and you know, taken knocks along the way and have said, "You know what, I am not going to stop, I am not going to give up," and they have persevered. So to be a successful person I need to be someone who is positive, number one, and someone who is really determined and persistent. So, positivity and determination. (006)

Similarly, another respondent described the need to overcome obstacles and dismiss the negative forces he is exposed to (whether in his community or in his family) to achieve labour market success:

Well, I just tell myself I can't let anyone get in the way. They are still going to get in the way but they are like obstacles, you have to find a way to climb over them. So you just have to find a way to go over it. Just observe how people are and know how to deal with them. (018)

Personal Drive

Related to the previous subcategory is individual personal drive. Respondents articulated that their own motivation was a barrier to achieving labour market success. The perception was that individuals who were committed through their own personal motivation were likelier to be successful with labour market attachment. For instance, one respondent described:

Someone told me that if you have a dream, you will get up at five o'clock in the morning and travel across the city if you really want it. So, I think, if you have a dream and you have the passion and the hard work, you can be anything and you do it. (004)

Similarly, another respondent described how her hope for success within the labour market was based on her own personal view of motivation and determination:

I do think that I can achieve success. There are opportunities here. It is just that you have to find them and make use of them. I think I am a very determined person and I know that if I put my mind to it I can definitely do it. (005)

This respondent further elaborated on ways in which people can achieve success with labour market attachment in a desired field:

I think definitely what makes people successful in terms of my family is that we all just have a drive to go after what we want, we have a determination and we don't give up until we accomplish it. What makes people actually have positive employment experiences is that they go out and they network, they go and they check stuff, they do their own research. All of which can help people get good jobs. (005)

Even amidst other barriers – such as having a family and other responsibilities – some respondents still described that a leading factor contributing to labour market success was individual personal drive. For instance, one respondent described:

Even if you have kids, it does not matter, you can still study, and you can achieve your goals. It is in your mind that you have to think you can achieve anything. If you believe you can achieve, it doesn't matter how many years it takes, you will be able to succeed. (007)

Likewise, another respondent described that even with the challenges individuals can experience, personal drive will help people move beyond those barriers to labour market success:

Well, to tell you the truth, I believe that there are things that are in place that makes people who they are, but at the end of the day, I still believe that if you want to get something, you are blessed here in Canada. Because it is a place where anything you want you go and get it. At the end of the day, if you really, really want to do something, you can go and get that job. (024)

Similarly, another respondent described that even with continued rejection, to achieve labour market success individuals must continue without giving up:

Success is determined by your drive for wanting to make it. If you are the type of lackadaisical person who is going to say, "Okay I've been turned down once, I am not going to try," then you are going to be stuck, you are going to cry every single day. But if you are the type of person who picks yourself up and dusts yourself off and says, "You know I am going to try again," then you will find your own way eventually. (008)

Respondents even identified how not having personal drive resulted in missed opportunities. For instance, one respondent who is interested in working in the acting industry stated:

I would say that it is really important to stay focused. I think that if you really stay focused you can achieve a lot more. I know in the last couple of weeks there has been at least two times where I've had something acting related that I needed to do, but it wasn't an automatic priority for me, and it should have been. I was more focused on hanging out with a friend. I know this comes across as a childish thing. I am scolding myself because I really felt as though that was something that I should have known better. So I guess one challenge at least for me right now, and again it could be a problem for other people, is to really try and stay focused on my career. (006)

Confidence

To a lesser extent, some respondents described that they would achieve employment success if they became more confident in themselves and their abilities. For instance, one respondent described that her inability to achieve outcomes in the photography field was individually rooted in her lack of self-assurance:

I think that I will be successful when I am able to not doubt myself. When I put out my work and not feel self-conscious about it. Just being easily knocked off my goal and discouraged from doing it. Sometimes I feel discouraged because I don't know how to go about it, especially in this business, it's like you have to intern for someone or I feel like I am not good enough to intern. It's not like my stuff is really crummy, I've seen crummier stuff out there, it is just that I am not confident. (001)

Similarly, another respondent described how confidence is achieved through gaining more employment experience:

I am more confident when I go to work and show that these are my skills and this is what I can do. If you don't like it, ok, you don't like it. But before I was so scared, you know, to do an interview or do the job because I didn't have experience. (012)

Perceptions of Accomplishment and Success are Internalized

Internalization is a term within the social sciences developed from theoretical and empirical literature on the cognitive functioning of individuals within the social framework of 'individualism' (Graham, Grey, Jones, & Shier, 2009). For instance, Paolo Freire (1970) described how a dominant social perspective can be imposed on a person who does not follow that view, but the person on whom that social perspective is imposed, in turn internalizes the values of that particular dominant worldview. And as Nussbaum (2000) argues, individuals who are not aligned to this dominant social perspective and who have internalized these negative notions of their own self-worth tend to not advocate for their own views and interests. As a result, individuals, whose participation in dominant social institutions (such as the labour market) is marginalized, place the blame on themselves for their inability to succeed. Respondents here identified three ways in which they have internalized their own inability to succeed in labour market attachment: 1) I do not have the right skills; 2) I do not have sufficient knowledge; and 3) I cannot make up my mind.

I do not have the Right Skills

Respondents identified that they did not have the right skills for successful labour market attachment. For instance, one respondent who had completed post-secondary education in photography described her inability to find employment as a photographer a result of not being able to interact socially to make connections within the field:

You have to sell yourself as a photographer. I don't think I'm able to do that. I don't know how to schmooze with people. I keep to myself, I am very quiet. I wouldn't say I am shy totally, I am just not that social. (001)

Likewise, another respondent described how his own perceived capabilities limited the types of opportunities he would pursue:

I think I tend to go to jobs that are my strengths. I feel like I am very one sided. For example, I was looking up volunteer opportunities today and I was like, "Wow, can't do that, can't do that, can't do that." I feel that there is a lot more of myself that could be developed. (004)

Other respondents characterized their inability to secure employment as a personal deficiency in their own ability to conduct themselves in an interview or adequately present themselves through a resume. For instance, one respondent who was conflicted in his perception about what was contributing to his inability to secure employment defaulted to blaming himself:

I was just sending in my resumes and stuff like that. I don't think they even bothered looking at them. I worked really hard at them. Like this one time I was working on my resume all night, and I went and dropped it off and they didn't even look at it. I even went to the place in Jane and Finch Mall, where they help people with their resumes... To this day I don't even know what happened. I probably did something wrong. There is probably something about me they don't like, or probably I did something wrong that I didn't even know I did wrong. (014)

Similarly, another respondent stated:

I can't get a job. I don't know why - I just can't. I don't know if it's a Jane and Finch community thing. But I think it's just me personally. Like part of my interview skills suck - that's why I can't get it. But, I think...I don't know why I can't get a job. I just don't know. Maybe, it's just me. (017)

I Have Insufficient Knowledge

One way to address not having the necessary skills is to increase individual educational levels. Respondents here described that their education levels were insufficient and contributing to their present labour market challenges. For instance, one respondent who had somewhat of a lengthy list of early employment experiences, described:

The first real job I had was [respondent names amusement park]. I was there and that was alright. And then my next job was at [respondent names courier company]. Then I worked at [respondent names grocery store chain] for a couple

months, and then at a telemarketing agency. That's pretty much it for job experiences...I think I could have had more opportunities. Right now, not having my GED (a high school equivalency diploma) is affecting me. I've got to finish that first, and then I just have to apply and see if people accept me...because I got kicked out of my house when I was in high school I did not finish. Not finishing high school was my fault because of the wrong decisions that I made, and I can't blame anyone else, they were my decisions. (002)

Similarly, another respondent described the types of skills needed to be successful in the labour market; skills that are achieved through completion of at least high school education. This individual is currently developing these skills further through participation in a post-secondary education program:

The employer feels that you're young but when you make a commitment and you finish your high school, that shows that you're more responsible. At the place I used to work you had to have knowledge about math and stuff and you have to know how to write properly. (012)

A further consideration about adequate knowledge identified by respondents related to aptitude that is developed through direct employment experience. For instance, one respondent described how volunteering is important to help develop a knowledge base in a particular field:

I think what makes people successful is being willing to try something new and experiment. I think volunteering is a big thing because it allows you to figure things out and about hard work and developing a level of integrity for your job. (004)

I Just Cannot Make Up My Mind

To a lesser extent, some respondents also described that they were unable to secure employment because they could not decide individually what they wanted to do. For instance, one respondent described,

I wouldn't say I've experienced any barriers. I wanted to do journalism for a long while, but I recently picked up performing music for the past year and I got pretty good. So I have been conflicted. Which one do I choose now? Which one do I pursue? It's hard to pick out of those experiences. (020)

Similarly, another respondent stated:

I just think I need some intervention, just to help make up my mind...I know with my kind of life, I feel like it's a game and I lost the beginning. I feel like I'm ready to turn things around again and straighten up. (026)

Discussion and Conclusion

Respondents in this study associated their lack of success within the labour market with limitations in psychosocial functioning and individual capabilities. Several observations emerge from these findings. For instance, for these respondents, achieving success through labour market attachment is the result of an individual's willingness to continue even amidst hardships and barriers. Also, respondents do not identify factors that can impede individual motivation. Instead, they expect of themselves to continue to achieve labour market success even though other factors in their personal lives and those within the labour market itself make it difficult to gain employment. And while respondents have a sense of how their own psychosocial characteristics can support or hinder labour market attachment, these insights provide evidence that some young adults have a realistic understanding of the challenges they face when seeking out full-time, stable and permanent employment. For example, articulating a position that success is only achieved through perseverance and hard work demonstrates awareness that attachment to the labour market is competitive and not equitable among all people within a particular demographic subpopulation. Even though these characteristics of the labour market are not explicitly stated by individual respondents as barriers to young adult labour market attachment, or challenges associated with fundamental shifts in labour market opportunities towards more precarious types of positions, these young adults have adapted, to some extent, their individual psychosocial framework to overcome these challenges that are caused by changing labour market dynamics.

This finding is important for better understanding the dynamic between youth cultural studies and youth transition studies. These young adult research participants, during this transitioning phase of their lives, are adapting their perspectives to be more aligned with the demands of labour market attachment. While youth transition studies emphasizes the changing social and economic conditions as leading factors contributing to the changing dynamics of youth and young adult transitions to successful labour market attachment, youth cultural studies emphasizes the culture and perspective of young adults as the leading factor impacting successful labour market attachment. Here we see these young adult participants fully engaging with changing social and economic conditions by adapting their perspectives to meet the demands of the contemporary labour market and support their own upward social mobility. A limitation of this research in this regard, though, is that it was not longitudinal. Such a study design would have allowed for more precision on the ways these individual attitudes and perspectives have evolved from adolescent ages through to the present. Nonetheless, respondents here still provide insight into how their identities are shaped by the labour market through this transitional period into stable employment.

Together these categories also describe ways in which respondents believe they can achieve successful labour market outcomes. They highlight the need to develop the right skills, complete the appropriate level of education, and to come forward with a clear plan. While these categories might contribute to labour market success, they also demonstrate the ways in which respondents have internalized their lack of success within the labour market. In each category, respondents identify individual limitations that they believe are affecting their individual outcomes of labour market attachment. But, are these individual limitations sufficient in explaining the high rates of young adult unemployment found throughout the world? In fact,

most programs aimed at addressing young adult unemployment focus on at least one of these factors. For instance, in Canada the federal government initiative to address young adult unemployment focuses on the development of basic skills and establishing long-term career plans for young adults (www.youth.gc.ca); two areas identified here by respondents. Even with specific initiatives to address these limitations, youth and young adult un- and under-employment continue to remain high. The suggestion, therefore, is that respondents' perspectives on success are more of an internalization of the dominant cultural perspective in society about the need for basic skills and less about the actual individual adaptations required for successful labour market attachment.

How then can we change the programs to better help these young adults become more successful? In part, this happens by addressing – within youth and young adults – the internalization of success and the misguided perceptions some youth and young adults have about how they can achieve that success. One place to start is through a stronger commitment among community based employment support programs for advocacy that is directed towards the young adult unemployment situation at a national policy level. At present, several programs and policies exist in Canada that aim to help people attach to the labour market. Many of them are targeted towards specific subpopulations identified as vulnerable – such as Aboriginal people (Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy, www.hrsdc.gc.ca), young adults (the Youth Employment Strategy, www.youth.gc.ca), formerly incarcerated individuals (Correction Canada's National Employability Skills Program, www.csc-scc.gc.ca), disabled people (Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, www.hrsdc.gc.ca), and Canadian newcomers (Adult Learning Literacy and Essential Skills Program, www.hrsdc.gc.ca). Through an assessment of these program initiatives it is apparent that each is intended to support immediate

employment following brief periods of skills training and career planning. This public policy disregards the realities of the labour market for many of these workers. In Canada for example, this reality includes an increasing precarious labour market situation along with an increasing polarization between low-skill/low-pay and high-skill/high pay employment opportunities. This is an interesting point. While young adult's psychosocial frameworks around successful labour market attachment have become aligned to the demands of the contemporary labour market (which asks for higher education, greater prevalence of specialized skills, and perseverance in a highly competitive labour market), contemporary labour market attachment policies and programs still falter. Basic skills programs only support attachment to the lower skill/lower pay employment sector. And for the young adult respondents in this study, their psycho-social framework is aimed at attachment to that higher skill/higher pay labour market sector. However, many young adults continue to struggle in attaching to the higher skill sector of the labour market.

For young adults interested in upward social mobility, attaining a professional occupational categorization has become necessary. But government programs and policies remain aligned with only supporting the development of basic skills – skills that the respondents from this study have internalized, leading to inadequate perspectives on what is fundamentally needed to be successful in the present labour market. While these skills might provide young adults the opportunity to attach to the service sector and sales related employment occupational categories, these basic skills programs do not sufficiently support the transition to a professional or technical occupation. Programs seeking to address the labour market challenges of young adults, therefore, need to be refocused to align to these current labour market patterns; with less

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emphasis on adapting young adult cognition and behavior. As these respondents show, having the right attitude or foundation of basic skills does not translate into meaningful, stable work.

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