UNDERSTANDING THE ACCULTURATION EXPERIENCE OF FIRST NATIONS

WORKERS IN NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO'S URBAN WORKFORCE

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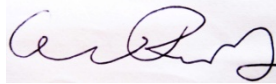
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1.0 Introduction

I was raised in Thunder Bay, a city in Ontario, on the northwest shore of Lake Superior. During university I studied in Sweden for one year in a university with 150 other exchange students from over 21 countries. Living in a foreign culture involved some expected challenges such as learning to read a new language, and many unexpected challenges, such as the time that I went to a phone store to buy a cell phone, and was surprised that no salespeople would speak to me. In my Canadian culture, salespeople in electronics stores often approach customers, or will offer their assistance when approached, and it took me a while to realize that this store was built on a different model. After much frustration, I deduced that to speak to a sales associate, I would have to take a ticket from a machine by the door, and wait until my number was signalled on a light-up board. Another time, in a grocery store when shopping with two German friends, one of the girls picked up a roll of garbage bags which she was planning on using to carry her groceries. When I asked why she was buying garbage bags when there were free grocery bags at the cash register, I found out that I'd been stealing grocery bags all year.

My year in Sweden afforded me the opportunity to experience acculturation (not to be confused with assimilation), a process of adjustment and coping within a different cultural context, and to observe the acculturation of my fellow exchange students (Berry, Kim, Minde & Mok, 1987). Without knowing any of the specific terminology or theories, I was fascinated with the different ways that other students functioned, from their food choices, to their selection of friends, social activities, and participation in sports and recreation. Some people lived in a foreign country as if they were still at home, surrounding themselves with friends from their own cultures and eating their traditional food, while others did the opposite, immersing themselves in the new culture, making friends with Swedish people, and there were also some who lived in

isolation from all cultural groups, and others who ended up with a lifestyle that was a mix of cultures.

Starting a new job or entering a new workplace often involves a period of adjustment which entails balancing one's personal way of being with the organizational culture so as to be able to function within that organization (Bauer, Morrison, & Callister, 1998). This adjustment is often compounded for those belonging to a cultural group that is different from the dominant culture of the workplace, with 'dominant' meaning the culture whose values govern workplace practices and expectations (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007; Peeters & Oerlemans, 2009). In Canada today, it can be said that the dominant culture is Euro-Western.

Cross-cultural research in the workplace has focused largely on the experiences of immigrants, expatriates, and refugees, people who belong to minority groups within a dominant foreign culture. Research in this field shows among other factors that individuals belonging to such groups experience varying levels of stress as they undergo acculturation (Berry et al., 1987). One of Canada's prominent cultural groups, Aboriginal people, have scarcely been studied in this domain, and although it was found in a comparative study of cultural groups in Canada on levels of adjustment stress[1], that Aboriginal people experienced high levels of stress as compared to immigrants, sojourners, and other ethnic groups, little is documented on the experiences of such individuals in the workplace (Berry et al., 1987). This research will focus on the experiences of Aboriginal workers in Thunder Bay, Ontario, in Euro-Western workplaces.

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[1] For the purposes of this article, stress is considered to be a generalized physiological and psychological state brought about by the experience of stressors in the environment, which the requires some reduction for normal functioning to occur, through a process of coping until some satisfactory adaptation to the new situation is achieved (Berry et al., 1987).

1.1 Background

Aboriginal people, being the original inhabitants of Canada, have a unique background, as unlike the above-mentioned groups, they are born into the country in which their cultural heritage is tied, but live as part of a minority culture within Canada's dominant Euro-Western society. Aboriginal people in Canada are categorized under three identity groups: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, which describe distinct peoples with unique histories, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. There is much diversity between and within these groups, and particularly amongst the First Nations population which is made up of 630 communities (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.; Environics Institute, 2010). Many Canadian cities are home to several nations (Environics Institute, 2010; Fort William First Nation, 2010).

Aboriginal people form Canada's fastest-growing cultural group, showing a growth rate of 20.1% from 2001 to 2006, a trend that far exceeds that of the general population (4.9%) and is expected to continue (Statistics Canada, 2005). Although up to half of the growth is estimated to be attributable to increased Aboriginal identification, and a more thorough enumeration of reserves, the Aboriginal population has grown significantly as a proportion of the total population (Statistics Canada, 2003). In 2001, Thunder Bay was one of four cities with an Aboriginal population of 5 percent or more of the general population, with Aboriginal people making up 6.8 percent of the city's residents (Mendelson, 2004).

In addition to a rapid increase in population, there is a shift toward living in urban areas, where 54 percent of Aboriginal people resided as of 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). These trends suggest that the number of Aboriginal people participating in the urban workforce will increase correspondingly in the future.

Aboriginal people experience overall poorer socio-economic conditions than non-Aboriginal people, and in 2001, over half of First Nations children and 43 percent of seniors were living below the low-income cut-off compared to 14 percent and 2 percent of their non-Aboriginal counterparts respectively (Urban Aboriginal Task Force, 2007). Additionally, the Thunder Bay site report conducted by the Urban Aboriginal Task Force in 2006, found that the majority of Aboriginal respondents struggle to meet basic needs such as shelter and food.

1.1.1 Employment.

Employment rates for Aboriginal people in Canada's Census Metropolitan Areas[2] (CMAs) have increased over the 20-year period from 1981-2001, nevertheless, there continues to be a substantial disparity when compared with employment rates of the general population which have seen even larger increases (Signer & Costa, 2005). Employment participation rates for Aboriginal people are significantly lower than those of the general population, and Aboriginal people are 2-3 times more likely to be unemployed than non-Aboriginal people (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Unemployment rates are higher still for Aboriginal people living off-reserve, whose rates of unemployment are 5-6 times higher than those of non-Aboriginal people living in urban areas (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). In 2001, Aboriginal people in Thunder Bay experienced an unemployment rate of 22.7 percent as compared to 8.8 percent for the rest of the city's population, making Thunder Bay the urban centre with the highest unemployment rate for Aboriginal people (Mendelson, 2004).

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[2] Canadian cities where at least 7,000 Aboriginal people resided in 2001 or where the Aboriginal population accounted for at least 5% of the total CMA population. CMAs selected for the study include: Montréal, Ottawa–Hull (now known as Ottawa–Gatineau), Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

Gaps in employment rates between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal people cannot be accounted for solely by educational level attainment, as at every level of schooling, employment rates for Aboriginal people aged 25-44 are generally lower than those of the general population with the exception of the university level, where rates are closer to, and in some cases higher for Aboriginal people (Siggner & Costa, 2005). The Urban Aboriginal People's Study conducted by the Environics Institute (2010) found employment rates among their participants to be highest for those with a university degree (79%) or college diploma (72%), and established a link between educational attainment and labour market success.

1.1.2 Education.

Although there is a paucity of research on Aboriginal workers, research in secondary and post-secondary education has shown difficulties in adjusting and functioning within a new cultural context as an explanatory mechanism for disparities between Aboriginal people and members of the dominant culture. In the educational system, barriers have been identified as being rooted in differences of worldview and cognitive style, as Aboriginal students are expected to function within a system where practices and norms are constructed and governed by the worldview of the dominant culture (Benjamin, Chambers & Reiterman, 1993; Brown & Kurpius, 1997; Monture-Angus, 1995). These school experiences may influence employment opportunities, and they may also be re-enacted in employment contexts.

1.1.3 Recruitment and retention.

Although there is very little research concerning the recruitment of Aboriginal employees or of the retention rates for employees from this cultural group, the information that is available concerning labour force participation and a large body of anecdotal evidence suggest that these are pertinent issues.

For example, Hanselmann's (2001) study finding that only one-fifth of urban Aboriginal people in Western Canada had held jobs for more than one month indicates that turnover is very high (as cited in Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Among the factors influencing urban Aboriginal workers' turnover intentions are job dissatisfaction - only 23 percent of those who reported high job satisfaction hoped to move on, as compared to 57 percent of those who were somewhat satisfied and 88 percent of those who reported low satisfaction (Environics Institute, 2010).

In addition, Siggner (2001) found that discrimination contributed significantly to unemployment among urban Aboriginal people (as cited in Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Non-Aboriginal participants in the Urban Aboriginal People's Survey believed almost unanimously that urban Aboriginal people are subject to discrimination in general, that is, not specific to the workplace, and this belief was found to be in line with the experiences of urban Aboriginal people themselves.

An article by Brown (2003) in *The Canadian HR Reporter* cited that different cultural traits can make adjustment to the workplace difficult for Aboriginal employees. One such trait is a low level of comfort with confrontation which was said to contribute to the outcomes of Aboriginal employees either not returning to work or getting fired as a result of escalated altercations.

Recruitment and retention were cited as big issues for Statistics Canada, an employer that in 2003 had already been working for five years toward a goal of making three percent of its workforce Aboriginal Canadian. Statistics Canada employed several measures to address its retention issues including the creation of an Aboriginal advisory circle which worked with a third-party consultant to create a sensitivity training program for non-Aboriginal employees

(Brown, 2003). The identification of the need for sensitivity training in this example is an indication that the Aboriginal workers felt that a cultural conflict existed in the workplace.

1.1.4 Employment equity.

Canadian laws categorize Aboriginal people as a separate designated group under the *Employment Equity Act* of 1995 through which they have been identified as a group which needs lawful protection from conditions of disadvantage in employment. The vision of equality upon which this statute is based came from Judge Rosalie Abella's Royal Commission report entitled *Equality in Employment* which states that:

> Equality in employment is not a concept that produces the same results for everyone. It is a concept that seeks to identify and remove, barrier by barrier, discriminatory disadvantages. Equality in employment is access to the fullest opportunity to exercise individual potential (Abella, 1984).

1.2 Significance of the Study

Through the examination of the reported work experiences of First Nations people, this study endeavours to capture the essence of their collective experiences which will serve to lay a foundation that may inform and direct future research in this area. It is anticipated that the findings from this study will be a step towards helping organizations successfully support First Nations employees in the Canadian workforce through awareness of pertinent issues.

1.3 Definition of Acculturation

The field of acculturation research is fragmented and difficult to trace, due to a systematic citation failure that has contributed to a persistent cycle of reinvention wherein new theories tend not to have been built on previous work (Rudmin, 2003, 2009). Two models of acculturation will be used to contextualize the focus of this study, the first, introduced by

Hofstede (2001), illustrates the individual acculturation experience typically reported by expatriates, and the second, a more complex fourfold model of Acculturation developed by Berry (1997), which despite having come under criticism, remains the most widely accepted model of acculturation (Rudmin, 2003).

Acculturation is a process of cultural change that prompts a number of cognitive, affective, and behavioural changes in response to continuous first-hand contact between distinct cultural groups or within a new cultural context (Aycan, 1997; Berry et al., 1987). There are many interrelated terms in the body of acculturation literature; acculturation itself describing the full spectrum of cultural change experience such as can be seen in Hofstede's Acculturation Curve. The Acculturation curve plots feelings (negative & positive) along a time horizon, outlining the process in four stages: euphoria; a period of excitement, culture shock; when the individual is exposed to different environmental stimuli or "stressors", acculturation; an appraisal and coping phase wherein the individual is learning to function under the new conditions, and the stable state; reached when the individual's feelings have stabilized (Hofstede, 2001).

Further developments in the acculturation literature (Berry, 1987, 1997) have led to the widely-used fourfold acculturation model, which generated the terminology that has become the standard in the field (Rudmin, 2003). The following conceptualization and discussion of acculturation is the process defined by Berry (1997). The framework for acculturation research in Figure 1 depicts acculturation as a phenomenon which can be observed at the group level, seen as "Group Acculturation", or at the individual level, seen as the central linear process beginning with "Acculturation Experience" and ending with "Long Term Outcomes", where changes occur as a result of the individual's particular experience of acculturation.

Figure 1: Framework for Acculturation Research.
Adapted from "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation," by J.W. Berry, 1997, *Applied Psychology*, 46(1), p. 15.
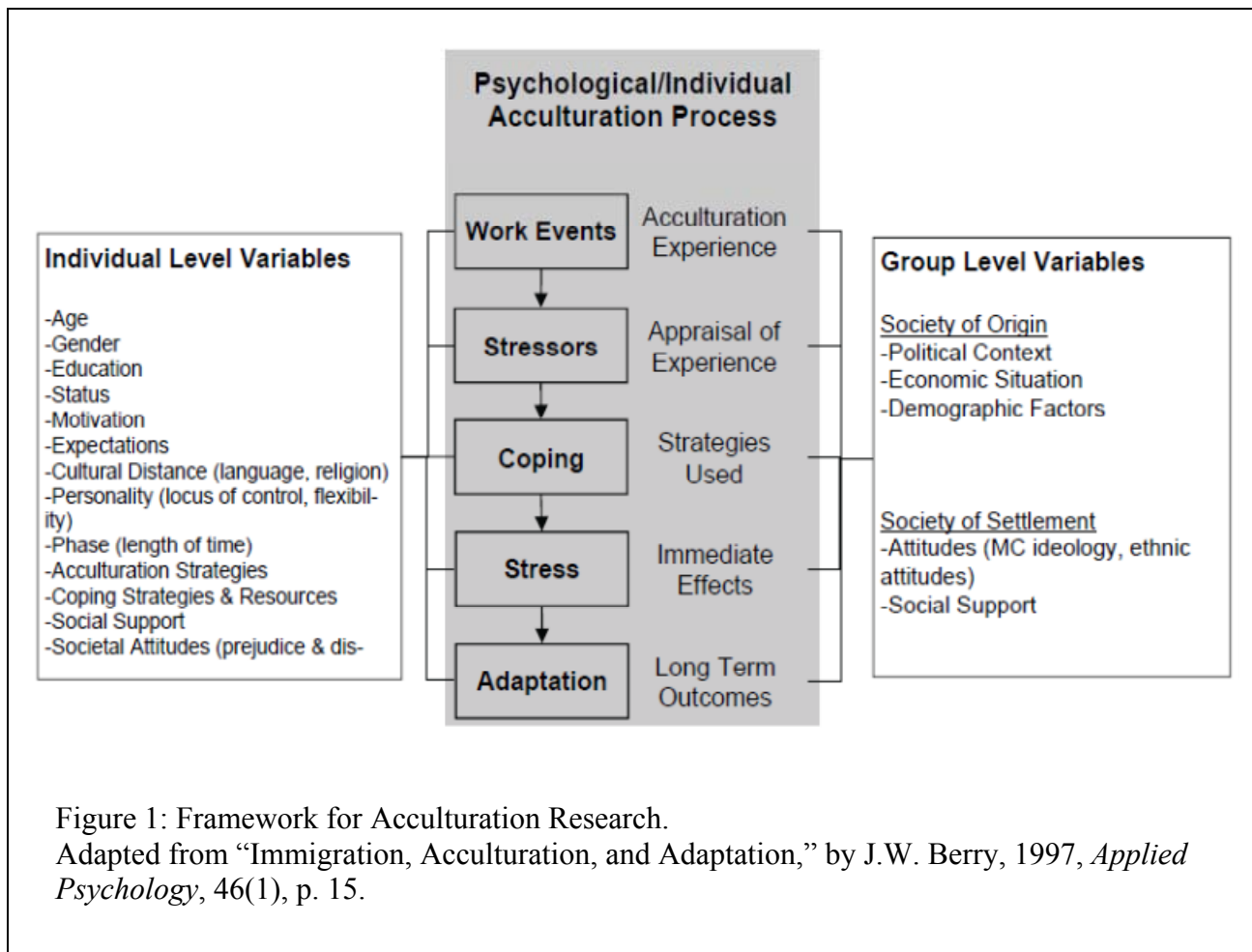
The individual-level experience of acculturation, termed "psychological acculturation" is referred to by Berry as "acculturation" as it will be in this study. This research will focus on the individual-level of analysis due to the objective of understanding the experiences of individuals in the workplace that may not be observed at the more broad cultural level. It is important to make a distinction between *psychological acculturation* and *psychological adaptation,* the latter of which deals only with the outcomes resulting from acculturation and not with the actual changes undergone by acculturating individuals (Berry, 1997).

Acculturation as a phenomenon can be highly variable for each individual depending on the many factors at the group (cultural) level and individual (psychological) levels. Individual-level factors have a moderating effect on the acculturation process (Berry, 1997). Research findings pertaining to individual factors suggest that a successful acculturation experience is more likely to be correlated with younger age at the start of the acculturation process, being male (there is substantial evidence that females may be more at risk for problems than males), a high level of education (higher education is predictive of lower stress), and low degree of cultural distance (low degree of dissimilarity in terms of language, religion etc.) (Berry, 1997). Although the term acculturation can depict a change in either or both cultural groups, there is a tendency for one group, the acculturating group, to undergo more change than the other (Berry et al., 1987).

At the group level, cultural variables can help to contextualize the individual's experience in terms of identifying and understanding the nature of their society of origin as well as that of the society of settlement. The fourfold acculturation model is so named for the four possible orientations or strategies that individuals may follow, assuming that acculturating individuals have the freedom to choose their strategy. The selection of an acculturation strategy is often highly influenced by group-level factors. These four acculturation strategies have been challenged primarily for failure to demonstrate good construct validity; however, they will be presented to give an idea of possible acculturation outcomes (Escobar & Vega, 2000; Rudmin, 2003; van de Vijver, 1999).

The outcomes of acculturation depicted by Berry (1976) in Figure 2 are dependent on the attitudes held by both the acculturating and the host group, and deal with the issues of cultural maintenance, contact, and participation in the host society (Berry et al., 1987; Berry, 1997).

Societies vary in their ideologies regarding cultural diversity. The integration strategy for

example, is supported by pluralistic societies which view multiculturalism as a valued resource.

These societies are less likely to enforce either cultural change, which may result in assimilation,

or exclusion, which may result in segregation or marginalisation. Integration, typically

determined to be the most successful strategy, requires mutual support, and a relationship of

respect from both the acculturating and host society. Of the remaining strategies, marginalization

is the least successful, with assimilation and separation typically seeing an intermediate level of

success (Berry, 1997).

Figure 2: Acculturation Strategies.
Adapted from "Human Ecology and Cognitive Style: Comparative studies in cultural and
psychological adaptation," by J. W. Berry, 1976, New York: Sage/Halsted.
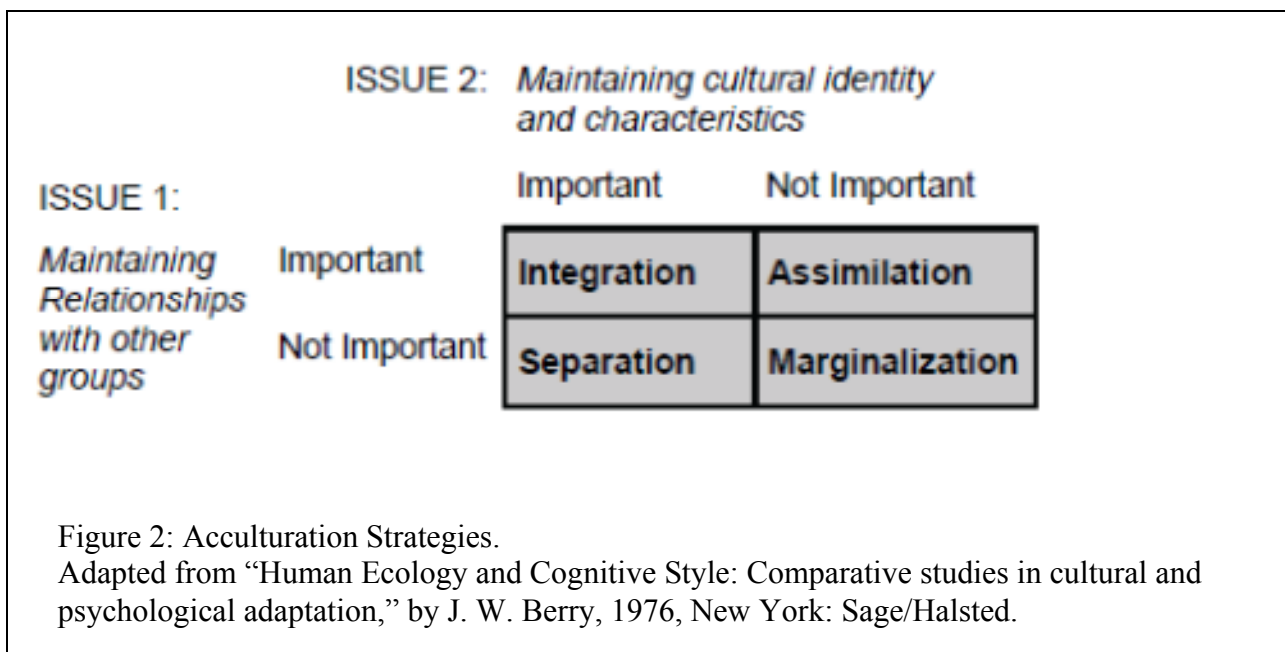
Opponents of the fourfold model have challenged the reported success rankings of these

acculturation strategies, particularly of the integration model's proclaimed superiority, and in

many studies, the success of each respective strategy has been measured as an attitudinal

question (Rudmin, 2003). Despite these criticisms, this model is deemed appropriate to

contextualize this research which is not concerned with the success of any particular strategy, and its inclusion is intended to describe possible coping strategies and acculturation outcomes.

The acculturation experience is moderated by the nature of the acculturating group with respect to the degree of voluntariness of contact, movement, and permanence of contact (Berry et al., 1987). Much research on acculturation has centered on acculturating groups such as expatriates, and immigrants whose contact with the dominant society differs greatly from that of Aboriginal populations being that the latter's contact is seen as involuntary, due to their permanent establishment in Canada, the land of their historical origins (Berry et al., 1987). In comparison to acculturating groups such as expatriates, immigrants and sojourners whose contact is seen as being more voluntary in nature, Aboriginal people are believed to experience the highest levels of acculturative stress (Berry et al., 1987).

Acculturative stress is a natural part of the acculturation process, and it can be defined as a generalized physiological state brought about by the experience of stressors in the environment that require reduction or coping for normal functioning to occur (Berry et al., 1987). Stress behaviours may be manifest through lowered health status (including mental health: confusion, anxiety, and depression), and feelings of marginalization and alienation, heightened psychosomatic symptom levels and identity confusion. It is important to note that acculturative stress is not always a negative state of distress, and rather can be an adaptive psychological state if stressors are perceived as positive challenges or eustress, by acculturating individuals (Berry et al., 1987; Selye, 1975).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to develop an understanding of the shared acculturation experience of Aboriginal people in the Northwestern Ontario urban workforce. It is hoped that

this exploration will lead to the discovery of themes that are relevant to a positive adjustment experience. In pursuit of this goal, the research questions will be designed so as to draw on both positive and negative experiences to obtain a complete picture of the acculturation process.

1.5 Research Question

Given the paucity of available information concerning First Nations people in the workforce, this study will focus on understanding the essence of their adjustment experience in the workplace. Similar to Swagler's (2003) qualitative study of Taiwanese students' acculturation experience in the US, this study will attempt to elicit responses from the perspective and worldview of participants without imposing the dominant culture's cultural context and theories. This study will attempt to answer the question: "What is the psychological acculturation experience of First Nations people in the Northwestern Ontario urban workforce?"

1.6 Stakeholders

For First Nations people, research in the context of the workplace can give a voice to their experiences and stories. This research will be a first step in determining whether there are barriers for First Nations' workers, which is essential for the creation of an inclusive workplace that is in line with the spirit of the *Employment Equity Act*. The *Act* views people as being of equal worth regardless of differences in gender, race, ethnicity, or disability (Doyle-Bedwell, 2008). The focus of this study on First Nations workers, who in this case are the minority culture, is not meant to place the burden of change and adaptation on these workers. Rather, it is important to point out that adaptation to the work environment is a two-way process wherein change can occur in individuals of both the majority and minority cultures (Berry et al., 1987).

For organizations in Canada that are looking to build or retain a cohesive diverse workforce, an understanding of the experiences of First Nations workers may facilitate supportive work environments and other human resource practices that will lead to greater success for these workers. The Canadian workforce is currently experiencing skilled labour shortages in some professions with further shortages projected into the future. The Aboriginal population, having an age distribution structure that is younger than that of the non-Aboriginal population, is important for the future of the Canadian workforce, as the growing labour supply could potentially alleviate some of these shortages (Anonson, 2008; Hanselmann, 2001; Mendelson, 2004). Additionally, having a workforce that includes Aboriginal employees could help organizations tap in to the growing market of Aboriginal consumers.

1.7 Historical Context

Social relations between the Aboriginal people and the dominant culture in Canada have been shaped by a long history of interaction dating as far back as the 1500s. The social, economic, and settlement patterns of the Aboriginal people have been profoundly impacted by treaties and legislation, a selection of which will be covered in brief to provide a contextual framework for viewing present day relationships (Odjig, 1985).

1.7.1 Treaties.

The issues of treaties, which include rights to land, resources, and self-governance, remain highly salient for Aboriginal people today (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.; Odjig, 1985). Although there were some treaties signed as early as 1680, the majority of the Canadian territory (excepting British Columbia, the Yukon, parts of Quebec and Newfoundland which to this day have not been treated) was obtained through 11 numbered Treaties established with First Nations bands between 1871 and 1921 by the new government which was formed through the

British North American Act (BNA Act) in 1867. The *BNA Act* was created without the

participation of Aboriginal peoples, and with it, the government of Canada assumed legislative

power over "Indians and Indian lands" (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Odjig, 1985).

The area encompassing Thunder Bay spans the northern shore of Lake Superior from

Pigeon River to Batchewana Bay, and is covered by the Robinson-Superior Treaty, signed pre-

confederation in 1850 with the Ojibewa Indians of Lake Superior (Fort William First Nation,

2010; INAC, 2008; Natural Resources Canada, 2009). For the relinquishment of their land, the

First Nations people received a one-time payment with a smaller sum to be paid in perpetuity,

reserve lands, and hunting and fishing rights on unoccupied Crown land (INAC, 2008, Natural

Resources Canada, 2009). The territory to the North and West of Thunder Bay is covered by

Treaties 9 and 3 respectively, which comprise similar terms with the addition of a school,

hunting and agricultural provisions, and exemption from conscription (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008;

Henderson, Benson & Findlay, 2000; INAC, 2010; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993, p. 25).

In a statement from the Fort William First Nation (2010), the Ojibway First Nation whose

reserve lands are south of and adjacent to Thunder Bay, the intention of those who signed their

treaty was expressed: "the Chief and Headmen who signed the Treaty on their behalf intended

that the reservation would provide not just for their children, but for their grandchildren's

grandchildren. However, most of the best reserve land was taken within about three generations".

During the treaty negotiations, First Nations leaders were assembled with government

officials and interpreters who conveyed a spirit of caring for the well-being of Aboriginal people.

An example of this can be seen in the government Commissioner's proclamation to the

Aboriginal people involved in the Treaty 7 negotiations, that they were not being approached to

barter for their lands, rather, the Queen wanted to help the Aboriginal people, whom she had

always valued equally to her "White children", she understood their problems, and was anxious to help them (Henderson et al., 2000; Study by Treaty 7 Elders and Tribal Council, 1996 in Frideres & Gadacz, 2008, Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

The government's negotiation of treaties is believed to have been undertaken to free the land for settlement and secure the safety of the colonies by avoiding confrontation with the Aboriginal people such as the bloody battles which had occurred south of the border (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Odgij, 1985). Henderson, et al. (2000) state that despite the government's intention to extinguish Aboriginal rights to the land, the nature and extent of such rights were neither discussed during negotiations nor defined in the treaties. Instead, the emphasis in preliminary treaty negotiations was placed on what the Aboriginal people would receive.

Some Aboriginal people feel that the government misrepresented their intentions, acting in its own best interests, as represented by statements such as the following from the Indian Brotherhood (1969): "the officials of Her Majesty the Queen committed a legal fraud in a very sophisticated manner upon unsophisticated, unsuspecting, illiterate, uninformed natives" (Cardinal, 1969 from Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993). Unfulfilled treaty promises have been a continual source of mistrust and conflict between Aboriginal people and the government, and remain a key issue today (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

The words spoken by government agents, verbal assurances, promises, and statements of Crown intent, were highly significant for a people accustomed to an oral tradition (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). In the course of many treaty negotiations, verbal promises were made to the Aboriginal people that were not included in the written treaty texts. These verbal promises went largely unrecognized, leading to widespread dissatisfaction among the Aboriginal people (Henderson et al., 2000). Aboriginal associations uniformly insist that the words spoken by

government agents during treaty negotiations cannot be separated from the written texts because they were accepted as truth by the Aboriginal participants (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). The Grand Council of Treaty No. 3 along with all of the Prairie Aboriginal organizations feels that the treaties should be revised to reflect their original spirit and intent (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

The treaty provisions implemented by the government are a source of grievance for Aboriginal people, and for many, a source of distrust for government motives (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Many Aboriginal people feel that the government did not in good faith uphold its end of the bargain such as a declared failure to provide the expected agricultural assistance. An introduction to farming offered under the treaty terms was a means to "civilize" Aboriginal people. Through farming, Aboriginal people would contribute to the Canadian labour force, and this was seen as a method of weaning them from a traditional subsistence (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

Aboriginal agricultural development was constrained through the prohibition of freely marketing produce or livestock, and also through the encouraged surrender of prime farm land when efforts to turn the Aboriginal people into farmers did not succeed (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Traditional practices of Aboriginal people were seen as a threat to assimilation efforts, and from 1830 to 1875, official programs were developed to force the cessation of traditional lifestyle practice; both the Potlatch and Sundance ceremonies, which interrupted ploughing and farming for up to six weeks, were banned (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

The most problematic concept throughout the treaty negotiations is perhaps the stated intent of the Crown to "help" the Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal people at that time, helping

would have meant support in continuing in their traditional way of life (Henderson, et al., 2000). In a changing environment wherein the diminishing game supply threatened a uniquely traditional subsistence, some Aboriginal people saw agricultural assistance as a gesture to supplement traditional gathering and hunting practices. For the Crown, however, helping meant assistance in becoming civilized; the assimilation of Aboriginal people into dominant society (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008).

1.7.2 Legislation.

Economic development and racism have been attributed as the drivers of the government's policy of detribalization which motivated a slew of policies and strategies that hindered the exercise of traditional lifestyles, and tried to force the assimilation of Aboriginal people into the dominant society (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Upton, 1973 from Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993; Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993;). The Royal Commission of Aboriginal peoples made a statement saying that "Successive governments have tried – sometimes intentionally, sometimes in ignorance – to absorb Aboriginal people into Canadian Society, thus eliminating them as distinct peoples" (Environics Institute, 2010). The effects of these policies have been intergenerational and continue to be felt by Aboriginal people today (Environics Institute, 2010). Historical relations between Euro-Western and Aboriginal people in Canada have been ethnocentric and hegemonic, based on the Euro-Western premise that Aboriginal people are inferior and uncivilized, have formed the basis for much of the legislation (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008; Kulchyski, 1995).

Assimilation was legislatively introduced through the *Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in this Province, and to Amend the Laws Relating to Indians*. Later re-named the *Gradual Civilization Act*, and passed in 1857, this statute introduced

enfranchisement, a process whereby Aboriginal people lost their legal Indian identities, became British citizens, meaning "full members" of society, and were personally allocated portions of land from their Tribe's existing reserve (from 1876 Annual report of the Canadian Department of the Interior as cited in Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996 as cited in Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Joseph (1991) states that enfranchisement was intended to devalue and eliminate Indian societies, and also to divest Aboriginal people of governance and ownership rights of their territories. Enfranchisement could be voluntary for those who qualified, but was mandatory for some, such as for male Indians fitting certain criteria such as the ability to read and write in French or English, and for Indian women who married a non-Indian man (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993; Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in this Province, and to Amend the Laws Relating to Indians, 1857).

Reinforcing a "civilization" orientation is the Indian Act of 1876, an amalgamation and expansion of previous legislation regarding Aboriginal people which can be seen as having three central elements: (1) defined who was an "Indian", putting the power to classify people into the hands of the government, (2) provided for the protection of Aboriginal lands, and (3) provided for the concentration of authority over Aboriginal people, who were seen as wards of the state (Wotherspoon & Satzewich, 1993).

The Indian Act was amended in 1985 by Bill C-31, which sought to remove sexual discrimination from it, restore Indian status and band membership rights to eligible individuals, and allow band control of membership (Joseph, 1991). Although conceivably well-intentioned, this Bill has triggered claims of genocide, and has been dubbed a Trojan horse by many who feel that its regulations serve only to advance the government's continued assimilation efforts. Joseph (1991) describes many difficulties that arise in putting this Bill into practice and mentions some

of the most contentious issues for individuals and bands explaining that they relate to the documentation and reinstatement process, limited band land and resources to share with reinstated Indians, and access to status benefits.

One last facet of the assimilation scheme of note is the residential school system, which ran primarily from the 1840s to the 1960s (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.) in partnership with dominant Christian religious institutions. These facilities were a particularly significant conduit by which to instil isolated Aboriginal children with dominant culture language, customs, and values to the exclusion of traditional teachings, which were devalued and prohibited (Frideres & Gadacz, 2008). Attendance at these institutions was compulsory from 1850 to 1948, affecting successive generations of Aboriginal people for nearly a century (Milloy, 1999).

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Characteristics of Phenomenological Research

Phenomenological research is qualitative, involving an inductive approach that is grounded in the philosophical assumptions of social constructivism, which holds that social reality is a product of social processes such as interactions, beliefs, and meaning (Neuman, 2006). Contrary to the positivist and postpositivist paradigms whose ontological beliefs are that reality is objective and exists "out there", reality in the social constructivist paradigm is believed to be subjective, existing in the mind of the perceiver (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Neuman, 2006). The fundamental differences in ontology lead to a corresponding divergence in views on human agency. Where positivist social science takes the stance that structural forces are more central towards predicting behaviour than mental processes, hinging on the assumption of human rationality, social constructivism acknowledges humans to be irrational, emotional, prejudice-based, and falsely informed at times, emphasizing instead the importance of internal thought processes and motives (Neuman, 2006). That is to say that knowledge is created from the analysis of internal thought processes and consideration of motives, and is based on the reality that is socially constructed by the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Neuman, 2006). Objective reality in this view can only be recognized subjectively through the perception of the person perceiving it, and thus, knowledge creation and the act of knowing is inextricably linked to the knower (Moustakas, 1994; Neuman, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1989).

The development of phenomenology is rooted in the work of Husserl (1859-1938), whose views were expanded upon by Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Polkinghorne, and most recently Moustakas (Spiegelberg & Schuhmann, 1982). Phenomenology is the study of the essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon, with the goal of deriving universal meanings;

the essence of the experience for those who have experienced it (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989; van Manen, 1990). Phenomenological research seeks to achieve a deep understanding of the world as it is immediately experienced, by gathering information relating to what experiences are like for participants that is uncontaminated by conceptualization, categorization, and theorizing (van Manen, 1984).

2.2 Approaches to Phenomenological Research

Creswell identifies two main approaches to phenomenological research: hermeneutic phenomenology, and transcendental (also known as empirical or psychological) phenomenology. The former, championed by van Manen (1990), sees phenomenology as an interpretive process in addition to a description of the lived experience wherein the researcher interprets and "mediates" between different meanings of the experiences. The latter approach, championed by Moustakas (1994) attempts to minimize researcher interpretation, using Husserl's process of epoché, to abstain from the 'natural' way of perceiving things so as to set aside presuppositions from prior experience and perceive the phenomenon freshly, as if for the first time (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The transcendental approach has been selected for this research in consideration of the researcher's level of experience with research, and out-group member status.

Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological approach has data analysis procedures that are more structured than van Manen's hermeneutical approach, the former, having four sequential steps, and the latter being more abstract, described as a dynamic interplay among six research activities.

2.3 Role of the Researcher

The transcendental phenomenological researcher has a responsibility to identify biases, values and personal interest (Creswell, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). This researcher is a member of

Canada's dominant culture and is of British ancestry, a cultural heritage recognized among Aboriginal people as that of a 'colonizer' (Smith, 2005). Being an outsider to the population of interest, it is expected that interpretations and correct attributions of all dialogue will present difficulties. As a new researcher from a different cultural context whose aim is to capture the responses of participants from their perspective and worldview, uncontaminated by presuppositions, I feel that the transcendental phenomenological approach will be most appropriate. The risk of bias in interpretation will be mitigated by the approach's structured data analysis process that focuses on capturing the experience of participants as they see it and not on researcher interpretation (Creswell, 2007; Neuman, 2006). The resulting textural and structural descriptions are expected to be more trustworthy and have the greatest chance of bridging the gap between the researcher's understanding of observed social reality and that of the participants (Neuman, 2006).

My interest in this area of study stems from my own experiences of the acculturation process on two separate one-year placements; the first as an exchange student in Sweden, and the second as an expatriate worker in France. During my time abroad I have had the opportunity to observe the acculturation processes of numerous others while struggling with my own acculturation difficulties, and have gained an understanding of the process. I have a desire to learn more about the acculturation processes of others, and help those who are facing their own cultural adjustment processes. To clarify, I intend for "helping" to entail taking steps towards creating a work environment that is supportive of Aboriginal workers, and this does not include the prescription of a particular acculturation coping strategy for those individuals.

My personal beliefs, derived through a combination of observation and interpretation, are that Aboriginal people do experience acculturation difficulties in the workplace and that they

face and perceive varying degrees of ethnocentrism from coworkers whereby they are judged by the standards and beliefs of the majority culture and are thus likely to be misunderstood and undervalued in the workplace. It is also my belief that in contrast to expatriates, who are more likely to be recognized as going through an adjustment process and having different cultural values, there is significantly less awareness of acculturation issues and cultural differences that are faced by Aboriginal people in Canada. Should common difficulties present themselves in the course of research; it is this researcher's view that increased awareness of such issues will be a necessary first step in identifying a potential solution.

2.3.1 Role of Co-researchers.

The term "co-researcher" describes persons who have taken part in this research whether as an advisor or participant. Discussions were held with advisors, stakeholders from the urban Aboriginal community who have served in an advisory capacity in the development of the research proposal. Discussions with advisors were undertaken to ensure the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in the creation of the research, to form and refine research questions as well as terminology, and to prepare the researcher for successful data collection.

The participants in this study are the source of knowledge, and the perceivers of the phenomenon of interest, whose dialogue with the researcher generated the essence of the lived experiences of acculturation. Participation in this study was open to any persons of the age of majority who self-identified as being Aboriginal and had been employed in a Euro-Western workplace in the Thunder Bay area within the six months preceding the time of interview. The time frame of six months was selected both to ensure that those persons who were unemployed at the time of data collection could be included, and also that the work experience recollections were recent enough for rich data collection.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection was undertaken from October 2010 to December 2010. Procedures will be discussed in terms of the setting, the actors, the events and the process as defined by Miles & Huberman (1994).

As with all elements of the data collection process, participants must feel at ease. According to Moustakas (1994) the researcher is responsible for creating a climate in which the co-researcher will feel comfortable, and respond honestly and comprehensively. To create such an atmosphere, a snack and warm beverage was offered to participants to build trust, as suggested by Moustakas (1994). Participants also had some input as to the physical setting and time of their interviews, as recommended by Smith (2005).

The actors, or participants, were purposefully selected through a sequential sampling strategy which took a non-probability sample (Neuman, 2006). The purposeful selection of participants was necessary to ensure the inclusion of a broad range of demographic backgrounds, work experiences to achieve wholeness, which is described by Moustakas (1994) as a concern with examining phenomena from many sides, angles and perspectives to capture a unified vision of the essence of the experiences.

Participants were contacted through the leads of the advisors and personal contacts within and connected to the Aboriginal community. The support and referrals of stakeholders and other in-group members was intended to help ease apprehensions that may exist surrounding research, allowing for more extensive and open interviews (Smith, 1999). Recommendations as to appropriate sample sizes in phenomenology are mixed as reported in Creswell's (2007) Qualitative Inquiry Handbook, with Polkinghorne (1989) recommending the selection of between 5-25 participants, and Dukes (1984) advising the selection of between 3-10. This

discrepancy in sample size makes the sequential sampling strategy particularly appropriate, as the number of participants will not be predetermined, as the sample size deemed adequate at saturation, the point at which no new themes are identified by the last additional participant (Miles & Huberman 1994; Neuman, 2006). The sequential sampling strategy has the strength of ensuring that a broad experience of acculturation is captured, as the sample size is reflexive of the complexity of the phenomenon of study.

The events consisted of the observation of participants' verbal and non-verbal responses in face-to-face, one-on-one interviews. The observation of non-verbal responses served as a means of capturing and understanding participants' experiences in more depth, allowing the researcher to ask probing questions related to observed behaviours and not as a basis for researcher interpretation. Data was collected both in the form of audio recording from which transcripts of the interviews were created, and through written notes with observations of non-verbal responses in an attempt to supplement transcripts and aid with understanding.

The interviews were semi-structured and one-on-one, using open-ended questions with the aim of obtaining descriptors of participants' experiences free from their interpretation or theoretical explanations (Polkinghorne, 1989). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate to the skill level of the researcher while offering the flexibility of being able to probe and explore topics further and in more depth as they emerged (Appendix 2). The flexibility of the semi-structured interviews also allowed for the researcher to ensure that enough detail was gathered and that participants understood the questions and responded on topic, as follow-up and probing questions could be used as required.

In line with the recommendations of Polkinghorne (1989), the interview questions were not shaped as tests of ready-made categories, and instead focused on specific situations and

instances of acculturation. The essence of themes was anticipated to emerge free of preconceived notions using this technique, ensuring that the worldview of participants was respected.

2.4.1 Participants.

Interviews were conducted over the period of October 2010 to December 2010. Six First Nations people participated, 3 females and 3 males ranging in age from 25 to 52 years old. All participants at the time of interview lived in Thunder Bay, an urban setting, and two of the group were born in rural settings experiencing life on a reserve before moving to urban centers by the age of 10. Five participants identified as being of Ojibway descent, and one as Saulteax Cree. In terms of education, all participants attempted either college, university or both, with two completing both university and college designations, one obtaining both undergraduate and post-graduate university degrees, two obtaining college diplomas, and one opting to further his/her education in the workforce. All participants were employed at their current workplaces ranging from 11 months to 18 years. In the sixth interview no new themes emerged indicating saturation.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Following Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for phenomenological data analysis, the procedures covered the subsequent four steps: epoché, transcendental phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and the synthesis of texture and structure.

The first step, epoché, also commonly referred to as "bracketing", means to refrain from judgment, and is pulled from the work of Husserl. Rigour in research was reinforced through epoché, which entails an attitude shift from the everyday way of perceiving things to a phenomenological attitude. This phenomenological attitude is realized through a naive perception – through the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego which is free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge from prior experience, meaning that looking must come

before judgment (Moustakas, 1994). Pursuant to this aim, the researcher engaged in an active process of reflecting and writing down preconceptions and prejudgments to reduce their influence in the data analysis procedure.

The second step, transcendental phenomenological reduction, involves bracketing, horizontalization, and delimitation of data. Bracketing occurs when the researcher "brackets out" the world, identifying data in pure form (Patton, 2002). Without interpreting data in terms of the standard meanings attributed to it in the literature, the researcher identified key statements and phrases that pertained directly to the phenomenon of acculturation. The meanings of these phrases were then inspected for what they said about the essential features of the phenomenon. Tentative themes were developed at this point that described the essential recurring phenomenon (Patton, 2002).Once bracketed, the data were horizontalized, which is to say, spread out for examination with equal weight given to all elements. Next the researcher deliminated the data, a process involving the elimination of irrelevant, repetitive, and overlapping data (Patton, 2002).

In the third step, imaginative variation, invariant themes were enhanced or expanded through their examination from different viewpoints, and the researcher developed a textural portrayal and structural description. The textural portrayal sought to explain "what" the participants experienced, and these enhanced versions of themes contained only the feelings and emotions derived from an analysis of the meanings associated with these experiences rather than the actual experiences. The structural description explained "how" the participants as a group experienced acculturation. In the final step, synthesis of texture and structure, the meanings and essences described were integrated (Moustakas, 1994, Patton, 2002).

2.6 Strategies for Validating Findings

The basic premise of reliability and validity, which stem from quantitative research, are accepted in qualitative research, however, they are often termed and applied differently as befits the general philosophical assumptions that underlie qualitative research.

Assessments of reliability and validity in qualitative research center on the ontological premise that reality is socially constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). According to Neuman (2006) it is due to the philosophical assumptions underlying qualitative research which hold that social reality "assumes that the beliefs and meaning people create and use fundamentally shape what reality is for them" that the corresponding approaches to reliability and validity are necessarily distinct from those in the quantitative approach. Reliability and validity in qualitative research focus on ensuring the accuracy of the reporting of reality, and seek to bridge the gap between the researcher's understanding of the participants' reality and their perceptions of their own realities (Carmines & Zellers, 1979 from Neuman, 2006).

2.6.1 Measurement reliability.

Reliability in qualitative research is often referred to as dependability or consistency, and it applies to the manner in which observations are made by the researchers over time. Neuman (2006) acknowledges that consistency may be difficult to achieve given that study processes often evolve and change, and are expected to do so. Creswell's (2003) view on reliability takes on the notion that reliability can be addressed in several ways during the research process such as using high-quality observational tools (Creswell, 2007). Interviews were recorded using a high-quality recording device, and data was coded using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software.

2.6.2 Measurement validity.

Neuman uses the term 'authenticity' to describe validity that reflects the truthfulness of the research and its being an accurate representation of a fair, honest, and balanced account of social life from the participant's perspective. Creswell's definition of validity centers on a process rather than verification as the term applies to quantitative research, and he suggests that researchers employ accepted validation strategies to document the accuracy of their studies. One example of a validation strategy is the act of working with people consistently for prolonged periods. This strategy is associated with building trust with participants (Creswell, 2007).

The measurement process must include certain features, according to Neuman (2006), for research to be valid. It is important that truth claims be plausible, reflecting the researcher's genuine experience. Data collection should be rich, as empirical claims gain validity when supported by numerous pieces of data. Validity arises with cumulative impact of many details and observations, and grows as a researcher makes a web of connections between data and details. Validity in qualitative research means bridging the gap between the researcher's understanding of observed social reality with that of the co-researcher (Neuman, 2006).

In the proposed study, participants were asked whether they would agree to a follow-up discussion via phone or other medium of their choice. Follow-up discussions were used to validate findings through member-checking, where participants had the opportunity to hear and discuss themes and specific descriptions pertaining to them to ascertain their accuracy and make clarifications.

Additional validation strategies were used, including : rich, thick description (to convey findings vividly), bias clarification (through bracketing), the presentation of negative or discrepant information (the focus was on providing a complete description of the experiences as

opposed to simplifying observations for convenience), and peer debriefing as per the recommendations of Creswell (2003).

2.7 Narrative Structure

Many styles as suggested in Creswell (2003) were used in the narrative including direct quotations from participants in various forms: embedded in text, in short and long forms, intertwined with author interpretations, and indented to draw attention. A discussion of the theories and general literature on acculturation were included following the narrative where a comparison was drawn highlighting items for which there was a consensus, and also those for which there are discrepancies as well as new information that may not have been explained by the literature.

2.8 Anticipated Ethical Issues

Studies including the Aboriginal population require adherence to additional requirements under the Canadian government's Tri-Council Policy (TCPS, 1998). To meet requirements, the full disclosure of the methods, purpose, and potential implications of the research occurred. Additionally, the research was developed with the input and advice of four stakeholders from the Aboriginal community, including Robert Jerome, M.Ed., and Esther McKay, Aboriginal Healing and Wellness Coordinator at the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre, to ensure that cultural values and beliefs were respected[3]. Due to the vulnerability of the target population, ethical considerations were built into the research design, and the good practices suggested in the Tri-Council Policy Statement were followed (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural

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[3] *Two individuals from an Aboriginal research organization also played an advisory role in the development of this research, but wished to remain anonymous.*

Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010).

There was no risk of physical harm, injury to reputation or privacy, and no laws were breached. Although it was not expected, there was some minimal psychological risk that participants may have felt uncomfortable talking about certain work experiences and may have found the recalling of some experiences from their past upsetting. To mitigate the risk of harm, participants were informed that they had the option of skipping questions, taking a break during the interview process, or withdrawing from the study at any time. The semi-structured interview style and open-ended questions gave participants the control of bringing up experiences of their choosing. The participant information sheet provided information about community resources that participants could access if their participation caused them any distress.

Participants who agreed to a post-interview discussion had the opportunity to review data from their interview to ensure that it was an accurate representation of what they would like to contribute to the research. During this process, participants had the opportunity to have any of their data modified or removed, and the researcher asked the participants to identify any existing anonymity issues.

The researcher maintained the confidentiality of individual participants. The nature of the phenomenological methodology requires reporting individual responses; however, the researcher protected the confidentiality of participants by not sharing information that could be used to identify any participant. Data was anonymized through the removal of information, such as the names of people or workplaces, which could reveal an individual's identity. As part of the debriefing process, the interviewer asked participants to identify any information shared that could compromise their confidentiality, and whether there had been any information shared

which they would prefer not to have included in the study. All information will be secured by the researcher's supervisor in either a locked cabinet or through password protection for a period of 5 years at which point it will be destroyed. This information is shared in the participant information letter (Appendix 3).

Following recommendations from Schinke (2010), and to be consistent with Aboriginal cultural expectations, verbal consent was obtained from participants and documented by the researcher. As part of the consent process, participants were given an information sheet which the researcher reviewed with them as part of the interview briefing. In-line with the REB requirements, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, what is involved, the risks and benefits of participating, and their rights such as the right to withdraw at any time from the study. Approval by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board was obtained on September 8, 2010 (see Appendix 4)

3.0 Results

The phenomenon of psychological acculturation in the workplace was examined using Berry's (1997) Framework for Acculturation Research (Figure 1) as a guide and looking at what the participants experienced in terms of stressors, coping, stress immediate effects, and adaptation (see Appendix 1).

3.1 Stressors

It is important to understand that the stressors are reported in aggregate, which does not imply that all participants experienced each stressor or that these stressors were ever-present in the participants' lives. This phenomenological study seeks in its findings to outline the most complete range of experiences felt by participants to better understand the phenomenon of psychological acculturation in the workplace. The stressors experienced by participants touched on the umbrella themes of:

1) Feeling misunderstood

2) Experiencing insensitivity

3) Feeling unsupported

4) Treated unfairly

5) Experiencing racial discrimination; and

6) Feeling disempowered.

3.1.1 Feeling misunderstood.

Some broad cultural misunderstandings were shared involving government dealings with First Nations people, specifically the residential schools settlement. Frustration was expressed surrounding the issuance of monetary compensation to First Nations people as part of the

settlement. The money was said by one participant to be interpreted by First Nations people as "a pay-off" and of the government it was said that on their part:

> It's not an acknowledgement that they're sorry that these things happened, and I can see
> the reason why these impacts have happened – the suicides – everybody who's trying to
> help them or come for help has hurt them further.

The government did not act with a thorough understanding of the values of First Nations people. The value and importance of apologies to First Nations people was brought up both in historical relations and in the life of one participant.

A lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people on the part of colleagues was identified by several participants as a stressor. One participant shared that "Often people will ask questions that come with a lot of assumptions of like a preconceived idea of what it means to be an Aboriginal person." This indicates a felt lack of accurate knowledge on the part of others, and the participant later went on to give an example of this through a conversation with a colleague who he had felt was a knowledgeable person:

> But when she was asking these questions, she was asking a lot of very basic questions
> like she really didn't understand much of Aboriginal people or, or myself, or a variation
> of very basic type of archaic knowledge about how Aboriginal people are…..I don't think
> I necessarily met all of her preconceived expectations.

The presence of preconceived expectations suggests that the participant felt that his coworker held stereotypes concerning First Nations people.

One participant discussed her desire for open communication and learning regarding cultural protocol with her colleagues who she described as "not open to asking the questions", attributing political correctness as a possible cause, and describing the lack of open dialogue as a

barrier. She also recounted her own experience of learning about Euro-Western culture, employing a pro-active approach:

> My favourite thing to say is "is it appropriate if?" you know, cause I don't know, and
>
> people look at you like you're slow because you don't know, but it's like being in two
>
> different countries while you're here.

When using this approach the participant often feels misunderstood; that others perceive her as slow or less capable instead of being aware and understanding that she is attempting to learn cultural protocol.

3.1.2 Experiencing insensitivity.

Closely tied to the feeling of being misunderstood is that of experiencing a lack of sensitivity towards those issues that are not understood. Participants reported many instances of cultural missteps on the part of people in general and colleagues such as the following exchange: "They asked me what my Indian name was and I said it's called a spirit name and then they go 'well, well whatever. So what's your Indian name?'" The comment and dismissive tone of the other person offended the participant who did not feel that the other person was being respectful of her or of her culture.

An instance of insensitivity in the workplace was evidenced through a participant's dialogue with a coworker:

> One woman asked me, oh she told me that she loved my lips, she said that I reminded her
>
> of queen Latifah and she goes "and you are kind of regal like that, I'm going to start
>
> calling you my black queen" and she didn't realize how offensive that could be. I said,
>
> "for one thing I'm brown. I wouldn't mind being black, but I'm not black". I said "I'm
>
> brown. So she goes "well how about brown queen?" and I said "well, what if I called you

pale sallow witch?" and she looks at me. I go "you don't find that like insulting?" She

goes "but I called you a queen, you called me a witch" and I said "I don't appreciate

being called a queen either" and then she was like "oh", and then she goes "oh, you're so

fun."

In this participant's experience, the colleague in her initial statement is unaware of her cultural

insensitivity in using a racial/ethnic nickname which also happens to be inaccurate (black instead

of brown). Although the participant interprets that the nickname is not intended to offend her, the

colleague's resulting dismissal of the issue "oh, you're so fun" led the participant to feel

disrespected, as she shares that her feelings were hurt and goes on to explain that:

I just feel like the etiquette is not really there for First Nations people. I feel like a lot of

times people think 'oh, I don't get it', so you know, why do I need to say I'm sorry

anyway.

The participant feels that a lot of the time other people do not make an effort or take

responsibility for their own cultural learning and that she must bear the entire burden instead of it

being a shared endeavour. These feelings are further evidenced in the following comment that

was said in the context of an incident which resulted in the participant verbally retaliating: "I

could take the high road, but sometimes it's hard when you feel like you're the only one who's

trying you know? Cause a lot of people are oblivious, you know?"

3.1.3 Feeling unsupported.

The feeling of being unsupported was a stressor shared by some participants, and most

instances of this related to cultural issues. Near the end of a discussion about the educational

system, one participant said about society:

We have two streams or more streams, I think that there's the white way, and then there's everybody else lumped into another way. I think that really exists still, and I don't think it's ever really going to change.

This same participant continued on to relate an example of a behavioural change that she has made in the workplace to "deal with the limitations" of people she encounters:

I can work with people I hate, I couldn't have done that before, cause I couldn't be a fake, cause I would have selective Tourette's, things would be bubbling out of my head 'oh my God I *hate* you' did I say that out loud? You know? But now it's more or less yeah, I can do that now. Pretend.

The workplace cultural protocol is experienced as required insincerity for the participant, a departure from her values, or natural way of being. In this instance the participant did not feel that she was supported in her value of honest communication nor that she would be supported in maintaining that value in the workplace.

Another example of work demands conflicting with personal and cultural values was voiced by a participant whose job position entailed representing Aboriginal people. The participant felt that his identity as an Aboriginal person was being used to gain credibility with Aboriginal people through his work, and shared that "in some ways I felt like [I was], I wouldn't go on to say necessarily exploited, but *used* to do this kind of work." Given that his work involved contact with Aboriginal people outside of his organization, the participant was especially cognizant of his impact and responsibility in representing his culture to his organization and representing his organization and work to other Aboriginal people. The participant felt pressured to compromise his values to meet workplace demands and stated that "I

don't necessarily feel that supported as an Aboriginal person in the workplace, I feel more like a machine…."

An instance of feeling unsupported that is not directly tied to culture was recalled by a participant who undertook a project of his own initiative that he felt was necessary to solve a problem in the workplace:

I had to write this difficult manual and I don't know anything about it, because my peers didn't have the time of day to do it….and nobody was overlooking all that, and there was nothing set up so until this manual had to come about and that's what I focused on. And now, I'm getting heck from my peers, the non-Aboriginal peers saying I'm not chipping in, I'm not helping, but I am, I'm busy trying to scramble around researching things I shouldn't even be doing.

In this example, the participant felt strongly that his project was essential to the workplace and is frustrated at his vision not being shared by coworkers who in turn do not support his efforts to the point that the work he is doing is not valued, and he feels overwhelmed by the task and criticized in his efforts.

3.1.4 Treated unfairly.

Participants reported some instances of unjust treatment in the workplace where they felt disrespected and bullied, singled out, and faced with unfair treatment. This theme includes only instances of unfair treatment that are not reported to be racially motivated, as racially motivated experiences have been included in the theme of racial discrimination.

An instance of unfair treatment that frustrated a participant concerned an exchange relationship whereby the participant felt smothered by her boss' close watch of her work hours, of which not all were not being properly valued, as the participant explained that the boss

"wouldn't consider the over and above work that I would do after work hours, it was like give and take, so I had a really hard time with that, with her". The participant's experience of her work hour monitoring led her to feel mistrusted and taken advantage of with respect to her overtime not being counted by her boss.

Instances of feeling unfairly reprimanded were also reported, and one participant while in the process of supporting a colleague felt singled out and disrespected by her boss who walked by and remarked in a snarky tone: oh that's *nice*, why don't you guys get some tea and coffee and get some cookies and then you can have a really good break in front of everybody" the participant shared that "the boss said it really loudly and was quite a ways away, so of course everybody heard her, right?" The participant felt frustrated at the rudeness and at the disrespectful intent of the boss' comment to belittle her and her colleague.

One participant reported experiencing bullying by a supervisor and not understanding the reason why, given that she is very competent at her job and receives positive feedback from satisfied customers. The participant experiences the bullying as intimidating behaviour such as yelling, distrust, not being given the benefit of the doubt, and being treated with disrespect. An example of a typical incident was shared wherein the supervisor came into the room "really hard walking" and yelled in an angry tone: "I want to know how this happened!!!" the participant replied: "what do you mean?" and the supervisor yelled jumping up and down: "This wasn't filled out properly!!!" Another occurrence experienced as bullying consisted of an accusation by the supervisor that the participant did not turn on the alarm in which the participant responded saying: "well, I know I turned the alarm on, maybe was it the cleaning staff? Like, could it possibly be" and her supervisor replied: "No, it *had* to be you (snide)".

3.1.5 Experienced racial discrimination.

Several participants reported stressors consistent with racial discrimination which for those who experienced it felt its presence both broadly across society and the workplace atmosphere, as well as on an individual level.

At the societal level, two participants shared feelings of being targeted for their First Nations identities in addition to their female gender, one exclaimed that "I feel like sometimes I should just walk around with a great big target on my back" and the other sharing that:

Having lived through discrimination, harassment through school, just daily lives, when

you see this kind of behaviour carry on in the workplace, having lived and experienced it,

I have a greater desire to stop that type of behaviour because I know it can be damaging.

In discussion of the participants' lives growing up and dealing with the general public, participants shared experiences of racial discrimination with bullies in the schoolyard, in stores, and walking down the street. Said one participant:

I've had people spit at my feet. Men walking up horking…just randomly. I've had eggs

whipped at me, you know, just walking. And it's always the entitled that think it's ok to

behave this way, you know "oh look there's a brown person" (gesture and sound of

someone whipping an egg).

The participants' experiences of racial discrimination stirred up feelings of being undervalued by society and considered inferior by some. These feelings were summed up in the following excerpt about how the participant is regarded:

We talk about equality and the golden rule and treating everybody as you'd treat your

neighbour – we've never been considered neighbours, and I think that that's hard, and it's

almost like I'm an inconvenience being a First Nations person working in an organization

that's not First Nations.

In the workplace, racial discrimination relating to the work atmosphere had to do with the

attitudes of coworkers towards First Nations people. One workplace was said to have "a history

of workplace discrimination issues, grievances and human rights complaints" the participant in

this workplace became teary-eyed, and her voice wavered in sharing that she was frustrated with

the strong negative stereotypes held by others in the workplace and described the attitudes as "a

bad mindset". The participant reported feeling this type of discrimination often indirectly as

reported to her by others who had witnessed incidents and exchanges. She related that:

And then when they [coworkers] find out you're Aboriginal…I never had any direct

issues, but it's there you know, people know, they'll go to say something and they'll stop

because you're in the room.

One participant who had applied for many jobs over the years only to see other people get

the positions felt undervalued and felt there was discrimination in advancement opportunities in

the workplace. She explained that "people don't want to see a brown face behind the counter

every day, you know what I mean? And I really feel that". The attitudes held by many colleagues

were described as "overt racism" and the participant found that in dealing with customers that

workers:

Don't want to help the First Nations person or the black person or even the French

Canadian person, they want their wholesome white people sliced up and they want the

same piece every time and that's who they want to help.

These attitudes offended the participant who felt that all workers should be willing to assist all

types of customers.

In terms of feeling personally targeted in the workplace, two participants shared stories of

being made to feel unwelcome and undeserving of their newly acquired jobs:

First day in, I'm sitting in an office doing some reading, you know orientation and stuff

and my coworker comes in and starts talking and says "are you Aboriginal?" "uh yeah,

actually, I am" "*Oh,* (high pitched) so that's how you got the job" and walked out.

Another participant felt judged to be inferior by a colleague who commented on her purchase of

a new car and said in a rude way "how can *you* afford *that*?" The comment made the participant

feel disrespected and attacked and she shared "it's almost kind of because I'm less…or my

capacity is lower than theirs automatically".

The experience of racial discrimination in the workplace was not limited to interactions

with colleagues and in some cases extended to interactions with customers while on the job. One

participant told of a First Nations coworker's experience in dealing with the customers which he

had shared with her "oh you wouldn't believe the racism I have to put up with, I just got to bite

my mouth, bite my lips just to keep on going".

3.1.6 Feeling disempowered.

Participants experienced disempowerment as being unable to effect change, being

unsupported, not being trusted, and having a low level of autonomy.

Participants who felt unable to effect change were stifled by the organizational cultures of their workplaces. One participant explained that her job satisfaction suffered as a result of the collective negative attitudes of organizational members exclaiming that "we're not going to change these people, no matter how hard we try". The participant felt concerned and upset by the behaviours and attitudes of workers and a sense of hopelessness; that although she could control employees' behaviour at work, she would be unable to change them inherently, and their attitudes would not change. Another participant felt stifled from improving his workplace by a rigid pecking order which caused conflicts with his coworkers "I had a couple of discrepancies with a couple employees there who had "seniority" issues over me being creative and making additions to the workplace". The participant had been excited about his ideas to make the workplace more effective and felt powerless to get them put into action.

The feeling of being unsupported for one participant was part of feeling micromanaged, having little autonomy, and receiving less feedback than desired. The participant described the job as being challenging due to the high level of responsibility and the supervisory relationship with her boss who she explained:

> would want everything run by her, and I always had to get her approval on everything…..and you're sending emails trying to get her ok or just getting support feedback from her wasn't there, which is fine so then you just did it, you know, ah well, if she has a problem she'll tell me right? [participant's thoughts] But then there's been times where, [the boss has said] 'well I didn't know whatever', [referring to information that the participant emailed to her] you know what I mean? Well read your email then and respond, like she wouldn't respond.

The participant felt confined by the lack of autonomy allowed by the supervisor and unable to win at times when she could not get feedback from the supervisor. Another supervisory relationship was described by a participant who felt smothered by a manager:

> I had a boss that was really so focused, like she was one of those people like a micro-manager, wanted to be on us right to the schedule and that kind of thing and there was no give and take…..I did enjoy the work itself but I didn't like the management style.

3.2 Coping

The coping strategies used by participants to deal with stressors came under the umbrella themes of:

1) Focusing on a larger goal

2) Open honest communication

3) Belief in self-efficacy

4) Receiving support from others

5) Being assertive

6) Retaliating

7) Conflict prevention and avoidance

3.2.1 Focusing on a larger goal.

Some participants navigated through stressors by looking at the big picture, and at what they wanted to achieve or work towards personally. Interestingly, all participants who had this outlook and coping style also shared the common larger goal of helping the Aboriginal community in some way, whether it is through capacity building, working towards equality, or having a positive impact on the Aboriginal community through the success of work initiatives.

A participant who felt undervalued in the workplace and coped with that feeling and other work stress by focusing on capacity building explained that:

I'm helping to develop capacity by being in a prominent public place. I'm building capacity within the workers to be able to be more accepting of the next person, and I'm certainly building more capacity in the First Nations people when they get to see that I've been there for [over 15] years.

Paving the way for First Nations people in her workplace was a focus for this individual who explained her philosophy: "don't let other people's limitations limit you, you know?" She also elaborated that:

I feel like an ambassador, I feel like the only brown face that somebody's going to see some days, and I think that that's a good thing. I want people to see that you can have any job you want.

In terms of working for the good of the Aboriginal community, one participant who was experiencing high work stress due to conflict with a supervisor explained that her focus looked beyond interpersonal issues:

Basically I just didn't focus on that [conflict with supervisor], I really focused on why I was there, and it wasn't about me, it wasn't about her [the supervisor], it was actually really making a difference in the lives of Aboriginal people, and I just stayed in that focus throughout and did my job.

The difference alluded to as explained by the participant involved influencing change; as the participant went on to say "it could be I'm changing a lot of peoples' behaviour when it comes to learning about Aboriginal people". This participant's focus on helping Aboriginal people was

grounded in her strong belief that she was put in her job position for a reason, and this belief

helped her to persist and focus through difficult times at work.

3.2.2 Open honest communication.

This strategy is about making a sincere effort to understand others and be understood.

One participant spoke about relationship building through the use of good people skills, open

honest communication and teamwork. She explained that it is important to:

> Be seen to be a part of the team, be seen to be able to say "yeah, you know what, you're
>
> right, I don't know that, I've never done that … help me understand that, explain it to me
>
> so that I can understand".

Open communication for this participant meant actively seeking to understand others and having

humility in being able to admit when she does not know something and needs to learn more. In

this discussion she also spoke about perception and highlighted the importance of being seen by

others to be a team player who gets involved and cares about understanding others and their jobs.

A participant who shared that he has never experienced a conflict with another person in

his workplace shared that in cases when different viewpoints had arisen "we actually discussed

it, and in some cases agree to disagree, other cases, you know they're right, and other cases I'm

right". In this participant's experience, having open communication with his coworkers has

helped him to better understand his colleagues to the point that he has begun some conversations

with one view and ended them with an acknowledgement that the other person's stance is

"right".

Two participants expressed that they used open communication in discussing their culture

with coworkers. Although both indicated that often other people will not have accurate

knowledge and additionally not be aware of that fact, both participants were willing to discuss

their cultures openly. Said one participant of a discussion with a coworker who had some very antiquated knowledge: "she had a lot of questions and I was open to answering them".

3.2.3 Belief in self-efficacy.

Participants who were faced with stressors involving distrust or lack of respect from coworkers expressed their satisfaction at having been able to prove that they deserved their jobs. These participants conveyed that they were competent at their jobs which they had earned through hard work.

When confronted with coworkers who voiced that a participant did not deserve her job, her belief in self-efficacy justified why she did deserve to be hired for the job, and she countered their claims thinking to herself "obviously I did my work, I did my preparation work for the interview, I did my homework, I worked hard, and I got the job so, I think it comes down to hard work".

In a similar case with another participant who had a coworker declare that she had gotten her job due to her Aboriginal identity, the participant explained that she had worked hard and "gone that little extra mile" and said that:

> Over the years I was able to demonstrate that I won the job cause I deserved the job, I wasn't given the job because I was Aboriginal and she became a very, you know, good coworker, respected me as a person, and me as [my job position]. In fact, I kind of moved up in that system too, so I find that was a success, that I was able to prove that I got this job because of me, not because of who I was.

This participant believed that she deserved her job, but it was also important to her that others shared her belief and respected her. Relationship building was very important to this participant,

and was one of the elements she had conscientiously worked at to make her more effective in the workplace.

3.2.4 Receiving support from others.

Participants who received support from others reported that their supporters were for the most-part people in their workplaces such as colleagues and supervisors, with one instance of support coming from the Aboriginal Community. The types of support that participants described were instrumental support for job tasks and feeling culturally connected, supported, and understood.

Kinship was described by one participant who felt a sense of connection with a supervisor who is Aboriginal:

> In terms of being supported I think it, there, there's always sort of an understanding between Aboriginal people that you can, a lot of people say this, you see somebody on the street and they yell at us where they're from or who they are or who they know that kind of thing, um so I do feel supported that way, having somebody else in the workplace that is Aboriginal.

This participant is expressing feeling comfort in sharing familiar cultural protocols with his coworker and this same example and feeling was echoed by another participant.

A participant whose job involved working with several stakeholders said that although the support wasn't there from her supervisor, she felt that there was an atmosphere of support among coworkers in her department and commented: "it was nice that they created two other positions in [my department] during that process because we really were each other's backbone and support". In addition to coworker support, this participant also reported support from people in other departments and from the Aboriginal Community.

Support from a manager was reported by a participant who experienced conflict with her direct supervisor who reported to that manager:

Even though I have times with that other boss I actually went to the [manager] cause she has an open door policy and expressed my challenges, and it's good to know that there's someone in a higher level that, which is very critical, someone else that you know you can go to. If you don't have that then it could be probably a different situation.

It was important for this participant, who felt unsupported by her direct supervisor to know that her supervisor's boss was accessible, understanding and supportive of her.

Support from workers in other departments was identified by a participant who stated that:

Through the four years of my work there I created, or um have allies in [the workplace], that I know that if I want something done, or that can help me get things done in [my department's initiatives] I know they're my support…I guess over time through relationships and working with people, I've been able to establish that rapport and trust and, and those are people that are very supportive of [my department's initiatives] and they've been my allies.

In this case the implementation of the participant's initiatives is dependent on the support of workers in other departments, and those who have been described as allies are workers who have become champions of the initiatives and have helped to lead and influence others to help make the participant's work projects successful.

3.2.5 Not taking things personally.

This theme is about thinking rationally and keeping one's ego separate from the situation at hand.

Participants exhibited not taking things personally through their stories and statements such as "I don't focus on the clashing of personalities, I just really focus on what it is I need to do and why I'm doing it" and:

> No matter how much, how people are negative, or no matter how much they frustrate you …I really don't focus on them no more...I don't take it to heart…I just really acknowledge it and think ok, well that's what I learned and then I just let it go and continue on my day to day.

These statements exemplify a rational thought process in response to interpersonal stressors which enables participants to focus on the tasks at hand and not on feeling involved in conflict on a personal level.

An example of behaving as if things are not taken personally despite feeling that way in the moment came up when the participant was asked a personally insulting question by a coworker. The incident, described in the stressors section, involved the participant being asked in a tone of disbelief how she could afford her new car, after which she thought "what an asshole" but delivered a rational answer that was free of emotion. Although the participant was insulted by the question, her coping style of maintaining composure did not let the other person see that she had been affected by it.

Forgiveness can also be part of not taking things personally, as it also entails separating one's self-concept from situations and involves letting go of the past and not letting it interfere with present-day judgements and behaviours. One participant explained her way of thinking:

> I've had a problem with this person before but that doesn't mean you're going to have the same person this time you know what I mean? …not trying to guess how people are going to be every single time and just give them a chance to be different.

This passage shows the participant's evolving strategy which started with her feeling that at times she needed to "keep her dukes up" and be prepared in case of attack and has changed to a more present-time oriented outlook wherein she is trying to let go of and forgive past transgressions, and deal with people as they are in the present.

3.2.5 Being assertive.

Being assertive is about being rational and dealing with problems in the workplace in what some participants described as a professional way, which entailed putting the business of the organization first and taking one's ego out of the equation. Being assertive also encompasses standing up for beliefs in a firm but not aggressive manner.

One participant demonstrated standing up for her beliefs and the use of assertiveness in many circumstances and explained that:

> If I'm going to be part of the system then I'm going to be part of the problem, I'd rather be the one that's saying "no, I don't like this"….I'd rather be that one person than fitting in and flowing, cause I don't want to fit in.

Fitting in for this person means to sit back and watch injustices happen, a behaviour that she considers to be troublesome as it enables the continuance of injustice.

When one participant was treated disrespectfully by a supervisor who approached her yelling with accusations, she remained calm, smiled and replied "you said you were going to talk to me, not yell at me" which was greeted with a yelling response of "I am communicating to you!" to which the participant replied calmly "No. I'm not going to stand there and let you scream at me. You either talk to me or you go". The supervisor ended up yelling again and the participant responded by turning her back and ending the exchange. It was assertive of the participant to remain unemotional and calmly but firmly insist that she be treated with respect.

She did not assert herself in a threatening or aggressive way, and in later speaking with a customer who had witnessed the incident she explained "this has nothing to do with me, this is her having a bad day and a temper tantrum and her thinking that she's going to be able to take it out on me and I told her no".

A further example of assertiveness took place when a supervisor yelled at two employees, one being a participant who later approached the supervisor to discuss her perspective on the situation and speak on her coworker's behalf:

> "That was really embarrassing, you really embarrassed him and I think you owe him an apology" (the supervisor scoffed) and I said "really, you do." So anyway, she didn't apologize to me though, but she did apologize to him – I didn't really need one though. I thought it was interesting that she did listen to what I had to say, but she did not offer me an apology so...and that was fine, I made my point I think.

The intent of the participant here is to help her coworker and she does this by advocating that he get an apology. The participant conveyed that the coworker had been humiliated by the incident and that she felt badly for him. Despite the supervisor's not extending an apology to the participant, it is clear from her later discussion that she feels satisfaction at seeing that the supervisor listened to what she had to say and offered an apology to her coworker.

3.2.6 Retaliating.

One participant shared that although on a good day she leads by example, "on a bad day I'm more or less beating up on myself and my coworkers, being critical". This participant explained that some of her coworkers will roll their eyes in disapproval when she talks with coworkers that she is friendly with and said of their behaviour: "it pisses me off and then I'm mean to them for the rest of the shift". No examples were given to explain what being mean to

her coworkers entailed, but the participant later shared an example where she retaliated to a customer in a clothing store:

> There was this not nice woman there and she says "how does my butt look in these jeans?" and I said "you walk into a plus store and you wear the clothes, what do you think your butt looks like in those jeans?" So, sometimes I can't help myself (laughs) but um, so I can be unkind, and that kind of makes me feel defeated too, like if I give in to it, you know, like it will be funny usually (laughs), but I'll feel like you know, I didn't really need to hurt her feelings back.

Although this participant often succeeds in following her preferred coping strategy of leading by example, when confronted with conflict, there are times when she has found it difficult to control her impulses, and has released frustration on others. It became evident through the course of the interview that the issues of respect and equality are highly salient for this individual. She explained her thought process of 'beating up on herself' after instances of retaliation:

> Oh, I shouldn't have let myself get so upset, you know, I know how she is, like if something was said or something was done – I know how she is, why did I let her trigger me…I think to myself, that really felt good, but it didn't gain me anything.

3.2.7 Conflict prevention and avoidance.

Coping strategies that helped participants to adapt to the workplace in a way that would minimize or prevent conflict included adopting practices of the organizational culture, compromising personal values, and modifying specific behaviours to avoid conflict. A different time orientation was identified by a participant as being an adjustment she had adapted to in her workplace, as she explained:

We have, the way we talk and communicate, it's kind of a story-based, and I'm speaking

of my culture, my Aboriginal culture. And so if you have meetings, if you have things

like that if [with] story-based people, they're, you know, it's different than when you go

into a business… you go in, you get your business done, 9 o'clock the agenda starts, 9:10

we talk about topic A, 9:20 we move on to topic B - that's not my culture, so you have to

adjust to that. We have this thing that we call 'Indian Time', it starts when it starts - we

talk about what we talk about as it goes through, so yes, there's one big adjustment right

there from growing up, how you manage your life and your family to when you get into a

business, and it's more business-oriented. So that's a big adjustment.

This participant has adopted the long-term time orientation of Euro-Western culture, an

orientation that attaches importance on the future that is the practice in her organization, while

maintaining her cultural present time-orientation in her family life (Hofstede, 2001). She also

shared that "culturally, we, as a people like to tease, there's things that - you can't do that

necessarily at work and be professional and expect to move up".

The difference in time orientation was just part of a larger adjustment made by the

participant who explained that her natural way of being as less prescriptive and more hands-on.

She used the example of storytelling and explained how stories in her culture are retold many

times "each time the essence will be there, but there may be a different focus". The participant

shared that in the workplace she still processes and thinks in her natural way, but has adapted

ways of presenting information that fit with the workplace.

An adaptation to the workplace culture brought up by another participant was her

learning to deal with people that she doesn't like using the social protocol of the organization,

which she described as being a fake and "pretend". This participant explained that her adoption

of the organizational way of dealing with people allowed her to work with people she dislikes, a coping strategy that enables her to prevent conflict in her workplace.

Adaptation to the workplace involving the compromising of personal values left one participant feeling conflicted, and forced him to follow work directives that were contrary to his personal values. He described one such directive which he and a coworker faced as being:

> Definitely a personal challenge at work that we had to somehow put aside our personal values and say this is the work, or just do the work, forget what our values are and what our beliefs are, we'll just go ahead and do what we're told kind of thing.

Behaviour aimed at conflict avoidance was evident in the accounts of two participants. One woman conveyed that:

> So if I go, and if I, and if I talk to certain ones, I mean, I got friends there some of them, you know, they pull me aside and we talk quietly, cause if we talk too loud the ones that I don't like or don't like me you know, they roll their eyes, … it pisses me off and then I'm mean to them for the rest of the shift."

Talking quietly is a way for this participant to speak with those coworkers she is friendly with and avoid being scolded by her other coworkers and becoming angry with them and having to deal with that conflict.

Another behaviour employed by a participant involved the circumstances under which he would discuss ideas of his that he felt opposed the ideas of other people in the workplace, and as he explained:

> I only speak of what I know. If I don't know anything I won't say anything so I'll just sit back and listen. If I have an idea then I will speak up or suggest it in private at the end of

the day, but if I feel it's going to contradict someone else's idea I think that's when I, I'll

recommend it in private. I avoid conflict.

This participant shared in his interview that he had experienced conflict with coworkers in the

past when bringing up his ideas, and not wanting to have any more problems with people, he

adopted a more discrete method of sharing his thoughts.

3.3 Stress Immediate Effects

Stress immediate effects occur either in direct response to stressors or following an attempt at

coping. While these are initially short-term, it is possible that some may progress into long-term

outcomes. Immediate effects that participants experienced fell under the umbrella themes of:

1) Negative health effects

2) Spillover of stress on other people

3) Emotional effects

3.3.1 Negative health effects.

The negative health effects experienced by participants consisted of using substances to

abate stress, and getting a stress-related medical condition.

One participant took up smoking during a stressful period and said:

When it got really stressful and that. Actually I was a non-smoker, and I started smoking

again when I started working for [my organization]…well probably in the second year,

yeah that's when I started smoking and I'd quit for 3.5 years, and that's my trigger for

smoking – stress.

Another participant described a tendency to choose unhealthy activities instead of activities he would have chosen in the past:

Instead of going out and fishing I'd rather, you know, maybe do things that aren't the healthiest...you just start going out with the guys and drinking more, you know, just acting stupid, stuff like that, you know, what anybody does when they're stressed.

In this participant's experience there is loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities and more of a focus on temporary stress release methods.

One participant was diagnosed with a medical condition that she interpreted to be a manifestation of stress in her body:

It's interesting because I'm not a linear thinker so I was like looking for alternative ways to fix my jaw and I was reading this one thing about body talk and body work and stuff like that so they give you things – things that are related like that manifest in you physically they feel is a direct result of the stresses that you're working under… and I saw that being true.

3.3.2 Spillover of stress on other people.

Others who were reportedly affected by the participants' stress included family members, coworkers and a customer.

Bringing work stress home was described by one participant who spoke of the high-stress nature of his line of work:

Honestly, you can only take so much of, of, of that [being exposed to stressful things on the job], where it starts to, to affect you where you can't just leave your ghosts in your mind at work, where you ultimately end up bringing stuff home and I mean, it affects people you live with for sure, and it's not just overnight, I mean, we're talking over a

long period of time here. And at some point you've got to think about you know, "is it worth it?" cause you're only here once right? I mean, yeah, like I thought, ok, it's taken a toll on my family, it's taken a toll on me.

The participant is speaking about his work stress spilling over into his personal and family life over the years and having a negative effect on his family and himself.

The stress effect of taking out frustration on coworkers was shared by a participant who would experience this on some occasions when she felt disrespected and said of her coworkers' behaviour and her reaction "it pisses me off and then I'm mean to them for the rest of the shift you know what I mean? So haha, have to go be difficult". This same participant also related an example of taking out frustration on a customer, which is described under coping, where she retaliated to a customer who was rude.

3.3.3 Emotional effects.

One participant reported feeling disliked by some coworkers and said of stressful issues and encounters in the workplace "you do start to take them personally you know like if it's all the time like I always say well maybe it's me". This participant would also at times be critical of the way she had dealt with issues in instances when she felt that she'd let the other person affect her:

I get upset with myself, I go 'oh, I shouldn't have let myself get so upset', you know, I know how she is, like if something was said or something was done, I know how she is, why did I let her trigger me or get me so upset.

The participant also shared her sense of defeat at giving in to her impulses and said that although her jabs in response were usually funny she felt that she didn't need to hurt the other person's feelings in return.

Another participant shared that during times of high stress in the workplace that she would cry: "there were times when I'd be bawling and stressed". Still another participant conveyed that her having gone through discrimination and harassment had given her greater empathy of what others in such situations experience. She explained about a time when an incidence of harassment was reported to a coworker of hers. Her coworker was unconvinced of the presence of harassment and shrugged it off as not being a big deal at which point the participant intervened and helped her coworker to both recognize the seriousness of the incident and to manage it, she explained:

I have a greater empathy and I have a greater how would I say it – understanding and have a greater desire to stop that type of behaviour 'cause I know it can be dama[ging] – whether it's someone picking on somebody because they're an Aboriginal…

3.4 Adaptation

Adaptation is about the long-term outcomes for the participants. Ultimately most long-term outcomes for participants were connected to their perceptions of stressors and their beliefs on human agency specifically dealing with their assumptions on whether they had the ability and will to change or influence the behaviours of others. Umbrella themes for adaptation were:

1) Accepting the limitations of others

2) Withdrawal

3) Determination to hold onto job despite struggles

4) Recognizing that change is needed

3.4.1 Accepting the limitations of others.

Those participants who experienced outcomes where they accepted the limitations of others reported that they worked with people as they were and did not focus on trying to change the behaviours of others in such cases.

One participant who had a history of actively fighting harassment, racial discrimination and disrespect explained a shift in her personal philosophy:

I think that ah, as I'm getting older I don't have to actually feel like I have to argue so much anymore, it's more like "you know what, those are your problems now" but it took me a long time to get there because I was always putting myself like oh, that's not fair, what makes you think like that, like what makes you feel that you are more deserving and more entitled to fresh water and fresh fruits and vegetables than anybody else, you know?

This shift in philosophy has led to a behavioural change for the participant in that she interprets ignorance and disrespect to be the limitations of those people who display such behaviour. A decrease in the felt need to personally challenge the views of others is not in this case to be interpreted as an acceptance of those views.

On an organizational level, a participant who expressed being routinely overlooked for opportunities she had applied for, only to find in many cases that those who were awarded the positions were not competent in their jobs, felt that the organization as a whole was racially discriminatory. This participant became reconciled to the fact that there was a ceiling in the workplace:

There is a ceiling there, like I've been working there for all these years…you know, I'm ok in a part-time capacity…you talk to people and they say 'oh you interview so well' you know 'we don't understand' [why she is not promoted] you know.

The participant, who later took on a second job has understood that she may never be promoted in the workplace, the racial discrimination aspect being a limitation of the organization, and she has sought opportunities outside the organization that allow her to maintain her employment at the first organization.

Accepting the limitations of customers also came up, and a participant expressed that she'd noticed that customers in her workplace would tend to ask for help from her white coworkers rather than herself. She conveyed that she didn't hold a grudge against those customers and would behave in a helpful and friendly way towards them. She explained, referring to discriminatory behaviour: "you do have to be forgiving too. I realize that we have to let things happen for whatever" This is an acknowledgement that the participant realizes that some people are going to behave in certain ways and that she will try not to take it personally.

3.4.2 Withdrawal.

Outcomes that involved participants reducing effort, repressing a part of themselves or removing themselves from the workplace were included in the theme of withdrawal.

One participant shared her frustration that in addition to being overlooked for some positions, she would have to continually deal with the people who were hired for those positions:

I've had people under me who just started or whatever get a full-time job that I didn't get, they'll say "how do you do this?" You got the job, figure it out! So I stopped being cheerful with the people that I work with because they're not competent, they don't know how to do the job and yet they got the job so go figure it out, go ask your supervisor, don't bug me, you know?

This example shows a withdrawal of effort and investment in some coworkers on the part of the participant who finds their incompetence to be an added burden of being denied opportunities in the workplace.

A participant who in previous jobs had been eager to share his ideas for improvements in the workplace showed that he has been impacted by some bad experiences and confrontations that have arisen in response to his suggestions. He conveyed his feeling that sometimes his bringing up opposing views and ideas could be a problem: "sometimes yeah, yeah, especially with seniority. If I'm the new guy I don't – I wouldn't speak up against somebody who had seniority again – I've had problems before." This is an example of someone suppressing a part of themselves in the workplace, as in this case the participant modified his behaviour such that he would not share his ideas openly.

Another participant who was dissatisfied with a past job decided to withdraw herself completely from that workplace. She felt repressed in her job position, "I was stuck behind a desk pushing paper, and it really wasn't what they said it was going to be…I found it very confining". She made the decision to terminate her employment and returned to her old job.

3.4.3 Determination to hold on to job despite struggles.

Participants who expressed determination in holding on to their jobs had all faced challenges and adversity over the course of their employment and reported being motivated by a variety of reasons.

A strong conviction and sense of purpose was cited as the reason that one participant resolved to stay in her position despite times of high stress:

I thought 'ok no, you know what, like I can't leave this job' even though I feel like it, but I really felt that I was put in the position for a reason, like I really strongly believe in that, and, so I stayed.

Another participant, who had questioned whether his job was worth all the stress, shared his thought process when he resolved the question:

I realized there's – I can't quit – as much as I would have liked to sometimes. I can't. What am I going to do? Where else am I going to go where the money is as good as it is, or the benefits are good? I mean, the benefits are fantastic.

Although performing his job can be like carrying a tremendous weight, this participant feels that he is trapped in that there is no better employment alternative for him. He is determined to persist in his employment to continue to support himself.

Serving in an ambassadorial capacity emerged as another reason that a participant was determined to hold onto her job:

I had somebody recently come back and say to me 'wow, you're still here?' he said 'I haven't been here for 15 years' so I said 'oh yeah' I said. I won't give up this job only because of the value I see in it personally, not just monetarily but being able to come and be like that ambassador type.

Earlier in the interview the participant conveyed that she wanted to demonstrate to First Nations people through her employment in a public place, that they can have any job they want, and this goal has motivated her to stay despite facing much conflict.

3.4.4 Recognizing that change is needed.

Recognizing that change is needed is about participants' long-term outcomes of feeling aware that certain things need to change and planning those changes. Types of changes recognized had to do with the participants' own behaviours and attitudes as well as those of their organizational counterparts.

Regarding participants' own behaviours, the smoking habit of one, a habit that started during a period of high stress at work, was identified as something that needed to change: "so I still smoke for now, but I know I'm going to be working towards quitting very soon, like I have it in my mind when I'm gonna quit".

A behaviour of an interpersonal nature that a participant who had felt attacked in the workplace wanted to change was explained when she recounted a conversation about feeling guarded and defensive:

I was talking to one friend and said you know, you get to the point where you feel like you keep your dukes up all the time and then you forget how to put them down and realize that you have to treat people individually.

This participant later elaborated that she had become more self-aware about how she deals with other people and that she now tried to avoid presupposing how people would act and approach interactions with an open mind.

One participant recognized the need to work through her issues and sought counselling through a work program, she said: "I'm going to EAP right now, Employee Assistance Program right now because of you know, issues". Another strategy used by a participant to "learn to deal with issues in a more productive way" was identified: "I've been reading tonnes of books, you

should see all the books I have. One of the books I have right now is 'Working with You is Killing Me' and another title is 'The No Asshole Rule'.

A recognized need to change involving others in the workplace was identified by a participant who wanted to keep discrimination and harassment in check. She felt that being both female and Aboriginal and having faced discrimination and harassment gives her a greater desire to manage those types of situations in the workplace. In explaining this belief she said of workplace discrimination and harassment that she wanted to: "stop that kind of behaviour – to make it [the workplace] equal as it should be".

4.0 Discussion

4.1 Delimitations & Limitations

Delimitations of this study include the participant selection, which consisted of informants who self-identified as being Aboriginal, and had worked in the city of Thunder Bay within the 6 months preceding data collection, meaning that some people may have been excluded if they had been unemployed for more than half a year prior to data collection. Participation was also delimited to those working in organizations that are not Aboriginal-run and to those who worked a minimum of 10 hours per week. The purposeful sampling participant selection process did not give every person in the population of study an equal chance to partake in the research and the sequential sampling procedure means that all population characteristics may not be represented accurately.

Limitations include the researcher's status as an out-group member, which brings with it limited experience and lack of complete background knowledge of the First Nations population of Thunder Bay. Out-group status may have affected the level of access to potential participants, and for some, may have affected the level of trust felt during the interview process. A lack of first-hand experience may have affected the degree of understanding that the researcher has interpreted from participant interaction and observation. To mitigate this, the researcher endeavoured to learn more about First Nations cultures through informal discussions with several members of the First Nations community in Thunder Bay, and undertook a review of the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The researcher's status as an out-group member may have served as a limitation for some participants while having the inverse effect for others. Out-group status may have been viewed positively by some participants, as some may have felt more comfortable sharing their stories

with a researcher who has no close ties to their community or family. Additionally, some First Nations people feel a sense of enhanced legitimacy concerning research performed by non-Aboriginal researchers as cited by Linda Smith (2005).

Language barriers are a potential limitation of this study, as the researcher learned through a First Nations advisor that many First Nations people speak in a different way in terms of enunciation, language choice, and tempo amongst themselves than they do with white people, and speaking with the researcher may have resulted in participants altering their natural way of speaking, which could have altered how information was shared by participants.

The guidelines governing the researcher's thesis are another limitation, as they precluded the research from being conducted in partnership with any Aboriginal groups due to the stipulation that the work must be the researcher's own (Faculty of Business Administration, 2006). In lieu of a partnership, the researcher held discussions with stakeholders from the urban Aboriginal community to ensure that the culture, traditions and knowledge of the Aboriginal participants was respected, as per the best practices outlined by Tri-Council Panel on Research Ethics Tri-Council policy (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010).

The negative connotation that research holds for many members of the population of study may have limited the type of participants who were willing to participate in this study (Smith, 1999, 2005) and potentially drew a disproportionate amount of participants who had a higher degree of trust or comfort with the dominant culture or who had employed particular acculturation strategies. This research using social constructivist approach is not intended to be generalizable for other Aboriginal people.

4.2 Theoretical Contribution

This research is the first to capture the experiences of First Nations people in the workplace and effectively introduces First Nations people into this body of acculturation knowledge. In line with research with other cultural groups, the experience of acculturation was very different for each First Nations participant with experiences ranging from acculturation being a daily struggle for one participant to another experiencing no reported acculturative stress. This is not to say that the participant did not undergo acculturation at all, just that it is not evident that it occurred in the workplace. An important contribution of this research is that it is possible that not all First Nations people undergo acculturation in the workplace.

The experiences of participants in this study were comparable to existing acculturation research findings concerning the individual factors of gender and cultural distance, but showed a lesser fit in the area of educational level attainment. Female participants reported more stressors and experienced more acculturative challenges than did the male participants. While the others exhibited slightly higher levels of cultural distance in terms of religion, importance of First Nations cultural practices and protocol in daily life, and visible identification as a First Nations person, the participant who conveyed the lowest cultural distance reported no acculturative stress.

In divergence from acculturation research findings, education did not emerge as a clear contributing factor in acculturation success. In this study, the participant with the lowest level of formal education had the most successful acculturation experience, while one of the participants with a high level of education reported experiencing high levels of acculturative stress, with the others falling somewhere in between. There were no clear findings concerning age at the

beginning of acculturation as it was not possible to ascertain the age of participants at the beginning of acculturation.

4.2.1 Stressors.

Stressors felt by participants included: feeling misunderstood, experiencing insensitivity, feeling unsupported, feeling treated unfairly, and experiencing racial discrimination; and were largely related to the attitudes and behaviours of the other people in the workplace and interactions with them. This finding shows that the participants' experiences of acculturative stress were influenced by the workplace atmosphere and the people in it.

It is important to acknowledge that the results are reported in the aggregate whether or not all individuals referenced them. In other words, an issue that emerged as a stressor for one participant would be reported as such even if the same issue was not perceived or experienced as a stressor by other participants. An example of this can be seen in the theme of racial discrimination which was identified as a stressor by three participants, but not experienced as such by a fourth participant who reported feeling no racial discrimination personally in the workplace but did observe differential treatment of Aboriginal people in his workplace:

> Things have been said around me that are different cause I don't look Native – things
> have been said around me that are different than have been said around other Native-
> looking co-workers.

This indicates that the fourth participant has experienced the workplace atmosphere to be different for Aboriginal people who are more visibly identifiable, but that this has not been a stressor for him. As this issue has not been experienced as a stressor for the individual, this example does not reflect an instance of acculturation. Being that the objective of this study was

to understand the shared acculturation experience of Aboriginal people, the findings have focused on data pertaining directly the phenomenon of acculturation.

The themes of feeling misunderstood, experiencing insensitivity, and feeling unsupported were illustrated with examples involving cultural issues that pointed to others including the government, society, and coworkers having a lack of accurate cultural knowledge, being unaware of knowledge gaps, and being insensitive to cultural issues.

Racial discrimination emerged as a theme for all female participants and was touched on by one male participant who described a belief in the existence of systematic racism but gave no example. Racial discrimination was not reported by two male participants, one of whom also reported experiencing no acculturative stress, and the other who described his work atmosphere as being intolerant of discrimination:

Discrimination was discussed in the training process. We were given sensitivity training on slander, on you cannot discriminate against homosexuals because of the ratio being 3:1 male and female, you can't discriminate against a woman or make sexual innuendo against a woman, everything is level on the level, they're equal to the men…On the job, out there it's in effect [the sensitivity training], and I've never seen it - I've never seen people discriminated against, or homosexuals, men on men, women with women, it has to be respected - last year, this year was good there is like zero tolerance for it - you start doing that [discriminating], you're out…on that hour you just drop whatever you're holding, you're gone home. Yep. And that's good, that's what's needed - some order. It's there and the Aboriginals respect it, the non-Natives they all respect it. You never hear anything about it.

This participant whose work atmosphere was explicitly supportive of diversity did not report feeling any acculturative stress involving cultural issues and was satisfied with the "order" and rules of his workplace.

4.2.2 Coping strategies.

This research identified coping behaviours used in acculturation that are more specific than the categories described in Berry's fourfold model of acculturation strategies (integration, assimilation, segregation, marginalization). Of the coping strategies employed by participants, it would be difficult to place each one within one of Berry's (1997) four strategies as the answers to his two main questions regarding the importance of maintaining cultural identity and maintaining relationships with the other group are not evident in most themes. An example of this can be seen within the theme of Belief in self-efficacy where one participant justified to herself that she deserved her job due to hard work and preparation. It is not clear in her use of positive self-talk what importance cultural maintenance or relationship maintenance play, and it would be difficult to classify this strategy into the fourfold model.

Looking at the overall coping experiences of individual participants rather than particular coping themes makes for a better fit with the fourfold model, and although the coping strategies of each participant are not in all cases consistent, they did have a tendency towards the dominant use of one or two strategies. The scope of focus for examining Berry's two main questions, as outlined in Figure 2, can have a great effect on which acculturation strategy category a participant's behaviour fits with. Within the theme of conflict prevention and avoidance for instance, the strategy of adopting the Euro-Western future-time orientation in the workplace while maintaining a present-time orientation in family life would fit within Berry's strategy of integration if considering the maintenance of her cultural time orientation in family life. On the

other hand, it would be classified as assimilation if looked at only in the scope of the workplace. For the purposes of this review, the scope of focus has been limited to the workplace.

The issue of cultural maintenance, the importance of which is a deciding factor in the selection of one of Berry's four acculturation strategies in Figure 2, proved difficult for participants to define, as a standardized definition of First Nations cultural characteristics would not accurately describe their personal cultures. Many of the participants described themselves as "urban Indians" and would not describe their lives as being traditional for First Nations people, meaning that they do not regularly practice cultural ceremonies or traditions, but have an appreciation for their heritage. That being said, some of the participants felt that their upbringing in terms of family life was comparable to that of other First Nations people.

Being that culture for the participants was described as a personal way of being, it has been examined as the personal philosophy and beliefs of each participant rather than with a standardized definition. This type of examination has allowed for a clearer indication of where each participant lies concerning the importance of cultural maintenance. One participant described her personal culture as being one of combating inequity:

> It's almost like I feel like it's part of my role as a person you know what I mean, like kicking down those doors and those barriers, and I mean that's ok - I'm always the one who talks about things that are unjust and not right and you know, and that's, that's what my mom has instilled in me.

This participant also spoke of her inclination for being the one person to speak up and said of challenging the status quo that she wasn't apprehensive about standing out: "I don't want to fit in (laughs while talking) and I think that that again puts me on the fringe side - I don't mind that either though". The importance of maintaining her personal culture in the workplace could be

categorized as very important, as this was demonstrated throughout the interview and it took precedence over maintaining relationships with coworkers. As a result, this participant's overall acculturation strategy fit into the category of separation.

Of the fourfold model acculturation strategies employed, four participants' strategies fit within a single category with one using integration, two using assimilation, and one using separation. The acculturation strategies of the other two participants fell across two categories each, with one participant using a combination of integration and assimilation, and the other using both assimilation and marginalization strategies.

4.2.3 Stress immediate effects.

Several stress immediate effects have been identified by participants, namely: Negative health effects, Spillover of stress on other people, and Emotional effects. The effects of acculturative stress in the workplace were felt both at its point of origin, and beyond, extending into other parts of the participants' lives. In the workplace, frustration was passed on to coworkers and customers causing damage to relationships in many forms including hurt feelings, resentment, and a reduction in trust, cooperation, and helping behaviours.

Beyond the workplace, acculturative stress had negative effects that spread to participants' work-life balance, family life, leisure time, and their physical and mental well-being. Not all stress immediate effects were negative, and the Emotional effect of gaining greater empathy for the harassed helped one participant to better understand and manage situations of harassment in her workplace.

4.2.4 Adaptation.

The commonality between long-term acculturation outcomes for participants (accepting the limitations of others, withdrawal, determination to hold onto job despite struggles, and

recognizing that change in needed), is that in each, the responsibility of acculturation was placed on the participants. There was no organizational response to ease adaptation to acculturation, resulting in the entire burden of adaptation and change being carried by the participants. Although one participant used counselling services available through work to deal with her acculturative stress, a resource which she found helpful, the responsibility of change was ultimately placed on her and not shared by her organization.

Interestingly, in the experience of one participant who had not experienced acculturative stress in his current organization, he attributed his experience to his organization's sensitivity training and non-tolerance policy towards discrimination; effectively to his organization's playing an active role in the acculturation process.

4.3 Practical Contribution

Although this research is but the first step in identifying whether there are acculturative barriers to equality in the workplace for First Nations people, and findings from this study are not meant to be generalizable, it is reasonable to anticipate that organizations may benefit from an awareness of the themes which presented barriers to equality for the participants of this study. Equality in employment seeks to identify and remove barriers and discriminatory disadvantages to allow access to the fullest opportunity to exercise individual potential (Abella, 1984). Themes that acted as barriers included the stressors of experiencing racial discrimination, experiencing insensitivity, feeling unsupported, feeling misunderstood, and feeling disempowered.

There may be a fine line between the themes of insensitivity and racial discrimination given that both dealt with cultural missteps and disrespect whether intentional or unintentional. In both cases participants faced the consequences of other people not making an effort or taking responsibility for their own cultural learning. Cultural sensitivity and learning is an issue that has

been addressed successfully through diversity training. Diversity programs have a demonstrated relationship with the creation of diversity climates, which in turn have been shown to mitigate the possible adverse effects of diversity such as relationship conflict, decreased productivity, turnover intention, and lower organizational commitment (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009 as cited in Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010).

Organizations may stand to benefit in many ways through the creation of diversity climates, which have been found to moderate the relationship between diversity, return on profit, and productivity at the organizational level (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009 from Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010). Diversity climate has also been positively linked to organizational commitment and lower absenteeism across cultural groups including non-minority employees (Avery et al. 2007 from Herdman & McMillan-Capehart, 2010).

Creating a work environment that does not allow racial discrimination may also help to remove barriers for First Nations people, which for the participants of this study made some feel unwelcome in their workplaces and overlooked for advancement opportunities. Racial discrimination can adversely impact the individuals directly involved and as such likely have an effect on the organization as a whole in terms of work outcomes and liability. The targets of workplace discrimination suffer from lower job satisfaction, increased stress, decreased commitment, fewer citizenship behaviours, and higher turnover (Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Gee, 2002; Robinson & Dechant, 1997 from Triana, Garcia & Collela, 2010; Regmi, Naidoo & Regmi, 2009; Triana, Garcia & Collela, 2010). Discrimination lawsuits can be costly for organizations, running as high as hundreds of millions of dollars, an example being a suit filed against Coca-Cola that was settled for 192.5 million (King & Spruell, 2001 from Triana, Garcia, & Colella, 2010). Although organizations may not monitor every individual interaction between

employees, it is possible that the risk of legal action would be mitigated as racial discrimination in the workplace is reduced.

In addition to removing barriers, organizations may find success supporting the acculturation process by assisting employees with constructive coping strategies. To do this, it is essential that organizations have an awareness of the types of stress immediate effects and adaptations experienced by their employees. Organizations may consider providing support to employees in using constructive coping strategies such as those reported by participants in this study: focusing on a larger goal, using open honest communication, believing in their self-efficacy, being assertive, not taking things personally, and receiving support from others. Individual support, although not sufficient, may help to create improved working experiences, which could contribute to better outcomes for individuals and the organization.

4.4 Future Directions

This study is only the beginning of research on the acculturation experiences of First Nations people in the workplace, and the development of additional qualitative research as well as quantitative studies could contribute greatly to furthering our understanding in this area.

Future research should, where possible, prioritize designs that are conceived, developed and implemented in partnership with First Nations people, groups and organizations. This type of research design is recommended to ensure that the research is culturally reflexive, respectful, and well-received. This format is especially important due to the past experiences of First Nations people with research being at times misused and exploitative (Smith, 2005). The traditional collaborative nature of First Nations peoples' lifestyles and communities lends itself to participatory action research (PAR), and this type of qualitative research has the potential to see the most success with this population of study.

Qualitative research is needed to further explore each step of the acculturation process, and identify emergent themes from the worldview of the participants. This type of research may focus on more specialized organizational settings or occupations, groups of participants with certain demographic characteristics, or specific human resources issues. It may be beneficial to study specific contexts such as governmental organizations, large organizations, small organizations, or specific industries. Additionally, examining the experiences of Aboriginal workers at various stages of contact with the dominant culture may also be valuable.

Once themes are identified, quantitative research will be instrumental in comparing results across studies, developing and testing constructs, and delivering generalizable findings that can advise organizational best practices. Quantitative research may be done to investigate possible variance in acculturation experiences across specific occupations, and it could be helpful to focus on those occupations for which labour shortages are forecasted, or those where recruitment and retention issues have been identified for First Nations people. It might also be worthwhile to study acculturation experiences at each organizational level (i.e. front-line employees, middle management, top management). At the organizational level, research could investigate the association between stressors such as feeling misunderstood or experiencing racial discrimination and the organizational diversity climate.

Further quantitative research emerging from this study could examine the interaction between the acculturative stress and coping strategies to investigate the extent to which the identified coping strategies actually mitigate the negative effects of acculturative stress on attitudes (e.g. job satisfaction) and behaviours (e.g. turnover, counterproductive work behaviours).

Seeing that this study and past research has reported experiences that vary according to gender, future research could benefit from taking look at acculturation experiences through a gender lens. Other demographic characteristics that could merit from further qualitative and quantitative study include the nation of the participants (i.e. Ojibwa, Cree), the cultural distance from the host culture, and the level of educational attainment.

Research needs to be done to identify any linkages or effects of acculturation experiences on human resources issues such as retention and recruitment. Research that examines possible linkages between acculturation issues at each of the four stages and work outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, turnover intentions, work withdrawal, and performance could prove to be useful for organizations in supporting and retaining First Nations employees. Given the experiences of acculturating individuals within organizations, future research should also investigate barriers to entry into employment.

Employment equity is another human resources issue that could benefit from research in acculturation, and the theme of racial discrimination that emerged in this study indicates that further research is needed in the field of acculturation to identify any barriers to equality in the workplace. Acculturation research needs to explore the concept of everyday discrimination, a less overt form of racism that Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, & Brief (2003) describes as "subtle acts of mistreatment experienced disproportionately by minority group members". The theme of being treated unfairly may have uncovered incidents of everyday discrimination, however, such incidents are often attributionally ambiguous, and participants may find it difficult to assign motivations behind the behaviours of others. Mixed methods research that first quantitatively identifies the presence of everyday discrimination and then seeks to gain a deeper understanding of it qualitatively is needed. Deitch et al.'s (2003) study on everyday racial discrimination in the

workplace which compared reported levels of mistreatment of workers from various cultural groups is a good model for development of quantitative research that could be employed with First Nations participants.

The stressor themes from this study of feeling misunderstood, experiencing insensitivity, feeling unsupported, treated unfairly, and experiencing racial discrimination, show that individual acculturation experiences are linked with the attitudes and behaviours of the other people in the workplace. Emergent themes from this study and past research suggest that a focus on the work environment and community of people in the majority culture is also needed to gain a more complete understanding of acculturation. It is therefore recommended that acculturation research involving First Nations people also include the surrounding members of the majority culture.

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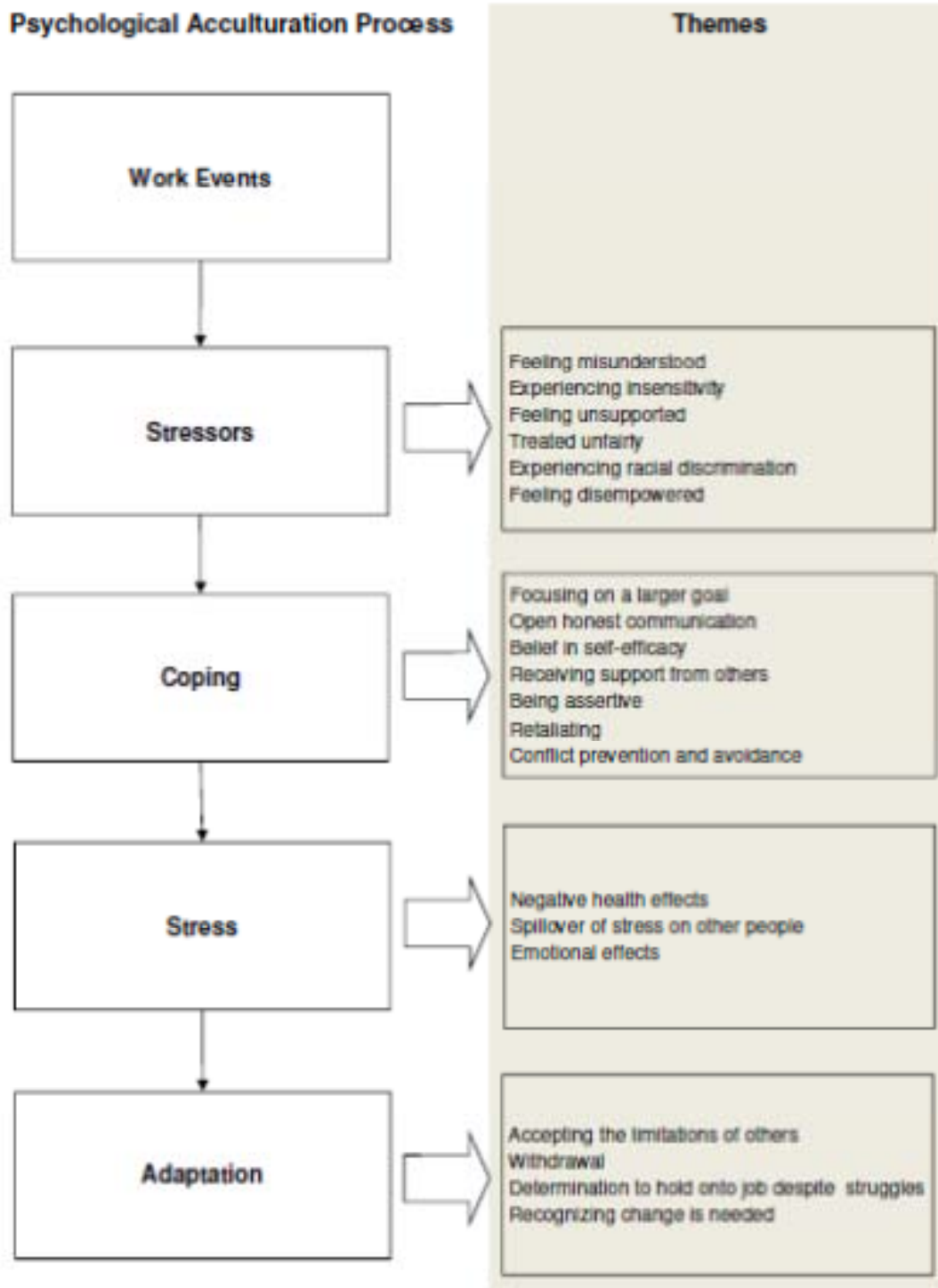
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Results Summary

Psychological Acculturation Process	Themes
Work Events	
Stressors	Feeling misunderstood Experiencing insensitivity Feeling unsupported Treated unfairly Experiencing racial discrimination Feeling disempowered
Coping	Focusing on a larger goal Open honest communication Belief in self-efficacy Receiving support from others Being assertive Retaliating Conflict prevention and avoidance
Stress	Negative health effects Spillover of stress on other people Emotional effects
Adaptation	Accepting the limitations of others Withdrawal Determination to hold onto job despite struggles Recognizing change is needed

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

<u>Interview Guide</u>

The goal of the interviews is to capture raw data in the form of stories that are as free from interpretation as possible. The semi-structured design will enable the researcher to ask additional questions in those instances where more detail is required. The main interview questions are in bold font, some having follow-up questions indented below to be used in cases where more detail is needed. In cases where questions are answered before they are asked, such as in the answering of a prior question, they may be skipped at the researcher's discretion.

Briefing: *"Thank you for your time today."*

Researcher will give the participant a copy of the information sheet, and review the information with him/her.

"Do you have any questions before we begin?"

"The first part will be a bit of demographics, to learn about the people who are in this research project"

The following questions will guide the semi-structured interview:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (background information i.e. education, living, age range, highest level of education/schooling, where they went to school)

-Can you tell me a bit about your employment history?

-Can you explain what your current work situation is like?

    -How did you get your job?

-Can you describe for me what it was like when you first started working there?

    -How might being an Aboriginal person have influenced your work experience in your current (or most recent) job?

-Would you recommend your workplace to other Aboriginal people? Reasons?

-Have you made any cultural adjustments at work?

    -Describe in detail an example of a specific cultural adjustment that you have encountered at work

-Describe for me a personal success story for you at work

-Elaborate for me a challenging or difficult situation for you at work

-How would you describe your relationship with other people at work?

    -Have you experienced conflict with another person at work?

-How have your work experiences influenced your attitudes and beliefs?

If the person left their job: **What factors led you to your decision to leave your latest position?**

If the person is still working at their job: **Have you ever considered changing work positions or leaving your current job? What factors made you feel that way?**

-How does your current (or latest job) compare with other employment experiences you have had?

-Is there anything that you would like to add?

Debriefing: *"Thank you for sharing your experiences with me."*

"How did you feel about answering these questions?"

"I will remove the names of people and workplaces for the report, was there any other information shared today that could identify you?"

"I will be writing out our discussion to include in the study, would it be ok for me to contact you in the next couple weeks to make sure that I have captured the meaning of what you have shared?"

Appendix 3: Participant Information Letter

Lakehead UNIVERSITY

Participant Information

Work Experiences of Aboriginal Workers in Non-Aboriginal Work Settings

Researcher: Leanne Ruberry, Master's Student

Supervisor: David Richards, PhD, Faculty of Business Administration

You are being invited to participate in a research study examining the work adjustment experiences of Aboriginal workers in Thunder Bay. The study is seeking to interview Aboriginal workers who are currently employed or who have been employed within the last 6 months in organizations that are not Aboriginal-run.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?
The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the experiences of Aboriginal workers. It is hoped that research in this area will help organizations to create supportive work environments that will lead to greater success for Aboriginal workers.

WHAT WILL MY RESPONSIBILITIES BE IF I TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview, and an optional follow-up discussion to make sure that the researcher has captured the meaning of what you have shared. The interviews will be audio-recorded to help ensure the accuracy of the data collected.

HOW MUCH TIME IS INVOLVED?
The interview will take 1 hour. There is also an optional 15 minute follow-up meeting.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FOR ME?
There are no direct benefits for participating in the research project. General benefits from this research will be information that may help organizations to understand and successfully address the needs of Aboriginal workers.

COMPENSATION
You will receive a $10 gift certificate for your participation.

HOW WILL INFORMATION BE KEPT PRIVATE?
The information you provide will be kept confidential. No one other than the researchers will know who participated in the study and names will not be included in any report. The final report will include comments provided in the interview, but any information that could identify individuals or organizations will be removed. You will be invited to discuss any concerns regarding the protection of your identity with the researcher during the interview. Only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to your information (including any notes or recordings), which will be secured in either a locked cabinet or with password protection for a period of 5 years at which point it will be destroyed.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?
There are no known risks involved in this study. Although it is not expected, you may feel uncomfortable talking about certain work experiences and may find the recalling of some experiences from the past upsetting. Please be assured that all responses will be kept anonymous and will not be linked to you in any report that arises from this study. If a specific question is troubling, it is possible to skip that question and still remain in the study. If you do find recalling certain experiences upsetting and wish to speak with a professional, a list of community resources is provided at the bottom of this information sheet.

WHAT IF I WANT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?
Participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw after your interview, you may request that your data be removed. All data related to your participation will be destroyed upon the email request to withdraw from the study (prior to the submission of the final report).

APPROVALS AND CONTACT INFORMATION
The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved this study. If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact:
 Susan Wright, Research Ethics Administration Officer
 (807) 343-8283 or email: susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca

Questions about the content and nature of this study may also be directed to:
    Leanne Ruberry, Faculty of Business Administration
    (807) 708-1835 or lfruberr@lakeheadu.ca
    or
    Dr. David Richards, Faculty of Business Administration
    (807) 343-8525 or david.richards@lakeheadu.ca

RESEARCH RESULTS
You may request a summary of the key findings of this study from the researcher through email.
The results of this study may be published in a journal or presented at a conference.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE!

Community Resources:

Thunder Bay Counselling Centre	**Anishnawbe Mushkiki: Thunder Bay Aboriginal Community Health Centre**
544 Winnipeg Avenue	
807-684-1880	**807-343-4843**
email: community@tbaycounselling.com	**Email:** mail@anishnawbe-mushkiki.org

Walk-in Clinic Wednesdays 12pm-6:30pm
    1st & 3rd of month at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre,
    2nd & 4th of month at Children's Centre Thunder Bay

Appendix 4: REB Approval

Lakehead
UNIVERSITY

Office of the Vice-President (Research)

Tel (807) 343-8201
Fax (807) 766-7105

September 5, 2010

Principal Investigator: Dr. David A. Richards
Student Investigator: Leanne Ruberry
Faculty of Business Administration
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Rd
Thunder Bay ON P7B 5E1

Dear Dr. Richards and Ms Ruberry:

Re: **REB Project #: 133 09-10/ROMEO #1461194**
      Granting Agency name: N/A
      Granting Agency Project #: N/A

On behalf of the Research Ethics Board, I am pleased to grant ethical approval to your research project entitled, "Work Experiences of Aboriginal Workers in Non-Aboriginal Work Settings".

Ethics approval is valid until **September 5, 2011**. Please submit a Request for Renewal form to the Office of Research by August 5, 2011 if your research involving human subjects will continue for longer than one year. **A Final Report must be submitted promptly upon completion of the project**. Request for Renewal and Final Report forms are available at:

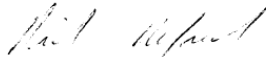   http://research.lakeheadu.ca/ethics_resources.html

During the course of the study, any modifications to the protocol or forms must not be initiated without prior written approval from the REB. You must promptly notify the REB of any adverse events that may occur.

Completed reports and correspondence may be directed to:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of Research
Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, ON P7B 5E1
Fax: (807) 346-7749

Best wishes for a successful research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Richard Maundrell
Chair, Research Ethics Board

/sw

cc: Office of Research
     Faculty of Graduate Studies

955 Oliver Road Thunder Bay Ontario Canada P7B 5E1 www.lakeheadu.ca