

## Work and Well-being in the Knowledge Economy: Evaluating the Effects of a Summer Employment Program for Youth from Low Income Neighborhoods

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### Abstract

This study assessed the influence of an employment program and participant demographic characteristics on several indicators of psychosocial well-being for 125 youth residing in low-income neighborhoods that were recruited by an urban-based social services agency in Southwestern Ontario to participate in the program. A one-group pretest-posttest design was used to collect quantitative data on four independent and five dependent variables. The study's results suggest the employment program had no effect on the selected indicators but certain demographic characteristics yielded significant associations with the dependent variables. Youth living with both of their parents at the same time perceived themselves as more intelligent, while youth born outside of Canada exhibited less attachment to their neighborhoods and lower self-esteem. The study's implications for designing and implementing gender-specific and culturally competent programs for youth seeking inclusion within the knowledge economy are discussed.

*Keywords:* youth, employment, employment programs, knowledge economy, well-being

### Introduction

The Summer Jobs for Youth Program (SJYP) was launched in 2007 by the Canadian province of Ontario as part of its Youth Opportunity Strategy (YOS), a province-wide initiative developed to bolster youths' capacity and propensity for labor market attachment. Both the SJYP and the YOS are indicative of the fledgling social investment state, Canada's new policy paradigm that arose from the forces of globalization and the new knowledge economy, in which the need for workers of higher skill levels is growing while the need for low skill levels is lessening, thus rendering those with low skills at a greater risk for unemployment (De

Grip & Wolbers, 2006; Ngai & Ngai, 2007). Consequently, the social investment state places less emphasis on the plethora of income maintenance programs that have dominated the nation's social policy landscape for the past several decades and more emphasis on knowledge and skills training intended to promote attachment to the labor market (Banting, 2005; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, n.d., *New Beginnings*, n.d.). In accord with the employment-oriented principles of the social investment state the purpose of this study was to ascertain the influence of the SJYP and various demographic characteristics on several indicators of work-related psychosocial well-being for youth residing in low-income neighborhoods.

A primary goal of the SJYP is to improve the self-esteem of the participant youth (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, n.d.). Hence, this study fulfills a key program evaluation function by assessing if program participation is associated with an increase in youths' self-esteem (Weiss, 1998). As stated above, however, we transcend a purely program evaluation function in this study by assessing the program's influence on other selected indicators of the participants' psychosocial well-being, and we also test for other determinants of these indicators. The basis of our selecting these other psychosocial well-being indicators is derived from our literature review found below.

## Literature Review

### *Psychological well-being*

Matsuba, Elder, Petrucci, and Marleau (2008) report that psychological well-being is a predictor of youth employment and their study assesses the effects an employment program had on participant youths' self-esteem and other indicators of psychological well-being. Matsuba et al. (2008) note the evaluated program did not consist of youth actually being employed but that they engaged in activities intended to boost their job skills and well-being, such as taking classes to upgrade their literacy and anger management skills, creating a housing registry, and developing websites. The results of the analysis by Matsuba et al. (2008) suggest the participants experienced an increase in their levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction, as well as a reduction in loneliness. Similarly, Padakannaya and Santhosh (2001) detected improvement in the self-esteem, locus of control and purpose-in-life scores (i.e., extent to which persons experience purpose in their daily life routine) of youth enrolled in a self-employment program.

Another positive finding regarding employment related interventions for youth was detected by Robitschek (1996), who assessed the impact of a ropes course, a short-term intervention consisting of individual and group activities that included an obstacle course and scaling a 12-foot wall. Results from the dependent samples t-test indicated increases in the participants' scores on the Hope Scale, which measured agency (i.e., determination or expectation that one will succeed in attaining goals) and pathways, or the belief that one will be able to generate various ways of meeting goals. Moreover, qualitative data gleaned from a thought-listing technique yielded a high proportion of positive feedback from the participants, including "49 comments [that] could be directly linked to the construct of hope" (p. 167).

In an evaluation of the Kmart Employment for Youth (KEY) program, a 10-week intervention that focused on a variety of areas, including obtaining and retaining a job, assertiveness training, and interviewing skills, Lingg (1996) measured increases in several job-specific confidence indicators. These indicators included perceived competence in career planning, resume writing, and attending a job interview.

In another study of the KEY program outlined above, Lingg (1995) detected gender differences in scores on the Adolescent Discouragement Indicator (ADI), a survey designed to assess discouragement levels in adolescents in five areas of life. These areas are work/school, friends and family, love, self, and the meaning of life. Lingg (1995) determined that females evinced lower levels of discouragement in the areas of work/school, friends, and self, and in order to promote gender equality recommends "that increased efforts be made to attract and retain males for the program while guarding against eliminating equally qualified females" (p. 80).

Not all studies yield findings that suggest the efficacy of employment programs for youth. For instance, Campbell (1995) reported in an evaluation of a 12-week cognitive-behavioral intervention which simulated an employment situation that the youths' scores on various measures of psychological well-being, including self-efficacy and self-control, were "mixed, erratic, and with no clear, interpretable pattern" (para. 19). Furthermore, Loughhead and Liu (1995) detected no increases in the self-concept and self-worth of youth from a low-income urban area who participated in a career development program that contained both paid employment and a classroom component. Thus, it is apparent from the review of studies outlined above that the evidence is mixed regarding

the influence employment programs have on the psychological well-being of youth.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital refers to relationships and patterns of trust that can help people access important resources, including jobs, and it is positively associated with income (Weaver & Habibov, 2012). Two indicators of social capital are close ties with supportive social networks, such as friends, and a positive affiliation with, or attachment to, one's neighborhood (Weaver, 2011; Weaver & Habibov, 2012).

For youth, friends can play a key role in their development by encouraging them to seek employment and pursue further education as well as to introduce them to other individuals who are aware of fruitful employment opportunities (Ellen & Turner, 1997; Green & White, 2008). As for the benefits of neighborhood attachment, Fogel (2004) states that creating "opportunities for youths to participate in neighborhood activities has strong potential as a strategic intervention intended to prevent youth disengagement from their immediate community and society" (p. 337). On the other hand, Curtis, Dooley, and Phipps (2004) report that unsafe neighborhoods that foster low attachment and poor cohesion amongst their residents are linked to negative emotional, behavioral, and physical outcomes for the children who reside in them.

In sum, it is evident that social capital can contribute to youth's successful transition to the labor market and to their overall well-being and that having friends and experiencing positive neighborhood attachment are two indicators of this valuable resource. Hence, it is vital to conduct research on potential determinants of social capital for youth, including their participation in employment-based programs.

### *Education*

As discussed above, the knowledge economy is predicated on an ample supply of highly-skilled workers. Due to this increasing demand for an educated labor force, it is not surprising that Staff and Mortimer (2007) stress the importance of adolescents obtaining as much education as possible in order to promote the likelihood of their success within an ever-growing "bifurcated labor market, where stable, high-paying jobs go to those who have been successful in obtaining college degrees" (p. 1170).

Becker (1998) also lauds the benefits of education for youth, reporting that it is a key component of human capital and that it is "the most effective way for able young people of poor backgrounds to rise in

the economic hierarchy” (p. 6). In their analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> century labor market dynamics, Brown and Thakur (2006) report that “[i]n the years ahead, over 75 percent of new jobs will require postsecondary education or training” (p. 92). Not surprisingly, education can also help people escape the snares of poverty and welfare dependency. For instance, in their analysis of 1993 Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data, Zhan and Pandey (2004) found that for women exiting the welfare rolls, education was positively associated with their income and inversely related to their returning to welfare.

Given this growing emphasis on the need for more education, it is important to consider the impact employment programs for youth have on their educational aptitude and proclivity to further their level of education. Brown and Thakur (2006) report in a review of various youth-based employment programs, including Big Brother Big Sisters, the Center for Employment Training, and the Job Corps, that they helped “young people avoid self-destructive behavior...[and] also enabled them to acquire the academic and work-readiness skills and personal attributes employers sought” (p. 93). Other favorable findings regarding Job Corps and education were reported by Schochet, Burghardt, and McConnell (2008), who determined that the program increased the participants’ educational achievement levels in the form of acquiring a GED or vocational certificate, as well as Taylor (1990) and Johnson (1992), who note that the educational achievements of Job Corp participants improved their labor market outcomes. Furthermore, in their study on the youth pre-employment program dubbed 70,001 Ltd., Lah, Wolf, Kelley, Christian, and Good (1986) report the program positively affected the rate at which the participants earned a GED.

Other studies suggest the impact of employment programs on youths’ educational progress is negligible. For instance, Larsson’s (2003) analysis of youth labor market programs in Sweden indicated the tested interventions were not associated with gains in the participants’ educational levels. In their Hong-Kong based study, Ngai and Ngai (2007) interviewed youth who participated in government-based programs intended to boost their occupational capacity through pre-employment training (which included training in computer operations and application) as well as on-the-job experience. Overall, the authors’ findings indicated that the participants were dissatisfied with the programs, lamenting they succeeded only in keeping them busy in routine tasks rather than providing them with a valuable educational experience.

Cheung and Ngai (2010) state that, alongside educational attainment and vocational training, the acquisition of so-called “soft skills” is an

important element in the human capital development of youth. Soft skills include interpersonal skills, work-related attitudes and ethic, and a work-related identity. Moreover, soft skills “are particularly essential for emotional labor, which means regulating one’s emotion for the work purpose, as required for an increasingly competitive, restructured labor market” (p. 298). In their survey-based study, Cheung and Ngai (2010) ascertained that soft skill training is particularly effective in increasing the work commitment of youth who have previously experienced powerlessness within the workplace.

Similarly, Donohue et al. (2005) detected an increase in the social skills of youth who received social skills training as part of their participation in a structured Summer Business Institute (SBI) training program. Their skill increases were in areas analogous to the soft skills outlined above, as they pertained to interacting professionally with others, proficiency in job interviewing, and taking initiative at work. The authors also measured an increase in various important money-related skills, such as budgeting, goal setting, and understanding investment protocols, of youth who received financial management training.

Clearly, the findings regarding the efficacy of employment programs to boost the educational proficiency and overall human capital development of youth are mixed. Noticeably absent, however, is how employment programs may influence youths’ perceptions relating to their educational capability and motivation. Moreover, as outlined above, results from the literature regarding the impact of employment programs on the psychological well-being of youth are also mixed and somewhat outdated as the bulk of the research in this area was conducted in the 1990s. Furthermore, there is a lacuna of literature pertaining to how youths’ participation in employment programs may help them acquire greater levels of social capital. In this study, we address these aforementioned gaps in the literature by exploring the influence that youths’ participation in an employment program has on their educational capability and motivation, psychological well-being, and levels of social capital.

## Method

### *Sample*

A total of 125 youth participated in this study, ranging from the age of 16 to 19 years ( $M = 16.9$ ,  $SD = .85$ ). Of these 125 participants, 68 (54.4%) were male and 57 (45.6%) were female. In terms of ethnicity, 35 (28%) were European-Canadian, 18 (14.4%) were African/Caribbean-Canadian,

16 (12.8%) were Middle-Eastern Canadian, 11 (8.8%) were Asian-Canadian, 6 (4.8%) were First Nations, 31 (24.8%) reported their ethnicity as “Other,” and there were 8 (6.4%) missing cases. As for national origin, 96 (76.8%) of the participants were born in Canada while 29 (23.2%) reported being born outside of Canada.

#### *Data Collection*

The study’s participants were recruited by an urban-based social services agency in Southwestern Ontario to participate in an employment program delivered during summer 2009. The program served youth who resided in one of the four low-income neighborhoods, characterized by poor employment opportunities, within the same city as the agency administering the program (New Beginnings, n.d.).

The tested intervention in this study consisted of a six-week paid employment experience for the participant youth. A total of 112 employers, over 50% of them located within the private sector, provided job placements for the youth. The rest of the placements were in government and the non-profit sector. The occupational classifications of the job placements included food services, health care, social services, and the automotive industry. In all of the jobs the participant youth were paid \$9.50 per hour. The youths’ job placements were preceded by a 20 hour pre-employment session, which included skills training in areas such as workplace communication and conflict resolution, as well as basic training in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and in the Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) (New Beginnings, n.d.; personal conversation, B. Mastromattei, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2010).

The one-group pre-test posttest design was employed in this study as data were collected by administering a survey to the participant youth on two separate occasions – the first when they were completing the pre-employment session and the second following their completion of their paid employment placement, both of which are outlined above (Royse, Thyer, Padgett, & Logan, 2001). Participant demographic information was collected at the initial wave of data collection, while measures assessing the participants’ self-perceived intelligence, intrinsic motivation, attachment to their neighborhood, quality and quantity of friendships, and self-esteem, all of which are described further below, were administered at both the pretest and the posttest.

The survey outlined above was developed following a thorough review of the literature, agency materials, and a pilot test with four agency youth who were representative of the study’s participants in terms of age and background. Prior to the study’s inception, the Research

Ethics Board (REB) located at the university in which we are employed granted its approval of this study. The REB approval included a formal granting of permission by the agency administering the SJYP.

#### *Dependent variables*

*Self-perceived intelligence:* This is a 4-item scale with items that include “How intelligent do you think you are, compared with others your age?” and “How do you rate yourself in school ability, compared with other students in your grade?” Participants respond to the items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Far above average” to “Far below average.” This measure was derived from Staff and Mortimer (2007). In our study, the alpha coefficient was .54 at the pretest and .61 at the posttest.

*Intrinsic motivation:* This 4-item measure, derived from Staff and Mortimer (2007), pertains to a youth’s motivation within school that is separate from one’s perceptions regarding what external rewards (e.g., wage, status, etc.) might result from educational attainment. The items include “I put a great deal of myself into some things at school because they have special meaning to me” and “How often does time seem to drag for you in school?” For three of the items, participants respond using a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from “Not at all true” to “Very true,” while for one item participants respond using a 5-point Likert-type scale which extends from “Almost always” to “Never.” In our study, the alpha coefficient was .52 at the pretest and .62 at the posttest.

*Neighborhood attachment:* This 4-item scale measures respondents’ sense of belonging and safety within their neighborhood. Examples of the scale items are “I feel like I am part of my neighborhood” and “I feel safe in my neighborhood.” Participants respond using a 5-item Likert-type scale that ranges from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” The items were derived from a school attachment measure used by Dornbusch, Erickson, Laird, and Wong (2001), but we inserted “neighborhood” for “school,” a substitution method similar to that done by Matsuba et al. (2008). As noted by Matsuba et al. (2008), this measure has good construct validity and high internal consistency. In our study, the alpha coefficient was .76 at the pretest and .75 at the posttest.

*Friends:* This 4-item scale measures youths’ perceptions of the quality and quantity of their peer network, as it contains items such as “I have



many friends” and “Most others my age like me.” Participants respond using a 5-item Likert-type scale with a response range that spans from “False” to “True.” We derived this measure from cycle 4 of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), which collects information about the physical, emotional, behavioral, and psychological development of a representative sample of Canada’s children and youth (Statistics Canada, 2001; Weaver & Habibov, 2010). The alpha coefficient in our study was .82 at the pretest and .86 at the posttest.

*Self-esteem:* The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) was used to assess the self-esteem of the youth participating in this study. Royse et al. (2001) note the RSE has been cited by other researchers over 1,000 times, which justifies it being considered the “most popular measure of global self-esteem” (p. 308). It is a 10-item scale that includes items such as “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself” and “At times I think I am no good at all” (reverse scored). Participants respond to items using a 4-point Likert-type scale, as responses range from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” The RSE demonstrates high inter-item and test-retest reliability, as well as construct validity (Matsuba et al., 2008). In our study, the alpha coefficient of the RSE was .84 at pretest and .87 at posttest.

#### *Independent Variables*

There were four independent or predictor variables in this study. Starting with sex, it was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. The participants’ national origin was determined by one item (“Were you born in Canada?”), with the responses coded as 0 = no and 1 = yes. Household status was measured by one item (“Do you live with both of your parents at the same time?”) and the responses were coded 0 = no and 1 = yes. Finally, the participants’ preprogram employment status was also measured by one item (“Between September 2008 and May 2009 did you have a job you were paid for?”), with the responses coded 0 = no and 1 = yes.

#### Results

We selected an alpha level of .10 in all of the statistical tests we employed, which is acceptable when researchers are conducting studies that are more exploratory in nature and which may provide statistical phenomena that act as a precursor to further studies (Bartlett II, Kotrick, & Higgins, 2001; Burns, Gillett, Rubenstein, & Gentry, 1990).

Dependent samples t-tests were conducted to test for pre- and posttest differences in the participants' scores on the various dimensions of psychosocial well-being outlined above. There were no differences detected between the pretest ( $M = 14.10$ ,  $SD = 2.10$ ) and posttest ( $M = 14.11$ ,  $SD = 2.20$ ) scores for self-perceived intelligence, as  $t(124) = -.054$ ,  $p > .10$ , or for intrinsic motivation, as the pretest ( $M = 11.66$ ,  $SD = 2.17$ ) and posttest ( $M = 11.49$ ,  $SD = 2.30$ ) scores yielded a result of  $t(119) = 1.018$ ,  $p > .10$ . Furthermore, there were no differences detected between the pretest ( $M = 14.25$ ,  $SD = 3.04$ ) and posttest ( $M = 14.37$ ,  $SD = 3.09$ ) scores for attachment to neighborhood, as  $t(123) = -.535$ ,  $p > .10$  or between the pretest ( $M = 16.04$ ,  $SD = 3.07$ ) and posttest ( $M = 15.96$ ,  $SD = 3.25$ ) scores for friends, as  $t(122) = .359$ ,  $p > .10$ . Finally, no differences were found between the participants' pretest ( $M = 30.32$ ,  $SD = 4.64$ ) and posttest ( $M = 30.46$ ,  $SD = 4.86$ ) scores for self-esteem, as  $t(123) = -.364$ ,  $p > .10$ .

We also conducted ordinary least squares (OLS) regression in order to determine if specific participant characteristics were associated with the dependent variables. Our rationale for doing this was so that program planners can potentially adjust their interventions to better address the needs of participants with characteristics that are negatively associated, or even not associated, with the selected dimensions of psychosocial well-being considered in this study.

There were a total of five regression models in this study; one for each of the dependent variables. In each of the models, the independent variables were selected from the participants' responses at the pretest component of the study and the dependent variables were derived from the participants' posttest responses. For the model 1 estimations, household status ( $B = .852$ ,  $t = 1.742$ ,  $p < .10$ ) and preprogram employment status ( $B = -1.081$ ,  $t = -2.222$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significantly associated with self-perceived intelligence. In other words, youth who lived with both parents at the same time viewed their own level of intelligence more favorably, while those who were employed during the school year prior to their participation in the SJYP had a lower perception of their level of intelligence.

The model 2 estimations pertained to determinants of the participants' intrinsic motivation, and in this model being female ( $B = 1.586$ ,  $t = 2.526$ ,  $p < .05$ ) was significantly associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. In the model 3 estimations being born in Canada ( $B = 2.475$ ,  $t = 2.283$ ,  $p < .05$ ) significantly predicted higher levels of neighborhood attachment amongst the participants. Refer to table 1 for the results of the estimations for models 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Statistics

Variable	B	Std Error	Beta
Model 1: Self-perceived Intelligence			
Sex			
Born in Canada	-0.047	0.650	-0.009
Household Status	0.852	0.489	0.212*
Preprogram Job Status	-1.081	0.487	0.271**
Model 2: Intrinsic Motivation			
Sex	1.586	0.628	0.310**
Born in Canada	-1.036	0.864	-0.148
Household Status	0.067	0.638	0.013
Preprogram Job Status	-0.085	0.643	-0.017
Model 3: Attachment to Neighbourhood			
Sex	-1.013	0.773	-0.160
Born in Canada	2.475	1.084	0.279**
Household Status	0.624	0.789	0.097
Preprogram Job Status	-0.293	0.787	-0.045
*p<.10    **p<.05			

The model 4 estimations focused on factors associated with variation in the participants' score on the friends measure, but no significant predictors were determined. Finally, the model 5 estimations yielded two significant predictors of the youths' self-esteem, as both being male ( $B = -2.178$ ,  $t = -1.852$ ,  $p < .10$ ) and being born in Canada ( $B = 3.763$ ,  $t = 2.397$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were associated with higher levels of this construct. Refer to table 2 for the results of models 4 and 5.

In order to address multicollinearity, we utilized the method employed by Habibov and Fan (2008), in which we conducted linear regression between each individual predictor that yielded significant results within the full model and the relevant outcome variable. The sign of the regression coefficient was then recorded. Any predictor variable whose coefficient in the full model was in the opposite direction from its coefficient in the one-by-one regression would be deemed multicollinear.

No evidence of multicollinearity was detected in any of the models discussed above.

Table 2. Ordinary Least Squares Regression Statistics

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta
Model 4: Friends			
Sex	-0.309	0.829	-0.047
Born in Canada	1.116	1.155	0.122
Household Status	-0.068	0.846	-0.010
Preprogram Job Status	-0.898	0.841	-0.135
Model 5: Self Esteem			
Sex	-2.178	1.176	-0.225*
Born in Canada	3.763	1.570	0.291**
Household Status	-0.445	1.176	-0.046
Preprogram Job Status	-1.266	1.178	-0.129

\*p<.10    \*\*p<.05

## Discussion

Recalling that the purpose of this study was to assess the influence of an employment program and various demographic characteristics on specific work-related psychosocial well-being indicators of the participant youth, it is evident that our analysis yielded several noteworthy implications. First, the results of the dependent samples t-test suggest the program did not influence the youth on any of the selected measures. As outlined above, the findings from the literature were mixed regarding the influence of employment programs on youths' psychosocial well-being, so our findings were not completely anomalous in this regard. It should also be noted that in the studies outlined above in which changes in various psychosocial indicators of youth were detected (Cheung & Ngai, 2010; Donohue et al., 2005; Lingg, 1996; Matsuba et al., 2008; Padakannaya & Santhosh, 2001; Robitschek, 1996), the tested interventions were training and skill building programs aimed at promoting the employment capacity of youth, while in our study the bulk of the intervention consisted of paid employment, save for a relatively brief 20-hour pre-employment session.

Thus, while more research is necessary, it may be the case that interventions which offer intensive psychoeducational programming are more effective than job placements alone in increasing youths' employment-related psychosocial functioning. Further research on interventions that contain both an intensive psychoeducational component and a paid employment experience of substantial length would also be beneficial. Moreover, recalling that research by Ngai and Ngai (2007) suggests that participants engaging in employment programs that lack stimulating learning opportunities leads to their dissatisfaction, we suggest researchers explore the relationship between youths' perceptions of the learning opportunities within the employment programs they participate in and their resultant psychosocial well-being.

The results of our OLS regression analyses also warrant elaboration. In the model 1 estimations, youth who reported they were living with both of their parents at the same time exhibited higher levels of self-perceived intelligence than youth not living with both of their parents. This was not altogether surprising, given that youth from single-parent families tend to exhibit lower levels of educational achievement and aspiration, as well as being more likely to drop out of school, than youth from intact families, (Garg, Melanson, & Levin, 2007). Thus, this finding contributes to the literature in that it implies youth from intact families perceive themselves as more intelligent and capable within the academic realm, which may partially explain the performance and aspiration differences outlined above. This also has important implications for practice, as it suggests that human service professionals working with youth should pay particular attention to boosting the education-related self-perceptions of youth from single-parent homes.

The other finding in the model 1 estimations that youth who were gainfully employed in the school year prior to their participation in the program had a lower perception of their level of intelligence also has a basis in the literature. Adolescents who work more than 20 hours per week during the school year tend to have a lower grade point average, score lower on standardized tests, and exhibit a greater likelihood for dropping out of school (Staff & Mortimer, 2008; Zimmer-Gembeck & Mortimer, 2006). It should be noted that working less than 20 hours per week is associated with higher educational outcomes in youth (Staff & Mortimer, 2007, 2008) and that we did not question youth on how many hours per week they worked in the school year prior to the employment program. Nonetheless, our findings provide suggestive evidence of a negative association between employment during the school year and youths' perceived intelligence. It may be the case that youth who

perceive themselves as less intelligent more readily engage in employment outside of school, as they view future educational prospects in a less than optimistic light. More research in this area is warranted.

The model 2 estimations yielded the finding that the female youth were more motivated in school and learning activities than the male youth. This finding resonates with other evidence gleaned from the literature. For instance, as noted above (Lingg, 1995), lower levels of discouragement in matters pertaining to school and work have been detected in female youth. This apparent higher level of school-related motivation in female youth is manifested in the pursuit of higher education, as in 2004 women comprised approximately 57% of all post-secondary students throughout the United States; a finding that is not surprising when one considers that female students outpace male students on a plethora of academic indicators throughout grade and high school (Riegle-Crumb, n.d.; Weaver & Habibov, 2010). Our finding, in conjunction with other evidence, suggests that program designers and human service practitioners need to be cognizant of this gender-based discrepancy by developing and implementing strategies and interventions which foster educational motivation and aptitude amongst both male and female students.

As discussed above, neighborhood attachment is a type of social capital and our findings from the model 3 estimations suggest that native-born Canadian youth are more attached to their neighborhoods than are youth born outside of Canada. In other words, immigrant youth may lack social capital. This is buttressed by Ngo and Schleifer (n.d.), who explain that a paucity of culturally inclusive programs has contributed to immigrant youths' low level of participation in community and neighborhood activities. Moreover, "racism and discrimination have denied many immigrant children and youth a sense of belonging and driven them into social isolation and alienation" (p. 32).

We propose that a more concerted effort to promote the inclusion of immigrant youth through local outreach programs and activities can result in their manifesting greater attachment to their neighborhoods and communities, thus accumulating a larger reservoir of social capital. As noted above, the accumulation of social capital promotes labor market attachment amongst youth. This is particularly relevant for immigrant youth as Ngo (2009) reports they "have the highest unemployment rate in Canada, at 20% for those aged 15 to 24, compared to a national rate of 8%" (p. 84). Moreover, "[a]s many as 51% of immigrants under the age of 15 and 41% of those aged 15-24 live in poverty" (p. 85).

As discussed above, the findings in this study suggest that participation in the Summer Jobs for Youth Program did not influence the youths' self-esteem, which was the primary goal of the program, but the results of the model 5 estimations indicate that female youth and youth born outside of Canada had lower levels of self-esteem than their male and native-born counterparts. Our finding of a gender-based discrepancy in self-esteem is not unique, as greater levels of self-esteem amongst male adolescents have been detected by other researchers (Benjet & Hernandez-Guzman, 2001; Bergman & Scott, 2001; Frost & Mckelvie, 2004; Riegle-Crumb, n.d., Weaver & Habibov, 2010). Thus, there is a considerable body of evidence that human service professionals, when developing employment-based and youth-oriented programs, should devise gender-specific interventions that place particular emphasis on boosting the self-esteem of female adolescents (Ngo, 2009).

As noted above, the results of the model 5 estimations also indicate a negative association between youth being born outside of Canada and their self-esteem. Although our study does not indicate the determinants of this specific association, Ngo and Schleifer (n.d.) note that immigrant youth frequently undergo stressful cognitive and emotional transitions which result from "cultural shock, unfamiliarity with new cultural norms and practices, and grief at leaving behind familiar language, culture and community....[t]heir development...may be further complicated by internalized racism..." (p. 29). These barriers and pressures could potentially compromise an immigrant youth's self-esteem, thus prompting the need for culturally competent and culturally proficient services (Ngo, 2009) that provide more opportunities for personal growth than the brief pre-employment training and job placement program assessed in this study. More research in this area is definitely warranted.

It should be noted there were two main limitations in this study. First, the convenience method of sampling and the small sample size limit its representativeness (Yegidis & Weinbach, 2009). Second, the alpha coefficients for two of the dependent variables, that is, the self-perceived intelligence and intrinsic motivation measures, were less than .70. Hence, the findings emanating from these measures should be interpreted with extreme caution (Royse, 2008).

In spite of this study's limitations, its findings provide suggestive evidence that is of importance for policymakers and program designers aiming to prepare youth with the skills and disposition to face the challenges found in the new knowledge economy. The fact that no differences were found in the dependent samples t-tests suggests that interventions more comprehensive than just a job placement are needed to

increase the employment-related psychosocial well-being of youth. Furthermore, the study's findings also suggest that these more comprehensive interventions must be gender-specific and culturally competent to meet the needs of all youth, including immigrant youth.

Major technological changes and a decline in the availability of low-skilled jobs during the last couple of decades have dramatically transformed the transition from adolescence to adulthood, as youth are expected to accumulate a considerable amount of personal, social, and educational resources in order to successfully enter adult society (Government of Canada, 2010). Consequently, it is vital that social investments such as the YOS enhance the likelihood that youths will acquire the attributes, skills, knowledge, and capacity to not only survive but to thrive within the dynamic economy which characterizes the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are hopeful this study and similar research initiatives will inform the development of programs that help youth prepare for their roles as active shapers of a prosperous and equitable society.

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