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Students speak up: career exploration and the working relationship

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Students Speak Up: Career Exploration and the Working Relationship

by

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A THESIS

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Abstract

This study was undertaken to learn more about how mature students perceive the career exploration process when visiting a university career service. Further, research has found that client ratings of the working alliance are a positive predictor of client change; however, this relationship has not been explored in career services. Following Smith and associates (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis, three mature students were selected and interviewed in order to explore their experiences of engaging in career exploration. They described experiencing a variety of emotions throughout counselling, and a process is suggested about how mature students view their career exploration experiences. The working alliance was an important contribution towards participant experiences and what they identified as helpful and hindering to its development is discussed. This study concludes that the experiences of mature students are unique and that a different career exploration model for mature students may be required.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Career Exploration and the Working Alliance	1
1.3 A Focus on Mature Students	3
1.3.1 Personal perspective.	3
1.3.2 Research perspective.	4
1.4 Current Study	6
1.5 Significance of Study	6
1.6 Organization of Thesis	7
1.7 Chapter Summary	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	8
2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Career Development: An Overview	8
2.2.1 Career theories.	10
2.2.2 Career specialist’s roles.	14
2.2.2.1 <i>Career continuum.</i>	15
2.2.2.2 <i>Career exploration research.</i>	16
2.2.3 Summary	17
2.3 Career Development and the Working Alliance	17
2.3.1 An overview of the working alliance.	18
2.3.1.1 <i>Defining the working alliance.</i>	18
2.3.1.2 <i>Effectiveness of the working alliance.</i>	19
2.3.1.3 <i>Qualities necessary for a working alliance.</i>	20
2.3.1.4 <i>Types of working alliances.</i>	20
2.3.1.5 <i>Factors influencing the working alliance.</i>	21
2.3.1.6 <i>Research within a career context.</i>	22
2.3.2 Summary	23
2.4 Career Development, Working Alliance, and University Students	23
2.4.1 Undergraduate university students.	24
2.4.1.1 <i>Transitions.</i>	24
2.4.1.2 <i>Stress and career indecision.</i>	26
2.4.2 Student perceptions of services.	27
2.4.3 Mature students.	28
2.4.4 Summary	30
2.5 Chapter Summary	30
CHAPTER THREE: METHOD	33
3.1 Introduction	33

3.2 Research Paradigms	33
3.2.1 Quantitative paradigm.	34
3.2.2 Qualitative paradigm.	34
3.2.3 Mixed method paradigm.....	35
3.2.4 Choosing a paradigm.....	36
3.3 Research Methodology	36
3.3.1 Research approaches.	37
3.3.1.1 <i>Background of phenomenology and hermeneutics</i>	38
3.3.2 Overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).....	43
3.3.2.1 <i>Philosophical underpinnings</i>	43
3.3.2.2 <i>Steps in the IPA process</i>	45
3.3.3 The approach used in this study.	46
3.4 Data Preparation	47
3.4.1 Initial demographic survey.	47
3.4.2 Interview technique.	47
3.4.2.1 <i>Critical incident technique</i>	48
3.4.3 Interview protocol.	50
3.4.4 Journal writing.....	51
3.4.5 Post questionnaire.....	51
3.5 Data Collection	52
3.5.1 Ethics.	52
3.5.2 Participant sampling.	52
3.5.3 Recruitment.	52
3.5.4 Selection of the sample.....	53
3.5.5 Interview procedure.....	54
3.5.5.1 <i>Recording device</i>	55
3.5.6 Data preparation.	55
3.6 Data Analysis.....	56
3.6.1 Exploratory comments.....	58
3.6.2 Developing themes.	58
3.6.3 Interpretative themes.	59
3.7 Quality Assurance of the Study Data.....	60
3.8 Chapter Summary	63
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF PARTICIPANTS.....	64
4.1 Introduction.....	64
4.2 Participant Demographics.....	64
4.2.1 Career specialist experience.	65
4.3 Preparation of Data	66
4.4 Participant Profiles.....	66
4.4.1 Sally's story.	66
4.4.1.1 <i>Sally's research interview</i>	67
4.4.1.2 <i>Exploratory comments</i>	67
4.4.1.3 <i>Developing themes</i>	73
4.4.1.4 <i>Journal reflections for Sally</i>	76

4.4.1.5 Summary.	78
4.4.2 Bubba’s story.....	78
4.4.2.1 Bubba’s research interview.	79
4.4.2.2 Exploratory comments.	80
4.4.2.3 Super-ordinate themes.	85
4.4.2.4 Personal reflection.....	88
4.4.2.5 Summary.	89
4.4.3 Mickey’s story.	90
4.4.3.1 Mickey’s research interview.	91
4.4.3.2 Exploratory comments.	92
4.4.3.3 Developing themes.	97
4.4.3.4 Journal writing after Mickey’s interview.....	100
4.4.3.5 Summary.	101
4.5 Chapter Summary	102
CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS ACROSS PARTICIPANTS	103
5.1 Introduction.....	103
5.2 Preparation of Data	103
5.3 Career Process and Career Identity.....	104
5.3.1 Master theme I: Reasons for entering into career exploration.	104
5.3.1.1 Uncertainty of career path.....	105
5.3.1.2 Career exploration may provide relief to uncertainty.	106
5.3.1.3 Career exploration as necessity only.	108
5.3.1.4 Summary.	110
5.3.2 Master theme II: Career experience as process of transition.....	110
5.3.2.1 Anxiety at start and through process.	111
5.3.2.2 Uncertain beginning.	113
5.3.2.3 Transition process.....	114
5.3.2.4 Increasing confidence.	116
5.3.2.5 Empathy for counsellor.....	116
5.3.2.6 Summary.	117
5.3.3 Master theme III: Career identity transformation.....	117
5.3.3.1 Desire for a renewed career identity.	118
5.3.3.2 University as place to re-envision career identity.	119
5.3.3.3 Career identity transformation through career exploration.....	120
5.3.3.4 Summary.	120
5.4 The Working Alliance	121
5.4.1 Master theme IV: Roles in the relationship.....	121
5.4.1.1 Client responsible for opening up.....	122
5.4.1.2 Career specialist as guide to relationship.....	124
5.4.1.3 Summary.	124
5.4.2 Master theme V: Identified ways to create client openness.	125
5.4.2.1 Creating individual process.....	126
5.4.2.2 Integrating personal counselling into career exploration.....	127
5.4.2.3 Shared conversation.	128

5.4.2.4	<i>Career specialist clarifies and admits faults.</i>	131
5.4.2.5	<i>Respect for client.</i>	131
5.4.2.6	<i>Additional variables.</i>	133
5.4.2.7	<i>Summary.</i>	134
5.4.3	Master theme VI: Impact of environment	135
5.4.3.1	<i>Environment as distracting.</i>	136
5.4.3.2	<i>Environment cues conversation.</i>	136
5.4.3.3	<i>Summary.</i>	137
5.4.4	Master theme VII: Focus on assessment.	137
5.4.4.1	<i>Stigma toward assessment.</i>	138
5.4.4.2	<i>Anxiety about response to tool.</i>	141
5.4.4.3	<i>Provided hope and clarity.</i>	142
5.4.4.4	<i>Summary.</i>	143
5.4.5	Master theme VIII: Ways to improve relationship.	143
5.4.5.1	<i>Explaining assessment.</i>	144
5.4.5.2	<i>Feedback versus advice.</i>	144
5.4.5.3	<i>Follow up.</i>	145
5.4.5.4	<i>Ways of giving work.</i>	145
5.4.5.5	<i>Summary.</i>	146
5.5	Chapter Summary	146
CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS		147
6.1	Introduction	147
6.2	Literature and Study Results	147
6.2.1	Career development and study results.	147
6.2.1.1	<i>Literature review.</i>	147
6.2.1.2	<i>Study results.</i>	148
6.2.2	Career focus and working alliance.	149
6.2.2.1	<i>Literature review.</i>	149
6.2.2.2	<i>Study results.</i>	149
6.2.2.3	<i>Summary.</i>	151
6.2.3	Career and mature university students.	152
6.2.3.1	<i>Literature review.</i>	152
6.2.3.2	<i>Study results.</i>	152
6.2.3.3	<i>Summary.</i>	154
6.3	Interpretation of Results: Model of Career Transitional Process for Participants	154
6.3.1	Mature student working toward transition.	156
6.3.1.1	<i>Mature student desire to reformulate career identity.</i>	156
6.3.1.2	<i>Mature student recognition of needing more resources.</i>	157
6.3.1.3	<i>Mature student decision to enter into career exploration.</i>	157
6.3.2	Mature student engaging in the transition.	158
6.3.2.1	<i>Importance of working alliance with career specialist</i>	158
6.3.3	Mature student completing his/her transition	160
6.3.3.1	<i>Unsuccessful completion.</i>	160
6.3.3.2	<i>Successful completion.</i>	161

6.3.4 Summary.....	161
6.3.5 Literature review	162
6.3.5.1 <i>Explanation of steps.</i>	163
6.3.5.2 <i>Schlossberg and work transition</i>	164
6.3.6 Application to mature students.....	165
6.3.6.1 <i>Similarities between the two models.</i>	165
6.3.6.2 <i>Differences between the two models.</i>	166
6.3.7 Summary.....	168
6.4 Contributions of this Study	168
6.4.1 Mature students.	168
6.4.2 Working alliance.	169
6.4.3 Use of IPA methodology.	169
6.5 Study Limitations.....	170
6.6 Future Research Directions.....	172
6.6.1 Implications for future research.....	172
6.6.2 Implications for professional practice.	173
6.7 Closing Remarks.....	175
6.7.1 Personal reflection.	175
6.7.2 Conclusion.....	176
REFERENCES	178
APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY	194
APPENDIX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE	195
APPENDIX C: POST-STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE	198
APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM	199
APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT POSTER.....	204

List of Tables

Table 2.0 <i>Career Development Frameworks</i>	12
Table 3.0 <i>Description of Qualitative Traditions</i>	37
Table 3.1 <i>Timeline of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics</i>	40
Table 3.2 <i>Summary of Philosophical Influences in IPA</i>	44
Table 3.3 <i>Overview and Description of Steps in IPA Analysis</i>	57
Table 3.4 <i>Suggested Ways to Identify Exploratory Comments</i>	58
Table 3.5 <i>Ways to Create Super-Ordinate Themes</i>	59
Table 3.6 <i>Quality Assurance Definitions, Criteria Used within this Study</i>	61
Table 4.0 <i>Participant Demographic Information</i>	64
Table 4.1 <i>Transcript Information</i>	66
Table 4.2 <i>Excerpt of Sally's Interview Process</i>	68
Table 4.3 <i>Excerpt of Sally's Exploratory Comments</i>	69
Table 4.4 <i>Excerpt of Sally's Emergent Themes</i>	71
Table 4.5 <i>Creation of Super-ordinate Themes</i>	73
Table 4.6 <i>List of Sally's Super-Ordinate Themes</i>	75
Table 4.7 <i>Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Sally</i>	77
Table 4.8 <i>Excerpt of Bubba's Interview Process</i>	80
Table 4.9 <i>Excerpt of Bubba's Exploratory Comments</i>	81
Table 4.10 <i>Excerpt of Bubba's Emergent Themes</i>	83
Table 4.11 <i>Creation of Super-ordinate Themes</i>	85
Table 4.12 <i>List of Bubba's Super-ordinate Themes</i>	86
Table 4.13 <i>Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Bubba</i>	90
Table 4.14 <i>Excerpt of Mickey's Interview Process</i>	92

Table 4.15 <i>Excerpt of Mickey's Exploratory Comments</i>	93
Table 4.16 <i>Excerpt of Mickey's Emergent Themes</i>	95
Table 4.17 <i>Creation of Super-Ordinate Themes</i>	98
Table 4.18 <i>List of Mickey's Super-ordinate Themes</i>	99
Table 4.19 <i>Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Mickey</i>	102

List of Figures

Figure 2.0 Advising-Counselling Continuum.....	15
Figure 5.0 Levels of themes.....	104
Figure 5.1 Master Theme I: Reasons for Entering into Career Exploration.....	105
Figure 5.2 Master Theme II: Experience as Process of Transition.....	111
Figure 5.3 Master Theme III: Career Identity Transformation.....	118
Figure 5.4 Master Theme IV: Roles in the Relationship	122
Figure 5.5 Master Theme V: Identified Ways to Create Client Openness	126
Figure 5.6 Master Theme VI: Impact of Environment	135
Figure 5.7 Master Theme VII: Focus on Assessment.....	138
Figure 5.8 Master Theme VIII: Ways to Improve Relationship.....	144
Figure 6.0 Participant Process Model of Career Exploration Transition	155
Figure 6.1 Schlossberg’s Individual Transition Model.....	163

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This Chapter will provide an overview of the focus of this study by exploring the importance of career exploration and the working alliance. The Chapter discusses why mature students are a useful subgroup to examine and concludes with a brief explanation of the study and its significance. It is completed with an overview of chapters included with this thesis.

1.2 Career Exploration and the Working Alliance

The career field of psychology is expanding and developing new ideas and theories that fit with today's post-modern style of thinking. However, this field is still considered to be coasting under the radar, with questions continually being raised about careers being separate from or integrated into the counselling field. Regardless of how the field is viewed, it is critically important to students in universities who are looking for a career path that is linked to their education. Career exploration, a process through which an academic advisor or counsellor aids a student in decision-making processes about future careers, is rooted in the history and progression of career development (Hughey, Nelson, Damminger & McCalla-Wriggins, 2009). It is studied in the context of career counselling or other counselling disciplines, including personal counselling (Hughey et al., 2009). It is important to explore what this specific profession has to offer, and how career specialists are separate from personal counsellors employed in counselling centers within universities.

Traditionally, research within the area of career exploration has primarily focused on theories and roles that career specialists may utilize, as well as creating ways to define the role of a career specialist as a professional (Ludwikowski, Vogel & Armstrong, 2009). There have also been increasingly more studies exploring the effectiveness of career interventions and ways that

counselling helps reduce career indecision (Whiston & Rahardja, 2008). One common result that has come from these effectiveness studies is that career interventions are most effective when a professional is involved; sessions between career professionals and clients have shown to be beneficial to participants (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). This relationship in the literature is defined as the “working alliance” (Bedi, 2004), and it speaks to the relationship between counsellor and client.

Literature focusing on the working alliance has demonstrated that a positive alliance is often an effective indicator of positive client change (Martin, Garske & Davies, 2000). More recently, research has focused on the characteristics and qualities necessary for the development of a working alliance (Horvath, 2006), noting that the types of working alliances that can exist between counsellor and client can differ with clients (Bedi & Duff, 2009). In fact, client ratings of this relationship can be more indicative of client change than therapist ratings (Bedi, 2006). Literature has also identified client and therapist behaviours that influence the working alliance, and include such concepts as openness and honesty on the part of the counsellor (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001), and the client’s positive motivation toward change (Saunders, 2000). While the literature is promising in identifying the effectiveness of the working alliance and variables that contribute towards its creation, there needs to be a greater focus on the importance of this working alliance in regard to career development contexts.

Within the career counselling context, the working alliance is viewed as important as it is in a personal counselling context (Lewis, 2001), however, more needs to be explored about the importance of this relationship. It is also important to broaden the scope of research and determine if this relationship is important in a career exploration setting. This study focuses on this issue more closely and does so within a university setting. A university setting was chosen as

it provides the opportunity to explore the issue where a wide range of career experiences and professionals exist.

1.3 A Focus on Mature Students

1.3.1 Personal perspective.

Throughout my time working at a career center I noticed that many of the clients I saw identified themselves as mature students. Defined by Tones, Fraser, Elder & White (2009), mature students are adults older than 21 years of age, independent of their parents, and are entering into undergraduate studies for the first time. As a young student providing counselling to mature students, I often found myself feeling uncertain about how to approach their past experiences. I was privileged to hear their stories that contained challenges, hopes, expectations, and dreams but I could not fully comprehend these experiences because of the differences in age, diversity, scope, time, and life experiences between myself and clients. As a novice counsellor, I understood that the relationship that developed between my client and myself was critically important, but I found it difficult to understand how to connect with the experiences of these mature students. I felt it was a slippery slope dealing with mature students, because at times I had to tell them that I did not know if their career dreams were realistic. Universities and career choices often shift, and what was popular as a career direction at one time may not be as wise at another time. I also heard about these students' concerns regarding the lack of proper resources for their particular place within a university setting. In fact, they felt alienated, isolated, and often stressed to a point where they considered dropping out of their counselling sessions and university.

This experience of working with these mature students prompted me to be interested in the unique aspects of their lives. The more I learned, the more I realized that there is more to

know about how these students experience and cope with their changing career paths. I found this to be shocking, considering the increase in mature student populations across universities, especially in an era where it is common to have multiple careers across one's life span. These students' voices were largely unheard. If we know more about their stories, then perhaps we can aid them in formulating a less stressful career path.

1.3.2 Research perspective.

Mature university students are a unique population of individuals with stressors, circumstances, and experiences that differ from those of typical, younger university students of 18 to 24 years of age. When university students enter into their first year of undergraduate studies, they experience a wide variety of transitions that focus on role changes, shifts in assumptions, new relationships, and increasing life demands (Arthur & Hiebert, 1996). These experiences and stressors, however, are often increased for mature students because they are placed in a setting where they are marginalized and may feel deficient or defective when sharing this particular setting with younger students (Kasworm, 2010). Literature has found that mature students are also often different in how they learn, their motivation to learn, and the level of energy they invest in school (Green & Kelso, 2006). For these students, there is a distinction between success in university and success in learning, where past experiences play a role (Donaldson, Graham, Martindill & Bradley, 2012). One can assume that mature students might also differ in their career exploration needs; however, this has not been explored in depth in the literature.

The experience of re-entering university or entering for the first time often leads to shifts in identity, questioning of self, self-doubt, and self-growth (Mercer, 2007) that can cause mature students to feel anxious or even depressed. Literature has found that career identity and re-

envisioning one's career self is one potential area that increases these students' stressors (Kasworm, 2010). Mature students may question their career identities and experience barriers that directly impede their success in university (Stone, 2008). In fact, the literature indicates that this problem is aggravated when mature students are unaware of services available or hesitant to utilize these services due to fear of being stigmatized as an individual seeking counselling (Shivy & Koehly, 2002). Despite this, mature students are more likely to invest in career exploration and be more committed to making a career choice (Watson & Stead, 1997).

Finally, a last note of interest is that research has demonstrated that mature students associate better with their professors than they do with younger students (Kasworm, 2010) and that these professionals are forms of support for these students (Stone, 2008). Since mature students associate with professionals, their relationship with a career specialist or counsellor may also differ from that of a younger student. Exploring this relationship and its development from a mature student's perspective may shed light on the importance of this relationship and how best to approach it, considering that these students need active positive support.

In conclusion, mature students offer a unique perspective on career exploration and the working alliance. These students experience unique stressors, challenges, and barriers in regard to forming their career identity and engaging in university. Their feelings of isolation and marginalization and their relationship with their professors can provide them with a different experience compared to younger students. They may have differing career needs, often viewing careers differently due to past experience and being more committed to career change. Therefore, it is important to explore how mature students in this population experiences career exploration and the development of the working alliance between their career specialist and themselves.

1.4 Current Study

This study was designed to respect the voices of mature students and to explore their experience of engaging in career exploration. The objective for this study was to develop an understanding of mature student experiences and identify what factors they found to be helpful in creating a relationship between their career specialist and themselves. To approach this, a qualitative approach of inquiry, specifically an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) advocated by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) was used. This approach provided an opportunity to explore the participants' lived experiences.

The primary questions that guided this study included: (a) what are the experiences of adults engaging in career exploration, and (b) how do participants perceive the development of the working alliance in this career exploration setting? In order to better understand these research questions and to explore what mature students identified as helping them to create the working alliance, a semi-structured interview was used. This study allowed me as a researcher to focus on specific incidences that helped or hindered the relationship. The final objective of the study was to invite participants to identify what events they believe could have occurred during their career exploration experience to help them through this process.

1.5 Significance of Study

The benefits of this study include the ability to create a thesis that will allow career specialists to become increasingly aware of the lived experiences of mature students engaging in career exploration and their working alliances with career specialists. As participants are being asked to describe their experiences, they are given a chance to advise what they specifically find to be helpful, hindering, and potentially helpful in creating a working alliance with their career specialists. This information is useful to society because career exploration is increasingly in

demand with the increase in career indecision and rates of unemployment, as well as the ill effects that unemployment can have on an individual's psychological wellbeing (Latif, 2010). Furthermore, this study, similar to the findings of Bedi, Davis, and Williams (2005), may also identify incidences that are indicative of a positive working alliance, which can be informative to a career specialist's practice. Such findings can help broaden the career specialist's understanding of how mature students view such behaviours, both now and in future research.

1.6 Organization of Thesis

The thesis is organized into chapters. Chapter 2 presents literature pertaining to career exploration, the working alliance, and mature students, while Chapter 3 provides an in-depth exploration of the methodology used for this study. Chapter 4 will provide a description of each participant, while Chapter 5 will explore themes across each analysis. Chapter 6 will discuss the findings in relation to existing literature and the study, and an interpretation will be given based on the study's findings. Chapter 7 concludes with contributions and limitations of the study, as well as directions for future research.

1.7 Chapter Summary

How mature students experience engaging in career exploration is important to understand, as this unique group of university students may struggle with their career paths and career identity in ways that perhaps other university students do not. This study explored their unique struggle through the use of a qualitative methodology informed by IPA. The exploration of this topic is timely in so far as this group of university students is increasing in number, and is dealing with increasing stressors. Understanding how they experience career services is a step toward creating specialized services for this population.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Career exploration, the process through which an academic advisor or counsellor aids a student in making career choices, is rooted in the history and progression of career development (Hughey et al., 2009) and intricately linked with career counselling. This chapter will provide an overview of career development, explore the services provided by career specialists, and examine the importance of the working alliance within the career field. The chapter will conclude with a discussion about career exploration as it occurs within a university setting and the importance of examining mature students' experiences.

2.2 Career Development: An Overview

Career exploration refers to the process of experiencing and making different choices in relation to work occupations available in society (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The process of engaging in career exploration can be traced back to 1888, where the first vocational guidance program emerged (Brown & Brooks, 1996). It wasn't until the early 1900s, however, that the first "framework" for career development was created when Frank Parson, a sociologist, emphasized the need for three important steps in order to successfully choose a career (Whiston, 2003). These include; (a) developing an understanding of one's abilities, values, and attitudes; (b) understanding the demands of different lines of work; and (c) finding an agreement between one's values and goals and the requirements of the chosen work field (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Parson hypothesized that when "jobs" are chosen with intention rather than through chance, individuals will demonstrate higher levels of efficiency and greater work performance because they have actively processed their wants and found a job that matches their needs and values (Lawrence, 1994).

Parson's theory has survived and informed many career development theories since the early 1900s. By the 1940s, Parson's theory was labelled a "trait and factor" theory and used alongside measures of intelligence, interests, and aptitudes to classify individuals and place them in jobs where they would thrive and perform (Brown & Brooks, 1996). In the 1950s, career development began to be viewed as a developmental process that included not only Parson's criteria but the notion that "occupation" was defined as any type of work on which a person spends most of their time, such as being a full-time mother with or without pay (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). This was also a time period when many other developmental theories emerged, including sociological theories, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, personality theories, and trait-orientated explanations that influenced career development (Brown & Brooks, 1996). The one thing that many of these theories shared was the notion that career development was primarily focused on fitting a person to a job position (Herr, 1997). At the same time, the field of career exploration was developing where increasing emphasis was placed on helping students transition into a "career" within an organization rather than simply getting a job (Pope, 2000).

The notion of personal interests was also recognized as important to the definition of "career." Although a more holistic view of career was emerging, notions such as roles, settings, and events in one's personal life were still considered distinguishable and separate from career development (Gysbers, Heppner & Johnston, 2003). A broader definition was not considered until the 1990s (McDaniels & Gysbers, 1992). By that time, these new definitions of career development began to explore how life roles, values, life events, and other interpersonal factors influence a career decision (Savickas, 2003). At this point in time, there was a shift away from viewing a career as a single path to viewing career as a process that was complex, multi-faceted, and moving toward a multi-dimensional pathway (Gysbers et al., 2003).

Today, career development is conceived as a dynamic, interactive, and life-long process that focuses on assisting individuals to understand how their values, goals, interests, and abilities relate to their career choices (Sampson Jr., 2009). This broader definition has greatly influenced how advisors and counsellors in universities view their roles today; it implies a demand for a greater range of services, and career exploration has become more of a life-long process rather than a time-limited process (Amundson, 2006). Career specialists are no longer simply matching a person with a potential job but are now considering “career” to be an entity that is fluid and constantly changing (Tang, 2003).

To match this new definition of career, the career specialist seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of his/her client. This requires a collaborative and in-depth exploration of interests, values, lifestyle, experience, and other life areas in order to help clients identify their potential career paths while, at the same time, teaching clients an approach to understanding how they can utilize career competency skills (Amundson, 2006). Career exploration is considered crucial for helping individuals to become prepared for the future (Hughey et al., 2009). With these new demands, new frameworks have developed within the career field.

2.2.1 Career theories.

Career exploration has been influenced by frameworks and theories that have been formulated within the career development and career counselling fields. A detailed overview of all these theoretical frameworks is beyond the scope of this paper, but a brief explanation will be provided. Career theories can be categorized into four groups: theories of content, theories of process, theories of content and process, and theories that move toward a wider more holistic explanation of career development (Patton & McMahon 2006). Theories of content focus on interests and values in relation to career development; they include theories of personality and

are generally considered trait-based. In contrast, theories of process focus on change over time in career contexts and are considered to be more individualistic, often including a developmental perspective (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Theories of content and process balance both trait-based features and developmental aspects of career development and may also integrate social cognitive theories. More holistic perspectives include exploring constructivist theories within career development, among others. Table 2.0 provides a brief glimpse into seven of the many theories (see Gysbers et al., 2003 for full review) career specialists may use to approach career exploration with clients. These theories explored in Table 2.0 are but a few of many currently utilized by career advisors and career counsellors. It should be noted as well that often career advisors will mix components from several theories in explaining how they view their clients.

Table 2.0

Career Development Frameworks

Theory	Description
Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment (Dawis, 1976).	This theory was developed in 1984 and focuses on work as an interaction between a work environment and an individual; it also focuses on the skills an individual needs to complete work and the compensation the individual receives. From this viewpoint, career specialists tend to focus on preparing an individual for a career by focusing on skills needed to find a starting position and work up the career ladder.
Life-Span (Super, 1980).	Super (1980) developed his theory in 1990 which is based on developmental psychology and includes fourteen propositions to describe career development. These propositions focus on the fact that people have different abilities and interests, that self-concept influences career choice, and that individuals organize their lives in categories of roles. He also created the notion of career maturity (i.e., a goal to reach that denotes readiness to engage in career exploration appropriate for one's age), which focuses on career as a life-span process. Career specialists using this theory focus on the adaptation to the work role, an exploration of stages of development in relation to career exploration, and the use of life stages as a way to assess a person's readiness for change.
Holland's Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments (Spokane & Cruza-Guet, 2005).	This is a more scientific way of exploring career decisions with clients. Holland created this theory in 1997, and it describes six different vocational patterns that people can have. They can be Realistic, Investigative, Conventional, Artistic, Social, or Enterprising. These six typologies can be associated with career opportunities and academic choices and be explored with clients to help inform them about their career decisions. From this viewpoint, career specialists can focus on identifying an individual's personality type and provide assistance that will help them find a job that will let their career personality type flourish.

Theory Cont'd.	Description Cont'd.
Social Cognitive Framework (Lent & Brown, 2006).	This is a newer approach to career theory that emphasizes a fusion of common elements of past theories. It focuses on how people develop and remake vocational decisions and achieve career success. Its center focus is on examining cognitions, behaviours, and other malleable factors, as well as how these factors impact self-efficacy, client beliefs, and personal goals. Furthermore, it examines how these can be integrated to improve performance in future jobs. Career specialists who operate with this theory as a backdrop often focus on personal barriers to career choices, goal setting, implementation, and job satisfaction.
Person-Centered, Holistic Model (Amundson, 2006).	Focuses on developing a strong relationship with the client in order to open up a venue to explore their values and interests for the purpose of understanding their integration of vocational domains in relation to personal and contextual factors of the client's lifestyle. There is also a focus on examining the significance the client places on the career counselling process and integrating this awareness into practice.
Narrative Model (Amundson, 2006).	This theory regards individuals as self-organizing systems and focuses more on how the individual understands their career stories and how this formulates a basis of truth for future expectations surrounding careers. This is a step away from examining the problems.
Transitional Model (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006).	This theory is a model based on theories of adult development and provides a way to conceptualize work and career transitions. There is a focus on exploring how an individual moves in, moves through and moves out of a transitional state. The type of transition, its impact on the individual and their coping strategies during the transition are explored while a professional helps the individual to take charge of the transition by providing more resources and support.

Along with these theories, Gordon (2006) states that effective career specialists need to incorporate counselling competencies such as listening and challenging skills, goal-setting, questioning, and paraphrasing to actually engage the client. Career specialists must also have substantial knowledge of career resources such as career development theories, assessment tools, career advising approaches, and measurements, as well as an understanding of career-related problems (Gordon, 2006). A review of the tools used by career specialists is not provided but can be found in Brown and Brooks (1996).

2.2.2 Career specialist's roles.

Through the use of these frameworks and assessment measures, a career specialist's goals include the ability to: a) describe and make known potential career choices, b) help clients integrate values, interests, abilities, and skills into potential work experiences, c) create a connection between different experiences and lessons learned and how these influence long-term career processes, and d) help a client develop career competencies, such as learning how to do career research (Hughey et al., 2009).

With increasing career options, it becomes a complex process to decide what careers are a good fit with individuals. Clients can become quite lost in this process. Clients may feel like they are drowning in a sea of job information available through multiple sources and formats, such as online media and advertisements. For these purposes, the use of a career specialist in defining and explaining career choices and career paths is optimal, as it provides structure within a rather chaotic process (Hughey et al., 2009).

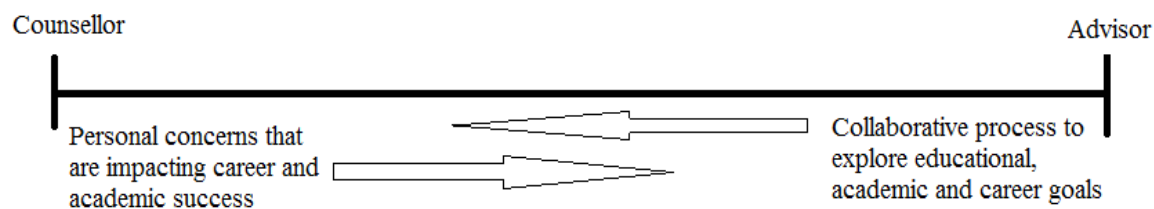
Career specialists are also there to provide up-to-date information on the changing economy and typically have valuable resources and knowledge on the changing demands of different careers; as such, they can show individuals how to become valuable assets in the work

field (Gordon, 2006). However, career exploration is not a profession that is limited to one setting, and this can become very confusing to clients.

2.2.2.1 Career continuum.

Career exploration services are often provided across disciplines, where a variety of professionals may offer career exploration help. For this reason, an advising-counselling continuum that defines professionals is often helpful to examine in order to develop an understanding of the underlying differences across professionals (Kuhn, Gordon & Webber, 2006). Figure 2.0 explores this continuum. At each end of the continuum there is a particular focus, but as this focus becomes less clear it begins to overlap with the opposite profession, as demonstrated by the arrows in Figure 2.0.

Figure 2.0 Advising-Counselling Continuum (informed by Kuhn et al., 2006)



At different institutions, for example, each of these terms (i.e., advisor and counsellor) may take on a different focus. For example, some post-secondary institutions guard the title of “counsellor,” stating that only registered psychologists may utilize this title, despite having advisors that engage in what may be considered the counselling process. Advisors and counsellors have roles that significantly overlap (Kuhn et al., 2006), but the term “counsellor” requires graduate level training whereas “advisor” often does not have this requirement. As such, occupations each may begin to overlap as client concerns become more complex in nature. For example, advisors typically do not focus on mental health concerns and substance abuse (Kuhn

et al., 2006) but counsellors do. Similarly, counsellors are not typically associated with study skills that are frequently the mainstay of advisors. Advisors may have a tendency to focus on situating students within career and academic planning goals (Hughey et al., 2009), whereas counsellors tend to address developmental issues.

Therefore, within the career development field, a professional who engages in career exploration may be a career advisor, a career counsellor, a mentor, or a guidance counsellor. The terms career advising, career counselling, and career exploration are often interchangeably used within universities under different connotations. For the purpose of this study, the term career exploration has been used to define the services explored within this study, and the term “career specialist” used to define the role of one who offers career exploration services. The term “career specialist” is also chosen as this is the terminology promoted by the university and a term that can be used to describe the middle of the continuum of Figure 2.0 where counsellor and advisor begin to blur. Therefore, a career specialist is neither an advisor nor a counsellor but one who specifically addresses issues of career exploration and may include personal context into the career exploration process.

2.2.2.2 Career exploration research.

Career exploration is demonstrated through different studies to be effective (Whiston & Rahardja, 2008). However, efficacy research in the career development field emphasizes the fact that there is relatively very little known about the process variables that influence career exploration. There is also little known about the way in which a client and a career specialist work together in career issues. Heppner and Heppner (2003) argue that the “process,” or what happens when a client and specialist get together for a session or two, might offer a unique

insight into the way career exploration is handled between them. This is referred to as the “working alliance” of career development and is considered to be a process variable.

2.2.3 Summary.

Career exploration has an in-depth history in career development and career counselling literature. Many career development theories and frameworks have been created since the nineteenth century, ranging from ways to place individuals into a job position to seeing career as a life-long multi-faceted process. With increasing career options there has also been an increase in career exploration needs, especially within university settings. This need has caused a continuum to be created where different professionals can offer overlapping career exploration services with the hope of providing individuals with the skills necessary to reduce career indecision. Throughout the development of career exploration services, research has demonstrated that career exploration is effective, but little is known about the process of career exploration and the importance of the relationship between client and career specialist.

2.3 Career Development and the Working Alliance

The field of career development is growing, and research is beginning to focus on process variables that may help contribute toward a better understanding of how career counselling is effective (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). One process variable that has been demonstrated as being imperative within the counselling field is exploring the relationship between client and counsellor, yet little research has examined this variable within a career context (Bedi, 2004). According to Gysbers et al., (2003) it is important to listen to client voices about what they deem to be helpful and needed within the working alliance in order to develop a solid understanding of how to aid clients. This is particularly true with career clients. It is by listening to client expectations that a career specialist is able to create a plan of action and develop goals with the

client (Gysbers et al., 2003). While this need has not been explored in depth in the career exploration field, it has received attention in the counselling literature, which will be presently explored as to provide a background important to this study.

2.3.1 An overview of the working alliance.

The working alliance, also termed the therapeutic alliance, is a concept that defines the relationship between a person who wishes to seek change and the individual who aids the client with this change (Bordin, 1979). In this section the reader is provided with a brief introduction to the working alliance. Factors that impact this relationship are explored, and the way this relationship relates to career exploration is examined.

2.3.1.1 Defining the working alliance.

The working alliance has many definitions depending on a counsellor's theoretical orientation. The term dates back to Freud's idea that the partnership between therapist and client was a useful tool in battling against the client's neurosis (Freud, 1913). Of the many definitions, Rogers, with his person-centered approach, brought to focus the idea that this helping relationship was a condition necessary to creating change in clients, irrespective of therapeutic orientation (Horvarth, 2001).

Carl Rogers (1957) outlined six criteria that needed to be met in a therapeutic setting for positive client change to occur. Of these six criteria, three developed parameters of a definition for the therapeutic alliance while the remaining three outlined the necessity of the client being in a state of turmoil and in contact with a therapist. Furthermore, the therapeutic alliance must have been at least partially achieved in session for change to occur.

Rogers (1957) outlined that the therapeutic alliance was composed of three essential factors from the therapist: a) therapist genuineness or congruence, where the therapist is open

and honest within the relationship and presents himself or herself honestly, b) unconditional positive regard, where the therapist accepts the client as a fellow human being and does not apply conditions upon the client or their experience and, c) empathy, where the therapist is both experiencing and demonstrating empathy toward the client's experiences in such a way that the therapist is acutely aware of the client's feelings but does not become part of them. According to Rogers (1957), these essential factors are important to the working alliance because, when present, they initiate the change process and if one condition is missing, change is hypothesized to not occur. It is these conditions that aid the client in connecting to his or her therapist.

A more pan-theoretical model of the working alliance was suggested by Bordin (1979). He argued that the working alliance was bi-directional and a collaborative process that occurs between an agent of change and a person seeking change (Bordin, 1979). He further noted that the working alliance includes the following: a) the client and therapist agree upon defined goals, b) the work towards agreement on goals and tasks is collaborative, and c) there is a development of a bond between therapist and client (Bordin, 1979). These three conditions are important to the working alliance because, when present, they are indicative of a positive and strong alliance, which is predictive of positive client change. If, for example, the goals for therapy are not defined and agreed upon between client and therapist, this can cause a weaker alliance as both client and therapist may be striving for different therapeutic aims and this will decrease the bond developed between them.

2.3.1.2 Effectiveness of the working alliance.

Although an in-depth examination of the effectiveness of the working alliance is beyond the scope of this paper, the working alliance has been subject to numerous inquiries with research. Findings include the idea that this relationship has a positive association between

treatment outcomes (Crits-Cristoph, Baranackie & Kurcias, 1991; Martin et al., 2000), where a stronger alliance is indicative of more positive client change (Horvath & Symonds, 1991). Psychometrically valid tools that assess the working alliance have been created by researchers and are often utilized within practice (Horvath, 2001). Research has also examined the qualities necessary to create a working alliance, types of alliances that can be formulated, and factors that influence the alliance. These are briefly discussed below.

2.3.1.3 Qualities necessary for a working alliance.

More recent research has explored qualities necessary within a counselling context for a working alliance to develop. Researchers such as Castonguay, Constantino, and Holtforth (2006), and Horvath (2006) suggest that an alliance should be determined over a period of 1-3 sessions. Strong alliances that develop early in therapy are indicative of positive outcomes in clients, whereas negative alliances developed early in therapy are highly predictive of client dropout (Castonguay et al., 2006; Sharf, Primavera, & Diener, 2010). This may be due to the findings that the working alliance is not linear but may have U-shaped, stable, linear (Kivlinghan and Shaughnessy 2000), or V-shaped patterns (Stiles et al., 2004). Each of these shapes is associated with different levels of client change. More research is needed to identify these patterns, the way they change over time, and how these patterns may be informative to therapy and impact the working alliance.

2.3.1.4 Types of working alliances.

Recent literature has demonstrated that client and therapist ratings of the alliance differ (Bedi, 2006; Bedi, Davis & Arvay, 2005; Bedi, Davis & Williams, 2005). Specifically, client ratings of the therapeutic alliance appear to be a stronger predictor of change than therapist ratings (Elvins & Green, 2008). Clients may also view the therapeutic alliance in a different way

than therapists. For example, a qualitative study by Bachelor in 1995 indicated that clients perceive three types of therapists: nurturing, insight-oriented, and collaborative, but these categories may not be completely associated with definitions of the working alliance established by Bordin and other researchers. Bedi and Duff (2009) also identified that clients may have preferences for different types of counselling alliances as well.

2.3.1.5 Factors influencing the working alliance.

Research has demonstrated that there are different types of factors that may influence the working alliance. These include counsellor and client factors, stages of change, and micro-behaviours. Each will be briefly described below.

Counsellor variables may have a positive or negative influence on the working alliance. For example, counsellor factors that positively influence the working alliance include such things as counsellor interest, questioning skills, active exploration of issues with clients, being respectful, trustworthy, warm, and having the ability to be flexible in a counselling context by making accurate interpretations and being self-aware (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). Conversely, counsellor factors that can limit the working alliance include over-structuring the therapy, inappropriate self-disclosure, and being both critical and rigid (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2001), as well as having an indifferent and non-engaged attitude with the client (Hersoug, Hoglend, Havik, Lippe & Monsen, 2009).

The working alliance is also affected by client factors. For example, client factors that positively influence the working alliance include motivation or desire to implement change and to be open to partake in therapy (Saunders, 2000). Conversely, client variables that negatively influence this relationship include such things as avoidance, no desire for change, interpersonal difficulties, and depressive cognitions (Castonguay et al., 2006).

Another variable that influences the working alliance is the client's stage of change, which is described on a five-factor model examining client readiness for change (Emmerling & Whelton, 2009). If the client is in a high level of change or progresses through the stages of change, they report stronger working alliances that are predictive of positive outcome versus clients who are not ready for change and are lower on the five-factor model of change (Emmerling & Whelton, 2009).

Finally, other variables that influence the working alliance include micro-behaviours (Duff & Bedi, 2010). These may include non-verbal communication, positive commentary, greetings and farewells, positive initial contact, and others (See Bedi, Davis & Williams, 2005). Research has begun to investigate if these behaviours that clients identify as being helpful to the development of the therapeutic alliance are predictive of the strength of the working alliance and positive outcome (Duff & Bedi, 2010). Of 15 behaviours analyzed, 11 appear to be moderately or strongly correlated ($p. < 0.01$) with ratings of the therapeutic alliance, implying that micro-behaviours as identified by clients play a role in strengthening the therapeutic alliance (Duff & Bedi, 2010). Therefore, it appears that exploring the client's perspective is an important yet under-researched area that needs to be addressed.

2.3.1.6 Research within a career context.

Although there are few studies examining the working alliance in career exploration specifically, those that do exist indicate that the working alliance within career exploration settings is just as important as it would be in career counselling contexts (Lewis, 2001; Perdrix, Roten, Kolly, & Rossier, 2010). A positive alliance in a career context is also predictive of positive client outcome (Multon, Heppner, Gysbers, Zook & Ellis-Kalton, 2001). Clients who described having a positive working alliance in career counselling settings also identified having

more future career prospects, increased life satisfaction, and a decrease in career decision difficulties (Masdonati, Massoudi & Rossier, 2009), as well as having an increase in career exploration processes after counselling had finished (Elad-Strenger & Littman-Ovadia, 2011). Similar to personal counselling, there also appears to be a discrepancy between client and counsellor ratings of the working alliance, where clients provide higher ratings of the alliance than counsellors (Elad-Strenger & Littman-Ovadia, 2011), implying that clients and therapists may view this relationship differently.

2.3.2 Summary.

The working alliance is a process variable that is important to counselling fields and may also be relevant within a career context. This relationship has a rich history and can be described differently across disciplines, but it is seen as a process variable that is predictive of client change, especially when it is indicated by the client to be a positive relationship. This relationship is often built over the span of 1-3 sessions and influenced by counsellor and client variables, as well as external variables such as micro-behaviours practiced by the counsellor. This relationship has been demonstrated to have importance within a career context similar to a counselling context; therefore, exploring client views of this relationship would help build a better understanding of the career exploration process.

2.4 Career Development, Working Alliance, and University Students

Career exploration and career counselling have a long history within university settings, with different career services being offered as early as the 19th century (Brown & Brooks, 1996). Currently, these services are on the rise as students have expressed a need for more personalized services to help them through their university years (Gordon, Habley & Grites et al., 2008). As such, university students will be chosen as the demographic group for this study due to their

unique characteristics, their request for career services, the limited research on this topic, and the challenges these individuals face on a daily basis.

2.4.1 Undergraduate university students.

University students are a dynamic group of individuals. They can be composed of both young and older adults, individuals who are novices entering their educational path or mature students returning to university with hopes of redesigning or changing their career path. Despite their age, as students go through university they experience a journey that can be considered a unique transitional period characterized by an increasing number of overlapping educational and personal issues combined with career decision-making, indecision, or career confusion. Each of these topics will be briefly discussed below, followed by a description of a distinct student type, and an exploration of student perceptions of career exploration services.

2.4.1.1 Transitions.

Be it students entering into their first year or adult learners returning to university, transitions have a major impact on students' careers and personal development. For example, Harvey, Drew, and Smith (2006), as cited in Palmer, O'Kane & Owens, (2009) outlined transitional themes that first-year students may encounter. These include developing and becoming concerned with new ways of viewing educational performance, new learning styles to accommodate for various teaching styles, and learning how to maintain university support systems.

Students also experience transitions within their social networks whereby they develop new friends but often lose pre-university friendships, thereby experiencing a phase of grief and loss (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell & McCune, 2008; Crissman-Ishler & Schreiber, 2002). Palmer et al., (2009) also argue that university students continuously experience a transition of

“belongingness” as students balance career life, personal life, and the creation of a “university” lifestyle. In trying to develop a university lifestyle, students may experience dissolution with family life, an increased sense of identity, and the development of new relationships (Palmer et al., 2009). It is important to note that these transitional changes are not linear but rather complex and often discontinuous (Palmer et al., 2009).

These transitions are often fraught with new turning points in life and the creation and dismantling of boundaries and understanding, and they may not necessarily represent a student’s initial expectations of the university life (Smith & Wertlieb, 2005). In fact, they found that students reported experiences throughout their first year of university as being highly misaligned with what students expected the university social and academic lifestyle to entail. In a longitudinal study, for example, Crisp, Palmer, Turnbull, Nettelbeck, and Ward (2009) found that students expected they would be able to manage both career and university but in reality they often skipped university lectures in favour of work, thereby finding it difficult to create a balance in this complex process.

Gordon and associates (2008) also note that the transitional phase students experience through university is dynamic and complex fraught with much change. Students experience the transition of entering school, moving through university, and moving away or finishing university. Each one of these transitional phases brings about new concerns. For example, beginning university education a student may experience more freedom, new insights, and a shift in their expectations, whereas a student who is moving through university may experience greater stress due to academic expectations, increased family or personal role, and/or other factors. A student who is moving out of university may experience different senses of loss and identity shifts, as well as relief from certain pressures or confusion due to an uncertainty of the

next step in his or her life. All of these transitions have one thing in common: increased stress on university students.

2.4.1.2 Stress and career indecision.

As university students experience a vast amount of change in a short period of time, they also experience an increased amount of stress. This stress may be caused by difficulties students encounter within their transitional adjustment phases. For example, Hamaideh (2011) outlined two forms of stress that university students can experience: self-imposed stress, such as worry about fitting in and getting good grades, and stress received from others, such as being overwhelmed with activities and workload. These stressors have been linked to increased substance abuse or negative health habits (Broman, 2002), an increased risk of depression, and experiencing burnout (Dahlin, Joneborg & Runeson., 2005).

One stressor that is directly related to university student transitions and has an influence on university student stress levels is career indecision and decision difficulties surrounding career paths or development of these paths and goals (Gordon & Meyer, 2002). Problems with career indecision can arise from lack of informational support systems, inconsistent information, and internal or external conflicts (Zhou & Santos, 2007) that a student may experience. This stressor is often highly prevalent in first-year university students and can be associated with inadequate career planning skills, few career resources, and difficulty in integrating career information (Gordon & Meyer, 2002). Students who experience career indecision are also more likely to have undefined career goals, difficulty committing to their career goals, and doubts and disappointments in relation to career aspirations and their academic studies (Kunnen, 2010). Career counselling or engaging in career exploration sessions, however, have been shown to

decrease career indecision (Zhou & Santos, 2007), and as such they have been demonstrated to be an effective treatment modality.

2.4.2 Student perceptions of services.

Within university settings there are numerous resources available for students. Specifically, most universities contain a counselling center and may or may not have a separate career center available. These centers provide university students with free career exploration sessions which can help students develop career skills thus reducing career indecision and stress. Furthermore, there is support suggesting that these services are effective (Whiston & Rahardia, 2008). The challenge, however, is recruiting students to participate in these services. Despite the fact that many students express career indecision as a central concern (Cueso, 2005), a survey in 2006 showed that only 6.3% of students actually utilized career services offered to them (Fouad et al., 2006). Kahn, Wood, and Wiesen (1999) found that although students were aware that campuses had counselling services, few students were cognizant of what these services offered and there was a bias toward using these services if the student had a moderate mental health concern.

Students have reported that they desired career services but were unsure of what engaging in career counselling would entail (Galassi, Crace, Martin, Jame, & Wallace, 1992). One theory as to why students appear to avoid utilizing career services is due to the stigma of using career services, and students' stigma of viewing career as time-limited and solely assessment based (Rochelen, Blazina, & Raghunathan, 2002; Rochlen, Milburn & Hill, 2004). For example, Rochlen and O'Brien (2002) found that when students, especially males, reported having career indecision or being uncertain about their career paths, they endorsed more stigmas toward the process of career counselling and were less likely to utilize services.

Despite there being evidence that supports career counselling as being effective for students, a study done by Galassi et al., (1992) illustrated the fact that a student's desired expectations for counselling (e.g., wanting directive counsellors) may not match a client's experience. Career service preferences were influenced by student levels of education, with undergraduate students preferring short-term or time-limited career assistance they could easily access (Shivy & Koehly, 2002).

What students deem as helpful within career counselling and career development is beginning to be explored by researchers but focuses mainly on students' perceptions of different types of interventions, such as computer or self-help book interventions. What has yet to be explored in depth is students' perceptions of working with a career specialist face-to-face. Since students appear to have different understandings of what career exploration entails and means to them, coupled with a low rate of enrolment for its use, it would be helpful to gain insight into what students feel they want and need when they consult a career specialist.

2.4.3 Mature students.

University students can be classified by different factors such as age, experience, and level of education. Mature students, however, are often considered to be adults who have worked first then enter into their undergraduate studies for the first time. They are older than 21 years of age, independent of their parents, and possess a large degree of life experience that they bring forward to a school setting (Tones, Fraser, Elder, & White, 2009). Mature students are also of interest as there is an increasing number of mature students entering into universities (Tones et al., 2009), they view their education differently (Mercer, 2007), they have unique economic and personal demands than younger students (Taniguchi and Kaufman, 2005), and they experience different barriers than other students.

Mature students also experience similar transitions as mentioned above, perhaps even more dramatically than young students. For many, they experience a transition of re-negotiating one's self-identity (Tones et al., 2009). Often the reasons for mature students returning to school are due to a catalyst for action, such as fulfilling a long-unmet dream, having an unexpected event that pushes them into the decision to enrol, or a wish to enhance their qualifications for better career opportunities (Green & Kelso, 2006). Despite these factors, mature students often experience barriers that directly impede their success in university. These include financial struggles, responsibility barriers such as being a single mom or dad wanting to attend university, geographic barriers, and others (Chapman, McGilp, Cartwright, De Souza & Toomey, 2006). Along with these concerns comes a struggle that forces mature students to constantly re-negotiate their identities.

Mature students also struggle with their identity as a "mature student," often trying to fit in with younger students or faculty members but defining their identity as one of "otherness" (Kasworm, 2010). Some mature students may identify themselves as harder workers than their younger counter-parts, more committed to the educational process, and consider that they have the ability to enhance the educational process of others through their experiences (Kasworm, 2010; Stone, 2008; Mercer, 2007)

Despite these identity struggles, there exist few resources that target mature student concerns specifically within a university setting, and often services provided do not fit with a mature student's time demands (Tones et al., 2009). This often leaves mature students feeling stressed as they juggle multiple roles, experience a rollercoaster of confidence levels, and feel isolated and alien to the university setting (Shanahan, 2000).

For this study, mature students are of interest due to the plethora of experience, needs, stressors, and questions they bring forward to a career setting. Mature students may present different questions to career specialists, they may experience career sessions quite differently than their younger counterparts, and may also provide unique insight into what services need to be offered in the future. Although it may be perceived as a limitation to focus solely on the experiences of mature students, their voices have not been heard independently of other students. Therefore it is imperative to identify what this unique sample of individuals has to say about the career exploration process and the relationship between themselves and their career specialists.

2.4.4 Summary.

Career exploration services are increasing within university contexts due to increased need of university students and increased career opportunities. For this study, university students provide a particular sample from which to explore the career exploration process. University students, especially mature students, are characterized by unique transitional periods and stressors in comparison to other categories of individuals. Mature students may experience re-negotiations of self-identity, barriers to change, and multiple roles and expectations, yet they often do not use services provided at universities for various reasons mentioned above. For this purpose, this study will focus on capturing mature student experiences, as they provide a unique outlook on how these students view the career exploration process and the relationship that develops between them and their career specialists.

2.5 Chapter Summary

If students view the development of the relationship differently from their career specialists (Elad-Strenger & Littman-Ovadia, 2011), it is important to create an understanding of what clients are identifying as important within this relationship. Students may have opinions or

expectations of career exploration that may or may not be met by their career specialists, and they may or may not have stigmas toward career exploration. These two factors may impact the development of the working alliance.

One way to examine this relationship is to simply ask students about their experiences of engaging in career exploration. Research has begun to examine this by using quantitative or experimental studies to compare ratings of the working alliance, but this often provides one approach to student experiences. Using a qualitative research lens, for example, it is possible to explore the experience of clients who have much to tell us about their experience of their working alliance when they engaged with their career specialist. By exploring this topic, students may be able to shed light on what the experience was like for them and create an understanding of how the working alliance develops between themselves and their career specialists.

While researchers, such as Bedi (2006), have provided a backdrop of factors that have been explored in the counselling setting, this relationship has not been explored in the context of the working alliance that develops within career exploration settings. While many settings might be explored, the use of university career settings has been chosen for this study. It offers the opportunity to explore career services offered in universities and the continuum of professionals who may offer these services within a university career setting.

Finally, university career settings have a long history at Canadian universities, in part because students, who are their target group, seek out these settings to explore their previous, present, and future career directions. They use these centers for many purposes ranging from career information, career assessment, career progression, and career advice, among others. In this study, I will focus on university students and examine how the working alliance is experienced for those seeking assistance specifically from a career specialist.

Based upon this literature review, I now move to a discussion of the methods that were chosen for the study and the way in which data would be gathered, analyzed, and reported on for the study. Each step is described in greater detail within Chapter 3 of this study.

Chapter Three: Method

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods used in this study to examine the lived experiences of students in career development settings. The beginning of this chapter gives an overview of the research paradigms available, followed by the research tools, data collection, data analysis, and write-up used in this study. The chapter concludes with issues of quality assurance relevant to this study.

3.2 Research Paradigms

Paradigms of research can be viewed on a continuum where quantitative paradigms are on the left, qualitative paradigms are on the right, and mixed paradigms are centered. By choosing a specific paradigm, a researcher is working under certain ontological assumptions about how one views the world and the nature of truth. There is a choice to be made about how a person understands these assumptions and the world, commonly identified as epistemology (Maxwell, 2005).

Quantitative research, for example, views the world as being material and object-oriented, where the world can be understood by scientific methods (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). On the other hand, qualitative researchers view the world as being subjective and personal; they understand the world as unpredictable with various standards (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Mixed method research combines these two opposing ends of the continuum and sees truth as being composed of both objective and subjective experiences, with knowledge being a combination of contrasting universal and individualistic needs (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). A brief description of each paradigm is provided below to give the reader a more in-depth

understanding of what it means to take up a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method paradigm in a research study.

3.2.1 Quantitative paradigm.

Quantitative research paradigms focus on studying psychological phenomena using objective variables and statistical methods (Millsap & Maydeu-Olivares, 2009). Quantitative research stems from the experimental psychological tradition, which was the central approach used by many psychologists in the mid-twentieth century. Quantitative research utilizes a “top-down” approach, where researchers test their hypotheses and theories with the collection of quantitative data in order to prove or disprove their hypothesis; it regards the nature of reality as being objective and structural (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In this regard, human behaviour is seen as objective, predictable, and structured, where one event can be seen to predict another. The researcher’s attempt is therefore to find an answer to this hypothesis by testing variables and observing results to then create conclusions from their studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Quantitative researchers often use surveys, empirically validated assessment tools, or experimental designs where participants are randomly assigned to a treatment condition within a laboratory, with the goal of collecting and analyzing their behaviours (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In summary, quantitative research is often thought of as using a “narrow-angle lens” (p.35) because it focuses only on certain related factors displayed in specific and objective means (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

3.2.2 Qualitative paradigm.

A qualitative research paradigm, on the other hand, focuses on the subjective human experience and aims to develop an understanding of unknown or poorly understood topics of interest (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The qualitative movement stemmed from researchers

stepping away from a statistical and objective way of examining phenomena and moving toward a descriptive, personal, and subjective way of viewing the same phenomena (Morrow, 2007)

Qualitative research uses a “bottom-up” approach, whereby researchers collect data by noting how a phenomenon is personally experienced (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Qualitative researchers note that reality is socially constructed, and in order to engage in qualitative research the researcher must be close to the phenomenon under investigation. A qualitative researcher’s goal is to form an understanding of an individual’s experiences by gathering subjective descriptions of the phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative researchers can collect data through a variety of research methods, including participant observations, in-depth interviews, open-ended questions, or field notes, thus enabling researchers to be used to gather participant experiences (Creswell, 2007). The aim of a qualitative researcher is to gather data and to identify characteristics, themes, or patterns among experiences (Creswell, 2009). In summary, a qualitative research method is viewed as using a “wide-angle and ‘deep-angle’ lens” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012 p.33) because it focuses on gathering personal in-depth experiences of distinct phenomena.

3.2.3 Mixed method paradigm.

Within the middle of the research continuum is a mixed method paradigm, which uses both quantitative and qualitative research methods for its studies. A researcher using mixed methods draws out the positive aspects of each paradigm. Qualitative researchers argue that the use of only one paradigm is limiting and that by using both paradigms one is being more receptive to viewing the world in a complete and full manner (Creswell, 2007; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). A researcher using a mixed method paradigm assumes that truth is both objective and subjective, that knowledge is contextual to the individual within each situation, and

that there exists a mixture of universal standards to which humans adhere (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Mixed method researchers aim to create a connection between theory and practice by exploring particular instances of experiences while examining objective measures that complement the experience (Creswell, 2009). In summary, a mixed method paradigm is seen as using a “multi-lens focus” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 33) because it centers on the in-depth experience and includes the use of objective measures to assess and further this experience.

3.2.4 Choosing a paradigm.

As the purpose of this study is to examine career development within the working alliance for mature students, a qualitative methodology is chosen. A qualitative design will allow participants to speak to their experiences, bring participant voices to life and provide them with a chance to describe their working alliance from their personal standpoint (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative methodology is appropriate as it explores the “how” and “what” of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2007). This methodology allows for a highly detailed view of the phenomenon of the working alliance, which has yet to be thoroughly explored within a career setting and which may or may not be comparable with a personal counselling context.

3.3 Research Methodology

In order to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of research methodology, this section will briefly discuss the possible qualitative research approaches that exist. A methodology will be chosen, a rationale will be provided, and a background of the approach will be presented.

3.3.1 Research approaches.

Within the context of qualitative research there are several approaches which might be used, including, but not limited to, biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2007). Each tradition has a unique focus it places on individuals, as illustrated in Table 3.0 below.

Table 3.0

Descriptions of Qualitative Traditions

Tradition	Description
Biography	Focuses on an individual's life experiences, typically a specific experience that is recollected by the researcher and then related to the larger context of what literature has to say about the experience. This often produces lessons learned or recollects an epiphany of participants.
Phenomenology	Focuses on developing an understanding of a lived experience or phenomenon experienced by several individuals and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. This contains an in-depth exploration of a single phenomenon and integrates a particular philosophical perspective into the approach and data, thus requiring the researcher to have a strong grounding in the philosophical underpinnings of this tradition. The purpose of this tradition is to sort information into descriptions, themes, and interpretations.
Grounded Theory	Focuses on creating or discovering a theory of how individuals react or engage with a certain phenomenon. This tradition is often involved with field studies so that the researcher gathers information about people's reactions to a phenomenon, with the goal of building a theory that can be empirically tested.
Ethnography	Focuses on developing an understanding or interpretation of cultural groups by examining different customs, ways of living, and behavioural patterns of individuals. The researcher becomes immersed with individuals to experience the way of living of different cultures, exploring for example their languages and behaviours. This tradition aims at creating a cultural portrait for others to comprehend.

Tradition Cont'd.	Description Cont'd.
Case Study	Focuses on the individual cases, persons, or phenomena that can be explored across time in relation to its specific setting. Often case studies are explored as being a unique person or phenomenon.

Note. Adapted from Creswell (2007) and Creswell (2009).

For the purposes of this study, the research question is best answered by choosing phenomenology as the methodology, as it allows for the in-depth exploration of student experiences of a single phenomenon: their lived experience of the working alliance in career development contexts. A more detailed description of phenomenology is provided below.

3.3.1.1 Background of phenomenology and hermeneutics

Phenomenology is a broad field that encompasses many different interests, but its underpinnings stem from philosophical inquiries into the lived experience (Finlay, 2009). Although many people have contributed to this growing philosophy and research tradition, four main philosophers will be discussed. Each philosopher and their contributions will be briefly explored below and are discussed in a timeline as seen in Table 3.1 that illustrates each major theorist's philosophical underpinnings.

Hermeneutics is reflected in an IPA model but is not a dominant force; however, it is important to have an understanding of its philosophical backgrounds in order to conceptualize how it's impacted IPA. Hermeneutics, identified as a parallel concept is the theory of interpretation. Hermeneutics is concerned with providing interpretation to a variety of texts with the goal of trying to identify the intention of the author of a text (Smith et al., 2009). Although many philosophers have contributed toward this growing philosophy, three main philosophers will be discussed in Table 3.1. Their contributions will be briefly explored and are discussed in a

timeline that illustrates each major theorist's philosophical underpinnings alongside the theorists of phenomenology.

Table 3.1

Timeline of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Definition	Phenomenology:	Definition	Hermeneutics:
	<p>Transcendental and/or descriptive phenomenology is the purposeful study of a person's lived experiences as they occur in order to further understand human consciousness (Dowling, 2007).</p>		<p>"Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 21). It is the exploration of interpretation itself and can focus on the interpretation of written text.</p>
<p>Husserl 1859-1938</p>	<p>Husserl's phenomenology describes the descriptive tradition (Lopez & Willis, 2004). He viewed conscious acts as being understood through the notion of "intentionality," which proposes that all thoughts or actions are related to an object of something external, that one is always conscious of something (Van Manen & Adams, 2010). Husserl became interested in "adopting a <i>phenomenological attitude</i>" (Smith et al., 2009, p.12) toward experience, where one directs his/her perceptions toward the inner consciousness of the experience. The lived experience needed to be understood from a pre-reflective state, where no interpretations or cultural context biased the description of an event. In order to achieve this inner understanding of the lived experience, Husserl stated that a person would need to engage in the act of bracketing, or putting aside one's presuppositions of the world to re-evaluate an experience (Giorgi, 1997). By engaging in this form of reductionism or bracketing and using such techniques as free imagination, in which one considers different instances of the experience under examination, one is able to get at the core of an experience (Smith et al., 2009).</p>	<p>Schleierma- cher 1768-1834</p>	<p>The notion of hermeneutics has a long history but Schleiermacher was the first to create what is known as general hermeneutics, which is defined as the interpretation of all dialogues (Gavridis, 2004). Schleiermacher (1998) argued that interpretation is not a method but a work of art, requiring the reader to use intuition and skills to come to an interpretative understanding of the author's meaning (Smith et al., 2009). He noted that by examining text in detail and analyzing the text holistically, a person would be able to better understand the author than the author could understand himself (Schleiermacher, 1998).</p>

Phenomenology Cont'd.		Hermeneutics Cont'd.	
Heidegger 1889-1976	<p>Heidegger's description of phenomenology describes the interpretive phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). As a student of Husserl, Heidegger stepped away from his teacher's approach to phenomenology and focused on the development of "hermeneutic phenomenology" (Smith et al., 2009). Although many of Husserl's notions of phenomenology were retained, Heidegger questioned the ability of a person to simply bracket their biases to one side. Instead, he proposed that all knowledge includes an interpretative stance of the individual examining an experience (Van Manen, 1997). For Heidegger, consciousness is an integral part of human existence and what it means to be a human being in context to the world (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Meaning exists in everything we do, and for Heidegger it is exploring what that meaning represents for each individual.</p>	Heidegger 1889-1976	<p>Hermeneutics was not just the process of interpreting text but included a bridge to discover that which is hidden in everyday experiences (Lavery, 2003). The interpretation of experience or text allowed a phenomenologist to explicitly study that which is hidden, purposefully exploring that which a phenomenologist is interested in: experience and being (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics is a way to explore that which is manifesting, a phenomenon, in order to move toward an understanding of being and of things themselves (Gavridis, 2004).</p>
Merleau-Ponty 1908-1961	<p>Merleau-Ponty diverged from Heidegger as he moved to describe the embodied nature of a person's relationship to the world (Van Manen & Adams, 2010), arguing that phenomenology was the study of perception and consciousness. For Merleau-Ponty, perception played a large role in how an individual understands and interacts with the world. The way in which one views herself in the world differs from how one sees <i>other</i> things in the world, and this is informed by the way we see ourselves (Dowling, 2005). The human body, which is an expressive space that makes sense of meaning through sensing, becomes the primary way of knowing and experiencing the world instead of consciousness (Smith et al., 2009). For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is concerned with physical existence, as perception of an event occurs prior to the meaning placed upon it (Dowling, 2005).</p>		<p>Heidegger noted that when one engages in the act of interpretation, one is bringing his/her biases, experiences, and assumptions, termed "fore-structures," forward to understand the manifestation of a phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). However, he also noted that these biases can work in the opposite way and that the engagement with a text can influence what fore-structures one perceives as being relevant (Gavridis, 2004). In this sense, Heidegger provides an argument against bracketing, as a phenomenon can influence one's fore-structures; instead, he suggests a cyclical process of examining reflexivity (Smith et al., 2009). This process included examining a text as a whole in relation to its parts and its parts in relation to its whole; this is referred to as the hermeneutic circle (Gavridis, 2004).</p>

Phenomenology Cont'd.		Hermeneutics Cont'd.	
Sartre 1905-1980	Sartre added a developmental aspect to Heidegger's existential phenomenology in so far as he noted that the development of oneself is a continuous project and that we are not pre-existing entities (Smith et al., 2009). Sartre also noted the importance of examining that which is absent in an experience, which he termed "nothingness," and that one's perception of the world changes by those with whom the person interacts and their perceptions of the world (Smith et al., 2009). For Sartre, all things experienced in the world are considered phenomena, and phenomena are just objects perceived in a person's consciousness (Smith et al., 2009). Consciousness, therefore, arises from the awareness and perception of objects, and phenomenology is the exploration of a person's awareness of these objects.	Gadamer 1900-2002	Gadamer added the idea that the phenomenon itself can have an influence on the interpretation, which can then affect one's biases and the interpretation of the phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). For Gadamer, interpretation requires openness to asking questions, as hermeneutics is an art of knowing, and it is not limited strictly to texts but encompasses all interpretive processes, including both past and present experiences, languages, and dialogue (Gavridis, 2004). He suggested that interpretation occurs in a circular holistic format, where the researcher integrates a part of a text, description, or story into the whole of the experience. Similarly, the whole can be informed by the particular.

3.3.2 Overview of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Within the phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives, there are several types of approaches that could be used and the decision was made to select IPA for this study. This approach was advocated in 1996 by Smith and authors when he argued for the creation of a qualitative approach that was usable in the field of psychology within the context of human lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009). This approach focuses on the examination of the lived experience of an individual and the way in which an understanding of the meaning of a particular experience or phenomenon is experienced by an individual (Smith et al., 2009). These experiences are the subjective perceptions that a person gives to these experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Although considered a relatively newer approach, IPA has a history drawn from philosophical underpinnings of the theorists described above in Table 3.1. These are described below in more detail.

3.3.2.1 Philosophical underpinnings

IPA is informed by the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics. Table 3.2 provides a brief summary of the key concepts that influenced the development of IPA.

Table 3.2

Summary of Philosophical Influences in IPA

Theoretical Foundation	Author	Influence on IPA
Phenomenology	Husserl	Influenced IPA by providing a way to focus on reflection and outlining the importance of attuning to the content of consciousness or the lived experience .
	Heidegger	Human beings live in a world where meaning exists, and therefore we are not separate from it. Heidegger focused on how human beings are always in relation to one another and the world they occupy; this is known as intersubjectivity, a notion that has influenced the development of IPA by noting that the interpretation of meaning-making is central to phenomenology.
	Merleau-Ponty	His notion that the body shapes a person's perception influences IPA by informing a researcher that the lived experience can never be completely captured by a researcher but is still important to explore. It also informs IPA researchers that interpretation contains the researcher's experiences.
	Sartre	Influences IPA by noting that experience is shaped not only by presence of self but also by the presence of others, by projects others engage in, and by these encounters with others that an individual experiences.
Hermeneutics	Schleiermacher	His ideas influenced IPA by providing IPA with a basis, stating that a researcher's analysis of participant verbatim experiences may provide insight on the experience that is broader than the participant's description.
	Heidegger	His ideas formed the path for phenomenology as an interpretative process, a notion that IPA follows. His push against bracketing and movement toward examining one's biases in a circular manner, as well as noting that it can only be partially achieved, also influences IPA researchers by making them aware of the importance of biases.

Hermeneutics Cont'd.	Gadamer	IPA takes up his notion that understanding the person is more important than understanding the text. It is Gadamer's developed notion of the hermeneutic circle (Dowling, 2007) that influences IPA's way of viewing data; a researcher can move back and forth while examining the data, looking at many ways to view it, from the part to the whole and the whole to the part.
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Note. Adapted from Shinebourne (2011) and Smith et al. (2009).

IPA is also influenced by idiography, focusing on in-depth details and on a single case or lived experience (Shinebourne, 2011). These personal experiences are gathered to demonstrate something intriguing or to demonstrate a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009) that can then provide new ideas. This allows for a questioning of assumptions by reflecting on personal and unique occurrences (Larkin, Watts & Clifton, 2006). For example, examining a case or a singular phenomenon can help the participant and the researcher to view what something “is” in its own right and allows researchers to question preconceptions and theories (Smith et al., 2009). In exploring the lived experience, IPA focuses on each unique case and then adds additional cases of participants.

3.3.2.2 Steps in the IPA process.

There are three processes used in an IPA study. First, each participant is valued for the meaning of his or her experience (Smith et al., 2009). It focuses on the lived experience of the participant, and therefore the first goal is to explore an individual's experience through the interview process by a verbal description of this experience as told by the participant. From this, the researcher creates a transcribed document of the audio interview with relevant note taking along the way.

This first goal is to explore each case and provide exploratory comments. Once the entire transcript has been read, and then re-read with exploratory notes created, the researcher than

forms emergent themes from these exploratory comments noted from the transcribed text (Smith et al., 2009). The themes are numerous and provide rich information about the lived experience in each case. The researcher then reviews all the emergent themes and sorts these themes into larger groups of similarities which Smith et al., (2009) refers to as super-ordinate themes. These super-ordinate themes are each labelled as they indicate a particular aspect of the phenomenon indicated by the interviewees.

The second goal of IPA is to explore the commonalities and differences that exist between these super-ordinate themes within each case and then across all cases. Within these steps, super-ordinate themes are compared and master themes are developed. The third goal of IPA requires the researcher to go beyond understanding participants sense-making of their experience, and to provide an interpretation of these master themes to the reader (Smith et al., 2009). In this interpretative stage, an attempt is made to interpret or give a deeper meaning to the text. The aim is to allow a broader understanding of the lived experience by attempting to paint a picture of all the participants' stories. It is the researcher's attempt to interpret the experience, and it is at this stage that answers to the researcher's questions become apparent.

3.3.3 The approach used in this study.

In this study, I as the researcher, chose an IPA approach because I wanted to understand more about the career exploration and the working alliance which exists through the stories offered by mature students. From this, I could hopefully interpret the meaning of the experiences that participants presented in the interviews.

In choosing an IPA approach, the question I sought to answer was, "What are the experiences of adults engaging in career exploration, and how do clients perceive the development of the working alliance in this career exploration setting?" The IPA methodology

provides a framework for me to explore individual cases, to compare and contrast cases, and to offer an interpretative approach to my findings. Through this methodology, my intention is to be able to provide a rich insight into the issue of the working alliance in career exploration settings with mature students in universities.

3.4 Data Preparation

In preparation for this study several research tools and preparatory methods were created and are discussed below.

3.4.1 Initial demographic survey.

The first step in the career exploration study was to prepare an initial survey (see Appendix A), which would be completed by all participants. The purpose of this survey was to collect demographic information that could be used to gather relevant information about the student clientele that would be used to create an introductory profile of study participants. A number of questions were asked including participant age, gender, year of study, and previous career experience in order to create profiles of the clients.

3.4.2 Interview technique.

A personal and confidential interview form was developed for use in this study. It was important to acknowledge the importance of the client's experience while at the same time recognizing the researcher's need for semi-structured questions. The interview format facilitates the discussion of the topic by engaging in direct conversation between client and researcher, while allowing the participant and myself to engage in matters arising in the interview. This interview technique would also allow me a way to enter into the lived experience of my participants. The location, date, and time of the interview would be set through a mutual convenience between the client and myself.

3.4.2.1 Critical incident technique.

In order to guide the interview, I chose to implement a research tool developed by Flanagan in 1954. This research tool, known as Critical Incident Technique (CIT), is an interviewing approach used to collect descriptions of human behaviours. This procedure has been used in research for many studies (Bedi, Davis, & Arvay, 2005; Bedi, 2005) and is often used in qualitative studies, specifically studies that examine individualistic reactions to situations. Flanagan (1954) originally developed this technique as a way to identify and describe effective and ineffective behaviours of individuals in their workplace, but CIT can also be used in research to ask individuals to describe a particular phenomenon they encounter (Butterfield et al., 2009). This method enables individuals to identify situations, how these occurrences are managed by participants with outcomes noted from the event. The aim of this technique is to gather an in-depth understanding of the incident from the individual by exploring the behavioural, cognitive, and affective elements of the individual's response to the occurrence (Gremler, 2004).

This tool has also been described as an appropriate method for data collection in counselling psychology, as it aids in gathering in-depth information in qualitative studies (Woosley, 1986). It is frequently used in exploratory studies where little is known about a topic and a thorough understanding of the phenomenon would be beneficial (Gremler, 2004). It allows the interviewer to focus on specific incidences that people report as helpful or hindering to the situation being explored. It asks individuals for an in-depth description of the incident and its significance to the individual, thus, producing a rich, "thick" description and understanding of the person's experience (Flanagan, 1954). Full and detail-driven accounts of an incident indicate that the information is seen to be an accurate reflection of the situation by the participant, thereby

allowing for incidences to be recollected from recent retrospective accounts (Butterfield et al., 2009). Although Flanagan (1954) originally emphasized that data collection should be performed by direct observers, he did note that retrospective self-reports were a second way to explore incidents, and this has been the method of choice in many research studies (Butterfield et al., 2005).

I created CIT questions by providing participants with a description of what an incident might entail. For example, asking what the counsellor did to enhance the client relationship. I created follow-up questions that reworded the questions created in the study done by Bedi et al. (2005). This study focused on the working alliance in counselling situations. These questions were created in order to help me initiate the conversation about this experience; explore how the experience impacted them, and how the situation might have changed had the incident not happened.

In addition, some questions from Keefer's (2009) adapted CIT questionnaire will be included but have also been reworded for use in an adult career exploration setting, as opposed to a school setting for which the questions were originally created. These questions relate to the career experience topic and help participants get to the heart of a critical incident (Keefer, 2009).

3.4.2.1.1 Enhanced critical incident technique (ECIT).

In addition to including these CIT questions, further questions were included focusing on what, if anything, would have been helpful for interviewee in dealing with the phenomenon under the counselling session. These questions are informed by the ECIT wish list items from a study done by Butterfield et al. (2009). Wish list items focus on having participants identify items they wish would have occurred with the incident described. These added questions allow participants to further explore the lived experience by speaking to additional factors that could

have been helpful to the career conversations they had with their career specialists. These incidences may have had an impact on the discussions yet they do not have to be extraordinary events (Butterfield et al., 2009). In fact, many incidents may be considered to be everyday events but they can often become critical incidents as an individual puts meaning to an event and interprets meaning from that event (Angelides, 2001).

In order to identify an incidence of importance within my participants experiences, I utilized the definition of a ‘working alliance incidence’ created in a study by Bedi et al (2005). They noted that an incidence of the working alliance consisted of “any reported occurrence that could be translated into specific, observable, and behavioural terms...that was also preferably quantifiable and stated, when possible, in terms of activity and presence...” (p.314). Additionally, incidences are defined as critical when the presence or lack of the incident impacted the working alliance. In this study, clients were asked about their conversations with their career specialists and what incidences arose that had an impact on their experience. These questions are organized into the creation of a semi-structured interview and appear in Appendix B.

3.4.3 Interview protocol.

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to provide a flexible structure to follow as I engaged in the process with participants. A semi-structured interview consisted of pre-reflected guided questions that I would ask to help the participant provide a deeper in-depth account of their experience. The interview guide for this study contains eight open-ended questions with prompts to guide me in my questioning sequence to help “facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 59).

Despite the use of a semi-structured interview to guide the interviewing process, it is important to remain open and allow the participant flexibility in the way they initiate conversation. This is an integral part of IPA research and is accomplished by allowing the participant to lead in the conversation rather than the researcher insisting the participants follow the interview guide. Therefore, the interview guide contains prompts such as “What did you enjoy about your experience...?” “Describe an example for me...” and “If this incident occurred again how would it impact the relationship...?” The purpose of these prompts is to allow participants the flexibility in explaining and detailing their lived experience. A copy of the question protocol guide is part of the semi-structured interview and is contained in Appendix B.

3.4.4 Journal writing.

In keeping with an IPA methodology, as noted by Smith et al., (2009), a research notebook was used to record early observations formed while engaging in the interviewing process. This notebook contains my initial thoughts and background with my own career exploration, notations on my understanding of each student’s experiences, and any biases that arose while I was engaged in the interview process.

3.4.5 Post questionnaire.

In keeping with an IPA methodology and to help ensure the credibility of the students’ described lived experiences (Smith et al., 2009), a post-questionnaire was created (see Appendix C) and was sent out to participants at the end of the study along with a summary of the master themes. The purpose of this questionnaire was to discover whether the themes I identified matched with the experiences of the participants. Three questions were asked: a) after having read the themes chosen about your career specialists, do you find these themes seem to reflect your experience? b) Do any of these themes seem not to relate to you? Please explain, and c)

Have you any other comments or suggestions that you would give to the researcher about the themes? Participants were also invited to mark if they wished to receive a brief executive summary of the results from the study. Participants were informed that their responses would be included as an Appendix to the study and that they would be given two weeks to respond.

3.5 Data Collection

This section will provide a detailed overview of the sampling and recruitment methods used in this study and how the data was prepared prior to data analysis.

3.5.1 Ethics.

Ethical approval was received on September 12, 2011. An amendment to the study was put forward on October 21st, 2011 that outlined further recruiting strategies; this was approved on October 24, 2011. The Ethics Approval document outlined the steps followed to ensure that ethical procedures were followed and the consent form to be signed is contained in Appendix D.

3.5.2 Participant sampling.

To participate, students needed to be fluent in English, must be a registered student at a local university, over the age of 18, and able to engage in a research interview. Students were invited to participate if they had engaged in a minimum of two career exploration sessions at a career exploration office at local universities. Career exploration sessions were defined as having discussions that focused on career paths, future job perspectives, and potential assessment, and did not focus on aiding a student in securing actual employment. These participants also were to have had the experience of developing a working alliance with a career specialist.

3.5.3 Recruitment.

Recruitment commenced in September 2011 and ended in March 2012. Participants were recruited initially by random purposeful sampling, where participants who engaged in the career

process were selected at random to participate and give insight into the research question. Recruitment posters were placed in career centers at local universities. The poster (Appendix E) outlines the criteria participants need for participation, what participants were asked to do, and contact information if individuals were interested in participating. Students recruited through the posters are self-identified as meeting the study's criteria.

In spite of best efforts, no participants were recruited in Fall, 2011. Therefore, in January, 2012 further sampling methods were introduced to gain further respondents. Opportunistic sampling requires a researcher to follow leads and use advantageous situations to recruit participants who may be interested in taking part in the study (Creswell, 2007). I contacted the career centers informing them of changes in recruitment in hopes that they might be aware of potential participants interested in participating in the study. I also had career specialists from the recruitment centers give recruitment flyers directly to participants who met the criteria to inform them about the study. Snowball sampling was then used to enable participants fitting the study's criteria to recruit other participants for the study (Creswell, 2007). I would then talk to these referrals for further involvement in the study. Finally, willing participants engaged in this study were informed that they would have their names entered into a draw for a chance to win a \$50 Visa gift certificate.

3.5.4 Selection of the sample.

The aim of this study was to explore a detailed account of the working alliance within a career exploration setting from a mature student's perspective. Ten undergraduate university students were originally recruited and interviewed. In order to follow Smith and associates (2009) suggestion of having a sample that shares similar characteristics, participants were grouped by their demographic information to see if a sub-group shared a number of common

characteristics that might customize this study. Of the ten participants, three were of similar age, had had previous careers and entered the institution with desires to focus on education for a second or third career. Of the ten participants these three were classified as mature students and were the subgroup selected for this study. Smith et al., (2009) suggest that the sample size include three to six participants who have similar demographic information, as this provides data to explore the individual case and similarities and differences across cases. All ten participants will, however, receive executive summary copies of the study.

3.5.5 Interview procedure.

Students who viewed the recruitment poster were provided again with details about the study via e-mail and students agreeing to participate were asked to send me a list of available dates, times, and locations for the interview.

Participants met with me in a secure and confidential location. Once the individuals signed the ethics consent form (Appendix D), they participated in an interview lasting approximately 75 minutes. Participants were asked about their personal experiences with career exploration, why they decided to seek career services, and their experience with their career specialist. I followed participant stories, asking probing questions with “how’s” and “what’s” to clarify as this is in keeping with the exploratory notion of IPA research.

Following this, participants identified specific incidents they felt helped or hindered the development of their relationship with the career specialist. Probing questions such as “how did [incident] help create, strengthen, or weaken this relationship?,” “if this [incident] occurred again, how would it affect the relationship?,” and “can you describe [this incident] in more detail?” were used as examples to probe participants about stories of their experiences and the

way they felt about these experiences. They went on to indicate what ways might have helped or hindered their interactions with their career specialist.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were reminded that they would be sent an e-mail containing a summary of their individual themes from the data and a short questionnaire asking participants to identify if these themes represented their experiences. Participants were free to respond and were informed that their responses would be summarized and added as an appendix to the study but would not affect the data analysis or interpretation of the study. This would be a check on the accuracy of the collected and organized data.

3.5.5.1 Recording device.

To allow the interview to be transcribed from audio to text, a Panasonic RR-US450 digital recorder was used with the consent of the participants. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim into secure, password-safe computer files to produce written transcripts from each oral interview.

3.5.6 Data preparation.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in a Word file. Participant pseudonyms were used to identify the transcripts. Each was placed into a participant portfolio that contained the audiotape of interview, the transcript, the time and date of interview, length of interview, and page length of the transcript. The demographic information was recorded including the participant's year of schooling, their student status, whether they had previous career experience, length of residency in Canada, gender, and e-mail address. Each portfolio file contained journal entries that outlined my personal thoughts and biases before and after each of the interviews.

3.6 Data Analysis

The following steps are undertaken to describe and work with the data and are analyzed on three levels. Level I includes the process of creating exploratory comments to develop emerging themes, Level II includes creating super-ordinate and master themes, and Level III includes an interpretation of the master themes. These Levels and steps are summarized in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3

Overview and Description of Steps in IPA Analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Level of Analysis	Level I: Exploratory Comments			Level II: Developing Themes		Level III: Interpreting Themes
	Step 1: Identifying emerging expressions			Step 2: Development of super-ordinate and master themes		Step 3: Interpretation of master themes
Sub-Steps	Step 1.1. Reading and re-reading.	Step 1.2. Creating exploratory comments	Step 1.3. Identifying emergent themes.	Step 2.1 Developing super-ordinate themes within cases.	Step 2.2. Developing master themes across cases.	Step 3.1. The researcher interprets the lived experience by posing questions of the text.
Explanation of steps	Transcript is re-read several times by researcher.	The researcher begins to make exploratory notes about each transcribed interview.	Identifying themes. Identify and note themes evident across the transcript of single participant.	Words, phrases, descriptive comments, and metaphors are used together to reflect participant meanings. This leads to super-ordinate themes within cases.	Super-ordinate themes assembled within cases get examined across cases and put into higher levels of meaning. These become master themes.	Master themes are interpreted by the researcher by examining across cases and re-connecting to parts of a passage at a micro-level.

3.6.1 Exploratory comments.

Each case was first read, re-read and then exploratory comments were noted for each of the verbatim transcripts. Table 3.4 details some of the suggested steps that I took to create exploratory comments.

Table 3.4

Suggested Ways to Identify Exploratory Comments

Name	Description
General note taking	Highlighting key words, ideas, or meanings that stick out to the researcher.
Descriptive comments	Identifying particular descriptive phases or explanations that the student used often in describing their experience of the working alliance.
Linguistic comments	Includes examining linguistic comments, examining such things as the use of laughter, pauses, and metaphors within the transcript, and making note of them.
Conceptual comments	In this section the researcher adds a level of personal reflection to grouping the transcription into segments of concepts versus simply details but remains close to the text as the researcher tries to grasp what the participant might have been inferring.

Note. Adapted from Smith et al., (2009)

After exploratory comments were created, I examined both the transcript and the exploratory comments in order to develop emergent themes (step 1.3 of Table 3.3). I posed the question, “What constitutes the nature of mature university students seeking career exploration within a working alliance?” to help create emergent themes from the exploratory comments.

3.6.2 Developing themes.

Step 2.1 of Level II then required super-ordinate themes to be created. Super-ordinate themes were created by following the suggested steps of Smith et al., (2009) outlined in Table

3.5. Comments were clustered together based on their similarities. For example, certain themes appeared to explain or comment on other similar notations and were clustered together to form a larger super-ordinate theme.

Table 3.5

Ways to Create Super-Ordinate Themes

Name	Description
Abstraction	The process of examining similarities across themes and clumping them together by naming the cluster.
Subsumption	Naming a theme that is stand alone and appears to be a subordinate theme itself.
Polarization	Exploring differences in themes in order to create a larger subordinate theme.
Contextualization	Noting life events, cultural components, or narrative themes and creating temporal themes.
Numeration	Includes noting the frequency of themes to create master themes.
Function	Includes organizing themes into subordinate themes themselves.

Note. Adapted from Smith et al., (2009)

After these steps were followed for each case, I then moved to Level II, step 2.2 in Table 3.3 and examined the super-ordinate themes across the cases. I compared and contrasted all super-ordinate themes and in doing so I was able to develop master themes that were created across the three cases.

3.6.3 Interpretative themes.

In the final stage of the data analysis, I progressed to Level III, reflecting on the interpretation of these themes. Master themes were re-examined, and passages from the transcribed texts that resonated with the themes were reviewed to identify unique and

distinguished features that helped define and conceptualize the lived experience of participants in this study.

To try to ensure that my interpretation was not purely descriptive, I examined passages that resonated with the master themes but then explored how these passages could be interpreted across other participant remarks. My knowledge of career exploration processes and my understandings of current research enabled me to begin to develop a speculative, interpretative stance on the meaning of these master themes. It should be noted that this level of interpretation was done by me as a single researcher. For this reason, there are additional steps that I took to assure quality of the analysis. These are described later in this chapter.

Once these master themes were created they were reviewed against the original transcripts and within super-ordinate themes for a final time. I also drew out specific passages from each participant's transcript to complement the themes and to help illustrate the lived experience.

3.7 Quality Assurance of the Study Data

To demonstrate integrity of qualitative studies, researchers must demonstrate that they have honestly attempted to gain in-depth accounts of an individual's lived experience (Smith et al., 2009). To do so, there exists a broad variety of standards to which a researcher needs to adhere to ensure their study is trustworthy, credible, and reliable as possible (Creswell, 2009).

To demonstrate integrity of qualitative research in this study, I followed Yardley's (2000) criteria and also included Vivar's (2007) credibility of data, an audit trail (Smith et al., 2009), and the idea of triangulation (Creswell, 2007). Table 3.7 describes the criteria and illustrates how I attempted to deal with each criterion within this present study.

Table 3.6

Quality Assurance Definitions, Criteria Used within this Study

Criteria	Description of Criteria	How Criteria is Demonstrated Within Context of this Study
1. Sensitivity to Context (Yardley, 2000)	Notion that researcher must have a strong background in the philosophy of their methodology, as well as an understanding of the existing literature of the topic being studied, and demonstrate sensitivity to participants.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I assured that this study contains an in-depth review of pertinent literature. 2. Sensitivity to participants is demonstrated through the inclusion of verbatim extracts and descriptions provided of participants. 3. As I was actively involved in the analysis process, I became committed to understanding each student's lived experience.
2. Commitment (Yardley, 2000)	The notion of commitment includes the researcher being engaged with the topic, demonstrating immersion within the data, and demonstrating competence in the research method.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deep exposure to data set through reading and re-reading, analyzing themes, and use of the hermeneutic circle ensures that I was engaged with the topic. 2. By engaging with participants in hour long interviews I demonstrated care to the participant by listening to their stories and becoming immersed in them.
3. Rigour (Yardley, 2000)	Refers to the completeness of the process of the study, the analysis, and the data collection.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Rigour is demonstrated by my research having a specific homogenous sample selected that fits the research question. 2. The use of research tools to obtain in-depth interviews invited participants to share their story but remain flexible within the interview process. 3. Having an analysis that is descriptive, thematic, and includes a level of interpretation demonstrates rigour.

Criteria Cont'd.	Description of Criteria Cont'd.	How Criteria is Demonstrated Within Context of this Study Cont'd.
4. Transparency and Coherence (Yardley, 2000)	Demonstrating that the research question fits with the methodology chosen and that the information presented demonstrates a version of reality that is understood by others.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I demonstrated transparency by providing an in-depth description of participant selection, recruitment, the procedures of the study, the methodology chosen, and how the raw data was analyzed. 2. To demonstrate both coherence and transparency I described how IPA and ECIT were combined, the tools used in the study, and described how my study maintained true to the phenomenological, hermeneutic, and idiographic commitments of IPA. 3. To be transparent about my biases a running journal diary was kept, detailing my past experiences with career counselling, my ideas of the participants, and more.
6. Credibility of data (Vivar, 2007) and Triangulation (Cresswell, 2007)	<p>The degree to which data truly reflects the participant's experience.</p> <p>Triangulation: To increase credibility of results and to provide corroborating evidence of a theme or perspective, a researcher uses multiple and different sources, theories, or methods to find similar or divergent results.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants were e-mailed a summary of themes and a short questionnaire to respond to in order to ensure that the themes matched their experiences and to provide multiple ways of viewing the data. 2. Participant feedback, if divergent, was included in an appendix for readers to view.
7. Audit Trail (Smith et al., 2009).	This is a method of checking validity by organizing all information in such a way that an individual can examine and follow	1. The audit trail consisted of initial notes of my research questions, my previous experiences with career exploration, the research proposal, a semi-structured interview schedule, the verbatim transcripts,

the researcher's thinking and plan of action for the study. This typically includes documenting initial notes all the way to the end of the final project. Audit trails are a way of noting that the researcher's account is a credible one.	tables, rough reports, and final reports, along with student responses to how themes fit their experiences. 2. A mini audit trail was conducted by my supervisor, who reviewed a piece of the initial analysis to verify that the annotations and themes I identified were congruent with her exploratory thoughts as well.
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3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an explanation for the methods chosen for this study by providing an overview of research paradigms available and a description of why IPA was chosen. The research tools used for this study and the process of data collection and data analysis were explained in-depth to provide the reader with a step-by-step process of what I engaged in as the researcher in this study. The chapter concluded with a discussion on how I try to ensure quality assurance within this specific study and benefits this study provides.

Chapter Four: Results of Participants

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with demographic information of participants, the narrative accounts of my participant's experiences, and a brief profile of each participant. From this data, each of the participants cases the themes are explored, an initial analysis is presented accompanied by my journaling notes.

4.2 Participant Demographics

Table 4.0 provides a summary of the demographic characteristics across the three participants.

Table 4.0

Participant Demographic Information

Details	Demographics
Gender	Male: n = 1 Female: n = 2
Age	Mean: 38 Range: 35-43
Type of Student	All undergraduates
Program of Study	All Open Studies ^a
Year of University	First year: n=2 Second year: n=1
Residency	Canadians
Education	Two completed a degree or certificate program, one dropped out of a diploma program

^aAn Open Studies program, sometimes known as unclassified student, is one in which a student is permitted to attend regular university credit courses but these courses do not count toward a formal degree or diploma. Individuals in open studies programs can be limited to a number of classes per semester, typically three courses (University of Calgary Undergraduate Calendar, 2011-2012).

4.2.1 Career specialist experience.

Of the three participants, two reported having attended two to three career exploration sessions in the past, therefore providing them with experience in the career field. These experiences were typically described as occurring years ago prior to entering into university.

Over the last year, all participants reported having three sessions with their career specialist. One participant reported the last appointment as having been in January 2012, while the other two finished in February 2012. Each participant reported a varying amount of time between the three distinct sessions, with the longest time period between sessions being two months. All three participants described having a standardized first session where similar questions were posed for each participant; however each participant worked with a different career specialist.

All three participants reported engaging in an assessment process while partaking in career exploration. Participants either completed the Strong Interest Inventory (Strong) or the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The Strong Interest Inventory is a 291 item interest assessment that provides the tester with insight on their personal interests based on Holland's interest codes (Donnay & Borgen, 1996). Results of the test indicate a person's interest in specific occupations, school subjects and work activities and provide information on careers suited for that individual's interest. The MBTI is a personality test that assesses how a person processes information, directs their energy, makes decisions and organizes their life (Edwards, Lanning & Hooker, 2002). Results provide an individual with a personality type code that can then be utilized to find careers and interests related to the personality code. Both measures are

considered reliable and valid, for more information see Donnay & Borgen, 1996 and Edwards and associates, 2002.

4.3 Preparation of Data

The data was transferred from audiotapes to transcripts and the details are provided in Table 4.1 below. From these transcripts, three profiles were created.

Table 4.1

Transcript Information

Case number	Length of Interview (minutes)	Time to Transcribe Interview (minutes)	Page Length of Transcript
Sally	47	189	25
Bubba	53	229	29
Mickey	60	208	27

4.4 Participant Profiles

4.4.1 Sally's story.

Sally was a woman in her early forties who had worked as a full-time massage therapist for nearly twenty years while raising two teenage children. Prior to becoming a massage therapist she had engaged in career exploration, but she described the experience as being a negative one and “a little bit weird.” In her former career exploration experiences, she felt unsupported and explained to me that the career specialist “was really negative about what I wanted to do, which was massage therapy.” She felt the advice she received was judgemental and unhelpful, especially since she had in fact pursued this and had many successful years as a massage therapist.

Despite her success, she now felt she needed to find something that would “take me into my older years.” She explained that it was time to do something new since massage therapy “is hard on the body” and can impact one’s health. With that notion in mind, she entered into university and decided to register in the Open Studies program as a broad starting point to identify what areas she might follow in her studies. As a mature student, she explained that she knew her strengths and abilities but was uncertain of how she might use these strengths within a new career setting. Despite her previous negative experience with engaging in career exploration in her earlier years, she again entered into career exploration at the university in the hopes of finding further direction about her career choices.

4.4.1.1 Sally’s research interview.

Over 47 minutes I had a relaxed, enjoyable conversation with Sally in which we discussed the interview questions in Appendix B. At first, Sally appeared to be nervous when starting the interview but as it unfolded and our interactions became more comfortable, she appeared more relaxed, providing in-depth descriptions of her experience. As the interview progressed, we discussed a range of relevant topics related to the questions. These included, for example, Sally’s experience of her first career exploration sessions, her interpretation of her career specialist’s behaviour, feelings towards the career exploration process as it unfolded across sessions, and what she took away from the experience as a whole.

4.4.1.2 Exploratory comments.

The first step was to read and study Sally’s transcript, making notes about the dialogue that Sally and I had in discussing the questions raised with her in the interview. Table 4.2 provides an excerpt from Sally’s transcript that demonstrates the dialogue and questioning process that occurred between Sally and me in our interview.

Table 4.2

Excerpt of Interview Process

My questioning	Sally's Transcript
Interviewer: So in comparison—you said you had some previous experience in career exploration. So did this one differ in any way or was it very similar?	Sally: I would say this was more positive. The last one a long time ago was a little bit weird.
Interviewer: Okay. What do you think was different between the two?	Sally: The person I was working with before was really negative about what I wanted to do, which was massage therapy, which I've been very successful at and made a ton of money in. It's been a very fulfilling career and I've been doing it for fifteen years. So, I was glad to not have listened to him, he was just giving me bad advice.

4.4.1.2.1 Identification of exploratory comments.

Closer examination of the transcript revealed many exploratory comments made about Sally's past and present experiences with career specialists and the process of engaging in career exploration. Table 4.3 provides an example that highlights some exploratory comments created from Sally's transcript.

Table 4.3

Excerpt of Sally's Exploratory Comments

Sally's Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Interviewer: So what would you tell someone about career exploration who has never really engaged in it before?	
Sally: I guess for me I expected too much from the first session. Where you have to do the work, I think I expected somebody to give me the answers but really you have to find the answers yourself. So, there are some tools there to help you find the answers. I think I wanted more, but I realized that this is not an appropriate wish, but that was okay.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Unmet expectations -Perhaps an assumption that these sessions are supposed to provide you with direction instead of providing you with choices and more options? - Career work is related to exploration of work, but she desired a straightforward answer. Maybe feeling lost and out of options? -Empowering realization of making choices herself
Interviewer: Anything else?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Career exploration provides tools only -Expectation that career specialist will be direct
Sally: So I would say maybe just be more realistic about what you want to get out of the session and then if you have someone planned you're going to get more out of the session, if you sort of already have some direction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Perhaps her life experience acted as a buffer against disappointment of not getting a straight answer as she did return to more sessions despite unmet expectations. -Did the ambiguity of first session and not getting straight answers impact relationship? -Importance of realistic expectations
Interviewer: So going in with some sort of idea is helpful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If client has no idea of options, providing more options may be detrimental
Sally: Yeah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Suggesting student should have a plan

Table 4.3 provides a sample from the beginning of the interview. The exploratory comments that appear are predominately questions I posed myself, as well as statements about Sally's transcript that I thought were relevant to her lived experience. As the interview progressed, I found myself making exploratory comments that questioned why Sally decided to enter into career exploration.

The interview began by focusing on her general experience and how it related to her previous career exploration sessions. It became apparent through the exploratory comments that Sally had a mixed experience but it appeared to improve by the second career exploration session. The exploratory comments also focused on how her past experiences, career experience, and her life may have played into the progression of her career sessions.

The interview also explored her experience of the working alliance with her career specialist. Many of my exploratory comments centered on how events may have impacted the relationship. For example, Sally describes knowing the career specialist was listening to her through the use of eye contact and laughter. My exploratory comments in this excerpt outlined the importance of being heard, what it meant to Sally to be heard, and the possible difference between non-verbal and verbal indications of listening to someone. From Sally's transcript I drew out exploratory comments that spoke to her experience, but I also included many contextual exploratory comments. Overall, from Sally's transcript I created 242 exploratory comments before progressing onto the next step.

4.4.1.2.2 Identification of emergent themes.

Working with the transcript, I began to identify emergent themes from the exploratory comments and Sally's transcript. As Table 4.4 indicates, I set up the transcript where exploratory comments are on the right and the emergent themes are on the left. In this way, I could examine both the actual transcript remarks and the exploratory comments. From these remarks, I began to identify emergent themes. An example is provided in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Excerpt of Sally's Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes	Sally's Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Time influences quality of relationship	Sally: Well because they were just two half an hour sessions they weren't long,	-Relationship, career specialist as knowledgeable
Career specialist is knowledgeable source	the person is very, was very approachable and knowledgably and easy to communicate with so that was all good.	-Hesitancy to describe relationship with time frame, as evident stuttering and correcting
Open communication		-Approachable and easy to communicate
	Interviewer: Yeah, okay, so it was kind of short, maybe not quite enough time to develop a very in depth relationship? But as you said easy to approach, easy to talk to?	-Short session may not be enough to develop an outstanding relationship but is enough to form an opinion of someone's ability in their job? -Importance of time
	Sally: Right	-Implying relationship develops over long periods, but what about first impressions?
	Interviewer: Okay. So what would you say you took away from your experience of doing career exploration?	-Many possibilities and options
Learned about possibilities	Sally: Well I realized what possibilities are out there, who hires in our city from this school, what I want to do, what education path I can take to get there, and which school and other schools I could look at.	-Beneficial by being given numerous options, choice product of age? -World independent of school?
Ability for change	How to market myself outside of the school and get more information about different jobs outside of school. Also it affirmed what other people told me...	-Repetition of information important, makes information appear credible?
Congruence across sources		-Some experience -Experience was affirming
Positive experience		-Does affirmation make the relationship build? Without affirmation would the relationship be less?
Affirmation as important to client		

The emergent themes from Table 4.4 predominantly reflect important aspects of the relationship and what Sally took away from the experience of engaging in career exploration. These themes fit with her general explanations of her experience. The emergent themes were organized chronologically and can be seen in the flow of the interview. Other emergent themes that were also present and included feelings of disappointment, feeling lost or being stuck as a precursor to entering into career exploration, an uncertainty of direction or future, and viewing career exploration as a way to diminish these feelings.

As Sally described her first and second career exploration session, emergent themes that evolved included, but were not limited to: a) viewing career exploration as a phase; b) acceptance and loss of dreams and feelings associated with these; c) resolving cognitive dissonance; and d) transitions. As the flow of the interview shifted to focus on the relationship, emergent themes arose including factors that influenced the relationship, expectations of the relationship, the importance of self-disclosure, factors that helped Sally feel vulnerable, and ways in which she understood and viewed both her role and the career specialist's role. In conjunction, certain emergent themes compared and contrasted her current and previous experience of career specialists, with the current one predominantly being described as friendly, nice, and approachable.

Finally, as Sally neared the end of the interview she described things that hindered the relationship and wish list items that were important to her. Emergent themes that were identified within this part of the interview included, but were not limited to, feeling rushed through the appointment, the impact of the environment in the counselling room, a shortage of time spent on the relationship, an underlying negativity of advice and criticism from the counsellor, and her

desire to be both remembered and feel important. From Sally's transcript, I was able to reduce the exploratory comments to 147 emergent themes that identified her experience.

4.4.1.3 Developing themes.

The final step in Sally's singular case analysis was to examine the emergent themes and begin to nest them into similar and different categories. This process commenced with me placing all the emergent themes into a table in order to gain a fuller picture and understanding of what I was examining. Then I followed Smith et al.'s (2009) suggested ways of grouping emergent themes together to form super-ordinate themes. Many emergent themes fit together based on similarities of content. Table 4.5 provides an example.

Table 4.5

Creation of Super-ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
Re-negotiation of identity	Process as way to re-create self (2) Process of self-discovery (3) Acceptance of being lost Better understanding of self through school (2) Recreation or expectation of identity (2)
Testing as impersonal	Testing as impersonal

Note. Numbers indicate repetition of emergent themes within the transcript.

Table 4.5 demonstrates two different ways utilized to create super-ordinate themes. The super-ordinate theme of re-negotiation of identity was created by putting together emergent themes that spoke about identity change, identity loss, or change of knowledge of self. Therefore, this super-ordinate theme was created by following the process of abstraction and numeration; the numbers in brackets indicate the frequency of that emergent theme within Sally's transcript.

In conjunction, the super-ordinate theme of testing as impersonal in Table 4.5 was created differently from the re-negotiation of identity theme. This second super-ordinate theme was developed because the emergent themes of testing as impersonal appeared to stand alone and not relate to other emergent themes, thereby making itself a super-ordinate theme in its own right.

During this process, many themes were organized and then reviewed and re-organized again so that the emergent themes truly represented a super-ordinate theme. For Sally's transcript I was able to identify 40 super-ordinate themes. Table 4.6 provides a summary of these super-ordinate themes.

Table 4.6*List of Sally's Super-Ordinate Themes*

Super-Ordinate Themes
1. Acceptance of disappointment/client responsibility
2. Career as a changing journey
3. Career exploration as necessity
4. Career exploration as transitional phase
5. Seeking career exploration for possibilities/relief
6. Seeking career for stability
7. Process instils hope through hope of new identities
8. Process creates confidence (process)
9. Re-negotiation of identity
10. Process of losing and creating dreams
11. Disappointment/dissolution of grand dream
12. Unsupported dreams creates conflict with counsellor
13. Environment as factor in relationship
14. Therapist as guide in career exploration process
15. Process creates anxiety and excitement
16. Sessions have a process or sequence
17. Information versus advice
18. Self-knowledge of strengths influences session impact
19. New career due to wish to use full potential:
20. Empathy for career counsellor creates understanding
21. Testing as impersonal (stigma)
22. Fear of testing misclassifying person / wrong answers
23. Fear of criticizing counsellor
24. Desire for sessions to be self-contained
25. Different levels of engagement
26. Client wants to feel important
27. Personalized information creates trust
28. Counsellor needs to know clients "readiness for change"
29. Respect for client as "bottom line"
30. Relationship development is client's responsibility
31. Personalized connection requires equality
32. Respect creates vulnerability/ personal connection
33. Counsellor seen as human when admitting faults
34. Shared conversation creates connection (this is when counsellor and client talk about things not session related)
35. Counsellor as professional
36. Counsellor as source of knowledge
37. Counsellor variables that create active listening or enhance relationship
38. Time as important factor to client
39. When rushed (time) client feels angry or rushed
40. Time given to client creates importance

The super-ordinate themes above outline Sally's experience of engaging in career exploration with her career specialist. There appear to be clusters of super-ordinate themes that have related explanations to them. For example, there are a couple of super-ordinate themes that focus on how Sally outlines career exploration as a journey but views it as a necessity. Other super-ordinate themes focus on areas that the career specialist did to aid the relationship, such as the therapist being the guide, and factors that seem to influence the relationship, such as the environment.

There are also super-ordinate themes that focus on what Sally identified as a requirement within the relationship, such as responsibility and respect. Certain super-ordinate themes appear as though they would relate to requirements of the relationship, such as counsellor as source of knowledge and professional; however, these super-ordinate themes were identified as separate themes because they appeared to define how Sally saw the career specialist versus what she identified as a requirement of the relationship. In conclusion, many of the super-ordinate themes reflect a need or requirement Sally identified, which was continuously expressed in the interview. Sally described the process as changing identities or transitions that may change over the course of the career exploration sessions.

4.4.1.4 Journal reflections for Sally.

The interview with Sally was engaging and insightful. She provided in-depth information and was not hesitant to respond to any question. One important note that should be mentioned is that I was more structured and rigid with the use of the semi-structured interview than with other participants due to being anxious, as Sally was my first interviewee. I feel that this might have introduced some limitations in the breadth and depth of the interview. After interviewing Sally

and exploring the transcript, I entered some remarks about the experience in my journal. These are reflected below.

One assumption that I have about the process of engaging in career exploration is that students enter into the experience with the hope of seeking direction. This was validated when Sally described hoping to get specific answers and a direction from the career specialist. She was disappointed when she was not given straight answers on what path to take. This disappointment or desire for answers versus engaging in the exploration process is noticeable throughout the interview.

The emotions Sally described during the experience were also noteworthy. Her description of the process being overwhelming and frustrating was interesting but she described the process as insightful in the end. An awareness that Sally brought to my attention on this topic was her ability to move past this feeling of being overwhelmed and continuing to engage in the career exploration process. I wonder if this is something that will be present with other mature students, as I know many younger students often find new avenues or do not return to career exploration as they feel frustrated by the process.

The interview with Sally also revealed insights about the working alliance. Sally expressed that the development of the working alliance was the responsibility of the client. I found this shocking, as this is typically collaborative without a clear cut direction indicated. She indicated things that helped her feel vulnerable within the relationship, and her focus on respect and equality was something I found interesting as I wonder if this necessity for respect would be as present in someone who had less experience. Overall, the experience with Sally was a good one, and she brought many insights into what it means to engage in career exploration and how the relationship develops between a career specialist and a mature student.

4.4.1.5 Summary.

Sally's transcript provided a wealth of information. Through the process of analysis, I was able to reduce the content to a number of themes that are used to reflect Sally's lived experience of engaging in career exploration and developing a working alliance with her career specialist. In conclusion, Table 4.7 provides an outline of the number of exploratory comments and themes identified in Sally's transcript.

Table 4.7

Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Sally

Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes	Super-Ordinate Themes
242	127	40

Sally's experience with career exploration commenced with negative experience years ago. Out of feeling lost and needing direction, she decided to try career exploration once more. She defined the process as both negative and positive, but she enjoyed gathering information for discussion with her career specialist. She described the relationship with her career specialist as positive, but noted she had not found a direct answer during the process about which career path she would eventually decide to pursue.

4.4.2 Bubba's story

Bubba is a gentleman in his mid-thirties who had a career as a computer technician in a different province for many years. He has no children but lives with his partner. His original desire was to finish a degree in nursing but he dropped out of school early in his career, electing instead to work as a computer technician because of his familiarity with technology. As his career grew he was offered a raise, which he promptly took, but he also felt that he was having

difficulties meeting the expectations of his role due to his lack of formal computer training, and shortly afterwards he decided to quit.

In an effort to find employment, he moved to a new province and took up a variety of jobs such as working in the trades. In working different jobs he also felt that he needed something more stable, noting, “I am getting kind of old so I can’t really do that for much longer so I figured it was time to go to school...” He thought it was time to “just reboot myself and start over.” He entered into university and decided to take Open Studies as a broad starting point, as he did not know in what exactly he wished to specialize.

During his first year of university, he described feeling lost and decided to partake in career exploration sessions in hopes that he could figure out “if there was a different career that I could do.” Other than this experience, he has no previous career exploration experience. He did describe taking some online career quizzes on his own volition but he did not have previous meetings with a career specialist.

4.4.2.1 Bubba’s research interview.

For 53 minutes I had an engaged and enthusiastic conversation with Bubba, in which we discussed the interview questions in Appendix B. Bubba appeared to be at ease during the interview and eager to share his experience, explaining that it was positive and that he hoped to convey his thanks by participating in this interview. During the interview I noticed that Bubba needed clarification of the questions I asked, but he was able to respond to them once they had been reworded or posed in a different way. As the interview progressed, we discussed a range of topics related to the questions. These included Bubba’s current experience with his career specialist, his dislike of the waiting time for career sessions and the way in which he found out about possible assessment tools. It also included his experience of the counselling environment,

his hesitancy yet enjoyment of completing an assessment tool along with a discussion of what led him to and through this path of engaging in career exploration.

4.4.2.2 Exploratory comments.

The first step in analyzing Bubba’s transcript was to create the transcript by reading and re-reading the dialogue that occurred between Bubba and me. Table 4.8 provides an excerpt from Bubba’s transcript that demonstrates this questioning process.

Table 4.8

Excerpt of Bubba’s Interview Process

My questioning	Bubba’s Transcript
Interviewer: So can you tell me a little bit about your decision around deciding to seek career sessions?	Bubba: I applied as an open studies student here in 2011. Is that the kind of information you need?
Interviewer: Yes, so why did you decide to go to see a career specialist?	Bubba: Basically I didn’t actually know, even though I was in open studies, what I wanted to do. So I guess I am at the second career stage of my life so I thought “just reboot myself and start over” and see if there was a different career I could be in, something I could do for the time. So I went there and they helped me out. I filled out the questionnaire, she asked me a bunch of questions about what I wanted to do and all that and as well...

4.4.2.2.1 Identification of exploratory comments.

As I engaged in the next step, many exploratory comments were created exploring Bubba’s experience with the career specialist and his experiences of engaging in career exploration. Table 4.9 highlights some exploratory comments found in Bubba’s transcript.

Table 4.9

Excerpt of Bubba's Exploratory Comments

Bubba's Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Interviewer: So you said it was your second career? Can you tell me a bit about that?	-Implication that there are phases or sections of career experience
Bubba: Well okay. It might sound kind of dumb. I was working in Toronto as a technical analyst, so basically a programmer at a hospital there. I had gone to school to become a nurse but didn't finish that so I only had a part of a degree, a diploma actually, and I knew a bit about computers and a bit about nursing so I matched what they wanted and worked in the hospital as a tech support person and I got promoted into an actual real job there, doing programming and applications development. But I didn't actually have the correct prerequisites for it so I was really struggling there. So I thought "you know this isn't really working out for me." I decided to quit that. I figured that I needed to think about what I want to do for my career again anyways, so for a few months I worked as a carpenter so there were jobs here in Calgary for a while a few years ago. So I came here to do that and I figured well I'm getting kind of old so I can't really do that for much longer, so I figured there was time to go to school still and so that's when I ended up here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Second career -Fear of embarrassment or worry about how I might understand his experience -Wonder if there is regret to not completing his diploma as a nurse? Why did he drop out? Was it due to believing he couldn't do it? -Found a job that used his skills and was perhaps a convenience for him -Promotion seen as something that caused difficulties -Focus on requirements that a job needs to complete it versus skills or ability to complete it -Struggle as sign of time to move forward or change path -Education required for higher positions? If so is there an implication that people need to specialize sooner? -Questioning what to do for career, implication that career is lifelong or a chunk/phase of one's life where as a job might be short term? -Choosing a career requires thought and a knowledge of what one wants to do -Trades as a job versus a career, implication that job helps survival but is not career -Age as factor in what jobs or careers a person can choose -School as a transitional phase, place to go when lost, or perhaps seen as requirement for career.

Table 4.9 provides a sample from the beginning of the interview. The exploratory comments that appear are predominately distinctions between his experience and general experience, comments I posed myself, and reflections of what Bubba was telling me. As the interview progressed, I found myself making exploratory comments that questioned his desire for a new path, his feelings toward changing careers and being lost, and his move towards entering into career exploration.

It became apparent through the exploratory comments that Bubba had a positive experience with the exception of the impact of the environment and the time he waited to be seen by the career center. The exploratory comments focused on questioning why these two items stood out, what importance they have for Bubba, and if they impacted his experience.

The interview also explored Bubba's experience of the working alliance with his career specialist. Within this section, many of the exploratory comments related to events that Bubba noted as being imperative to the working alliance. For example, having a non-judgemental atmosphere was crucial to Bubba and his ability to connect to his career specialist. During this part of the interview, my exploratory comments reflected the incidents that Bubba felt were important to him.

From Bubba's transcript I drew out many exploratory comments that reflected on his experience, his use of language, and his feelings as they evolved during the process. During the final phase of the interview, my exploratory comments became predominately conceptual as Bubba described possible incidences he wished would have occurred within the relationship to enhance the working alliance. Overall, from Bubba's transcript I created 237 exploratory comments before progressing to the next step.

4.4.2.2.2 Identification of emergent themes.

Working with the transcript, I began to identify emergent themes from the exploratory comments of Bubba's transcript. Table 4.10 provides an example of the creation of emergent themes from Bubba's transcript and is created in the same fashion as Sally's transcript.

Table 4.10

Excerpt of Bubba's Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes	Bubba's Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	Interviewer: So you said it was your second career? Can you tell me a bit about that?	-Implication that there are phases or sections of career experience
Worry	Bubba: Well okay. It might sound kind of dumb. I was working in Toronto as a technical analyst, so basically a programmer at a hospital there. I had gone to school to become a nurse but didn't finish that so I only had a part of a degree, a diploma actually, and I knew a bit about computers and a bit about nursing so I matched what they wanted and worked in the hospital as a tech support person and I got promoted into an actual real job there, doing programming and applications development. But I didn't actually have the correct prerequisites for it so I was really struggling there. So I thought "you know this isn't really working out for me". I decided to quit that. I figured that I needed to think about what I want to do for my	-Second career -Fear of embarrassment or worry about how I might understand his experience -Wonder if there is regret to not completing his diploma as a nurse? Why did he drop out? Was it due to believing he couldn't do it? -Found a job that used his skills and was perhaps a convenience for him -Promotion seen as something that caused difficulties -Focus on requirements that a job needs to complete it versus skills or ability to complete it -Struggle as sign of time to move forward or change path -Education required for higher positions? If so is there an implication that people need to specialize sooner? -Questioning what to do for career, implication that career
Regret of not completing degree		
Previous job as necessity		
Career requires training		
Career transition		
Jobs as necessity for survival		
Implication of jobs different from careers		
Inability to remain		

in same field due to age	career again anyways, so for a few months I worked as a carpenter so there were jobs here in Calgary for a while a few years ago. So I came here to do that and I figured well I'm getting kind of old so I can't really do that for much longer, so I figured there was time to go to school still and so that's when I ended up here.	is lifelong or a chunk/phase of one's life where as a job might be short term?
Transitional period		-Choosing a career requires thought and a knowledge of what one wants to do
School as necessity for stable career		-Trades as a job versus a career, implication that job helps survival but is not career
Age as important to career		-Age as factor in what jobs or careers a person can choose
School as way to re-develop self		-School as a transitional phase, place to go when lost, or perhaps seen as requirement for career.

The emergent themes from Table 4.10 reflect upon Bubba's transition from his previous full-time career to a transitional period of being lost and uncertain of what to do prior to entering into university. These themes above appear to fit with the general explanation of his experience and re-appear frequently throughout the interview. Other emergent themes that appeared include viewing school as distinct from career, feelings of being lost and confused, a hope for recreating his identity, the impact of being in a transitional period, and his feelings toward entering into the career exploration process.

As Bubba described the sessions he had with his career specialist, emergent themes that arose included, but are not limited to, the career exploration process as being overwhelming but affirming, finding direction, original negative expectations of the process being helpful, the importance of the personal relationship, the importance of the assessment process for Bubba, and things that he identified as imperative to the relationship. These include the career specialist being friendly, accepting, non-judgemental, and guiding in the conversation.

Finally, as Bubba neared the end of the interview he described what hindered the relationship and incidences that might have enhanced the relationship. Emergent themes that were identified included, but are not limited to, the impact of the environment, feeling rushed, the impact of waiting, a desire for choices between assessment tools, a desire to have the assessments explained prior to its completion, and providing the student with an explanation of the waiting time. Overall, from Bubba's transcript I was able to reduce the 237 exploratory comments to 154 emergent themes.

4.4.2.3 Super-ordinate themes.

The final step in Bubba's case analysis was to examine the emergent themes and begin to nest them into similar and different categories. This process followed the one used to create Sally's super-ordinate themes. Bubba had several repeating emergent themes that clustered together to form super-ordinate themes. Table 4.11 provides an example of this analysis process.

Table 4.11

Creation of Super-ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate Themes	Emergent Themes
Desire for new identity	Desire for new identity (3) Opportunity to redefine self Lost with career identity Difficulty accepting previous identity (2) Creation of new career identity
Environment as distracting	Environment as distracting (5) Frustrated at environment; Open setting as invasive Clutter makes it hard to concentrate (2)

Note. Numbers indicate repetition of emergent themes within the transcript.

Table 4.11 demonstrates two ways of identifying super-ordinate themes. The first is the “desire for new identity” that spoke about loss and hope for a new career identity. This super-ordinate theme was created by exploring similarities and differences, as some of the emergent themes contrast with one another in terms of loss and creation of identity. The second super-ordinate theme was of “environment as distracting.” This theme was created by exploring the amount of times the theme repeated as Bubba had many incidences of discussing the environment’s impact on his experience.

Through the process of creating super-ordinate themes from Bubba’s transcript I often would organize and then re-organize his emergent themes to create super-ordinate themes that best captured his experience. For Bubba I was able to identify 45 super-ordinate themes. Table 4.12 provides a summary.

Table 4.12

List of Bubba’s Super-Ordinate Themes

Super-ordinate Themes
1. CC as necessity
2. No expectation of CC being helpful
3. Career as fluid and changing
4. Jobs as necessity to survive
5. Difficulty in job
6. Regret of not finishing degree
7. Desire for career for stability
8. Desire for new identity
9. Uncertainty of path
10. University as necessary for career
11. University as opportunity to develop self-identity
12. Desire to find path quickly
13. Wait increases anxiety and negative perceptions of CC
14. Tasks during wait as way to distil anxiety (wish list)
15. Environment as distracting

Super-ordinate Themes Cont'd.

16. Cluttered environment = cluttered counsellor
 17. Being rushed transfers onto client
 18. Things to improve experience
 19. Empathy towards counsellor
 20. Realization of need of CC (process)
 21. Negative expectation of process
 22. Transitional period of excitement but overwhelming
 23. Shift in ideas during process
 24. Process provides clarity of ideas
 25. Process creates identity change
 26. Process enhances confidence in self
 27. Stigma toward assessment
 28. Assessment overwhelming
 29. Anxiety about responses
 30. Strong Interest Inventory not adequately explained
 31. Assessment objective and empowering
 32. Things that enhance relationship
 33. Counsellor as knowledgeable/professional
 34. Relationship difficult and takes time
 35. Negative expectations
 36. Broad questions as help / counsellor guides
 37. Explaining counsellor weakness makes her seem human
 38. Shared conversation
 39. Interest in client distils anxiety
 40. Patience created vulnerable atmosphere
 41. Given non-judgemental atmosphere to explore values
 42. Counsellor organized client ideas
 43. Process individualized
 44. Client felt listened to
 45. Relationship as collaborative
-

The super-ordinate themes above outline Bubba's experience of engaging in career exploration with his career specialist. By examining the list in Table 4.12 it becomes apparent that there is a grouping of super-ordinate themes describing Bubba's views of careers, jobs, and his understanding of the journey and the transition that he experienced as well as his feelings during this process.

There are also super-ordinate themes that outline Bubba's relationship with the career specialist and items that he found helped to enhance the relationship. Of intrigue is the super-ordinate theme that reflects Bubba's emotions regarding the working alliance, specifically about how it takes time and is difficult to create. Other super-ordinate themes reflect how he viewed the career specialist, his expectations of the initial relationship based on past experience, and how he moved toward having a positive experience with the career specialist. These were in addition to those that impacted the working alliance relationship such as the environment, feeling rushed, and the assessment process.

4.4.2.4 Personal reflection.

The interview with Bubba was engaging and he was able to provide a large degree of in-depth explanations about his experience and how it impacted his life. This interview was less structured as I was now comfortable with the process. I used the semi-structured interview as a general guideline but stayed more with the client's description, asking guiding questions to get more insight into his experience. Bubba was responsive, enthusiastic, and appeared to be advocating that the career exploration process was a beneficial one. I will explore below only a few reflections that emerged from this process.

After interviewing Bubba and exploring the transcript, I rewrote my preconceptions and my experience, then compared it to previous notes. Bubba felt that career exploration is sought when a student is feeling lost or helpless and does not know what other avenues to choose. My thoughts were that perhaps this was common for many students, where they view career services as a tool utilized only when one is feeling hopeless and lost.

Bubba's interview gave me some new insights. Although I had initially noted that the environment may have a small impact upon the working alliance, Bubba brought to my attention

that the environment might be more important than I had initially thought. His focus on the environment and how it impacted his emotions was insightful, and his comments on how to notice or improve the environment were beneficial. Bubba also brought forward ideas about how career specialists might invite an individual to talk in this dynamic relationship, and some of his ideas were novel despite appearing to be conceptually fundamental ideas. For example, he noted that it would have been helpful if his career specialist had said to him that he can take time to think before answering, as this would have made him feel more at ease in the relationship had it occurred.

Finally, Bubba's interview brought to light the impact that the assessment process can have upon clients. Although I had assumed the results from the assessment would be beneficial, I believe I underestimated the impact they can have on helping a person find their path and offering some affirmation. Bubba found the assessment process to be beneficial and affirming to what he knew but had doubts about himself, suggesting to me that it might be helpful to provide deeper insight on how these tools can be beneficial during the process of career exploration.

4.4.2.5 Summary.

Bubba's transcript provided a wealth of information, especially on the transition of engaging in career exploration and the assessment process. Through the process of analysis I was able to reduce the content of Bubba's transcript to a number of themes that reflect his lived experience of engaging in career exploration and the relationship he developed with his career specialist. Table 4.13 provides an outline of the number of exploratory comments and themes identified in Bubba's transcript.

Table 4.13

Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Bubba

Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes	Super-Ordinate Themes
237	154	45

Bubba's experience with career exploration commenced due to a feeling of being lost and uncertain of what path to take. His experience appeared negative at first due to a long wait period for the career specialist's appointment and an uncertainty of the relationship that might develop. Fortunately, this was a short lived concern for Bubba. Through the interview process it became apparent that Bubba had a good experience with his career specialist and was able to take away information that helped him further formulate his future career path and increase his confidence in himself.

4.4.3 Mickey's story.

Mickey is a woman who is in her mid-thirties and has recently gone through a divorce. She describes herself as being single with no children and at a point in her life where she can work on herself. She spent many years working in the forest industry, but felt her past career as one that did not fit with her lifestyle. Her original decision to enter into the field of forestry was brought on by her previous career exploration experience, where she engaged in the assessment process. The results of her assessment informed her that this field would be an ideal fit, but after working in this field she decided she needed something more.

After leaving this position she has spent the last couple of years working various jobs, many of which could be classified as retail-oriented. She felt that her job within the forest industry was a "very isolating type of work" and that retail may have provided her with the social aspect she desired. Mickey, however, decided that going from job to job was creating "a

lot of personal dissatisfaction...” and that those jobs “don’t require a lot of you, they weren’t challenging enough...” Mickey’s choice to return to university was predicated on the idea that “I need [a degree] for what I’m looking to do for the future.”

Mickey describes that a career is one that needs qualifications from a university and something that should fit her lifestyle choices, but she is uncertain of what career path she wishes to take. Therefore, she entered into open studies as it provided a broad start to decide what path to take. She describes being lost in her career choice and identifies the university experience as being overwhelming:

Even the whole, you know, getting your feet under you in the first semester, it was like a whole different world; classes are different, there’s 200 people in your classes. I’ve never been in a class with 200 people; it kind of freaked me out. It was extremely overwhelming a part of that, part of going to the career, center was part of that.

Another part of her decision to enter into the career exploration process was the hope that the process would help her find some direction or “provide a piece of the puzzle” to her.

4.4.3.1 Mickey’s research interview.

For over 60 minutes I had a highly engaged, energetic, and enthusiastic interview with Mickey in which we discussed the interview questions in Appendix B. Mickey was confident and comfortable with the interview process and able to respond to all questions without hesitation. She appeared thoughtful and took time with most of her responses, trying to provide as much detail as possible. At times I had to redirect her back to the initial question; we discussed many topics including her reasons for engaging in career exploration, how the relationship developed with the specialist, her experience with assessment, and how she viewed the entire process.

4.4.3.2 Exploratory comments.

The first step was to read and re-read the transcript while making notes about the dialogue that occurred between Mickey and me. Table 4.14 provides an excerpt from the interview, demonstrating the questioning process.

Table 4.14

Excerpt of Mickey's Interview Process

My questioning	Mickey's Transcript
Interviewer: So what made you decide to go to the center and engage in career exploration?	Mickey: Just kind of not having a clue. I really didn't know, right now I'm actually not even in psychology yet, I'm just in general studies and haven't been accepted into the department yet so hopefully by the end of the year that'll happen. So it shouldn't be that much of a big deal just with my transfer credits and such like that it kind of mucked up the admissions qualification. So with my GPA at the end of the year they'll just be able to say "okay this is great now you fit into the little box that we need to fit you in here you go". So yeah, I knew I had to come back and I knew I needed more education to fulfill a career; working retail just isn't doing it for me....

4.4.3.2.1 Identification of exploratory comments.

The second step was to examine the transcript closer to identify exploratory comments. Through this process I was able to create 238 initial exploratory comments about Mickey's lived experience. An excerpt is provided in Table 4.15.

Table 4.15

Excerpt of Mickey's Exploratory Comments

Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Interviewer: That's good. So what were your hopes when you went into see the career counsellor? What did you want to get out of that experience?</p>	
<p>Mickey: Just a little bit more clarification basically, not for her to tell me what to do necessarily but for her to just kind of get someone else's ideas on what kind of career fit, or you know this is kind of what I envision myself doing or what I need for a career and a job, you know this is a lifestyle I want to have, can you kind of guide me to figure out what is going to fit? This is the pieces of the puzzle that I bring what can we kind of see that works with those pieces?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Didn't expect direction but options and information on how to get careers -Provided different ways to view what she hoped to get out of relationship -Wanted guidance to path -Career fit to lifestyle, implication that there is more to career than a job, that it needs to fit a person -Metaphor -She has direction of what she wants out of the relationship, clear goal
<p>Interviewer: So what can we add and change sort of thing?</p>	
<p>Mickey: Yeah, or do you have some insight on what kind of job that would fit into that puzzle.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Career exploration as a guide to get to desired path
<p>Interviewer: so what was the experience like for you with the career specialist?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Metaphor of pieces of a puzzle -Process as a journey, or has many pieces to it
<p>Mickey: I mean they were quite clarifying but through the actual process it was a little intimidating and confusing. Some of the questions were asked, I did a Strong Inventory and the Myers Briggs, and so I did both of them and through that sort of process it was a little intimidating just because you don't know if you're answering those things properly. But when the results come back you obviously sit down with someone one on one and they explain more ...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Process clarifying -Process intimidating and overwhelming -Engaged in two assessments -Assessment process as intimidating -Fear of responding wrong to objective measures. Does this indicate a fear of being classified/not wanting to respond wrong because it's seen as the ultimate test? -Process involves face-to-face -Explanation is retrospective, what if more explanation was given before would this reduce anxiety?

Table 4.15 provides a sample of the exploratory comments. Predominantly, these comments are descriptive in nature with a few questions that I inserted along the way to question what the experience meant to Mickey or if there were other implications she was conveying to me. Throughout Mickey's transcripts I also began to outline many of the metaphors she used which focused on a way to explain how she viewed her career exploration process.

The interview provided an explanation for her decision for entering into this process. I also outlined contextual comments that questioned why she had engaged in these career episodes, what careers meant to her as opposed to a 'job,' her past experience with career exploration specialists and counsellors, and her experience of previous assessments.

The exploratory comments reflected more of what Mickey identified as important factors that occurred in the relationship that aided her in feeling comfortable with the career specialist. These included, for example, identifying the importance of shared conversation and the career specialist being relaxed. Some contextual exploratory comments were made reflecting the importance these had for Mickey and how they compared to her previous experience. There were also many exploratory comments that noted her two experiences with assessment and how they varied drastically due to the working alliance. She described how her current experience in utilizing assessment tools was overwhelming; similar to her first experience, but that the career specialist was able to help her relax through mutual exploration of the assessment results. She also identified that within her current experience discussing the results in depth provided her with more understanding.

Interestingly, the exploratory comments also reflected upon Mickey's use of metaphors throughout the interview, things she noted that might have hindered the relationship such as waiting times, and notes of the wish list items she described in detail. Overall from Mickey's

transcript I was able to create a plethora of exploratory comments that reflected her lived experience and what it meant throughout the entirety of the interview.

4.4.3.2.2 Identification of emergent themes.

The next step followed the same process used in identifying emergent themes for Sally and Bubba. Mickey presented some repetitious emergent themes but also had many themes that diverged, and these differences were used to create clusters of their own. Mickey also used metaphors to describe her experience. To stay true to her lived experience, some of the metaphors she provided were used as labels for emergent themes. Table 4.16 provides an example of some of Mickey's emergent themes.

Table 4.16

Excerpt of Mickey's Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes	Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	Interviewer: That's good. So what were your hopes when you went into see the career counsellor? What did you want to get out of that experience?	
Need to know options to move forward	Mickey: Just a little bit more clarification basically, not for her to tell me what to do necessarily but for her to just kind of get someone else's ideas on what kind of career fit, or you know this is kind of what I envision myself doing or what I need for a career and a job, you know this is a lifestyle I want to have, can you kind of guide me to figure out what is going to fit?	-Didn't expect direction but options and information on how to get careers -Provided different ways to view what she hoped to get out of relationship -Wanted guidance to path
Career exploration provides clarification		
Options versus advice		-Career fit to lifestyle, implication that there is more to career than a job, that it needs to fit a person
She has concept of self- identity		-Metaphor

Emergent Themes Cont'd	Transcript Cont'd	Exploratory Comments Cont'd
Puzzle pieces offered Career as a puzzle	This is the pieces of the puzzle that I bring what can we kind of see that works with those pieces?	-She has direction of what she wants out of the relationship, clear goal
Desire for clarification of path	Interviewer: So what can we add and change sort of thing?	-Career exploration as a guide to get to desired path
Clarification given through process	Mickey: Yeah, or do you have some insight on what kind of job that would fit into that puzzle.	-Metaphor of pieces of a puzzle -Process as a journey, or has many pieces to it
Process confusing and intimidating	Interviewer: so what was the experience like for you with the career specialist?	-Process clarifying -Process intimidating and overwhelming
Uncertainty of responses to assessment	Mickey: I mean they were quite clarifying but through the actual process it was a little intimidating and confusing. Some of the questions were asked, I did a Strong Inventory and the Myers Briggs, and so I did both of them and through that sort of process it was a little intimidating just because you don't know if you're answering those things properly. But when the results come back you obviously sit down with someone one on one and they explain more things about the actual process and how they come up with the tests...	-Engaged in two assessments -Assessment process as intimidating -Fear of responding wrong to objective measures. Does this indicate a fear of being classified/not wanting to respond wrong because it's seen as the ultimate test?
Fear of misclassification of self		-Process involves face-to-face
Anxiety due to lack of explanation of assessment process		-Explanation is retrospective, what if more explanation was given before would this reduce anxiety?
Career exploration as a transitional process		
One-on-one process reduces anxiety		
Strong as tool to provide options		

The emergent themes from Table 4.16 reflect important aspects of Mickey's hopes of what she wished from the relationship and her overall experience. The emergent themes above

illustrate a mixed experience. Mickey describes being confused and overwhelmed, with a worry about the assessment process, but that it provided her with answers. This may have been mediated by her previous experience with assessment that became apparent later in the interview process.

As the interview progressed, other emergent themes that developed included career as a puzzle, identity shifts and identity losses, a desire to make a mark, university as hoop jumping, ways to describe the overall process, shifts in understanding that occurred, responsibilities within the relationship, issues that impacted the relationship, and the importance of an individualized process. Emergent themes reflected metaphors were also used by Mickey as ways contrasting previous and current career experiences.

Finally, Mickey provided ways that she views her career specialist, further items that might have enhanced the relationship, and what she took away from the overall experience. From Mickey's transcript I was able to reduce the 238 exploratory comments to 183 emergent themes.

4.4.3.3 Developing themes.

After exploring Mickey's emergent themes and paying close attention to her use of metaphors and descriptions, I began to clump and organize the emergent themes into categories. This was done in a similar fashion as Sally and Bubba, using a table to organize all the emergent themes. Although I had a series of metaphors originally classified together, I reorganized and placed them into their own super-ordinate themes. Table 4.17 provides a sample of the emergent themes and the super-ordinate themes.

Table 4.17

Excerpt of Mickey's Super-Ordinate Themes

Super -ordinate themes	Emergent themes
Career as fluid, malleable and changing	Career as a puzzle (4) Career includes what you're good at (1) Career is a lifestyle Career choice is malleable Career is a commitment Fluid and evolving
Job provides convenience but source of regret	Got stuck in job Regret of not changing path sooner Disappointed with lost time Regret (2)

Note. Numbers indicate repetition of emergent themes within the transcript.

Table 4.17 demonstrates two different examples of how I created super-ordinate themes from Mickey's transcript and the emergent themes. The super-ordinate theme of "career as fluid malleable and changing" represents the way in which Mickey understands careers. She views them as continually changing, evolving and growing as she ages and gains more experience in life. A career is something that requires commitment but also includes parts of a person's lifestyle.

The super-ordinate theme of "job provides convenience but also source of regret" illustrates how Mickey felt that it was easy to get lost or stuck in a job. In Mickey's mind, there was regret at needing to have jobs to maintain stability in her life whilst she wished to find a way to create a career. For Mickey a career is seen as more stable, providing feelings of accomplishment, success, and may include her lifestyle whereas a job did not. Mickey had the experience of trying many jobs to identify which fit with her, therefore this theme also illustrates her regret of choosing different unfulfilling jobs and not feeling accomplished. Overall, I was

able to identify 43 super-ordinate themes from Mickey's transcript that are listed in Table 4.18 below.

Table 4.18

List of Mickey's Super-Ordinate Themes

Super-Ordinate Themes
1. Fear and regret of starting over
2. CC as necessity
3. CC can provide clarity and distil fear
4. CC has individual information
5. Career as fluid, malleable and changing
6. Job as necessity but stable
7. Job as unfulfilling
8. Job provides convenience, creates regret
9. Desire for career due to stability
10. Desire for new career identity and making a mark
11. Feeling lost with career identity
12. Chance to regenerate identity
13. University as necessity for career
14. University as gateway to identity
15. Identity formation takes time and is frustrating
16. Questioning usefulness of process
17. Process as overwhelming
18. Process creates shift in ideas
19. Process provides clarity of ideas
20. Process creates identity change
21. Relationship created by session 3
22. Negative career experience
23. Environment impacts experience
24. Doing assessment as failure to own abilities
25. Stigma towards assessment
26 Strong not adequately explained at start
27. Fear of being grouped by assessment
28. Concerned about answers to Strong Interest Inventory
29. Assessment provided options and hope
30. Counsellor as benchmark to possibility of goals
31. Difficult to open up
32. Client responsible for relationship
33. Counsellor provides initial direction or guide
34. Client as a whole vs. only career focus

Super-Ordinate Themes Cont'd.

35. Genuine interest in client helps client open up
 36. Relationship instils trust and vulnerability
 37. Individualized process is important
 38. Client feels important
 39. Feedback appreciated vs. advice
 40. Variables enhancing relationship
 41. Respect created when counsellor clarifies/admits faults
 42. Counsellor seen as guide or friend
 43. Empathy and gratitude to counsellor
-

The super-ordinate themes above outline Mickey's lived experience. Many super-ordinate themes reflect how she viewed the overall process of engaging in career exploration, her desire for and the shift of her identity throughout the process, the emotions the process created, her feelings towards the assessment process, and her experience of the working alliance. Certain super-ordinate themes reflect aspects of the relationship that helped make her more open, reflect her views of the career specialist, and identify ways that the relationship could improve. Overall, the super-ordinate themes grasp and provide a depth of information that reflect the lived experience that Mickey described to me throughout the interview process.

4.4.3.4 Journal writing after Mickey's interview.

The interview with Mickey was enlightening and provided a clearer picture of what it meant for her to be a mature student returning to university and going through the career exploration process. She was engaged, responsive, and provided in-depth and coherent answers to all questions posed. Of the three interviews, Mickey's was the most detailed and I found it easier to engage with her due to her enthusiasm with her experience. After interviewing Mickey and exploring the transcript, I rewrote my preconceptions and my experience and compared it to previous notes. I will explore below only a few reflections that emerged from this process.

I was surprised at how different participant's previous career exploration expectations were compared to their experience. Mickey described to me that her previous career experience was not validating and that looking back on it, she probably should not have followed the advice she was given due to a dislike of the first career advice given. Further, I believe that the more personal rather than professional relationship Mickey had with the career specialist, the more it would make her feel comfortable and respected. This in fact proved to be the case with her career exploration experience in the university. In fact, Mickey described in depth how she viewed her career specialist as more personable and what things her career specialist did that made the relationship a personal versus a professional one. I also assumed that a personal relationship would help the process become positive, and this seemed to be the case with Mickey.

Mickey's interview also brought to light some new insights. One was the feeling of regret that Mickey described in her own abilities when she was first asked to do the Strong Inventory and Myers-Briggs. Reflecting upon this, it does make sense that mature students may feel like they have failed to find their own path when given an objective measure to guide them. Another insight that Mickey brought to the forefront was the way in which she described what a career meant to her. Although I had assumed that career would be defined more flexibly than it has been in the past, Mickey's focus on career as a lifestyle and 'career as a puzzle' that is ever-changing provided a new way to view this experience.

4.4.3.5 Summary.

Mickey's transcript provided a wealth of information, especially reflecting on the relationship and her experience with assessment. Through the process of analysis I was able to reduce the content of Mickey's transcript to a number of themes that reflect her lived experience

of engaging in career exploration and the relationship that developed with her career specialist. Table 4.13 provides an outline of the number of exploratory comments and themes identified in Mickey's transcript.

Table 4.19

Number of Comments and Themes Gathered from Mickey

Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes	Super-Ordinate Themes
238	183	43

Mickey described her career exploration process as one that provided her with pieces to the puzzle. Her experience started off as nerve-wracking, where she felt lost and overwhelmed, but she left after three sessions feeling like she had more direction. Things that stood out for Mickey were her career exploration specialist's openness to responding to personal questions, the answers she got through the assessment process, and the process in general.

4.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, participant demographics and each participant's story were provided. Their backgrounds, previous experience with career exploration, and reasons for now returning to or entering into school and the career process once more were described. The way in which exploratory comments, emergent themes, and super-ordinate themes were created for each participant were demonstrated, along with reflections upon the insights gained through each interview process. Chapter 5 will present and discuss the master themes *across* these three cases and how the super-ordinate themes were useful in identifying master themes.

Chapter Five: Results across Participants

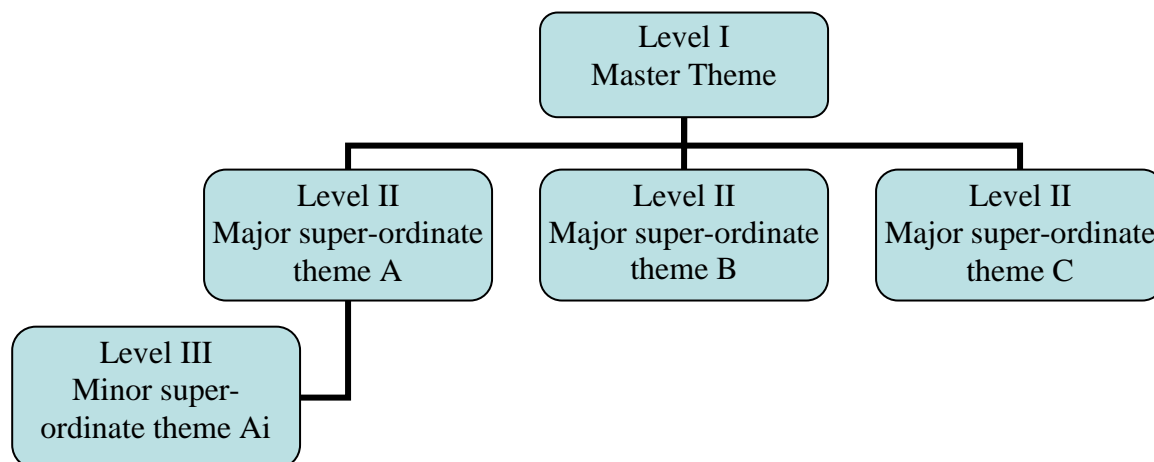
5.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the results of the across cases analysis I conducted to explore the lived experiences of mature students engaging in career exploration. The chapter commences with an explanation of how the data was prepared in this phase of the analysis. Each master theme is presented with a description, diagram, and explanation of the master theme and the super-ordinate themes it contains.

5.2 Preparation of Data

In order to analyse the data *across* participants, I organized the super-ordinate themes of each case into a Word file. All super-ordinate themes from all participants were colour-coordinated to remain identifiable to a single case and were printed. The super-ordinate themes for each participant were then posted on a bulletin board and I began the process of bringing super-ordinate themes together if they had common features. By taking time, sorting, resorting and regrouping the super-ordinate themes I began to arrange these super-ordinate themes into clusters. These clusters consisted of several sub-ordinate themes nested under a common topical area. Following further review, these topical areas were each named and became known as the master themes. These master themes were then entered into a Word file and reviewed a final time.

As shown in Figure 5.0, each cluster of master themes consisted of major sub-ordinate themes, followed by minor sub-ordinate themes. The number of major and minor sub-ordinate themes varied across master themes.

Figure 5.0 Levels of themes

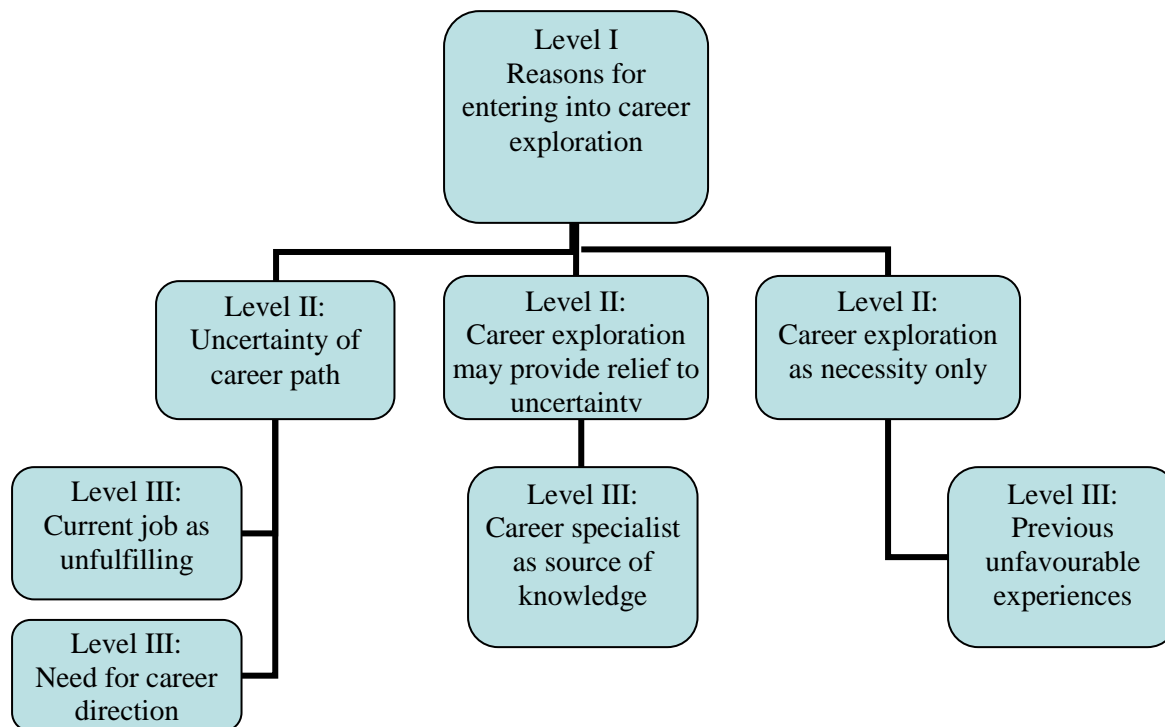
By engaging in this thought-provoking process, I was able to organize themes into a total of eight master themes across all cases. These master themes represent the overall meaning of the participants' lived experiences. I then looked at these eight themes carefully. I felt that three of them spoke to the career process and career- identity and five master themes dealt with the working alliance as defined and explained by participants. I begin with an explanation of career process and self-identity.

5.3 Career Process and Career Identity

5.3.1 Master theme I: Reasons for entering into career exploration.

This theme predominantly focuses on why participants decided to enter the career exploration process, the way in which they viewed career exploration, and how their emotions played a role in their decisions. This is summarized in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Master Theme I: Reasons for Entering into Career Exploration



5.3.1.1 Uncertainty of career path.

The participants' journeys commenced with a profound feeling of uncertainty. These feelings were perpetuated by this being the second or third time they had changed careers and an inability to feel satisfied with their current path, or a desire for a new one. There were two issues that participants felt best described their situation, as detailed below.

5.3.1.1.1 Current job as unfulfilling.

Participants attributed their feeling of loss to uncertainty toward their career satisfaction. This was often due to the fact that their current or past careers were unfulfilling for various reasons. For Mickey, her previous job “just didn’t fit because it was a very isolating type of work, it was very transient and that piece of the lifestyle didn’t fit with who I was as a person.”

In contrast, both Bubba and Sally appeared to appreciate their old jobs, but they identified that the job may not have been a good fit. Bubba described his old job as one that would not support him financially, and Sally described a desire for a job that, “is going to take me into my older years.” In each case, participants had reasons to leave their current jobs and move forward toward finding new careers.

Regret at not finding a career sooner was also a prevalent theme that occurred with participants; they often described that they had spent years just working in jobs versus having a career. This dichotomy of job versus career appeared often within participants’ descriptions of what they hoped to achieve and their current positions. Mickey described having a desire to have a career that “includes my lifestyle,” while Bubba hoped to find a long-term career that provided stability. In each case, participants described a feeling of regret at not finding a career that fit their desires and expressed concerns about continuing to look for such a fit.

5.3.1.1.2 Need for career direction.

Participants explained the importance of having direction in their new career path. Bubba stated that he did not have this direction because he “didn’t know what to do.” In fact, although all participants had decided to enter into university and enrol in an open studies program, their plans beyond this initial step needed time to develop. Feelings of being lost emerged as they tried to navigate their way through university while still lacking a concrete source of career direction.

5.3.1.2 Career exploration may provide relief to uncertainty.

Career exploration was viewed as a potential way of easing the negative and often overwhelming emotions of fear, uncertainty, and confusion, stemming from the worry of possibly choosing the wrong career. The potential for relief became evident when participants

viewed the career specialist as someone who could guide and help them with their decisions.

This is described in greater depth below.

5.3.1.2.1 Career specialist as source of knowledge.

Career specialists were described by Mickey as “somebody who has information that you’re going to find helpful.” Thus, participants hoped the career specialist would be able to ease their anxiety, regret, and fear they experienced by having the counsellors share their knowledge of career resources and aid them in finding a career direction. Participants explained that the career specialist was an individual who had training and access to career information that they themselves did not possess. Despite viewing the career specialist as an individual who has access to a plethora of career information, participants still felt uncertain and anxious about the career process. This unease and anxiety may be due to previous negative experiences that participants described having with career exploration. For example, Sally describes her experience as one where she received “bad advice” and feared that this would occur again.

Participants differed on their expectations of the knowledge they hoped to obtain from the career specialist, potentially influencing how much relief they anticipated receiving from the counselling experience. For example, Sally “expected somebody to give me the answers,” while Mickey’s expectations were to get “a little bit more clarification basically, not for [the career specialist] to tell me what to do necessarily...” Although expectations differed, the commonality that occurred across participants was that the career specialist, with their career knowledge, was seen as having the ability to potentially ease participants’ anxiety by providing them with relevant individual career information.

5.3.1.3 Career exploration as necessity only.

As illustrated in Figure 5.1 participants did not have a positive initial view of the career exploration process; in fact, as Bubba suggested, he “didn’t think much of it.” He found out about the career exploration process through the internet and through friends, but he did not initially consider it as a direction for help. Mickey describes what prompted her to use this service, “Basically, I was out of options... I tried to do it on my own for long enough.” Feeling frustrated at her lack of knowledge of career options, and feeling stuck in an uncertain path, she chose to utilize the career services the university provided. This was common across each case, with each participant identifying that engaging in career exploration was seen as a necessary option toward finding a career path and easing career uncertainty.

The career exploration process is viewed as a need-based service as opposed to a service that can be continuously used as an exploration process. Participants described themselves as only utilizing the service for three sessions and often ending once they felt they had received answers to their uncertainty. When queried if they would return or continue with career exploration, responses ranged from Mickey who indicated, “I’m going to forget about that until the next time I’m looking for a job,” to Bubba who said, “I couldn’t think of anything else that I needed from them to go back, so I don’t have a reason to go back.” Each of the participants in this study viewed career exploration as a necessity, to be utilized when they feel lost or uncertain but did not view career exploration as required for them to continue exploring their career possibilities.

5.3.1.3.1 Previous unfavourable experiences.

This view of career exploration as a *necessity* appeared to be influenced by the negative perceptions participants had earlier in their careers or the singular approach that can be taken to

the area of career exploration. Mickey, for example, describes the common view of career exploration by indicating that career resources are often not available outside of a university setting, and when they are available to the public, “no one is going to pay that much and sit down and talk about a career.” Participants explained that career services were difficult to find and, if available outside of the university, often too expensive for the client.

Sally and Mickey both described having negative previous career experiences, which influenced their view of career exploration. While these experiences occurred over a decade ago, they left a lasting impression on both women. Sally described her experiences as being given “bad advice,” while Mickey indicated her experience lacked a “personal connection” where the “focus wasn’t on what is right for you; it was on getting you back to work.” Both women appeared hesitant at first to re-enter into the career exploration process, reiterating that they did so only because they were out of options after Mickey confessed, she had “tried to do it on my own for so long...” Therefore, these negative experiences influenced participants’ emotional reactions toward entering into the career process a second time, causing them to feel anxious and hesitant.

While Bubba did not have previous career experience, his view of career exploration as a necessity also appeared to be mediated by negative past experiences with professionals. Specifically, he described incidences where he felt that services provided to help individuals were like the “meat market kind of thing,” further describing it as pulling numbers, waiting for a service, and then being disappointed by the service received. These experiences influenced participants’ current view of using career exploration as a service. All three participants had the expectation that it would be no different than previous career experiences, yet each felt the need

for help, and so would try again at the university where the service was designed for university students at no cost.

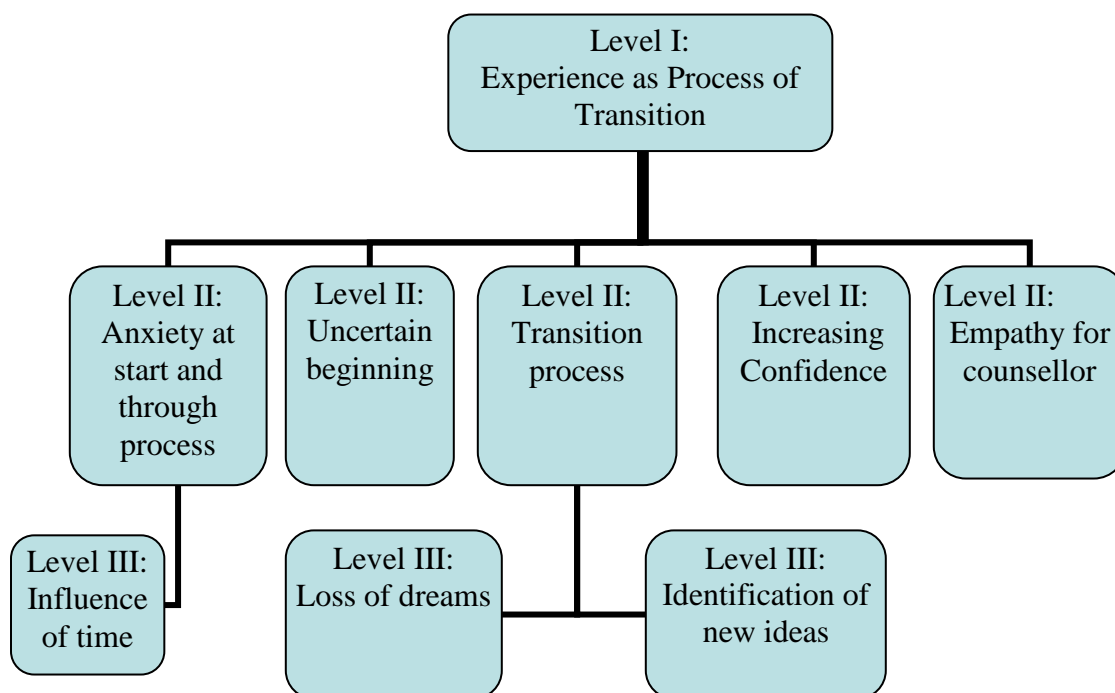
5.3.1.4 Summary.

The reasons each participant entered into the career exploration process was not due to choice or desire but because of feelings of fear, uncertainty, and anxiety toward a career paths. Participants hoped that the career specialist could provide information and would potentially relieve their uneasy feelings. Career exploration was viewed as a necessity and perceived as useful when one feels lost, uncertain of one's path, and lacking options. Even after engaging in the process, career exploration was viewed as a need-based service only, where guidance is provided by the career specialist. Once career information had been gathered by participants, there was no longer reason to continue engaging in the joint career exploration process.

5.3.2 Master theme II: Career experience as process of transition.

This theme predominantly reflects the transitions that occurred over the first to the third sessions and participants' emotional reactions and questions they posed about themselves as they engaged in the transition process over this time period. As participants engaged in career exploration, numerous changes occurred on an emotional level. Ideas, thoughts, and feelings transitioned across the three sessions. Figure 5.2 provides a visual representation of this master theme below, followed by a description of the themes.

Figure 5.2 Master Theme II: Experience as Process of Transition



5.3.2.1 Anxiety at start and through process.

Prior to entering into sessions, participants described feelings of uncertainty and anxiety at how the process would be beneficial as seen in Figure 5.2. This anxiety continued throughout the counselling sessions that participants experienced and was an overarching theme across the three participants. At many junctions, participants were anxious, uncertain, and felt overwhelmed by the exploration experience. One distinct mediating factor that influenced an increase in anxiety prior to and during the process was the issue of “time,” which is explored below.

5.3.2.1.1 Influence of time.

Time had an influence on anxiety in two distinct areas. The first was how time influenced the beginning of the process prior to even seeing the career specialist. Participants described feeling anxious because of the waiting period, and they explained that although they had

attempted to be seen earlier in the year they had to wait for lengthy time periods for an appointment. Bubba described how waiting impacted him:

Because it did take so long to make an appointment, I started to worry about things and make it worse in my head than it actually was. So I guess that caused a harder time to focus on what I needed to do to help myself and make a choice.

This long wait created anxiety and left Bubba wishing the appointment, “was earlier so I would have gotten more information sooner.” Participants were nervous as they waited and were left with their own thoughts, expectations, and hopes with uncertain resolutions.

The second influence was how time impacted the participants’ perceptions of the career specialist. Each participant described their career specialist as appearing to be rushed and distracted in sessions. Bubba identified that this was most likely due to “so many people waiting for that service,” but participants were nevertheless impacted. They described feeling rushed as a result of their career specialist appearing to be rushed; they felt unheard by their career specialist and did not have enough time to discuss all of their concerns. Sally identified that there was a large difference for her between her first and second sessions due to the impact of time:

The second time I didn’t feel as rushed... You know why it was the first week of January and people weren’t back in school yet... and I could get in right away that day so she wasn’t jammed packed and booked so that’s a big thing.

For Sally, seeing her career specialist when things were slower in the school year created the impression that the career specialist had more time for her. Without the career specialist appearing rushed, a connection was able to form and Sally felt comfortable discussing her concerns.

While university centers run on a budget and must be time efficient, counsellors being rushed were a concern for these clients. When more time was given, participants felt more relaxed, as Sally describes, “more at ease” in session. This allowed these clients to feel like they had more time to discuss topics of interest, express their concerns, and receive thoughtful responses from the career specialist. Taking time was a major factor in assisting these participants.

5.3.2.2 Uncertain beginning.

Participants described the beginning of their sessions as being uncertain. They did not know what to expect, particularly in view of their past experiences. The first session was often seen as more structured rather than flexible to the participants’ needs. Sally provided an in-depth description of her experience:

That was the first session; it was a little disappointing because I think I wanted more. The first session was really trying to identify my strengths which I had already identified, so [it] was a little bit useless for me... I had hoped that it would be different because I wanted something different when I started this process...

Similar experiences were identified by Bubba and Mickey, where the first session appeared to not meet their opening expectations of their career needs as mature students. Participants identified that this lack of fit was not the direct fault of the career specialist but that it was perpetuated by a lack of recognition that mature students may have differing needs. Participants did not identify possible approaches, but Sally noted that “It wasn’t anyone’s fault because it could have been good for someone younger maybe, but not for someone my age.” Bubba and Mickey also felt that the first session could have been a better fit for a younger population, indicating that this population can benefit from a different approach.

5.3.2.3 Transition process.

In the early session, there were surprising developments. While often participants experienced a loss of their career dreams, there was also new hope that stemmed from clarification of ideas and/or creation of new dreams. This shift was created by engaging in the career process where client ideas were challenged, career realities were discussed, career options were presented, and choices were generated for consideration. These are discussed below.

5.3.2.3.1 Loss of dreams.

As participants entered the beginnings of the career exploration process, two of the participants actually experienced a phase of personal or career loss. Through discussing their career aspirations with the career specialist, it became evident that the careers they initially desired were problematic for specific reasons. For example, participants described wanting to obtain careers that would require up to six years of education, a commitment that was not plausible given the participants' life circumstances. It was only through discussing these options with a specialist that new insights were discussed between the client and counsellor. For at least two of the participants, this was at once seen as a loss while at the same time offering new opportunities to these clients.

The initial response to this loss generated anger and uncertainty about the counselling experience, which led to an uncertainty toward self, "a lot of disappointment" in Sally's case. Sally explained that her disappointment was due to her desire to pursue her dream career and "wanting someone to tell me that I could do it." There was hope that the career specialist would help the client move toward his or her dream, but instead the career specialist provided options and information about the difficult reality that might be present toward getting to the client's dream. The responsibility of shouldering the disappointment was often realized by the client in a

hidden and non-disclosed way. In fact, no participant discussed their disappointment or anxiety with the career specialist. Instead participants noted, as Sally suggests, that she had, “expected too much...” of the process and themselves. By shouldering this disappointment, a shift in the expectations of the career process began to develop. Sally described seeing the career process differently as she continued to pursue it. The process was one of self-discovery and potential. While the loss of her dreams created disappointment, the situation created a realization for Sally that “there’s something there for me, it’s just not what I expected...”

5.3.2.3.2 Identification of new ideas.

New career ideas and possibilities were formulated as participants engaged in the career exploration process. For Mickey, this process provided hope and created a “clearer picture.” The formulation of new career ideas and possibilities did not happen instantaneously but took time, and they developed over the course of the career exploration process. In fact, none of the participants had a clear and solid career path chosen by the end of their third session, but rather they noted as Sally said, “I realized what possibilities are out there,” while Mickey felt that the career process has “definitely given me more pieces to the puzzle...” Bubba’s experience was that the process “gave me an idea of what I want to do...” for the future. In each case, the career exploration process offered a way for participants to see the world differently and to see themselves as an active contributing participant within this new world. Clearly, the participants had experienced a transition by going from unexpected outcomes at the beginning of the exploration to a sense of becoming a more self-confident person with a stronger sense of self-identity.

5.3.2.4 Increasing confidence.

Participants also identified that engaging in career exploration allowed them to feel more confident in their career path and career choices. This was aided by talking with the career specialist, completing the assessment process, investigating the potential outcomes with the specialist, identifying possible courses of action given personal thoughts and situations, and beginning to create a plan of action. These steps helped to affirm the client's ideas, options, and strategies. For Bubba, it got him confident in saying that certain jobs did not fit him and that "there's nothing wrong with me in choosing what I like..." Both Mickey and Sally also identified that they felt more confident in their choices, had a clearer idea of what to do going forward, and were glad they entered into the career exploration process.

5.3.2.5 Empathy for counsellor.

A final theme was participants' notion of felt empathy and gratitude toward their career specialists. These feelings did not present themselves at the beginning of the counselling period when participants felt uncertain, disappointed, anxious, and concerned about the sessions. Empathy and gratitude developed as participants gained confidence and identified new career paths to follow.

Empathy was repeatedly commented upon by participants. Bubba indicated, "She did as well as she could for having to be thrown in twenty times a day..." while Sally said, "She tried really hard too, and she did stay with me and she stayed focused." She went on to note an important factor in the career process by saying that it was not the career specialist's fault that her dreams were changed but rather, "she was just doing her job and being knowledgeable and being accessible..." Through the transitional process, the participants' uncertainties shifted toward empathy and respect for their career specialists' role in helping them to create new career

aspirations. At the completion of the career exploration process, participants were thankful and had a new understanding of their career specialists' roles and the tasks they performed for their clients.

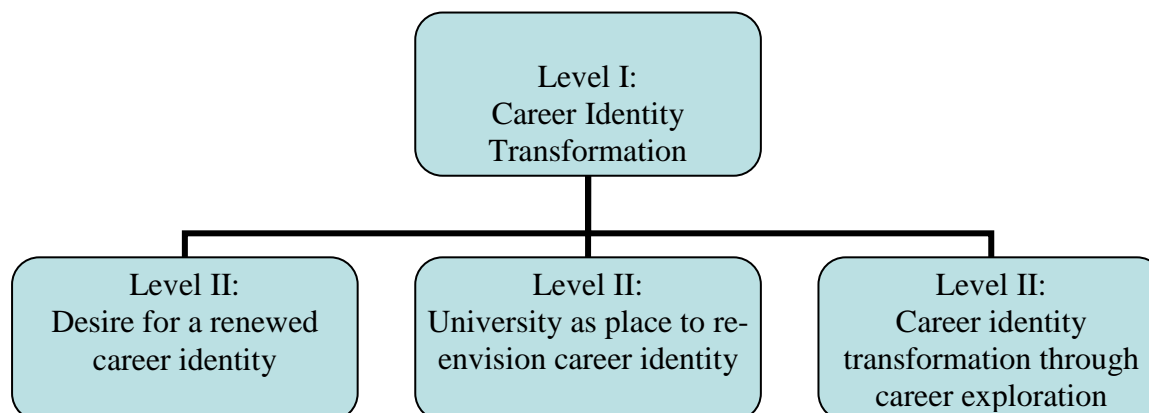
5.3.2.6 Summary.

By entering, proceeding with, and concluding the career exploration process, participants were thrust into a constantly changing period with many insights for these three mature students. At first, participants experienced anxiety due to waiting time, uncertainty of how the sessions would progress due to past experiences, and disappointment when expectations were suddenly not met. The fact that these were mature students having different needs may have been a factor in this issue. Their experiences included a loss of dreams, assessment, conversation, development of new options coupled with a new growth in confidence of one's career journey, and career decisions. At the end of the career exploration journey, all participants gained a renewed sense of empathy and gratitude toward their counsellors. This seemed to be retrospectively concluded by each of the three participants rather than noted through the actual counselling process.

5.3.3 Master theme III: Career identity transformation.

This theme focuses on how participants viewed their identities as mature students returning to university, their career identities, and shifts that occurred within themselves. University was viewed as the place to commence re-negotiating one's career identity, and further career identity change occurred by engaging in the career exploration process. Figure 5.3 provides a visual representation of how this was achieved and the themes that were crucial for this process to occur.

Figure 5.3 Master Theme III: Career Identity Transformation



5.3.3.1 Desire for a renewed career identity.

All three mature students aspired to move forward by re-envisioning their career identities. They felt lost and uncertain with their current career selves and explained that their past jobs and careers did not fit with their current lifestyles. Explanations for this lack of fit included, but were not limited to, lack of credentials, worry about health, or incongruence between their age and career work. Complicating this was the presence in midlife of children, aging, divorce, and changing living arrangements that further impacted their decisions on wanting to renew their career identity.

Each participant had different hopes for a renewed career identity. Mickey hoped to be “doing something that really meant something” and would be challenging for her, while Sally aspired to identify a career that would “take me into my older years.” Bubba was interested in exploring a renewed career direction due to a lack of fit between his credentials and his past career choices. Although participants were prompted by differing desires, they described wanting to create new career identities as they went forward with their lives.

5.3.3.2 University as place to re-envision career identity.

University was viewed as a place to commence the process of re-envisioning one's career identity. Bubba noted that university was a place that offered a "buffer to decide what to do" in a relatively safe place. Although participants identified being excited about the opportunity to re-envision their career identities, entering into university was stressful. There were concerns about their status as mature students related to how they would do in a university setting, anxiety about how overwhelming the process can be, and frustration at the lack of resources provided for mature students. They often felt different from other students. For example, Mickey explained that although she was technically a second-year university student she did not feel like she fit in. She stated that "this is my first crack at university," explaining that she identified more as a first-year rather than a second-year student and that this differentiation caused her to feel stressed and isolated. Participants were hopeful to have the opportunity to re-envision their identities and have access to new possibilities, but they were also anxious and uncertain about how to be a student within a university setting.

Participants' views of university as a place to re-envision one's identity were also at odds with their view of university as a stepping stone. As Sally described it, "I knew I needed more education to fulfill a career," it appears that university is seen as a means to gain credentials for a career. Similarly, Mickey saw the university process as "hoop jumping" to gain necessary credentials, but she also found the process frustrating and stressful. Participants described being shocked at how difficult their first year of university was, but it provided them with a time to explore their career paths as they had hoped.

5.3.3.3 Career identity transformation through career exploration.

University was a stepping stone toward re-envisioning career directions; however, it did not seem to be the only process needed to aid these students. Students still felt lost and uncertain of their career paths as they engaged in university. The second process that aided them in working through their career paths was engagement in the career exploration process. Through this process, participants were able to create an understanding of the “missing puzzle pieces” that Mickey felt was important to help her in her internal searching processes. By engaging in the career process, she said “you kind of get to re-invent yourself, and although not everything is going to be re-invented, you get to be the kind of person you really envision yourself being.” Although participants had commenced exploring new career-selves by entering into university, it was possible to be involved in the career exploration process in such a way as to create a safe environment for examining and further negotiating with himself or herself their career identities.

The career exploration process helped to build participants’ career identities; it pushed them to question what career aspects fit, and in Bubba’s case it was “what finalized my career idea.” For Sally, it helped her to question the career identity she had envisioned and recreate a career identity that was a new fit for her, while for Mickey the career exploration process helped solidify a career identity shift into a new area. Therefore, engaging in university alone did not appear sufficient to push participants into exploring their career paths, but by going through the full career exploration process they were able to question, explore, and try-on and develop the beginnings of their new career possibilities.

5.3.3.4 Summary.

Identity is an important aspect of mature students’ lived experiences of career exploration. Participants had a desire to create a new vision of their career identity and focus on

becoming someone different within the career world. The way to do this was to return to university, as this was seen as the only way to possibly gain a stable career path. As participants engaged in university, however, they felt at a loss and confused, and thus they entered into the career exploration process. It is by engaging in career exploration that these three mature students were able to identify paths and options that could lead toward re-visioning their career identity and reducing their anxiety about the unknown.

5.4 The Working Alliance

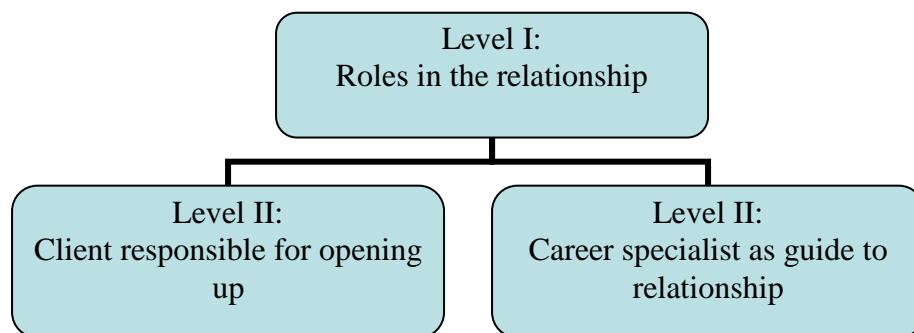
Five master themes have been identified as relating to the participants' lived experience of the working alliance. These themes focus on roles within the relationship, behaviours career specialist can engage in to help clients self-disclose, and a focus on the environment and assessment as it impacts the alliance. The last master theme focuses on considerations participants identified that may help enhance the alliance in the future. These are described below.

5.4.1 Master theme IV: Roles in the relationship

Within the exploration of the relationship that developed between the career specialists and the participants, it became evident that both client and practitioner had distinct roles according to these three mature students. The relationship was described differently by each participant in this study. For example, Mickey described the relationship as that of a "mentorship," whereas Bubba described it more as a "friendship" and Sally as a form of working relationship where the practitioner shares professional knowledge with the client. The commonality that occurred was how the participants viewed their role in conjunction to the practitioner's role and how this relationship was developed and maintained. Figure 5.4 provides a visual representation of the

master theme and the two super-ordinate themes that distinctly outline the differences in how this was viewed by participants.

Figure 5.4 Master Theme IV: Roles in the Relationship



5.4.1.1 Client responsible for opening up.

When discussing the relationship that developed between the client and the career specialist, it became evident that these three mature students viewed their role in distinctive manners. They identified that it was their personal responsibility to decide if they wanted to let the career specialist into their lives. Mickey explains both her role and the career specialists:

You have to let them in and say okay, this is my lifestyle, this is what I envision after work...and by discussing those bits of information you're painting the other person a complete picture of who you are as a person...

The client becomes responsible for the decision to open up to the career specialist. As Mickey said, "you have to open up that gate and let the other person really figure out how to get to the heart of the matter... you have to break down those barriers." It is the clients' decision to lower their barriers and allow the career specialist in on their personal and career experiences. If clients decide that they do not trust the career specialist or they feel uncomfortable, they maintain the

ability to disclose only what they believe is necessary without fully committing themselves to the relationship.

It also became apparent that the role of expectation and previous career experiences were an important part of clients' willingness to lower their barriers and be open with the career specialist. For example, due to his past experience with professionals, Bubba was weary of meeting the career specialist, concerned that he/she would be "really busy, be snippy and try to get me in and out as fast as possible." This perception of the career specialist created the expectation that the environment would be unwelcoming and the career specialist would be unfriendly, causing Bubba to feel uneasy in the first session. Bubba identified that it was his responsibility within this situation to disclose what information he felt comfortable sharing with the career specialist. Participants identified behaviours that aided them in becoming more open, but most importantly participants were adamant that it was they who decided to open up and become vulnerable within the relationship with the specialist.

When mutual expectations were not met within the relationship, it became more difficult for the client to self-disclose. Sally, for example, described how the relationship in the first session did not develop due to her disappointment with the specialist and the progression of the session. One might assume that this break in the alliance would fall on the therapist to try to repair; however, Sally described that she felt this repair fell on her shoulders. "I would say that maybe it wasn't really her doing, it was probably mine. Just realizing that she was just there to do her job, she did it, and I had to take it away and deal with it." In this context Sally implies that the relationship is something she has to initiate once she's accepted her disappointment, and she can decide how much self-disclosure to provide to the career specialist.

5.4.1.2 Career specialist as guide to relationship.

The role of the career specialist is to be the guide of the relationship. As a guide, it becomes the career specialist's responsibility to initiate conversation within the session and, according to Bubba, to "guide the conversation into what we needed to talk about." Participants noted feeling anxious and nervous at the start of the relationship, but as the career specialist asked opening and broad questions they felt they could open up. Mickey suggested, "there [are] a lot of interviewing questions and that sort of thing that comes from the other side [i.e. the career specialist] that needs to happen" for participants to feel receptive to the relationship. When one is stuck in the conversation, participants relied on the career specialist to ask questions to help them elaborate. Mickey indicated that, "the career counsellor can kind of guide you and say okay, let's not do this and this let's focus on somewhere in the middle." It was the career specialist who identified important aspects of conversations to focus on, narrowed the topics that the clients discussed, and helped to frame and guide the conversation. Although participants controlled what they disclosed, the career specialist took this information and formulated it into a therapeutic context to help the client delve deeper into the conversation.

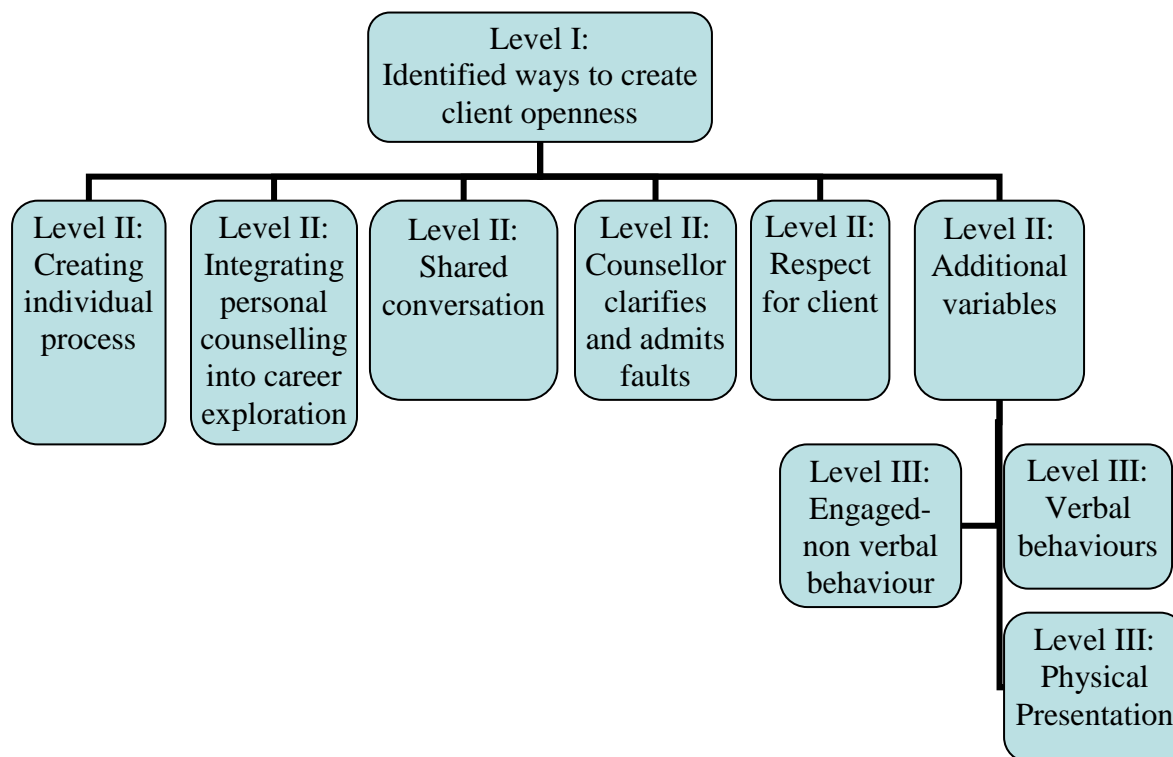
5.4.1.3 Summary.

Within the relationship that develops between client and career specialist, participants identified that there were distinct roles for each party in the relationship. Participants needed to be open within the relationship, deciding if they wanted to be vulnerable, while the career specialists' responsibility was to guide the relationship. It was the career specialists' task to guide the way for conversation and to be the first to start the discussion.

5.4.2 Master theme V: Identified ways to create client openness.

Participants provided in-depth information on how the career specialist, as a guide to the relationship, helped create client openness. The actions of their career specialist helped participants to feel more comfortable within the setting, enable them to feel vulnerable enough to trust the career specialist, and create an open environment with their clients. Over and above these identified actions, participants also outlined additional aspects of the relationship with their career specialist to allow them to trust their career specialist. Without these aspects present, all participants felt the relationship may not have developed to a place where they felt open enough to discuss personal and career concerns. They also noted that had these behaviours not been present within the sessions, they may well not have returned or benefitted from their experience. Figure 5.5 provides a visual representation of the master theme and the major super-ordinate themes that were found within this theme.

Figure 5.5 Master Theme V: Identified Ways to Create Client Openness



5.4.2.1 *Creating individual process.*

One action that helped participants feel like they could become vulnerable within the relationship was the career specialists' effort to make the sessions individualized. Both Bubba and Mickey felt as though this process was one that allowed them to be understood as clients. Bubba felt he was provided with "individualized information" relevant to his circumstance, and it was this individuality that allowed him to self-disclose more within sessions. By tailoring the session toward the individual experience of the client, the client felt that the career specialist truly cared about their career paths.

The ways in which sessions were identified as being individualized differed for each participant, but common themes included integration of information that was relevant to the client within sessions, and having the specialist ask questions that contained the participant's life

story and utilizing these for present and future discussions. Providing individualized assessment results that integrated individual and personal client feedback also created a personal experience. When sessions were individualized, the participants felt nurtured and individual within the relationship.

For Mickey this individualized process “builds trust, it kind of allows you to open the gate to talk about lifestyles and things like that...” For Bubba, this individualized process allowed him to slow down and discuss his concerns, and it created a supportive environment for him. For Sally, it was evident that a non-individualized session created dissonance within the relationship, as was evident by a poor first session where she felt the information provided by the specialist did not fit with her career needs. In contrast, when sessions became more individualized to her circumstances, she felt as though the information was “real life, it’s not institutional rhetoric,” making her feel more comfortable with her career specialist.

5.4.2.2 Integrating personal counselling into career exploration.

To instil trust and create a vulnerable atmosphere where clients could be open, it was important that the career specialist was interested in the “whole” client. Viewing the client this way did not entail focusing solely on career decisions, career path, or career questions, but navigating how the career fit with the client as a person while at the same time trying to understand personal contexts. Mickey said career is “a big part of your life,” but it was important to explore the personal contexts of the individual’s life, and how these influence career paths. By exploring the personal lives of participants, Mickey noted that the career specialist got a “whole picture of me.” Bubba noted that he felt he was “listened to...it was more about me” than just focused on finding a career. Bubba explains what he was able to discuss with his career specialist:

You know all the things you don't really tell people, like things that might be silly, I could tell her. Like thoughts of having to leave Calgary...I start wondering if there are other options...I thought about what I might end up doing and worrying, so I could tell her those things.

Exploring the person as a whole and integrating personal counselling helped reduce the participants' anxiety and fear, allowing them to reduce their personal barriers and engage more in the counselling process.

Participants also identified ways in which they felt their career specialist was considering them as a whole rather than focusing only on their career path. The career specialist was able to accomplish this by listening to the client and asking questions that were not solely focused on career-related endeavours. Bubba notes, "She was interested in what I was saying versus telling me what I needed..." For Mickey, it was this felt sense that the career specialist "cared about me actually figuring out what I needed to figure out at the time," which helped her feel that her career specialist was interested in her personal development within the context of a career direction. By questioning clients on their personal life contexts, and incorporating client responses and life concerns into the career setting, clients felt respected as a "whole" person.

5.4.2.3 Shared conversation.

Participants identified being engaged throughout different phases within their career sessions, but they noted that the personal conversations they engaged in with their career specialist created a different form of engagement. This engagement was short and unrelated to the task at hand, but it was more intimate and allowed participants to feel more comfortable in session. It provided Bubba, for example, with a sense of real connection, "Wow, a real

conversation.” Sally describes an incident where she discussed a picture in her career specialist’s office:

He/she had some pictures of places he’s/she’s been so they were really beautiful...I asked if he/she had been to those places and he/she said yes and told me where they were and that was all... I think it takes it to a little more of a personal level... It was more personal, we were very engaged, more engaged I would say than with the other things. It just felt, I guess because it was more personal, it felt more engaging in that moment.

For Sally, this shared conversation “made the environment more comfortable” and gave her a chance to be open, creating a “connection” between her and the career specialist. If this personal conversation did not occur the relationship would not have experienced a deeper connection, and it was this connection that helped Sally self-disclose more information within the session.

Mickey identified the relationship as, “a situational kind of thing...building a rapport is fairly one-on-one and not going to be the same for every person,” but for her it was this shared conversation that helped create a level of trust with her career specialist. Mickey noted, “The career specialist wasn’t cold about his/her own situation. I asked him/her about his/her education in the first session and he/she was very open about his/her educational and personal life.” This shared conversation included the career specialist revealing different levels of information. This information often included providing details about one’s credentials as a career specialist, discussing how the career specialist had entered into this profession, and revealing some personal information about one’s life. By sharing this information with clients, the career specialists illustrated themselves as human, demonstrated their own life experience, and helped to normalize

the client's career paths. By sharing educational information, clients also felt that their career specialist was a useful and positive source of help.

Interestingly, shared conversations that occurred outside of the sessions were also enjoyed by participants. They identified that they felt remembered or special if their career specialist asked how they were doing outside of session. This did not include identifying oneself as their career specialist but simply acknowledging the client's presence in another environment. When acknowledged in this manner, it created a more personal environment and let the client feel important, as well as helped to create more trust in future interactions. Mickey provides an example:

I run into him/her on campus all the time and it's like "Hey, how are you, how are things going?" We definitely are not taking just a professional interest in each other but more of a personal one too...I think for me personally this was something that I needed so I could kind of let that trust build. It's a huge thing.

A note of caution that became apparent was that too much self-disclosure or advisory information from the career specialist was not appreciated and negatively impacted the relationship. This was a concern that had occurred with Sally and Mickey in their previous career experiences, where their career specialist provided too much information that bordered on providing advice versus creating a personal connection. The negotiating line between too much self-disclosure and not enough appears balanced by simply responding to Sally's questions: "He/She answered what I wanted to know... It was just straightforward and it was good." In previous career experiences, Sally describes being given bad advice and feeling judged by the career specialist. She described too much information as information that contained the career specialist's biases and value statements.

5.4.2.4 Career specialist clarifies and admits faults.

An action that aided participants in feeling connected, relaxed, and open within the process included the career specialist admitting mistakes and clarifying misunderstandings. When there was an uncertainty in regard to meaning, more respect was given to the situation when the career specialist asked the client to explain again. By clarifying, participants felt respected.

Admitting mistakes and questioning misunderstandings also created a level of equality between the client and the career specialist, as it demonstrated the fact that the career specialist was not making assumptions on the individual's life. Mickey noted, "The person you're talking to can obviously enlighten you or bring your attention to certain things but they can't tell you anymore about you than you already know about yourself." The client is the expert, and by questioning misunderstandings the career specialist was allowing more room for the clients to explain who they were as a person.

Bubba suggested this clarification also helped, "organize ideas that I was having" and created a 'back and forth' passing of information. This became particularly important when discussing assessment results. For example, Bubba responded to his career specialist with "this doesn't really sound like me" when exploring assessment results. By asking, "Does this fit with you?" rather than assuming it did, Bubba felt that his career specialist was being respectful and mindful that not all assessment results would be accurate. This opened the pathway for further explanation to the client about the results, which eased Bubba's anxiety.

5.4.2.5 Respect for client.

An important action that helped client openness was feeling respected by their career specialist. Participants differed on how important respect was to them within the relationship, but all participants also identified that lack of respect created a negative environment. In the end,

Sally states it well: “Respect, absolute bottom line... no matter where a person is coming from, a single mother on welfare, who cares, that’s no less a person than someone who has a PhD.”

Respect provided an equal footing for client and career specialist, helping clients be more vulnerable within the relationship due to a decrease in fear of judgement. Ways in which participants felt respected differed, but a common theme included feeling respected when their career specialist was listening to them. If the career specialist was open about himself or herself, clients felt equal to their specialist and respected in relation to power differentials. Feeling accepted as a “whole” from the career specialist was also an indication that the client was being respected.

Participants only identified one specific behaviour that the career specialist engaged in that to them indicated that they were being respected. This was engaging in the act of paraphrasing. Paraphrasing what participants stated was a way that clients identified being heard. Paraphrasing was often associated with the notion that the career specialist was listening to the participant’s stories because they were able to reiterate them. Sally indicated, “I can tell you’re listening to me because of the way you’re paraphrasing”. Participants did not indicate that they understood how paraphrasing was done exactly, but Bubba suggests it included “not repeating but reiterating or restating” what was said “in a way that it clarified it for me”. Paraphrasing not only demonstrated respect but also helped participants to clarify the ideas they were presenting to their career specialists. When the career specialist utilized paraphrasing as a tool within the session, clients identified being respected by their career specialist, and felt more comfortable within session.

5.4.2.6 Additional variables.

Many incidences were noted that allowed for more in-depth exploration of different actions that, when present, had a small impact on the relationship but, if lacking, would create deterioration in the relationship. Examples of these included engaged non-verbal behaviours, verbal behaviours, and career specialist physical presentation.

5.4.2.6.1 Engaged non-verbal behaviours.

Non-verbal behaviours included the career specialist smiling, having eye contact, shaking clients' hands, having an open stance when in session, and facing the client face-to-face. By engaging in these actions participants felt respected, listened to, and more comfortable with the interaction. These were considered small actions that could help further enhance the relationship because they often made the career specialist personable, kind, and friendly. Participants also appreciated when these behaviours occurred. Non-verbal behaviours were noted to be only beneficial if they did not occur in an excessive manner. For example, Sally noted, "She looked me in the eyes when I was talking, which I appreciated. I mean not like peering into my soul but just eye contact." Although non-verbal signals were beneficial, it should be noted that no cultural context was discussed and that responses to these behaviours may differ depending on cultural background.

5.4.2.6.2 Verbal behaviours.

Verbal behaviours that helped clients feel relaxed, open, and listened to in session included the career specialist talking in a friendly manner, being articulate, using non-judgemental words, not being demeaning, and having a respectful tone. Of all the types of verbal behaviours that could have been discussed by participants, tone was the only one described in depth and appeared to have a strong influence on how participants interpreted their career specialist's

responses to questions. For example, Sally noted, “I think just her tone...a little bit sharp with their responses like kind of ‘you should know that’...” impacted how close Sally felt she could get to her previous career specialist. In contrast, her current specialist had an appealing tone that was more accepting, respectful, and non-judgemental. She felt her career specialist was putting in an effort to “meet me where I’m at.” It was by having a welcoming and respectful tone that Sally felt comfortable within the relationship.

5.4.2.6.3 Physical presentation.

As mature students come from an employed, professional background, the career specialists’ style influenced the relationship. All participants identified that they viewed their career specialists as dressing appropriately and in a formal, professional manner; this aided them in believing the credibility of the career specialists’ knowledge. It also created respect for the career specialist. Sally noted, “She’s very well presented...I guess when you see someone who is sort of unkempt you maybe think that person is scattered.” This perception was shared across participants, where dishevelled appearances led to feeling that the career specialist was rushed or unorganized while formal appearances suggested organization and commitment. Participants did not state that having an unkempt career specialist would ruin the relationship but that it was nice to see their career specialist presenting in a formal, confident manner.

5.4.2.7 Summary.

It is the participant’s responsibility to be open within the relationship, but there are certain behaviours and non-verbal actions a career specialist can engage in or demonstrate that create an open and trusting environment. These include, creating an individualized process where the client feels important and respected, being interested in the client as a whole, and respecting the client as a person. By engaging in shared personal conversation, clients feel more comfortable in

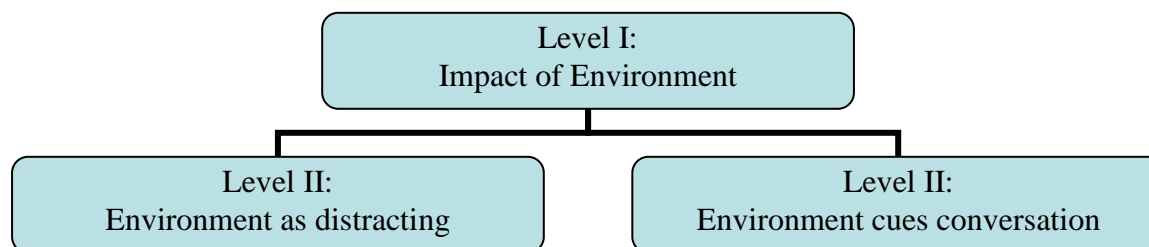
being open and responsive in the relationship while their career specialists were more human when they admitted to faults or asked clarifying questions.

Finally, it was found that having good non-verbal and verbal behaviours like eye contact and an inviting tone helped to reduce anxiety. Participants were also more relaxed and felt they could be vulnerable when they visually saw the formality of their career specialists, who were professionally presented. Engaging in non-verbal and verbal behaviours, separate or together, are ways to create an open environment and encourage clients to become more comfortable, perhaps more relaxed and even vulnerable to engage in the career exploration process.

5.4.3 Master theme VI: Impact of environment

The environment had a large impact on how the relationship developed and progressed. Specifically, there were instances where the environment created problems for the relationship and changed the way in which participants viewed their career specialist. In other instances, the environment eased tension in the relationship and reduced client anxiety by providing a conversational component to the relationship. The environment stood out to participants in their current lived experience because it played an important role for each one of them. Figure 5.6 provides a visual representation of the master theme. There are two super-ordinate themes that will be described in more detail below.

Figure 5.6 Master Theme VI: Impact of Environment



5.4.3.1 Environment as distracting.

Two aspects of the environment were perceived as distracting for clients and were noted to impact the relationship. The first was a constantly shifting setting that caused participants to feel disorganized and misplaced. Participants stated that it was difficult to associate continuity with their career specialist when they were unsure where to find the specialist. Although this was not a large problem, as their office is now permanently located for clients in a career setting, participants did note that being informed of the changes would have been appreciated.

A second way involved the location of the current office and how the design is distracting to participants. For example, the general office space is located in glass buildings, which to some participants, like Bubba, made him feel as though he was “sitting in a glass bowl.” He found the environment distracting and felt it took away from the general experience as he couldn’t concentrate on the career specialist and the process at hand. Bubba felt that the career specialist’s room was a “busy office...He/She had his/her computer going on behind him/her and books and other things so it was like neat and suddenly I’m distracted.” Cluttered environments also impacted the relationship, as it provided the participants with a first impression of their career specialist being disorganized, making it difficult for them to feel comfortable in the setting.

5.4.3.2 Environment cues conversation.

If the office was not overly cluttered but contained some personal objects, this provided clients with a way to engage in shared conversation with the career specialist. Sally noted, “The career specialist has pictures and plants and some nice homey stuff.” These personal objects provided a safe venue for Sally to enter into a non-threatening conversation with her career specialist prior to engaging in career exploration. Mickey observed that it also helped create a “comfortable cozy” feeling that relaxed her when engaging with the specialist.

A final environmental consideration that was deemed important were the small but professional rooms, which had desks and chairs and a place to have a one-on-one conversation, without people walking around the office or interrupting. Mickey noted, “Having a quiet place to connect with one another would have been a big part of it, the surroundings, the situation.” Without these positive factors to the environment, the relationship would not have been ruined but it would have been impacted. Clients such as Sally, identified that although they would still “connect” to their career specialist, the environment helped them create a connection sooner. The environment aids in creating a safe place for the client to self-disclose to the career specialist, and it also represents a visual illustration of the career specialist’s organization and values.

5.4.3.3 Summary.

The environment in which career exploration occurred had a large impact on participants. If the environment was held in different locations then this was seen as overly cluttered, creating distractions and presenting the career specialist as disorganized. If the environment was organized and contained only a few personal objects but was not overly professional, this allowed participants to engage in a safe conversation about a piece of the environment. This helped create a more one-on-one feeling to the atmosphere.

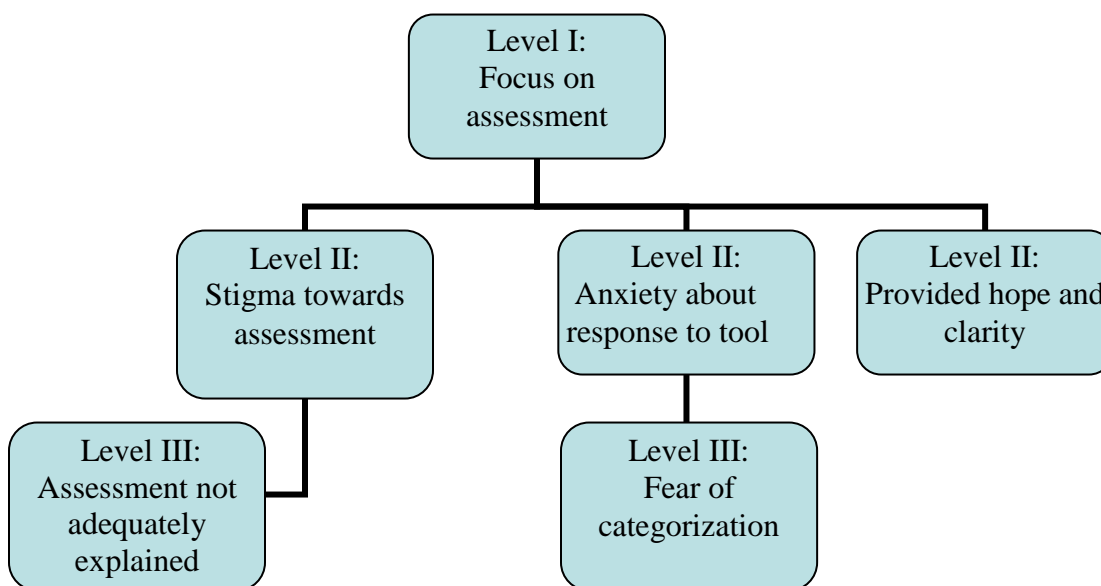
5.4.4 Master theme VII: Focus on assessment.

Within the university career setting, assessment is an integral part of the career exploration process. Therefore, assessment stood out as a large part of the participants’ lived experience and impacted the working relationship with their career specialists. They described the experience as one that was overwhelming but insightful. While it often started as a process where participants felt nervous, uncertain, and overwhelmed, as participants progressed through the experience of engaging in assessment they took away many insights from the objective assessment process.

The way in which the assessment tool was used by the career specialist also impacted their view of the relationship and of the overall experience.

Figure 5.7 provides a visual representation of this master theme of assessments. It contains three major super-ordinate themes that focus on different aspects of the lived experience of engaging in assessment

Figure 5.7 Master Theme VII: Focus on Assessment



5.4.4.1 *Stigma toward assessment.*

When the option was given to participants to complete a standard inventory assessment, they did so reluctantly. Bubba confessed, he agreed because he was “out of options.” This response was largely due in part to assessment tools being seen as a generalized assessment strategy, while the participants in this study were each looking for an individualized and personal approach to their career dilemmas. By engaging in the assessment process, they felt the individualized experience would be limited, the sessions would become more “generic...because

they seemed like those responses would be for everybody” as noted by Sally. Mickey explains her hesitancy:

It kind of makes you feel a little pigeonholed because you’re just like “Well, everyone else on the planet is taking this test to figure out what they should do for a career...” I can’t trust it.

Each participant held the perception that the assessment process would reduce the importance of the one-on-one experience with the career specialist. In fact, each felt that the utility of the career specialist was diminished once they were asked to engage in assessment. As Mickey said, “How come I’m coming to see you if I’m doing these two tests and they will tell me everything?” This process created a dissonance with participants that served only to increase their stress, especially since they were also unaware of the function of these assessment tools. Mickey noted, “It was a little stressful and you’re wondering what the heck you’re doing there...”

This dissonance also arose from regret of their inability to identify a career path without the use of an assessment tool. Participants felt ashamed of their own abilities to sort themselves out about their career directions and were anxious to seek help. Mickey said, “How come I just can’t figure this out on my own?” This was a question often voiced by participants. Mickey explains her fear and shame of the assessment: “Wow, how is a test going to be able to tell me how I feel and think?” Mickey and participants described searching for answers to no avail. By entering into the process and having to complete an assessment inventory that might lead them in a new direction they could not find themselves, it became a frustrating experience.

This stigma can likely be traced to the participants’ experiences with career exploration in the past and how they found the process to be neither helpful nor personal. The second reason, which was perhaps more important, was that this assessment process was not being adequately

explained to participants prior to them engaging in it. Participants were provided with some details but noted they were not sufficient. This is described below.

5.4.4.1.1 Assessment not adequately explained.

The minor super-ordinate theme reflects the fact that participants felt the assessment inventory was not explained in enough depth. Participants described being informed on a superficial level about why the inventory could be helpful to them, the purpose for its use, and what it could offer. They described desiring a more in-depth exploration of this tool, as this would have reduced their frustration and anxiety about completing the assessment inventory.

When participants were finally provided with information about the way the inventory was used, some background about the creation, and purposes of the inventory, each of the participants could then see the reasons why they might benefit from completing the inventory. This needed to be provided up front instead of waiting for participant completion of the inventory. As Bubba said, “It seemed like it was there on its own, it didn’t have any explanation,” hence the anxiety and frustration.

After completing the assessment process and discussing it with their career specialists, participants were informed that the assessment information was not, as Bubba and Mickey indicated, “written in stone.” This realization helped to decrease their anxiety, but it was described as occurring too late. Mickey explains that when the career specialist informed her, “I’m giving you these tests to gather information and take this information from these tests and use it to actually figure out a few puzzle pieces,” her anxiety decreased dramatically. However, this information was given after Mickey engaged in the assessment process and she notes that it would have been more beneficial up front. By being able to understand the utility and purpose of these tests, participants’ anxiety would be decreased.

5.4.4.2 Anxiety about response to tool.

As participants responded to the questions on the assessments, fear and anxiety increased. There was a heavy concern toward answering the questions appropriately and in a manner that would reflect their personality. Participants felt pressured, explaining that because they knew little about the assessment tool they felt as though their responses would dictate the rest of the process. For Bubba, he noted that many of his answers were neutral and he worried if this would reflect on him in some way after completion. As Mickey said, engaging in the assessment process was “a little intimidating and confusing... just because you don’t know if you’re answering those things properly.” All participants identified varying levels of fear in response to how their answers would be interpreted and how this may lead to them being categorized.

5.4.4.2.1 Fear of categorization.

As participants were not given direction that their responses would not in any way be indicative of their identities, fear of being labelled was a concern amongst these students. Bubba was worried about being classified as an “A or B type” that would dictate his career path. Mickey indicated she had fears that her responses might somehow “affect the outcome” of the career exploration process, that it would be “this group thing and you’re in group A or group B or group C” and this could potentially have further consequences. Although this categorization ultimately proved not to be the case, participants said they may not have continued with the assessment process had they found other avenues that would have reduced their anxiety. Not having an understanding of the outcome of the assessment process increased client anxiety, creating uncertainty within them and a fear of being categorized.

5.4.4.3 Provided hope and clarity.

Toward the end of engaging in the assessment process, participants were less anxious, more hopeful, and felt they had clarified their own career path. What inspired this shift from anxiety to hope and clarity was re-engaging in the one-on-one process with the career specialist and discussing the assessment results. Mickey noted that she realized this phase had become “individualized, and it wasn’t this group thing.” The process of exploring individualized assessment results created confidence once again with the career process. The individualized assessment results also provided participants with possible career interests, options, and directions that they may not have considered otherwise.

The assessment results provided hope, as they helped to instill confidence in the career path. As Bubba noted, “It really helped me realize that okay well there’s nothing wrong with me choosing what I like, so that’s okay.” The objectivity of the measure helped participants feel as though the results were not just shared ideas between people but were in fact solid and helpful. Bubba took strength from the fact that the inventory “statistically said that 99% of people like you choose this.” This objectivity aided participants in feeling normalized and opened up the conversation with the career specialist.

The results provided participants with more ideas and career options than they were aware of, highlighting Bubba’s notion that, “I could choose a career that would be good for me, whatever abilities I have.” He said it helped to “put thoughts into a bit more of a pattern for you so you can kind of lay it out.” By discussing these results with a career specialist, patterns emerged in which participants were provided with potential career paths, thus leading to options and the answers they sought through engaging in the consultation process.

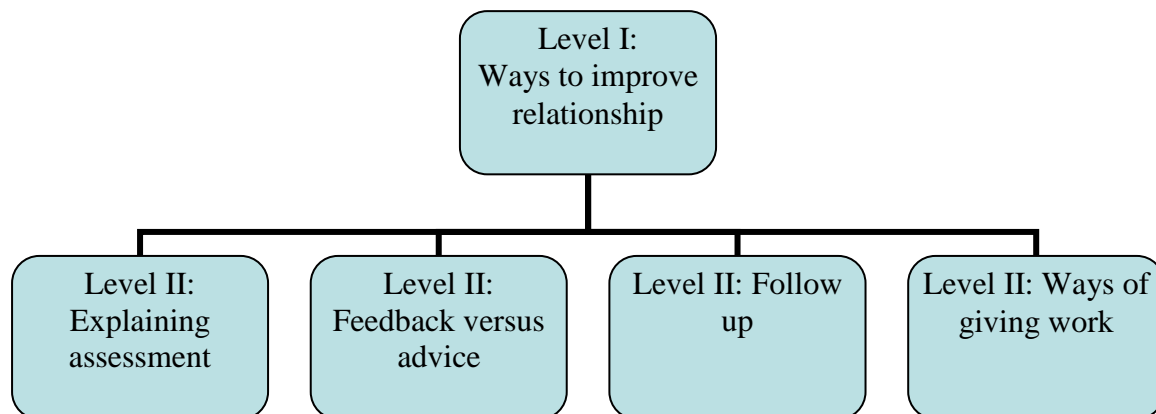
5.4.4.4 Summary.

The process of engaging in assessment had a large impact on mature students' lived experiences. Depending on how this process was handled, it also influenced the relationship. Participants felt anxious about the assessment due to past experiences and a fear of being labelled by others. They felt that the assessment inventories were not adequately explained prior to completing these measures, thereby increasing their anxiety as they worried about responding correctly to the questions. Upon completion of the assessment and discussing results with the career specialist, anxiety diminished and was replaced with hope and clarity. These objective measures provided the ability to be confident in one's likes.

5.4.5 Master theme VIII: Ways to improve relationship.

By discussing a 'wish list' of items, participants were able to create several ideas they believed would improve the working alliance between client and career specialist. These considerations are hypothetical in nature. Had these considerations been present, each of the participants believed their relationship would have been enhanced with the specialist. These suggestions included explaining the assessment process in more detail, providing feedback, follow up, and considering different ways of providing homework or work between sessions. Participants identified that these considerations are able to enhance the relationship as they help instil confidence within the relationship, create more respect toward the client, and make the process more individualized. Figure 5.8 provides a visual representation of the master theme and the super-ordinate themes that compose it.

Figure 5.8 Master Theme VIII: Ways to Improve Relationship



5.4.5.1 Explaining assessment.

Explaining the assessment strategies to clients before rather than after completion would have reduced anxiety. As Bubba noted, providing a “blurb on them...to describe them in more detail and the benefit of them and what I needed them for” in order to help decide “what would fit better for me.” Providing more information would help create a sense of agency with clients while easing their anxiety of engaging in the unknown assessment process.

5.4.5.2 Feedback versus advice.

In the past, participants identified that they received what they classified as advice from their career specialists. Advice was considered to be unwanted information, or the career specialist’s opinion, or negative and/or judgemental commentary to a person’s dilemma and career choice. What participants desired was to be given general information they could choose to use or dismiss with their career planning. Often information is given on alternative pathways or choices to a chosen career, linked with information pertaining to university. Participants appreciated feedback from individuals with professional and personal insights and accuracy. When this was done, participants suggested this would help reduce anxiety and uncertainty.

Although participants received some feedback from their career specialists, further information would be helpful for clients.

5.4.5.3 Follow up.

Participants felt that if the career specialist engaged in follow-up with the clients then this would take the experience, as noted by Sally, “to another level.” Follow-up might include an e-mail from the career specialist asking the client how they were progressing on their career journey and reminding them of potential follow-up services offered by the Centre for these clients. Although e-mails are presently sent out en masse, participants stated that receiving a personal e-mail from their career specialist would be beneficial. It would help them feel individualized and remembered while reminding them of the services that are available. For them, an e-mail would be a friendly reminder that they were not alone and have options if needed.

5.4.5.4 Ways of giving work.

Two different ways became evident in relation to how career specialists give homework or work to clients that participants felt could be altered. Providing work for clients to complete during the wait period to the first appointment was suggested by participants. This work may include websites a client could explore, information relevant to the career process they could read about, or other places they could visit. This could be done via an e-mail with information that was optional, allowing motivated clients to engage in a self-assessment early in their process and thereby decreasing their anxiety prior to the first session. Bubba felt this would “give the career specialist an impression of me.” Bubba suggests that this would help streamline things, allowing the counsellor to know a small piece of the client and decreasing his anxiety and uncertainty of going into a new situation.

A further suggestion was to have the assessment completed within a session versus doing it outside the career centre. Participants who provided this suggestion noted that it may not be plausible to do an entire assessment in session. Instead, they suggested that parts of the assessment could be done with the specialist, or a small section, so that the career specialist may gather more information in the moment to client responses and clients could have a chance to clarify any misunderstandings. Sally described the benefit of doing this as “I would be receiving his/her responses...so a little more input.” This idea of doing the assessment in session was more hypothetical that participants thought could be beneficial to the alliance.

5.4.5.5 Summary.

Participants were able to identify ideas they believed would help to enhance the working alliance relationship. These ideas included providing a better explanation of the assessment prior to assigning the assessments, thereby decreasing anxiety. Additionally, options and choices could be provided as part of feedback rather than advice to clients. Engaging in follow-up e-mails and altering the way in which homework is given were also suggested as potential activities that could help enhance the working alliance between client and career specialist.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth overview of the eight master themes and their connection with major and minor super-ordinate themes. Each was provided with excerpts from participant transcripts in order to demonstrate the depth of emotion, frustration, hope, and movement that the participants experienced. The themes can be classified into two distinct sections: a focus on the career exploration process and career-identity, and the working alliance between client and career specialist. An interpretation for this section is provided in Chapter 6 .

Chapter Six: Interpretation and Implications

6.1 Introduction

The objective of this study was to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of mature students engaging in career counselling and to explore the development of a working alliance during this process. Following the presentation of the thematic analysis *within* and *across* participants in previous chapters, the focus of this chapter is interpreting a process model that explains the transition that occurs when mature students engage in the career exploration process. This interpretation will then be explored in relation to literature presented earlier in the thesis. The chapter concludes by critically examining a retrospective view of the method used for the study, strengths and limitations identified from this study, and implications for future research and practice. Final remarks include my personal reflection of how this study impacted personal learning.

6.2 Literature and Study Results

This section will provide a brief summary of the literature referenced in Chapter 2 and explore how this study enhanced what is known about career development, the working alliance, and mature students.

6.2.1 Career development and study results.

6.2.1.1 Literature review.

Chapter 2 provided a review of the history of career development definitions and processes and explained some of the different career theories that are utilized in career exploration today. Seven career theories were presented in Table 2.0 as being often utilized by career specialists. These ranged from theories of content, such as Holland's theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments, to constructivist theories, such as Lent and Brown's (2006) Social

Cognitive Framework. In this study, participants described their experiences of engaging in career exploration. Although these theories are useful, the stories revealed in this study fit best with a career framework that highlights the importance of transitions. Of particular importance is Schlossberg's transition model (2011), which explores adult transitions and ways to cope with them. Schlossberg also offers a transitional framework for work transitions and provides practitioners with concepts to consider when working with adults.

6.2.1.2 Study results.

For participants, engaging in career exploration created an array of emotions ranging from anxiety to hope and encouraged participants to redevelop their roles and assumptions about their career selves. In essence, they experienced a transition. Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) describe a transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions and roles" (p. 33). Within the literature, there is a focus on adult student transitions (Hardin, 2008); however, this focus primarily refers to events such as divorce, academic deficiencies, and academic identity. What is missing is a focus on the career processes mature students engage in while attending university.

By comparing the definition of what a transition entails to participant experiences in this study, the process of engaging in career exploration seemed to be a transition in its own right. When they commenced with this process, participants were put into a situation where they had to assume a new role in which they questioned their assumptions about the working world in the context of their previous and present career identities. The transition initiated by engaging in career exploration differed for each participant with respect to time and the impact it had on their lives, but each identified that the transition caused them to reconsider their career directions.

6.2.2 Career focus and working alliance.

6.2.2.1 Literature review.

Chapter 2 offered an overview of the working alliance as it pertains to counselling and career contexts. A definition, the history, and the context of the working alliance were provided. Literature focusing on the impact of the working alliance and the variables that influence it derive from personal counselling research. The working alliance in a career context has only recently emerged as a topic of research interest, but this relationship has been found to be imperative to career counselling (Perdrix et al., 2010). Client ratings of this relationship in a career context also differ from practitioner ratings, suggesting it is important to explore how this relationship is experienced by clients (Elad-Strenger & Littman-Ovadia, 2011). In this study, participants were invited to discuss what helped and hindered the development of a working alliance as they engaged in career exploration. This study supports the importance of the alliance in a career context as noted by Perdrix et al., (2010), and highlights the importance of considering client feedback about the relationship, as mature student voices have not been expressed on this topic. These are explored below.

6.2.2.2 Study results.

Literature supports that a positive working alliance enhances career prospects, increases life satisfaction, and decreases career indecision (Masdonati et al., 2009). This study adds to the literature by emphasizing that the alliance was imperative to their transition experience of engaging in career exploration for these participants. This study also enhances the literature by highlighting the importance of two specific aspects of the alliance within a career context: the importance of factors contributing to the alliance and the importance of integrating personal context into career exploration.

6.2.2.2.1 Important factors to the working alliance.

This study qualitatively explored factors that helped or hindered the development of a working alliance within a career context. Participants in this study identified similar constructs to the literature that they considered important to the alliance. These include: professional presentation, knowledge, honesty, and sincerity (Bedi, 2006); body language or micro-behaviours (Duff & Bedi, 2010); the importance of limited self-disclosure (Myers & Hayes, 2006); and respect to the client (Ackerman & Hilsenroth, 2003). Each participant in this study also classified the relationship differently; this relationship was nurturing, professional, or similar to a friendship depending on each participant's perspective. These relationships demonstrated that clients may have different preferences for alliance types, as is described in the literature (Bedi & Duff, 2009).

Within the career context, factors that stood out for participants which have not been fully addressed by past literature include the importance of creating an individualized career session for mature students and the integration of personal issues into a career context. Participants identified that the individualized process was important to their experience of transitioning through career exploration. By having career exploration sessions tailored to them, participants felt respected, remembered, and important. As respect was a large part of what created a positive alliance for these mature students, this individualized process was critically important to participants. Brown and Krane (2000) noted that it is important to provide clients with one-on-one feedback in career counselling; however, participants in this study emphasize that the one-on-one interaction needs to be present from the first session onward. When this sense of individualization was lacking, participants stated that the session was problematic as it did not meet their needs, making them hesitant to return for their second session with the specialist. This

individualized process may be a way to build a relationship and elicit feedback, which might lead to a continuity of clients from the first to the second session, as continuity across sessions has been found within the literature to be difficult in career settings (Rochlen et al., 2002).

6.2.2.2.2 Personal context in career exploration.

The integration of personal concerns into career contexts has been widely debated within the literature, with older career models emphasizing a strict career focus while more recent models integrate personal concerns (Bedi, 2004; Amundson, 2006). Within this study, the integration of personal concerns into career contexts helped to enhance the working alliance and to create a space for participants to feel heard and accepted. Similar to the literature focusing on mature students' stressors (Tones et al., 2009), participants experienced a variety of stressors, transitions, and unique economic and personal demands that young students may not experience. By respecting and opening discussion about these concerns within a career context, participants identified that this helped them feel open within the relationship and respected. The participants' desires to be seen as a whole person are in accordance to Amundson's (2003) statement that factors such as family, leisure, and spirituality should be considered in career concerns. Participants within this study demonstrated the importance of considering recent models of career development that emphasize the integration of personal concerns into career context. Amundson (2006) proposes that narrative and post-modern approaches to career exploration should be considered as a way to approach the integration of personal contexts, which Bedi (2004) notes is important for this field to consider as it grows.

6.2.2.3 Summary.

This study enhances literature regarding the working alliance within a career context by exploring its importance and defining specific incidences that help or hinder the alliance. The

working alliance within career contexts is just as imperative as within personal contexts, and thus it was considered to be an important issue in the career transition. This study demonstrates the importance of creating individualized sessions for clients and integrating personal concerns into a career context in order to enhance the working alliance.

6.2.3 Career and mature university students.

6.2.3.1 Literature review.

Chapter 2 offered a review of career literature as it related to the traditional university student, who is typically between the ages of 18-24 years old. The literature is extensive and highlights that students entering into university endure unique stressors, transitions, and experiences compared to other adults. Of particular importance is the issue of mature students, who within the literature have been noted to have differing experiences from 18-24 year old university students (Mercer, 2007). While mature students did share many of the issues noted in the literature related to typical university students, such as experiencing stressors (Hamaideh, 2011) and transitions going through university (Palmer et al., 2009), there is a lack of understanding about how mature students experience career exploration within a university context. In this study, participants had the opportunity to explain why and how they expressed an interest in engaging in career exploration and what their experience entailed.

6.2.3.2 Study results.

This study enhances the understanding of how mature students experience the process of engaging in career exploration and what aspects of the participants' lives influenced them to engage in career exploration. Participants discussed reasons as to why they wished to enter into the career exploration process, their need to enter into career exploration, and their experience.

6.2.3.2.1 Career identity and career exploration.

Literature has focused on mature students and how they experience their identity within a university context, finding that mature students struggle with their academic identity (Kasworm, 2010). In this study, participants not only struggled with their academic identity but also with their career identity. This distinction between academic identity and career identity has not been explored in-depth in the literature. Literature has focused on reasons why a person would wish to enter into university, with aspirations for a new career being one of them (Donaldson et al., 2012); for mature students, there is also a desire to change their overall self-identity (Mercer, 2007). However, participants in this study distinctly explained that within their desires to redefine themselves is the hope to re-envision their career identities. A focus on career identity within career exploration services could be beneficial, as mature students have a wide variety of life experience, and unlike younger students they have had time to develop different career identities.

Participants also explained that in order to re-envision their career selves, they needed to enter into the career exploration process. This was due to participants feeling lost and needing more support in identifying possible career paths, despite their hesitancy to utilize career services. This distinction is important: although participants were not coerced into entering into career exploration, they viewed it as a last resort, taking a leap of faith in hopes that this resource would help them. This finding provides a new way of understanding and considering mature student motivations for entering into the career exploration process.

6.2.3.2.2 The career exploration experience.

Literature has focused on student experiences of career services in regards to effectiveness of services, stigma, and the working alliance. With regard to mature students, the

literature has focused on exploring counselling models and mature student characteristics as opposed to their actual experience. This study enhances the literature by providing participants a space in which to describe their experience of engaging in career exploration.

Participants identified that although their experience was positive, they all experienced a negative first session that caused them to question returning for a second session. Although not explored in-depth within this study, participants identified that the first session focused on identifying personal strengths, with which they were already familiar. Although this step may be helpful for younger students who do not have extensive career experience, it may be redundant for mature students. Participant experiences highlight the importance of tailoring sessions to fit not only an individual but potentially a subgroup of students who could benefit from a different approach.

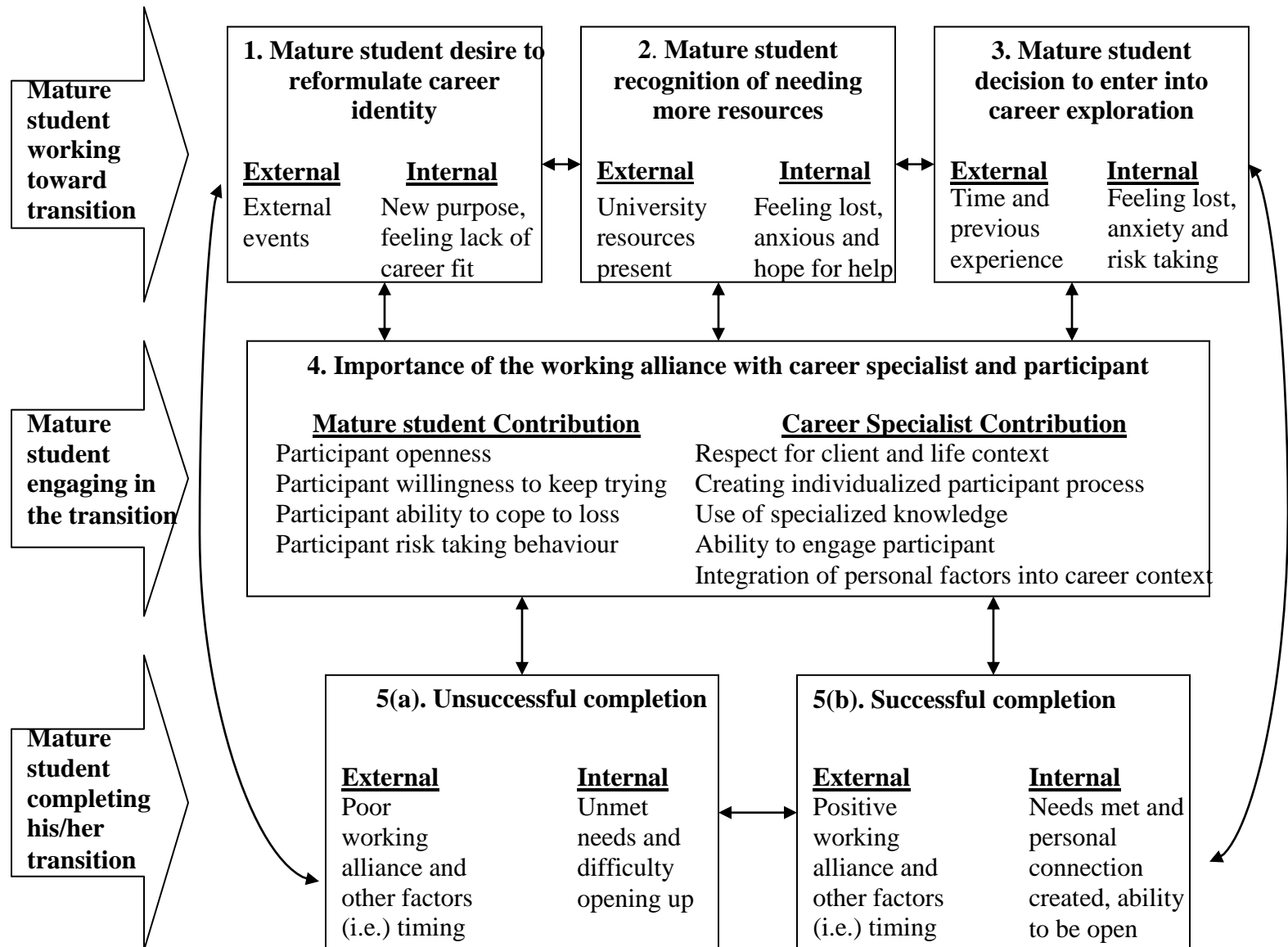
6.2.3.3 Summary.

Mature students in this study entered into the career exploration process feeling lost about their career identities. They needed support in identifying future career paths in order to re-envision their career selves. Despite this hope for aid, they all experienced a negative first session, indicating that mature students may benefit from a different exploration process than younger students, a topic that has yet to be explored within the career exploration literature.

6.3 Interpretation of Results: Model of Career Transitional Process for Participants

The master themes identified in Chapter 5 provide significant information detailing each participant's career exploration experience. By examining these themes and developing an interpretation of their meaning, a process model detailing their transition was developed and is illustrated below in Figure 6.0.

Figure 6.0 Mature Student Process Model of Career Exploration Transition



This model represents the lived experience of mature students engaging in career exploration and how this experience is a transition in its own right. This model has three stages of transition: participant working toward transition, participant engaging in transition, and participant completing his/her transition process. The numbers in the figure indicate a linear process; however, transitions are cyclical in that the experiences and lessons taken from this transition will influence future transitions. The cyclical nature of the transition is demonstrated through the arrows in Figure 6.0, illustrating that this transitional experience will influence future transitions. As demonstrated in Figure 6.0, each phase has external components that clients cannot control and internal components that occur to the client. These are detailed below.

6.3.1 Mature student working toward transition.

Within this phase, participants were aware that they were actively making decisions that would impact their futures. These decisions were provoked by external events and internal choices. Within this phase, participants experienced a series of cyclical psychological clarifications as outlined below.

6.3.1.1 Mature student desire to reformulate career identity.

As seen in Figure 6.0, participants begin the transition with a desire to reformulate or re-envision their career identity. This desire is prompted by external events that were out of the participant's control. For example, Mickey was pressed to explore her career needs due to a significant family dynamic shift that occurred, prompting her to decide to pursue a university stream, which she had not explored previously. Internal choices were also made by participants as they described not feeling connected to their current career, desiring a new career fit, and feeling uncertain of current career choices. This combination of external and internal pressures initiated the career transition process in each of these mature students.

6.3.1.2 Mature student recognition of needing more resources.

All participants experienced feelings of loss and anxiety as they moved into this clarification process, step 2 of Figure 6.0. There was recognition that although they had entered into university to commence re-envisioning their career selves, more help was needed to initiate the process of re-envisioning their career identity. To obtain this assistance, these students had a profound need for career information and resources. For this study, the resource in question was a career centre for students at a local university. The combination of seeing this identifiable resource as readily available and a feeling of being lost made the career centre a natural progression for these mature students. This recognition also moved participants into the transition process. By deciding to utilize this resource, participants hoped to be provided with specialized knowledge that would aid them in re-envisioning their career selves. This career centre would help them identify what they were missing in their progression toward trying to re-envision their career identities.

6.3.1.3 Mature student decision to enter into career exploration.

Participants had to decide if they wanted to make use of the career centre. Certain considerations were noted by participants as they engaged in the decision-making process in step 3 of Figure 6.0. For example, external considerations included the availability of the resource. Participants wanted to utilize the resource quickly and efficiently. Participants described feeling hesitant to utilize this resource due to the long wait time at this centre. Another external consideration was each participant's past career exploration experiences. Participants identified being worried that this experience would be similar to their previous experiences. While they hoped to have a better experience if they engaged with this centre, internal considerations such as feelings of uncertainty, loss, and anxiety were present as participants decided if they should

utilize this resource. Another internal consideration was participants' risk-taking behaviours and their resilience. In spite of these pressures, participants demonstrated a degree of resilience; they chose to take a risk and moved past their previous career experience with counsellors, hoping this new experience would be different. These participants engaged in risk-taking behaviour by entering into this process.

6.3.2 Mature student engaging in the transition.

It became evident that different resources were involved in how participants addressed their coping strategies for engaging in the transition process. For example, participants described having external support systems, guidance from others who were in similar situations, and a sense of going down the right path to help them in this process.

6.3.2.1 Importance of working alliance with career specialist and mature student.

Within the transition experience, the working alliance was an important factor in determining the level of success of the transition, as seen in Figure 6.0. The alliance is composed of both the participant and the specialist engaging in a dynamic relationship, with each person bringing thoughts, feelings, and ideas into this relationship. Participant and career specialist contributions to the relationship will be discussed below.

6.3.2.1.1 Mature student contribution.

While participants engaged in the process of career exploration, they described having to be open to the process. They identified that their openness helped them to be receptive to the career specialist's feedback and truly connect with this professional. Participants identified that it was their decision to be open with their career specialist. While openness was easier to achieve when the career specialist was personal and professional, the participant had to feel comfortable in order to participate in the relationship. It was important for the participant to keep trying

within this relationship, as not all relationships are perfect or begin on a positive note. This willingness to keep trying helped participants to connect with their career specialist. As the process progressed, participants felt uncertain and upset about moving forward. They described feeling a loss of dreams as their career expectations shifted. It was their internal willingness to keep moving forward that helped them to continue past the first session, even when it did not meet their needs.

As participants experienced this shift in their expectations of how the sessions would progress, it also became evident that different resources were involved in how participants coped as they engaged in the process of career exploration. For example, participants described having external support systems, guidance from others in similar situations, and a sense of their own intuition that they were heading down a path better suited for them individually. Participants also learned how to use different coping strategies throughout the transition process to address the experience of having to re-negotiate their career ideals. By developing and utilizing coping strategies during the exploration process, participants were able to conquer their fears and explore new career possibilities.

6.3.2.1.2 Career specialist contribution.

Participants identified that when the career specialist helped them through their own personal coping strategies, they experienced a strong working alliance with the career specialist. This helping behaviour was achieved through several different behaviours exhibited by the career specialist. Participants described the career specialist as being helpful when they showed acknowledgement of the participants' previous career exploration experiences, demonstrated an understanding of the present complexity of their life roles, and attempted to understand their emotions as they engaged in the career exploration process. By showing respect to the

participant, the career specialist was able to integrate the client's personal context into the career exploration sessions and to both identify and normalize the participants' feelings about being involved in the transition process. Participants identified that the career specialist appeared to create an individualized career process for clients, and this helped them feel more open to the experience.

To build this alliance between participant and career specialist, the career specialist needed to be knowledgeable within his/her field. In fact, participants looked to these professionals for information and expected them to share their career knowledge with the participant. The career specialist needed to be a guide to the conversation with the participant in order to engage his/her in the alliance interaction. In doing so, participants felt ready to open up and share their experiences with the career specialist.

6.3.3 Mature student completing his/her transition

The final stage of the transition in Figure 6.0 was created by engaging in career exploration as the completion of the career sessions. When sessions were finished, this brought about a sense of completeness; however, there are two distinct ways in which this process could conclude. As Figure 6.0 illustrates, successful or unsuccessful completion of career sessions can occur as described below.

6.3.3.1 Unsuccessful completion.

While an unsuccessful completion did not occur with their career specialists, participants indicated that they had previous career sessions, experiences, events, behaviours, and actions that led to an unsuccessful ending. Situations were recounted where past career specialists were not respectful, often self-disclosed more information than necessary, and provided clients with "advice" as opposed to helpful knowledge. Timing was also important, as participants felt that if

more time elapsed between visits or their career specialist appeared to be rushed and inattentive, this contributed to unsuccessful endings.

With the participants' previous experiences of career exploration, unsuccessful transitions caused them to feel more anxious about their current experience and created an unfavourable view of career specialists. Participants felt that their needs were not met in previous experiences and expressed that they were less willing to be receptive to the career specialist. Although other factors could influence unsuccessful completion of sessions and the transition, the above factors identified contributed to a poor and ineffective relationship between client and career specialist.

6.3.3.2 Successful completion.

On the other hand, when the relationship was mutual and beneficial, participants felt their needs were being met by the career specialist. They felt that they were able to create both a professional and personal connection with the career specialist and to be open within the relationship. With the successful completion of sessions, participants also identified an end to their career exploration transition. This end was characterized by an increase in confidence in regard to sorting and choosing a new career path, a shift in career identity, and an acceptance of a transition that can occur within the career field. Participants noted they felt grateful for the experience and hopeful for their future transitions. Their views of career exploration professionals were positive, and these characteristics helped to define a positive and successful relationship and working alliance with their career specialist.

6.3.4 Summary

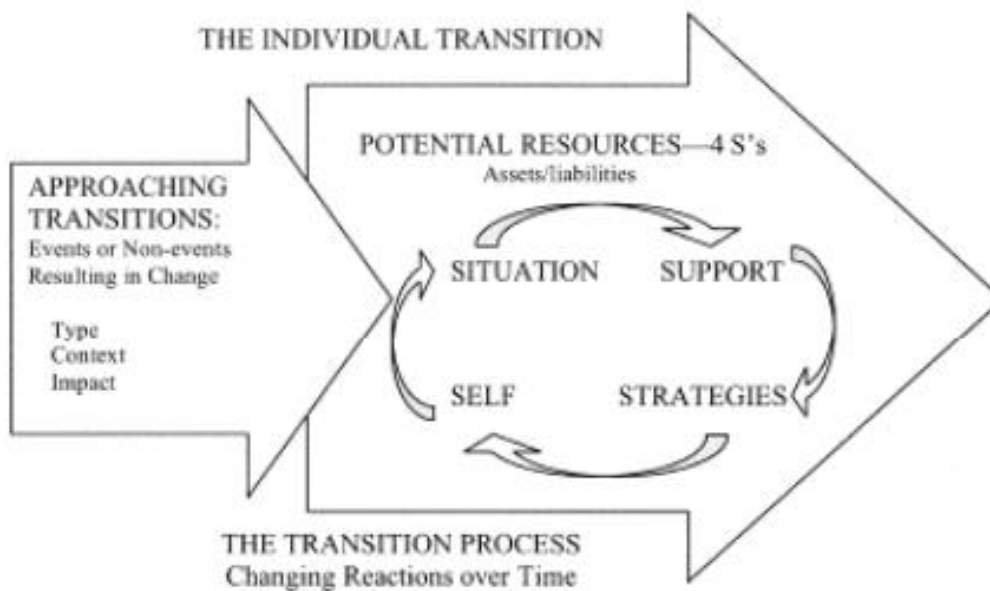
A process model was developed that outlines the transitional experience participants described moving through as they engaged in the career exploration process. This model contains linear steps that participants progressed through in order to move into, through, and out of the

career exploration experience. Influencing participants' movements through the steps were both external and internal considerations, which were taken into consideration. This process model also illustrates the importance of the working alliance as a support system and what contributions both participant and career specialist made to the success of this relationship. As indicated by the arrows, this process model is also cyclical in nature, as successful completion of the transition will influence future career exploration transitions.

6.3.5 Literature review

In looking at the process described in this study and comparing it to the literature of transition processes, several models are prominent within the literature as a way to explore personal experiences and change. Schlossberg's Transition Model (2011) is of particular interest, as it is considered to be a model based on a theory of adult development and provides a way to understand how individuals adapt and react to work transitions. This model consists of three specific steps: a) approaching the transition and identifying its type, b) identifying an individual's coping resources for the transition, and c) taking charge, which includes utilizing new strategies (Goodman et al., 2006). Figure 6.1 illustrates Schlossberg's model and the first two steps.

Figure 6.1 Schlossberg's Individual Transition Model (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 33)



6.3.5.1 Explanation of steps.

The first step in Schlossberg's model is to identify the type of transition. Transitions can be anticipated, expected events that typically occur in an individual's life, such as marriage, or unanticipated, unexpected events that can involve crisis, such as being laid off from a job. Transitions can also be non-event transitions, or expected events that do not occur, such as not receiving an expected raise (Goodman et al., 2006). The second step, as identified by Goodman et al. (2006) is for a professional to identify the context of the transition and its impact on an individual. For example, one can ask if the context of the transition is personal or impersonal, if it started at an individual or societal level, and how impactful this transition is to an individual's life. Identifying if the transition is impactful is important; if a person does not identify with this occurrence as being a transition, then it is classified instead as a change (Goodman et al., 2006). The third step in understanding how a transition impacts an individual and their ability to cope with it is to assess his/her potential resources or the 4Ss (Schlossberg, 2011).

The 4Ss include the self, situation, support, and strategies, which are four considerations that impact how a person copes and deals with the transition (Goodman et al., 2006). An in-depth review is beyond the scope of this chapter, but a brief explanation for each of the 4Ss will be provided. The 4Ss when interacting can become a set of assets or liabilities and contribute to differences in how individuals perceive and react to transitions. Schlossberg (2011) provides an explanation for each of the 4Ss. The self includes personal characteristics, such as age and an individual's psychological resources for handling transitions. The situation includes what created the transition, the timing, duration, and assessment of the transition, how much control one has over the situation, and if they have previous experience with it, as well as other stressors occurring during the transition. Support includes external support systems an individual has helping them to move through the transition, such as friendships or professional help. Strategies include an individual's responses to stressors and which coping strategies they employ to manage them.

6.3.5.2 Schlossberg and work transition.

Schlossberg provides a way to conceptualize her model with work transitions (Goodman et al., 2006). Work transitions are often seen as crises and are unexpected transitions that have clients wanting direct answers from their counsellor. Exploring the timing and concurrent stressors with work transitions are important. Schlossberg notes the importance of considering the economy as a part of timing in transitions (Goodman et al., 2009), as well as an individual's previous experiences, as often adults will have had more than one work transition. Particular salient "self" issues to consider are how individuals are maintaining a work-life balance and how they conceptualize their work roles or career identities (Goodman et al., 2009). Meaning-making and how one identifies his/her purpose through work transitions should also be explored. Support

systems that adults have as they transition between work roles are important, as these support systems can be both helpful and hindering if they add extra stress to an individual.

A final consideration includes exploring what part of the integrated transition cycle an adult is approaching. They may be moving into a transition by being newly employed, moving through a transition by getting a raise, or moving out of a transition by being laid off (Goodman et al., 2006). These phases of moving in, out, and through are cycled through with various transitions, and it is helpful to identify which phase a client is experiencing. This integrated cycle, along with Schlossberg's transition model, can easily be applied to mature students as they experience similar and added stressors, transitions, and experiences as working adults.

6.3.6 Application to mature students

Schlossberg's transition model is helpful when exploring mature student experiences of engaging in career exploration and career transitions. Similarities and differences between this study's process model and Schlossberg's transition model will be explored.

6.3.6.1 Similarities between the two models.

The process model of this study aligns with Schlossberg's model in many ways. Mature student experiences of engaging in career exploration can be seen as an anticipated transition while they actively choose to enter into the process, then an unanticipated transition as they need to shift their expectations of the process if their needs are not met. The process model of this study explores both internal and external considerations that can impact the phase of working toward a transition, which is similar to exploring the context and impact of Schlossberg's (2011) model.

These internal and external considerations also align with Schlossberg's (2011) exploration of potential resources a person needs to cope with the transition. Within the process

model, participants needed to experience a liability within the “self” section of Schlossberg’s model, causing them to feel lost and uneasy so that they would enter into the transition of engaging in career exploration. Schlossberg (2011) outlines the importance of healthy supports to aid with a transition. As indicated by participants in this study, the career specialist is an important support, as well as each participant’s own openness to the process and coping strategies.

Goodman et al., (2006) make reference to the integrated transition model, and as previously noted by Schlossberg, this is also helpful with working transitions. This integrated model is respected within the process model as well. As participants are working toward the transition, this is similar to the “moving in” phase of the transition where new roles and assumptions are challenged. As participants engage in the transition, this parallels to the “moving through” phase of the integrated transition model where participants experienced a phase of confusion and new challenges, often having their career identities and assumptions challenged by the career specialist. Finally, as participants completed the transition this can be viewed as the “moving out” phase of the integrated transition model, where participants conclude the career exploration process, experience a period of disengagement with their career specialist, and gain newly-found confidence.

6.3.6.2 Differences between the two models.

There are also differences between the process model developed from this study and Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model. The process model provides more information on the decision process participants experienced as they decided to enter into a transition and possible internal and external considerations that were involved. For mature students who experience a variety of stressors and challenges within university, having a model that explores how they

decide to enter into career exploration is useful in providing practitioners with a starting base on how to make this experience common and normal for students. It should be noted that the detailed decision-making process of participants working toward the transition relates to the anticipated transition of engaging in career exploration. A detailed process of the unanticipated transition of having to shift career ideals was not explored by participants.

The process model also focuses on a specific type of support system: the relationship that develops between the career specialist and the participant. This would be considered the fourth support system in Schlossberg's model, an organizational or agency support (Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg notes that support systems are "key to handling stress" (Goodman et al., 2006, p. 75), and this is reflected in the process model as this relationship helped lead to a successful completion of the transition. The process model enhances our understanding of this support system in a career exploration setting by having participants outline specific behaviours, actions, and considerations the career specialist can engage in to help the participant connect to the relationship. Many of these actions consider exploring the participants' assets and liabilities in a respectful way.

The process model outlines specific things the participants stated they would have to do in order to open themselves to the relationship, making this support system effective. These include strategies such as helping cope with the emotional shifts created in the transition, and characteristics of the self that need to be present, such as willingness to be open, that allow the relationship to develop. Although Goodman et al. (2006) discuss how the 4Ss interact, the process model provides a more detailed understanding of what participants felt was necessary to create and maintain this support system throughout the transition and how it was a necessary factor in completing the transition.

The process model outlines specific ways that this transition can be completed, either successfully or unsuccessfully, providing more in-depth details of how a participant “moved out” of their transition. Although Goodman et al. (2006) briefly discuss transition resolutions, specific details are not explored. The process model enhances our understanding of this transition by having participants identify what they believed helped them to move out of the transition of engaging in the career exploration process. Similar to the discussion Goodman et al. provide with resolutions, the process model notes that although participants have left the transition of engaging in career exploration, the experience will forever be part of their life and influence future transitions.

6.3.7 Summary.

The process model provides a detailed understanding of how participants moved in, through, and out of the transition of engaging in career exploration. Although there are other transition models that have a career development focus, such as Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model, the process model described in this study provides specific information about this transition. There are numerous overlaps and identifiable differences between the process model and Schlossberg’s model; both appear to be useful in working with adults who engage in the career exploration process.

6.4 Contributions of this Study

6.4.1 Mature students.

Mature student literature has focused on the experiences of mature students going through the educational process and engaging in counselling, but literature has not explored in depth their experience of career exploration. The current understandings of their experiences with career counselling are derived from studies that focus on either adult experiences of counselling or

student perceptions of career exploration, where mature students are a small subset utilized in these studies. Moreover, few studies have explored this topic from a qualitative standpoint. This study examined their experiences from their perspective using a unique qualitative methodological approach.

Conducting this study has also enabled me to understand the issue of career exploration by exploring the process of career transition of mature students. This adds a new layer of understanding about their transitional experience, providing career specialists with insights about ways to consider this transition as it occurs for mature students. As such, this study provides new considerations for research and career literature on the importance of a transition focus when dealing with mature students.

6.4.2 Working alliance.

This study outlined in detail some of the feelings participants had about their experiences in career exploration. As discussed in Chapter 2, the findings from this study tell us much about the context of the working alliance as it described by these mature students. This includes the importance of respecting a client, the value of creating an individualized process for clients, providing clarity and admitting faults to clients, integrating personal life context into career sessions, and other characteristics that help to establish a healthy development of the working alliance. These characteristics add another layer to our understanding of the literature as related to mature students.

6.4.3 Use of IPA methodology.

The career exploration experiences of mature students have not been previously researched using a qualitative methodology. The use of IPA methodology in this study provided a sound foundation for exploring this topic and produced master themes that then allowed for an

interpretation of those themes. In doing so, an interpretation of the lived experiences of three individuals was possible to provide greater detail than other methodologies might have produced.

One advantage of the IPA method used in this study was that it allowed the participants, rather than the researcher, to guide the interview process. The use of IPA provided me with the opportunity to discern the complicated and complex interactions between the participant and the career specialist. It was this methodology and its utilization of an interview technique informed by ECIT that allowed me to draw out incidences from the career exploration sessions. This was beneficial, as it identified what was helpful or hindering about these incidences. This resulted in gathering information that is helpful to me as a novice counsellor and to others who are interested in developing a strong working alliance with participants.

Finally, the analytic process of IPA, although detailed, enabled me to make sense of the whole lived experience by exploring the parts of each case. It pushed me to understand the idiosyncrasies of each participant first before rushing into comparisons of the experiences of others in the study. IPA also invites a researcher to provide an interpretation of these experiences, which enables a reflective analysis on these lived experiences. While my interpretation likely does not reveal a complete understanding of these experiences, it does provide an exploratory place from which to begin research conversation.

6.5 Study Limitations

As a consequence of selecting a sample with similar characteristics and commonalities, the results of this study are limited to the perspective of three mature students' experiences of career exploration. These perspectives may have been very different from other participants selected, however, by focusing on mature students specifically we garner insight into their experiences, which is needed in the career development field.

As is a common risk with phenomenological studies, the descriptions given by clients may be limited in fully describing a lived experience and may not provide a sufficient understanding of the meaning of this experience. Similarly, I too may not understand or have misrepresented the stories told by the participants, thus leading to inaccuracies. My interpretation is only one researcher's view and not exhaustive of all interpretive possibilities. Furthermore, the interpretative meaning based on participant descriptions and themes may have been limited with a sample of three. Also, the stories told by participants were retrospective, allowing participants to develop new interpretations of their lived experience and consequently change it from the original phenomenon. Future studies may benefit from analyzing a client's career experience in the moment to get a better description of the lived experience.

Another consideration is how I as a researcher may have influenced the current study. I do have experience in the career field and because I am not approaching this topic completely from an "outsider's" perspective, I may have interpreted the results from an "insider's" perspective, or the perspective of someone involved in the career exploration process. Given this potential limitation, the interpretations I have made were done with active reflection on my role in the study, where I noted my biases and reflections in journals in order to help contextualize the information with the literature and not solely based on my experience.

Participants were invited to respond to a short questionnaire in order to assess the congruence of themes to their lived experiences. Unfortunately none of the participants provided a response to this e-mail, limiting the readers' knowledge of how congruent the themes may be. Possible reasons for a lack of response include the voluntary nature of the feedback, the timing of the feedback requested as e-mails were sent during summer break, and that the themes may be congruent with participant experiences so they did not feel a need to respond. Future research

would benefit from acquiring participant feedback and integrating the feedback process into the study so that the researcher can cross check the themes they identified to the participants lived experience.

6.6 Future Research Directions

The findings from this study shed light on aspects of research and discussion pertaining to mature student career experiences. The following section will provide suggestions for both researchers and practitioners to take into consideration when researching and working with mature students. Though these suggestions are not exhaustive, they offer a starting point for consideration.

6.6.1 Implications for future research.

As research on mature student experiences involved with career exploration is limited at present, as revealed in Chapter 2, it is suggested that future research continue to qualitatively explore mature student experiences of engaging in career exploration. It would be beneficial to use this study as a pilot study, drawing on a larger sample size to confirm whether the experiences noted in this study can be expanded/validated in a larger study and if the process model created is accurate across a larger and more diverse sample. By exploring a variety of mature student experiences, researchers can develop a broader understanding of how these students experience the process of engaging in career exploration.

Future research could also benefit from qualitatively exploring the experiences of young students versus mature students. Literature has often focused on young student experiences of being in university, changing careers, and entering into the career world. Future studies could explore the commonalities and differences of experiences between 18-24 year old and mature students as their experiences may differ. For example, mature students placed importance on

professional experience in helping enhance the therapeutic alliance. This preference may be different for 18-24 year old students who may be more comfortable around a more casually dressed career specialist. It would also be important to explore if the process model created in this study applies to 18-24 year old students or if other considerations become important to the process model for a younger group of individuals. This opens a new area of research on how to frame practice approaches and interventions to suit students' needs.

A final consideration for future research is to qualitatively explore career specialists' experiences of providing career services. By exploring their experiences a process model could be created on how career specialists deliver career help. This process model could then be compared and contrasted to the one created in this study to identify if there are divergent experiences. A comparison between career specialist and mature student experiences of the career exploration process would provide more information on what changes may need to occur for sessions to be tailored to mature students in order to better meet their needs.

6.6.2 Implications for professional practice.

Based on findings from this study, it is important to begin exploring whether mature students need to be approached differently than younger students. The process model identified in this study may help career specialists learn more about this sub-group, specifically the transitional and emotional shifts of mature students and the questioning of career selves, expectations, and losses they experience. A dialogue of questioning needs to begin in order to help mature students feel respected while aiding them in having their needs met.

A factor that arose within this study is the impact that loss of career identity can have on mature students. As the first career exploration session did not go well for participants in this study, career specialists would benefit from asking their clients about what they hope to achieve

and their career exploration expectations, and being aware of stressors confronting mature students. It might be that the first session needs to be tailored to mature students who are already aware of their strengths and looking to find their career path. The participants in this study had already achieved this stage in their lives and now wished to re-envision their career identities and explore where and how they could progress in their next phase of life. Further research needs to explore this issue.

This study also illustrates the importance of the working alliance for mature students who engage in career exploration. Certain factors were identified as being beneficial to the relationship and stand out in relation to the literature in Chapter 2. The focus of creating an individualized process for participants and integrating personal concerns into a career exploration session has not been well researched. If these considerations are important for mature students, sessions need to be tailored to fit these needs as opposed to implementing a one-size-fits-all approach. As mentioned previously, this individualized process should ideally commence at the start of the first session rather than at the assessment phase of the counselling process. This suggests that practitioners need to know their client and help build a positive working alliance prior to utilizing specific career techniques.

A final suggestion would be to develop support groups that mature students can partake in, as they do share common needs. Universities offer groups on dealing with stress and anxiety, and often these support groups cater to 18-24 aged students. There appears to be a lack of such groups specifically for mature students. Support groups like this may help mature students transition through their career identity issues if they were invited to normalize their experience by sharing their issues with other mature students. In conclusion, this study has provided

different avenues to research and consider within practice, but more research is still required to better understand and alter the experience of this particular university subgroup.

6.7 Closing Remarks

6.7.1 Personal reflection.

While mature students are acknowledged as a unique population who experience events differently than their traditionally younger counterparts, their experiences within a career context are not well understood. By utilizing IPA, this study provided me with the opportunity to better understand their struggles as they try to discover their career identities and engage in career exploration. Participants in this study experienced an array of thoughts, emotions, and shifts throughout the span of their three sessions with a career specialist. Being privileged to listen to these students' experiences, I was forever changed in how I interact with mature students. I now have a better understanding of their struggles, and as a young student I feel graced with this knowledge and hope to use it during my own interactions with mature students.

Having been interested in the working alliance from a counsellor's perspective for a long time, viewing how this relationship developed between a mature student and their career specialist was intriguing. The need of participants to be respected, viewed as an individual, and given an individualized process as they engage in career exploration stood out for me. I felt these participants had a strong sense of self and were aware of their strengths but were lost in sorting out their own career identity. They had specific expectations of their career specialist and often experienced a sense of loss as they had to reframe their career hopes. While they may not have used the term "working alliance" to describe the nature of the relationship between themselves and their career specialist, it seemed to be this working alliance that helped the mature students

navigate through this transitional process and come out of it feeling more confident about their career paths.

The importance of this alliance adds to my growing knowledge of how I can impact a person depending on how I interact with them. This study has also brought to light the fact that career and personal contexts go hand in hand. While the debate between career and personal counselling lingers, these participants helped me to bridge my understanding of what is important for them. These influences have shaped my personal interactions with mature students, and for that, I am forever thankful.

6.7.2 Conclusion.

Career development is a field in growth, with research broadening its scope. One consideration entering into the literature is how the working alliance affects career exploration, especially in regard to different groups of individuals. One group of interest is mature students, as they have a vast array of experiences that they bring to university and are often only considered a part of university studies and not a subgroup of their own. As mature students experience career shifts, it is important to develop an understanding of how they experience career exploration. This study focused on the lived experiences of engaging in career exploration for these students in order to provide them with an active voice.

Through the use of IPA and ECIT, I was able to draw out mature student experiences. They identified that by engaging in career exploration they moved through a phase of transitioning, where they had to question and re-envision their career identities and ideals. Within this transition, they noted that it was the working alliance between their career specialists and themselves that aided them in moving forward, if this alliance was deemed to be positive. For the purposes of this study, a process model was created that helped to explore this transition

and identify specific things that both the career specialist and the participant felt were needed to create a positive relationship.

Much can be taken away from these mature students' experiences. A greater understanding of their transitional experiences, as well as what helps create a strong working alliance, are key topics of interest that require more research. Suggestions for practitioners and researchers have been given in order to help create more interest in the topic of mature students and career exploration. A last word of wisdom is to always consider the individual in front of you, where they have come from, and how their unique experiences will guide their movement through their transitions in life.

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Appendix A: Demographic Survey

1. What year of university are you currently in?
 - a. Are you an undergraduate or graduate student?
2. Have you partaken in career exploration before?
 - a. If so, how long ago and how many sessions did you attend?
3. How many career exploration sessions have you currently had with your career specialist (if still partaking in career exploration sessions)?
4. What is your length of residency in Canada?

Age:

Gender:

E-mail:

Pseudonym:

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Stage 1: Introducing self

“I’d like to thank you for your interest in my study. Before we get started I’m going to tell you a little bit about myself, the purpose of the study, and then I will give you a consent form to read and sign. If you have any questions, feel free to interrupt at any time.

My name is Terilyn Pott, and I’m a Master’s of Science in Counselling Psychology student who is working under the direct supervision of Dr. Willment, a faculty member in the Education Department. As part of the requirements of my program, I am conducting a study. The reason I’m interested specifically in career exploration is due to my background in working within this sector.”

Stage 2: Purpose of the study

“The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding of what you believe to be helpful in forming a bond between a career specialist and yourself as a student. I’m also interested in gaining more in-depth knowledge of your experience with career exploration. The reason I’m interested in these topics is because I hope to enhance existing research that addresses the working relationship within the career development field and to help career specialists become aware of what variables students deem to be important. Any questions so far?”

Stage 3: Consent form and questions

“Now I’d like you to take some time to read this form. While you’re reading it, if you have any questions or concerns then please feel free to ask me. The form goes over the purpose of the study, the criteria that you need to meet to participate, what will be required of you as a participant, and information about how the interview data will be stored and kept confidential. I know that you’ve read some of this information in the e-mail I sent you, but please take a moment to revisit it. Once you’ve finished reading, please tell me if you have any questions.”
 [Once student is finished] “Do you have any questions? [Respond to them if they do]. By signing this consent form you are agreeing to participate, but remember that you are free to withdraw from the study at any point and you will not be penalized for withdrawing. Your consent means that you agree to partake in today’s interview, that the interview can be audio-recorded, and that your information can be included in the data analysis of the study”.

Stage 4: Demographic questionnaire

“Before we start I’m going to ask you to fill out a short demographic questionnaire. This information will remain confidential and will only be associated with your pseudonym. Only my supervisor and I will be aware of how this information relates to you. This information is being collected for the purpose of identifying what category you can be associated with; for example, being a graduate or an undergraduate student”.

Stage 6: Interview

Part 1: Experience component

So just to recap what I’ve mentioned to you previously, I am interested in investigating students’ experiences with career exploration and finding out what factors people identify to be important in creating and strengthening the relationship between a student and a career specialist.

This semi-structured interview will last approximately 75 minutes; do you have any questions before we begin?

Definition of career exploration:

1. Can you tell me about your decision to seek career exploration?

Probes: When did you decide to seek career exploration, what made you decide to speak to a career specialist?

2. Tell me about your experience of partaking in career exploration.

Probes: What happened? What did you enjoy about your experience? What did you dislike?

3. How would you define your relationship with the career specialists?

Probes: Was it a helpful relationship? Did you find yourself being heard or understood? Can you give me an example of how you and your career specialist interacted?

5. What did you take away from this experience?

Probes: Did you learn anything from this experience? What would you tell someone about career exploration who has never engaged in it before? (Why?)

Part 2: Critical incident component, strengthen

Try to recall the relationship that developed and how it progressed throughout each session you had with your career specialist. What were/are areas that you believe helped to develop and strengthen the relationship between you and the career specialist? I am interested in specific examples that you can describe in as much detail as possible; for example, was there a certain ambience or set up of the office that helped, or did the career specialists act in a certain way? Or was the content of the session what helped you develop a relationship with the career specialist?

Part 3: Critical incident component, hindrance

Now that we've painted a picture of what things helped to create and strengthen a working relationship between you and the career specialist, I am interested in knowing if anything occurred that helped to weaken or cause a rupture in this relationship. Can you think of any incidences that occurred that might have caused the relationship to weaken?

Probing questions for part 2 and 3:

- Describe an example for me.
- At what moment during your session with the career specialists did you feel most/least engaged?
- Describe any actions that the career specialists engaged in that you found affirmative/helpful or hindering.
- How or why [incident] did this help create, strengthen, or weaken the relationship created between you and the career specialist?
- If this [incident/behaviour] occurred again, how would it affect the relationship?
- Can you describe [incident] in more detail? What was [person/room/etc.] like? What was your reaction to this?
- So you felt [emotion] when [incident] occurred, tell me more about that, why did that make you feel [emotion]?

Part 4: Wish list item

We are nearing the end of the interview, so I would like to ask you one more question. We have discussed up to this point different things that may have helped create and strengthen the relationship between you and your career counsellor, as well as some things that may have hindered it. Is there anything else that you think would help this relationship grow even more? For example, what specific things(incidents) do you believe the career specialist could have done that would have strengthened the relationship with you?

Probes: How would [incident] help the relationship?

What would [incident] occurring mean to you as a student? What would make you feel understood or better heard?

If [incident] never occurred, how would that affect the relationship?

What might be done by a career specialists that might help you or other students?

Stage 7: End

“We’ve come to the end of the interview, and I would again like to thank you for taking the time to participate. Do you have any questions now that we’ve finished the interview? [Respond to any questions]. I would also like to remind you that at the end of my study I will be sending you an e-mail that contains the themes that I’ve created from pooling all the interviews I have together. You’ll be sent a five-question questionnaire to fill out that should take you approximately half an hour, and you’ll have two weeks from the date I send the e-mail to respond. The questionnaire will be asking you how the themes I’ve created fit with your experience and what suggestions you might give me if there are any discrepancies.

One last thing, in order to thank for your participation, your name will be entered into a draw to win a fifty dollar Visa gift card. In order to be considered for the draw, please write your name and an e-mail that you may be contacted at on this piece of paper. This information will be stored in my computer until the draw is to take place, and my supervisor and I will be aware of your identity. Your name and e-mail address will be deleted at the end of the draw”.

Appendix C: Post-Study Questionnaire

1. After having read the themes chosen about your career specialists, do you think these themes seem to reflect your experiences?

2. Do any of the themes seem not to relate to you? Please explain.

3. Have you any other comments or suggestions that you would give to the researcher about these themes?

4. If you wish to receive a copy of the brief executive summary of results from this study on mature students and the careers, please check below.

I wish to receive a copy of the executive summary.

I do not require a copy of the executive summary.

Thank you for completing this survey and it can be returned to Terilyn Pott at
tampott@ucalgary.ca

Appendix D: Consent Form

hi

This document is a template. The italicized text is instructional. Delete it, including these paragraphs, when writing your consent form.

Supply the information requested under the bolded headings. Use ordinary language, understandable by a layperson. Add details relevant to your study. Be sure the consent form is written in second person. Please check the correctness of your spelling and grammar.

***Do not** alter the mandatory statements that appear in this template as regular type unless you have the CFREB's permission to do so. See also the section on consent found in, "Information to Help Applicants", at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/UofC/research/html/ethics/cfreb.html> for additional help in preparing informed consent.*

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Terilyn Pott, Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, 587-777-5998, tampott@ucalgary.ca

Supervisor:

Dr. Jo-Anne Willment, Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, 403-220-2517, willment@ucalgary.ca

Title of Project:

Students Speak Up: Career Exploration and the Working Relationship

Sponsor:

None

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Purpose of the Study:

The aim of the current study is to gain a better understanding of what students believe to be helpful in forming a bond between career specialists and themselves, as well as to understand students experiences of career exploration. By exploring what students believe to be helpful, I hope to provide and further the research that addresses the working relationship within the career development field and inform career specialists that student's suggest as being most important and valuable to them. In order to participate in

this study the following criteria must be met by each participant: be over the age of 18 and have received and finished at least two career counselling sessions at either the University of Calgary Student Success Services or through the Haskayne Career Center or have received career development at the Mount Royal Career Services Center in the past three months. You must have seen a career specialist, and not a practicum student to participate, and be fluent in the English language in order to participate in a 75 minute long interview and respond to an e-mail.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

If you agree to participate in this study, the following will be asked of you;

1. Attend the University of Calgary or Mount Royal University to partake in a 75 minute long interview with the researcher related to your experience of having received career exploration. Upon consent, this session will be audio-taped and conducted by a Masters Counselling student who is completing this study with all information remaining confidential.
2. An e-mail will be sent out to you at the end of the study and will contain the results the researcher has developed. You will be asked to review these results and inform the researcher how these results fit with your experience. You will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire in response to the results of the data. You will have two weeks to respond to this e-mail. If there is no response, it will be assumed that you approve of the results as they are. The reason for the two week deadline is for consideration of the researcher's deadline. The e-mail used will be the one you used to contact the researcher. If you feel that there is more to share beyond responding to this e-mail, a separate 30 minute interview can be set up for you to discuss your concerns with the researcher, however, this is not mandatory.

For partaking in the study, you will receive an executive summary of the thesis, which will be e-mailed to you, after the thesis has been successfully defended. Also, to thank you for your participation and upon completion of the interview, your name will be entered into a draw for a \$50.00 dollar Visa gift card in gratitude for your time and effort. If at any point you choose to withdraw, you will still be entitled to enter the draw. All participants will be notified by the e-mail they provided when the draw is taking place as a reminder, and will be notified if they have won or not. The winner's name will not be given, and the winner of the draw will be sent notification of their win by e-mail. The draw will take place once all participants have participated; therefore, the draw is estimated to occur at the end of the Winter 2012 semester in the month of April.

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide the following information before the interview. You will be asked to respond to the following questions. What year of university are you in? Are you an undergraduate, graduate student? Have you have partaken in career exploration before and if so how long ago and for how many sessions? How many career exploration sessions have you currently had with your career speicalists? And what is the length of residency in Canada? During the interview you will be asked to speak to your experience of career exploration, and describe what things were helpful and hindering in developing a relationship with your career specialist. Although career centers

will not be identified within the write up of the thesis, you will be required to use and provide a pseudonym for your career specialist in order to keep their identity anonymous.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: ___ No: ___

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: ___ No: ___

_____ The pseudonym I choose for myself is:

_____ The pseudonym I choose to identify my career specialist is:

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

This study will be asking you to reflect on what things you found particularly helpful in your career development sessions that made you feel closer to/connected with the career specialist and that helped sessions progress in a positive way. Due to the nature of this study, it is very important that you understand the time commitment of participating in an interview of approximately one hour. Your participation in this study will allow you to voice your opinions about your career experience, and you will have a voice in informing career specialists about what things are helpful in creating a positive working relationship.

You will also be asked to voice what additional behaviours you may find helpful in a working relationship that were not present in your career development experience. Upon reflection of your career development sessions, you may feel that you need further assistance and wish to continue engaging in career exploration. If this situation were to arise, contact information to the counselling and career services will be provided and you will be invited to discuss this with the researcher to develop a list of resources that could be helpful.

The information that you give will be valuable in creating a better understanding of what students deem helpful in a career development session, and all information will remain confidential. You are also free to withdraw at any point during this study, and will not be penalized for withdrawing.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

All information that you give will be confidential and no information will be shared with your career specialists. I also ask that you select a pseudonym to identify your career specialist during the interview, to ensure the career specialists name remains anonymous. All data collected will only be viewed by the researcher and her supervisor, will be kept in a confidential and secure environment, and will contain only a pseudonym to identify your data. The audio-recorded data will be transcribed into a word document, with only a pseudonym used to identify the document. At the end of the study the audio-recorded data

will be deleted within a 3 year time period. All data collected is used to inform a Masters Degree project being conducted by the interviewer.

Explain who will have access to the information collected.

Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. The information that you have given will be pooled with other participants and analyzed, and only a summary will be given to you to view in an e-mail. No identifying information will be present in this summary and only pseudonyms will be used, therefore the information is anonymous.

Should you wish to withdraw from the study, your personal information, audio-recording and transcript will be deleted but your name and e-mail will still be entered into a draw.

All information will be stored for three years on a computer disk which is password protected and only accessible by the researcher and the supervisor. After three years have elapsed, all information will be permanently erased. Audio-recorded information will be stored on the researcher's computer and erased at the end of the study.

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print)

Participant's Signature _____ Date:

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date:

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

*Ms. Terilyn Pott
Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education,
587-777-5998, tampott@ucalgary.ca*

Or

*Supervisor Dr. Jo-Anne Willment, Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, 403-
220-2517, willment@ucalgary.ca*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Senior Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email rburrows@ucalgary.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

What did you find helpful?

Have you engaged in career exploration? Have you talked to someone about your future career direction, done a career assessment or needed help finding a job? Then read on!

Study Criteria: Be 18+ years of age, have taken part in 2 or more career sessions



As a person interested in participating in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- **Attend a one hour interview** where you will be asked to describe your experience of partaking in career exploration, and explain what things you believed were helpful in creating a working relationship between you and the career specialist.

- Respond to a short questionnaire e-mailed to you at the end of the study.

→ **To participate please e-mail the researcher**



Bonus: All participants will be entered into a draw for the chance **to win a \$50.00 visa card** to be drawn at the end of the study.

This study has been cleared by the University of Calgary's CFREB ethics.

Career exploration
study

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