Work-life Transitions for Young, Coastal Adults: A Qualitative Follow-Up Study

by

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The transition from education to the world of work has changed significantly for most young people in recent years. Social and economic changes have impacted the process, particularly for youth in small communities. Much career development research has identified the needs of urban youth; however, the needs of young people living in rural areas have largely been omitted. This qualitative study illuminated the work-life transitions of nine adults from a small, coastal community on northern Vancouver Island. Elicited through semi-structured interviews, a variety of living and work pathways were identified. Participants described supportive families, community involvement, passions for their surrounding environment, and positive future outlooks; in addition to struggling with frequent moving, economic hardship, and changes in employment and career aspirations. The results have important implications for research and policy regarding education and work planning.
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Chapter I - Introduction

Background to the Study

Patterns of young peoples’ work-life transitions have changed over the last few decades, becoming more protracted and complex (Blatterer, 2007). Globalization of the world’s economies has significant effects on the ways in which people live their lives and is changing the nature of working life. While 20 years ago most young people formulated relatively straightforward ideas about their destinations in the labour market, today’s growing unemployment, shrinking labour force participation, and prolonged education creates more complexities and uncertainties for young people (Schoon, McCulloch, Joshi, Wiggins, & Bynner, 2001). A process unlike that for generations before, the work-life transition has transformed from a relatively linear pathway to an often meandering, gradual, and individualized process. More than ever, work-life transitions are multifaceted processes significantly influenced by changing socio-economic conditions.

Identity formation is similarly more complex and extended as young people enter adulthood and the labour market (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). Characteristic of increased levels of individual complexity and insecurity, new transition pathways are no longer fully explained by family background, social class, or educational achievements. Identity formation is a defining feature of the transition to adulthood as young people explore and self-choose values and work goals in order to achieve identity synthesis (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Given the nature of this process, young people need to take an active role in their own development and planning (Coté, 1996).

The multiple and diverse work patterns and pathways that currently exist are evident in urban settings where they have received considered research attention. Previous work-life
transition findings among urban young people predict different values and pathways than the experiences of young people from rural, coastal communities (Marshall, 2002). However, there is a paucity of in-depth research on the work-life transitions of people from rural areas. In the current literature, the impact of a rural context is often ignored or assumed to be simply “just one more variable to be entered into a multivariate equation” (Looker & Dwyer, 1998, p. 9).

Research Focus

Many researchers and theorists consider the school-to-work transition to be one of the most difficult developmental challenges for young people (Erikson, 1968, Lapan, Tucker, Kim & Kosciulek, 2003; Thomson & Holland, 2002). Work-life transitions remain a significant challenge; however, more than ever before, personal and work lives, about which decisions involve complex intellectual and social processes, are weaving together. Blustein (2006) posits that with the landscape of working rapidly and unexpectedly shifting, the role of work in the lives of individuals is increasingly more pervasive. Changes such as less defined and predictable career pathways, greater competition and pressure for productivity, more tasks and greater work/life complexity, more need for dual career planning/pressure on families are impacting working life (Amundson, 2005). Notably, current research on work-life transitions is often conducted with college and university student participants; while the process of young people entering the labour market after high school has received far less attention. An increasing criticism of career development theories and interventions is that they typically address the most economically and educationally advantaged young people (college and university students; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). From 1990 to 2009, the proportion of Canadians aged 20 to 24 that participated in university accounted for about 15-25% of the population (Statistics Canada, 2009). Moreover, a considerable amount of research has also identified the employment and
education needs of urban youth, leaving the needs of young people living in rural areas largely unexplored (Marshall, 2002). This “urban assumption”, as Jeffrey, Lehr, Hache, and Campbell (1992, p. 253) have termed the phenomenon, has left the contextual landscape of work-life transitions for rural young people scarcely understood. The focus of the present study was to provide in-depth, qualitative research on this population.

**Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to provide follow-up data on work-life transitions of coastal, rural young adults who were initially interviewed in high school as part of the “Coasts Under Stress” study (www.coastsunderstress.com). The research question to be answered was: What have been young adults’ work-life experiences since their participation in the Coasts Under Stress study? As part of this descriptive qualitative study, nine young adults from a coastal, rural community in British Columbia described what has happened for them since leaving high school. Through purposeful, semi-structured interviews, the participants shared their work-life transition experiences, the consequential supports and barriers in their lives, and their future plans.

**Researcher Self Location**

As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge that my subjective position is a necessary component of this research process. I recognize that my perceptions and experiences are part of the reality of my study and hence I describe my positioning in this section.

I have had several professional experiences witnessing and counselling individuals through work-life transitions, experiences that have dramatically influenced my ideas about transitions. For example, after completing my undergraduate degree in psychology, I worked as an employment counsellor with adults with disabilities. Then, during my Master’s studies, I
worked both as counsellor at an alternative high school with youth and then at the university’s
counselling services with other students.

While collecting data for my thesis, I took great pleasure in visiting some of the North
Island rural communities and interviewing young people. I identified with many aspects of the
participants’ stories because I am a young woman and “emerging adult” (Arnett, 2004) who is
currently experiencing my own work-life transitions as I attend school, work, and make future
life plans. Furthermore, I was born and raised in a small town in the interior of British Columbia.

After I finished high school I remained in my small community for the first year of my
studies. I continued working at the same part-time job I had in high-school, lived with my
parents, and attended the local college. However, I was eager to live on my own, attend a larger
university, meet new people, and experience a larger city. After my first year of college I moved
to Victoria, BC to continue my studies; however, in a different field of interest. Moving to
Victoria was my first major move and my first experience of living in a city - adjusting to life in
a larger city was an exciting, yet challenging change. I did not return to my small community
during the summers, as many of my friends did, but rather worked part-time jobs in Victoria and
often took summer courses. Growing up in my small community I appreciated the environment
(i.e. the lakes and climate) and participated in sports unique to my community (i.e. downhill,
cross-country, and water skiing). However, I also longed to live in city where I felt I had more
academic, employment, and social opportunities. Increasingly I felt comfortable and connected
to living in a larger city. I continued to live in Victoria after I completed my undergraduate
degree and quickly found work in my general field of interest. After working for two years I
returned to the University of Victoria to pursue my Master’s degree. Now, as I approach the end
of this degree I will be navigating another major work-life transition. I feel Victoria is now my
home, although I frequently return home to visit friends and family. I would like to continue living in a larger city and pursuing my education in the field of psychology. Hence, I bring to this research information and experiences I have gained personally as well as professionally.
Chapter II – Review of Selected Literature

This chapter provides a review of literature relevant to the study of young peoples’ work-life transitions. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) maintain that as qualitative researchers, we are all in a sense philosophers who are guided by highly abstract principles. Thus, I begin this chapter by describing these abstract principles, that is to say, the theoretical framework underlying this research. I situate the present study within an overarching social constructionist framework and then describe how theories of identity, the psychology of working, and social cognitive career development inform this research. To better acquaint the reader with the scholarly knowledge on this research topic, selected literature is presented in the following main sections: work and life transitions for young people, rurality, and supports and barriers. I provide a general conceptualization of young adults and describe research on young adults’ transition pathways, including entry into the workforce and unemployment. I address the global context of the changing labour market and the impact of this on young peoples’ transitions. Next, the implications and definitional considerations of rurality are provided. Research on support and barriers is presented, including internal factors, relational factors, educational factors, and structural conditions. I conclude the chapter by situating the present study within the “Coasts Under Stress” study and “Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth” project.

Theoretical Framework

When conducting inquiry, Marshall and Rossman (1995) suggest that researchers be guided by systematic considerations of existing theory and research and that they explicate the conceptual framework with which the study is approached. Moreover, in order to determine the appropriate standards for evaluating its rigor and trustworthiness, one must understand the philosophy of science paradigm that informs a study (Haverkamp & Young, 2007).
describing my theoretical framework I am making transparent my processes of conceptualizing and decision making pre and post data collection. The interplay of personal observation with theoretical conceptualizations informs not only the articulation of the research questions, but also the manner in which this study is interpreted and presented.

**Interpretive/constructivist research paradigm.** A “basic set of beliefs that guides actions” (Guba, 1990, p. 17), a paradigm is a net containing the researcher’s ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions (Morrow, 2007). Grounded in relativist ontology, this study involves an interpretive/constructivist paradigm, which posits that every social situation involves multiple social realities (Haverkamp & Young, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Interpretivism is the tradition that is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, and produced (Mason, 2002). Interpretivism is transactional and subjective in epistemology, such that knowledge and meaning transpire through social interactions and are described as co-constructed. As a result of the subjective nature of interpretivism, knowledge and meaning derived within this framework cannot be observed directly but rather are inferred, or interpreted. Moreover, the researcher’s values are assumed to exist, further emphasizing subjectivity as an integral aspect of this study (Morrow, 2007).

**Social constructivism and social constructionism.** Social constructivists and social constructionists such as Mahoney (2003), Arvay (2002), and Gergen (1994) contend that there is no single or objective “reality” or “truth,” but there exist rather “truth claims,” based on contingent, transient, partial, and situated realities. From a constructivist perspective, career is understood as a subjective experience (Peavy, 1995). Reality is socially constructed, thus there are multiple versions of social reality, individually and communally created, at any given time (Arvay, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Mahoney (2003) contends that the self is self-
organizing, relational, and based on a system seeking balance during novel experiences that challenge beliefs, assumptions, and patterns of experience. These core ordering processes “organize experience and activity along dimensions of emotional valance, reality states, personal identity and power” (p. 46) and are developed from the ways in which people understand their lives and create meaning. Within this framework, this research is based on the belief that people are active agents in creating meaning in their lives and the focus is on the ways in which people make sense of their working life.

While constructivist epistemology focuses on individual cognitive processes as a means of understanding human behaviour (Neimeyer, 1995), social constructionists expand on the constructivist epistemology to include the idea that the “social realm of people’s lives … impinge[s] on the knowledge that one can know” (Arvay, 2002, p. 207). Of central importance to the present study is the emphasis of the construction of meaning (of work-life transitions). In social constructionism, knowledge is constructed through relationships rooted in a cultural, socioeconomic, and socio-political context rather than being solely a product of the individual (Burr, 1995; Gergen, 1999). Social constructionists call attention to the co-constructed nature of reality and the influence of language as a basis for multiple reality notions. As Gergen (1991) proposes, “words are not maps of reality… [but] rather, words gain their meaning through their use in social interchange, within the ‘language games’ of the culture” (p. 102). Words and concepts gain meaning from the manner in which they are used in social life. When we understand others’ words correctly, we are aiming to grasp their intention and meaning.

Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss, and Flum (2004) note several key assumptions of the social constructionist position that are central to studying work-life. Firstly, the social constructionist position challenges the notion that knowledge is based on objective observations
and assumes a critical stance towards ways of understanding the world and ourselves. This critical reflection and questioning of beliefs leads to new ways of knowing and multiple perspectives of knowledge (Gergen, 1999). Second, social constructionism presumes that one’s understanding of the world is culturally and historically rooted (Blustein et al.). Third, knowledge is constructed among people through social interactions and relationships rather than objective observations (Blustein et al.). And fourth, socially constructed and negotiated views of the world take numerous forms and lead to related patterns of social action (Blustein et al.). In summary, from a social constructionist position, the process and dynamics of work-life social interaction is the focus rather than “objective truth” (Burr, 1995).

Identity. Beginning with Erikson’s (1968) research on identity, there has been considerable interest in understanding the influence of historical and social forces and how they impact the process of identity formation (Blustein & Noumair, 1996). This interest has formed the theoretical foundation for various investigators and theorists who have researched numerous facets of the role of culture in identity and concluded that the definition of identity varies across cultures and time frames (Blustein & Noumair). Arnett (2004), Nelson and Barry (2005), and Schwartz (2001) have suggested that young people experience a period of exploration that lasts into at least the early 20s – termed “Emerging Adulthood” by Arnett – during which they attempt to answer “Who am I, and what is my place in society?” Nelson and Barry contend that following this period of identity exploration, young people develop personal values and work goals whereby they achieve identity synthesis. Exploration during this period of time tends to occur across various domains. For example, Coté (1996) identified three clusters including: (a) psychological (i.e. career choice), (b) interactional (i.e. dating), and (c) social-structures (i.e. morality, politics).
Consistent with the social constructionist perspective, identity is conceptualized as constructed and reconstructed within relationships and across multiple contexts (Blustein et al., 2004; Gergen, 1994, 1999). For example, individuals derive a sense of self from subjective experiences, social roles, and various helping and hindering social conditions (cf. Blustein & Noumair, 1996). Gergen (1991) proposes that identity is continuously emergent, re-formed, and re-directed through ever-changing relationships. Such constructions are based on language that draws upon the socially and culturally available discourses such as meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, and statements (Burr, 1995). These discourses come together to describe versions of events or persons and provide a way of interpreting and giving meaning to the world and the people in it (Burr). For example, explorations in work can be seen in young peoples’ tendencies to change educational majors, in their participation in short-term volunteer jobs, or in travelling for work, educational, or personal purposes (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Gergen (1991) emphasizes the ways in which social saturation has come to govern daily life, and that, as we become increasingly conjoined with our social surroundings, we come to reflect these varied surroundings. This populating of the self reflects the mixture of partial identities fostered by social saturation. As each of us comes to harbour this multitude of hidden potentials, the notion of a well-formed identity becomes doubtful; social saturation increasingly adds to the populated and repertoire of potential selves (Gergen). Consistent with postmodernism, we absorb multiple voices and consider potential selves; we find that each truth is “revitalized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives and [we] come to be aware that each truth about our possible selves is constructions of the moment, true only for a given time and within certain relationships” (Gergen, 1991, p. 16). For example, a young person holds a vision of becoming a marine biologist, she had work experience at the local fish farm that
has been seen as successful and rewarding; however, while at college she earns poor grades in her college science classes. Caught in these seemingly contradictory behaviours or incoherent activities, one can grow anguished over the confusion of one’s sense of identity. However, by casting “the true” and “the identifiable” out the window, Gergen maintains that an enormous world of potential unfolds and one ceases to believe in the self as independent of the relations in which she or he is embedded. A case in point, Arnett and Jensen’s (2002) and Arnett’s (1997) research suggests that young people explore many worldviews and beliefs and that often deviate from the views in which they were raised.

**Place identity.** Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff (1983) and more recently Gustafson (2000) and Fried (2000) propose that “place identity” is a cognitive structure that contributes to identity processes. Previous research (Marshall, 2002) on young adults from coastal communities highlights the significance of place identity with this population. Marshall highlights the “central importance of an individual’s physical, social, and cultural milieu, and how these affect life planning and decision making ... particularly pertinent for small town and coastal residents” (p. 70). Place identity is a construct of identity whereby people explore the “Who am I?” question by answering the “Where am I?” question (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Place identity is conceptualized as an individual’s strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging to a particular place or setting; it is personally constructed and is developed from subjective experiences within the physical environment (Proshansky et al., 1983). Described as a substructure of identity, place identity is a set of complex cognitions characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meaning, and behavioural tendencies. These cognitions are expressed through engagement with an individual’s environment on both a conscious and unconscious level (Proshansky et al).
Through daily happenings as well as extraordinary circumstances, place identity develops by positioning oneself within environmental contexts (Pretty, Chipuer, & Bramston, 2003). Proshansky and colleagues state that “we not only experience the physical realities, for example, of a particular neighbourhood in which we grew up, but also the social meaning and beliefs attached to it by those who live outside of it as well as its residents” (1983, p. 62). In sum, place identity is formed by cognitions influencing assimilated values, beliefs, and attitudes pertinent to past, present, and anticipated physical settings and begins to characterize the person’s daily existence. Pretty and colleagues posit that community can have personal meanings that are constructed such that the experiences and images of the place constitute a symbolic extension of the self.

**Psychology of working.** A prominent theme in the current movement to contextualize career concerns has been the exploration of the link between interpersonal relationships and the work and career world (Blustein, et al., 2004). The distinction between work and non-work issues in psychological theories and practices is increasingly fading. The changes taking place in our current work world are having significant effects on the manner in which people live their lives. For example, utilizing the various forms of information technology, we are witnessing a revolution as work and personal lives become integrated into a complex, and not yet well understood, fusion (Blustein, 2006). Furthermore, the new Psychology of Working is now understood as concerning the whole person and the combination of physical, social, political, economic, and cultural contexts, rather than as work or career choice alone.

In his book “The Psychology of Working”, David Blustein (2006) describes three core functions that work has the potential to fulfill: (a) survival and power, with power referring to the exchange of work for money or goods and services, which serves as a means to sustain one’s
life; (b) social connection: working connects people to their social context and to interpersonal relationships; and (c) self-determination and identity formation such that an extrinsically motivated activity that may become internalized and part of a broader set of values, behaviours, and goals. In summary, working includes a wide range of experiences, for “people with volition in their work lives to those who work in any task simply to survive for another day” (Blustein, 2006, p. 21).

**Social cognitive career theory.** Anchored in Bandura’s (1986) general social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory (SCCT, Lent, Brown, Hacket, 1996) is an evolving view of career development that embraces certain constructivist assumptions about people’s capacity to influence their own development and surroundings (Mahoney & Patterson, 1992). SCCT focuses on several “agentic” variables (self-efficacy, outcome expectation, goals) and how these variables interact with environmental variables (e.g. social support and barriers) in the context of career development (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999). The three central variables from Bandura’s social cognitive theory (i.e., self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals) are the “basic building blocks” of career development and the central theoretical constructs of SCCT. Self-efficacy refers to people’s beliefs about their capabilities (Bandura, 1986; Lent, et al., 1996). A dynamic set of self-beliefs, specific to particular contexts, that interact in a complex manner with other people, behavioural, and environmental factors self-efficacy is not unitary, fixed, or decontextualized. Lent and colleagues (1996) contend that self efficacy beliefs are acquired and adapted through four main sources of information: (a) personal performance accomplishments, (b) vicarious learning, (c) social persuasion, and (d) physiological states and reactions. Personal attainments are typically seen as the most effective sources. Success experiences with a given
task are robust sources of self-efficacy beliefs while failure experiences tend to diminish these beliefs (Lent et al., 1996).

Outcome expectations are the second key variable in SCCT. They involve personal beliefs about and the imagined consequences of performing given behaviours. Outcome expectations include beliefs about extrinsic reinforcement, self-directed consequences, and outcomes derived from the process of performing a given activity (Lent et al., 1996). For example, these beliefs derive from the outcomes people may have experienced from past actions or observations of the outcomes produced by other people. The third key variable in SCCT refers to people’s determination to engage in a given activity or achieve goals. Goal-setting is a critical mechanism through which people exercise personal control or agency. By setting personal goals, people help to organize, guide, and sustain their own behaviour (Lent et al.).

General social cognitive theory posits a complex interplay between goals, self-efficacy, and outcome expectation. Goals are assumed to influence the development of self-efficacy, while self-efficacy and outcome expectations, in turn, affect the goals that one selects and the effort expended in their pursuit (Bandura, 1986). However, these social cognitive variables do not arise in a vacuum, nor do they function alone in shaping vocational interests. SCCT is concerned with a number of other important personal and contextual influences such as gender, race/ethnicity, genetic endowment, physical health/disability, place, and socioeconomic status, variables that are assumed to be intricately related to the social cognitive variables and to the career development process (Lent et al., 1996). SCCT is relevant to this study’s focus – young people in work-life transitions.

**Life and Work Transitions**
Young adults. Identity formation is a crucial developmental task for young adults (Erikson 1968, Arnett, 2004). The transformation to a postmodern society has led to expansive freedoms and a large range of social opportunities affecting young people’s development and growth (Luyckx, Schwartz, Goossens, & Pollock, 2008). Jeffrey Arnett’s (2004) view of this particular period of development, which he labels “Emerging Adulthood,” reflects the socio-structural changes that have taken place in many Western nations. Rather than a universal period of development, emerging adulthood is thought to be a period that exists under certain conditions that has become present only over the past few decades and in some cultures; it is hypothesized to exist mainly in developed countries of the West, along with Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea (Arnett).

Arnett (2004) maintains that emerging adulthood is the time when young people explore various possibilities available to them in love and work, and then gradually move toward adulthood and making enduring decisions. The rise in age of entering into marriage and parenthood, the lengthening of time spent in higher education, and the prolonged job instability during one’s twenties, characterize the life for young people in industrialized societies. The transition into adulthood for such individuals is long and gradual and is not an extension of adolescence or a phase of early adulthood - emerging adulthood is a “new and historically unprecedented period of the life course” (Arnett, 2004, p. 4). From the late teens into the late twenties, five essential features characterize emerging adulthood: (a) identity exploration, especially in love and work; (b) instability; (c) the most self-focused period of life; (d) feeling neither adolescent nor adult; (e) possibilities (Arnett). According to Arnett, this developmental stage is when young people see themselves as too old to be an adolescent or youth, but not yet a full fledged adult.
Emerging adulthood is a significant period of identity exploration whereby young people explore many of their possible selves, especially in terms of work (Arnett, 2004). Compared to 40 or 50 years ago, young people today explore a wider array of values and identities, and, consequently, work options (Coté, 1996). Emerging adulthood is generally a period in which young people become more independent from their parents and often leave the family home (at least temporarily), but do not necessarily have the stable commitments of typical western adult life (long-term job, marriage, parenthood). They often try out different ways of living and different options in their work and personal lives. During this period, work choices are often based on underlying identity questions such as: “What kind of work am I good at? What kind of work would I find satisfying for the long term? What are my chances of getting a job in the field that seems to suit me best?” (Arnett, 2004, p. 9) and through different work and life experiences, young people expand their repertoire of possible selves by examining their abilities, interests, strengths, and weaknesses.

Branded the “age of possibilities”, during emerging adulthood, individuals experience the future as open to numerous options (Arnett, 2004; Konstam, 2007) and more than any other period of life, this time presents multiple possibilities for changes. Known as a period of high hopes and great expectations, emerging adults are positively future-oriented, often envisioning satisfying and well-paying work in addition to loving relationships. During their twenties, fulfillment of hopes and expectations seem entirely possible as many young people experience ranges of possibilities for how to live and work. Drawing from interview and questionnaire data, Arnett suggests that young people use internal and individualistic criteria for adulthood such as taking responsibility for one’s actions, independent decision-making, and financial independence. Structural dimensions, such as race and gender, are downplayed and
individualistic qualities such as achieving a sense of personal responsibility and independence are emphasized.

In the present study, young adulthood for rural coastal people is characteristic of a period of identity exploration as well as work-life transitional events. For example, Molgat (2007) contends that emerging adulthood is understood in terms of both individualistic qualities as well as transition markers. This Canadian researcher suggests that individualistic criteria such as autonomy, financial independence, and responsibility, in addition to transitional events such as finishing school, getting a “real job,” entering into financial obligations, leaving home, partnerships, and parenthood are elements of moving into adulthood. Luyckx and colleagues’ (2008) research demonstrated how identity formation, measured by scoring high on sense of coherence scale, mediated contextual and psychological processes for young adults working towards a sense of adulthood. A strong “sense of coherence” (p. 568) referred to the extent to which one views the world, the individual environment, and life events as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful (Luyckx et al.). Nelson and Barry (2005) investigated subjective experiences of adulthood; their findings suggested that young people who considered themselves adults, compared to their emerging adulthood peers, believed they had a more solid sense of both identity as well as the type of person they wanted as a romantic partner, were less depressed, and engaged in fewer risk taking behaviours. These studies establish an important link between identity formation and subjective sense of adulthood - two crucial concepts are related to emerging adulthood.

There is some debate among scholars about emerging adulthood. Late adolescent/early adulthood researchers do not all acknowledge the concept of emerging adulthood as a recognizable stage. Horowitz and Brominick (2007) label this time period for young people as
“contestable adulthood” (p. 212). From their perspective, claims to adult status are subject to contention and dispute; arguably, the label “adult” is essentially contestable at various stages of one’s life course with markers of adulthood multiple and contradictory. The stage immediately prior to adulthood is understood by these researchers as the period when adult status is contestable, with wide disparities and varieties of markers, as opposed to Arnett (2004) who views this stage as involving consistent patterns with clearly defined markers. Other critics of Arnett’s theory suggest that the importance of structural factors, such as race, class, and gender, are negated (Brynner, 2005). Additionally, Luyckx and colleagues suggest that Arnett’s (2004) approach “applies primarily to those individuals who have the economic wherewithal to postpone adult responsibilities” (p. 567). Galambos and Martinez (2007) emphasize that young people from less advantaged families and backgrounds (particularly those from developing countries) have limited freedom for extended identity exploration, and hence work-life options.

**Transition pathways.** Whatever the label used, the stage of young adulthood is accepted as being a time of personal and contextual transitions. Worthington and Juntunen (1997) suggest that Parsons, in 1909, was perhaps the first to emphasize the importance of helping young people during the school-to-work transition; he acknowledged the complexity of this task and compared career development during this period to that of building a house. Recent writers such as Amundson (2005), Amundson, Jang, and To (2004), Blustein and colleagues (2004), Feller (2003), and Savickas (1993) categorize the school-to-work transition as a developmental task, strongly influenced by cultural, social, economic, and historical circumstances. Goodwin and O’Connor (2007) observe that this movement from “full-time education to employment has always been fraught with risk, uncertainty, insecurity, and individualization” (p. 570). Horowitz and Brominick (2007) draw attention to the increasing consensus that radical social change has
transformed the transition to adulthood from a relatively definite and logical pathway to a now complex, perhaps fragmented, individualized process dependent on young peoples’ abilities to manage various landmark events and transitions (Dwyer, Smith, Tyler, & Wyn, 2003; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Young adults are increasingly required to “individualize” (p. 203) their work-life pathways in order to form working and personal relationships, to gain educational credentials and employment experiences, and to plan for the future (Schwartz, Coté, & Arnett, 2005). Career development theories highlight that individuals have the potential to exercise some agency during school-to-work transitions, assuming that certain psychological and social factors are in place (Krumboltz & Worthington, 1999; Lent et al., 1999; Savickas, 1999; Swanson & Fouad, 1999).

Growing up in a world different to that experienced by previous generations, these changes have been significant enough to merit a reconceptualization of young peoples’ transitions patterns. A number of authors have outlined how navigating educational requirements and career decision making processes have grown in complexity due to changes such globalization and as rapid advances in technology (Amundson, 2005; Feller, 2003). For example, some changes to working life include greater competition and pressure for productivity, organizational change being driven by mergers, more opportunities to work in different parts of the world, greater need to consider self-employment options, increased racial and gender diversity, and increased emphasis on interpersonal changes. The traditional links between family, school, and work seem to have weakened as young people embark on journeys into adulthood that involves a wide variety of routes, many with uncertain outcomes. For example, work histories are more complex than originally indentified by school-to-work transition researchers in the 1970s (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2007). Young people are more often engaged in short-term
work positions, frequently change employment, experience periods of unemployment, and may undertake post-secondary education or training more than once. As such, contemporary transition experiences have become more prolonged and ambiguous (Goodwin & O’Connor, 2007; Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). In the past, transitions typically involved young people finding a job, getting married, and leaving the parental home in a relatively short period of time (Goodwin & O’Connor 2007; Schwartz, et al., 2005). Compared to twenty years ago, transition patterns have become more destandardized and often include reversible pathways. For example, returning to the parental home during periods of unemployment or transition (i.e. post-secondary to work) is not uncommon.

Molgat’s (2007) study described reversible pathways that included transitioning from work back to school, moving back into the parental house from independent living, and changing relationship status. Moreover, examples of reversible transitions include switching post-secondary programs, changing house status and housing arrangements, and job-loss. These examples suggest a shifting between dependence and independence and that young people are managing work-life courses consistent with “yo-yo-ization” (Horowitz and Brominick, 2007, p. 210). Walther and Plug (2006) refer to “yo-yo transitions” as the growing sense of reversibility of transitions between youth and adulthood. These researchers contend that yo-yo transitions are not necessarily young people’s first choice, but are rather the result of traditional structures of social inequalities and other circumstances (i.e. family need, financial need, health, relationship changes).

Walther and Plug (2006) identified five transition categories among European young people: smooth transitions, institutionally repaired transitions, alternative transitions, stagnant transitions, and downward transitions. Smooth transitions were those that include transitioning
from education to stable work with sufficient support from teachers and parents, or without need for assistance. Institutionally repaired transitions were interrupted transitions that included early school leaving, unemployment, or family crisis and were characteristic of support from specialized agencies with guidance such as counselling, training, and possible reintegration into the labour market. Alternative transitions were not characteristic of predictable patterns but rather situations where young people pursued education exceeding common standards or left “institutionalized pathways” and followed an alternative pathway that offered more personal satisfaction rather than social or economic success and stability. Those from middle or higher socioeconomic backgrounds were most prevalent in this category. Stagnant transitions were patterns of disparity between education and employment and included phases in which young people were in a cycle of causal or precarious work with unemployment, educational dropout, or participation in periodic training or placement schemes. This pattern of transition was thought to inhibit young people from approaching adulthood status, related to work stability and more frequently characteristic of those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. Intervention programs targeted at this group did not seem to change their unfortunate situations or increase motivation among participants.

The last pattern that Walther and Plug identified was downward transitions. This comprised the smallest number of young people. This transition pattern was characteristic of difficult life events such as family problems, school drop-out, drug use, long periods of unemployment, legal prosecution, or other critical incidents. This pattern was more often found in those from poorer socioeconomic background and thought to be at high risk for social marginalization. Walther and Plug’s analysis of transition patterns demonstrates the close relationship between varying social structures and the resultant influences on young peoples’
transition experiences. In the present study, transition patterns demonstrate the varying supports and barriers experienced by coastal young adults.

**Entry into the workforce.** Other researchers have more specifically identified that the changing nature of the labour market has created a precarious economic environment which hinders young people’s attainment of some of the conventional markers of adulthood (financial and living independence and stable employment). Devadason (2007) examined young peoples’ narrative accounts in which they reflected upon their entry into the workforce. Devadason described five transition themes including: (a) climbing the career ladder; (b) personal development; (c) avoiding monotony and boredom; (d) at “square one” and; (e) “setback stories.” Climbing the career ladder was specifically associated with high income professionals and managers. This transition pattern was attributed to moving “onwards and upwards” (Devadson, 2007, p. 209) in a chosen occupation. The personal development theme was implicitly and explicitly connected with the desire for change. For example, young people sometimes had less-established career paths and pursued activities that were personally meaningful but unrelated to their career (for example, learning a second language). The avoidance of monotony and boredom theme included narratives that emphasized the importance of change and developing various aspects of self. These young people de-emphasized money and extrinsic career goals and instead framed their ultimate goals with respect to self-actualization. The “at square one” theme was related to a lack of alternatives. Choices were limited and pragmatic, reflecting available opportunities rather than individual goals. The last theme in this research, setback stories, reflected young people’s accounts of why they had not succeeded in pursuing their ambitions. A particularly relevant implication from this study, ambitious young adults described their personal ambition and drive as helping them to overcome barriers. In
contrast, other young adults – despite being structurally disadvantaged – pointed to their lack of focus, self-confidence, or factors “beyond their control” as undermining their life chances.

A later study by Bradley and Devadason (2008) described four typologies of labour market-influenced pathways that emphasized the length, complexity, and variability of young peoples’ transitions. “Shifters,” “stickers,” “switchers,” and “settlers” were respectively defined as: (a) those with no chosen career and various changes between types of work and employment statuses; (b) those pursuing a specific type of work; (c) those making a major change of direction after elapsed period of time in a specific vocation; (d) those making a change to pursue a single type of vocation after an elapsed period of shifting (Bradley & Devadason). Residing in Bristol, England, many of the participants experienced periods of unemployment and were characterized as shifters and switchers moving in and out of the labour market and between temporary, low-paid and low-status types of work. Although not a rural sample, these typologies reflect how current work-life pathways for young people are significantly impacted by changing social and economic conditions.

Unemployment. Negative labour market experiences have been linked with young people not in education, employment, or training and have been associated with a lack of sense of control over one’s life and dissatisfaction with life (Bynner & Parsons 2002). Devadason’s (2007) square one transition pattern characterized young peoples’ labour market entry as limited and pragmatic choices reflective of available opportunities rather than individual goals. Schoon and colleagues (2007) conclude that over the last three decades young peoples’ transitions have been increasingly associated with rising risks of unemployment because of rapidly changing economic and social contexts. Holland, Reynolds, and Weller (2007) contend that this struggle to maintain an educational route is the intricate interplay of agency, structure, resources,
resourcefulness, contingency, and social policy. For example, for some young people, individual resources of ability and ambition do not necessarily translate into educational and occupational success.

In November, 2008 (the time period of the majority of the present study research interviews), Statistics Canada reported that men and youths (aged 15 to 24) were most affected by employment declines. In fact, for youths, employment declined by 19,000 between November 2007 and November 2008. As shown in Table 1, Labour force characteristics of British Columbia, the general unemployment rate for British Columbians was 4.9 in 2008. However, specifically for young men and women the unemployment rate is much higher, 13.2 – more than double the overall rate. For young men and women aged 15 to 24, the unemployment rate continues to increase; for example, in 2007 the unemployment rate was 7.6, and then in 2008 the unemployment rate was 8.4. Detailed statistics by age and area of residence in British Columbia, urban and rural labour force activity for young people aged 15 to 24 was almost equal at the time of the 2006 census.

Table 1.

Labour Force Characteristics for British Columbia

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>3,663.9</td>
<td>3,668.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force</td>
<td>2,434.2</td>
<td>2,429.3</td>
<td>-4.9</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>2,311.1</td>
<td>2,310.4</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1,855.7</td>
<td>1,841.8</td>
<td>-13.9</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>455.5</td>
<td>468.6</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>123.00</td>
<td>119.00</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>-3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rate</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>-0.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment rate</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note. ... = not applicable. Dates are seasonally adjusted. Source: Statistics Canada (2008)
Looker and Dwyer (1998) posit that many young people were likely to experience unemployment and more movement in and out of employment. In fact, Good and O’Connor (2007) found that some young people have identified changing jobs as many as seven times during the first year of employment due to poor training, pay and working conditions, not being able to sign apprenticeship papers, and workplace bullying. Perhaps a result of insufficient preparation for employment and little assistance in making the transition to work, young people have been found to struggle upon initial entry into the workforce and were found in positions that lacked the opportunities for advancement (Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). Furlong and Cartmel (1997) posit that those who failed to find a job immediately after leaving high school career training programs found it difficult to escape long-term unemployment. Not gaining entry into a desired occupation, not attaining a position one has applied for (Devadason, 2007), and not learning the skills necessary to succeed in the technological workforce (Worthington & Juntunen) were further barriers related to unemployment.

In summary, life-courses and transition patterns that were once more normatively structured have changed to some degree for young people. It would seem that these shifts have had an impact of their decisions - influencing young people to take on new responsibilities for living and managing the consequences of such actions (Schwartz, et al., 2005).

**Changing work context.** The work-life experience of young people has changed significantly over the last two decades. Globalization, advances in technology and information, and significant demographic shifts are sweeping changes that affect the national and local labour markets. As a result, once well-established local industries and companies are disappearing from the industrial landscape: jobs and trades, once thought to be secure, have vanished alongside these transformations (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007). For example, in rural and coastal BC,
Restructuring in fishing and logging industries has resulted in widespread cutbacks and substantial job losses. Since the aftermath of the recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s, young people, in particular, have become more susceptible than before to the ever-changing impacts of global socio-economic conditions (Schoon et al., 2001). Changes in relationships with family and friends, experiences in education and work, leisure and lifestyle, and young peoples’ ability to establish themselves as adults are more challenging in this current state of affairs (Furlong & Cartmel).

Affected by this restructuring of the labour market, transitions into employment now tend to take longer because young people finish school at different stages and follow a variety of different work-life pathways (Schoon et al., 2001). Increasing demands for highly qualified and well educated workers, flexible specialization in the workplace, and changes in social policies have far-reaching impacts on the work experiences of young people, especially at entry levels (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997). Rising qualification levels have been observed in most developed countries as a growing number of young people are participating in higher education, and consequently, the age when young people enter employment has been effectively delayed. As a result of these dynamics, “young people today have to negotiate a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents” (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 1). Because these changes have come about in a relatively short period of time, points of reference that previously helped smooth social processes have become obscure or outdated. In turn, young people face “increased uncertainty [that] can be seen as a source of stress and vulnerability” (Furlong & Cartmel, 1997, p. 1). With new and more diverse lifestyles, Furlong and Cartmel assert that it is no longer suited to apply “grand theories” to the study of work-life as patterns as behaviour and individual life chances have lost their predictability.
The current social and economic climate has created a challenging context for counsellors and advisors supporting young people through work-life transitions. In the field of counselling psychology, changes to work-life that have been identified include (but are not limited to):
greater competition and pressure for productivity, organizational changes driven by mergers;
joint ventures and work alliances; more opportunities for work in various parts of the world;
increased dependence on temporary or contract positions; greater need to consider self employment alternatives; increased racial and gender diversity in the workplace; increased demand for technological skills and complex tasks; increased dual career planning/pressure on families; emphasis on interpersonal skills such as teamwork and networking; need for continuous learning; fewer opportunities for upward mobility; and greater income disparities between workers and managers (Amundson, 2005; Amundson et al., 2004; Savickas, Van Esbroeck, Herr, 2005; Feller, 2003). When considering these changes, young people experience situations with new combinations of both challenges and opportunities.

**Rurality**

Much of the research on young people and post-high school transitions is based on urban samples which ignore the impact of “rurality” (Looker & Dwyer, 1998, p. 9). Reflected in both decision processes and the costs associated with the outcomes of such decisions, Looker and Dwyer (1998) argue that the transition pathways of rural young people are qualitatively different from those experienced by urban and suburban young people. Little attention has been paid to implications of rurality in the school-to-work transitions literature and this could in part be due to the difficulty, even in the field of rural studies, on how to define rurality (Rye, 2006).

Statistics Canada (2001) states that “almost every social, economic, and environmental policy issue has a rural dimension” (p. 2). Several definitions of “rural” are available and the
appropriate definition should be determined by what question is being asked. Challenges associated with determining a definition include, for example, how different definitions generate a different demographic of rural populations. As such, to best understand Canada’s rural populations, Statistics Canada suggests using their “rural and small town” definition. This definition is specific to populations living in towns and municipalities outside the commuting zone of larger urban centres. Moreover, the geographical classification of rural communities requires a population density of less than 150 people per square kilometre (Statistics Canada, 2001).

While size and distance from urban centres are aspects of rurality, Looker and Dwyer (1998) suggest trying to identify the social characteristics of rural as compared to urban areas. For example, these include social networks of internal community connections and strong feelings of community – some observe that people may seem closer to each other partly due to the transparency of rural life that ensures that “everyone knows everyone” (Rye, 2006; Looker & Dwyer, 1998). Moreover, rural communities differ from urban centres due to their access to resources. Compared to urban centres, rural communities are more often described in terms of what they lack, particularly regarding access to various private and public facilities and services. However, long-standing family ties to the community, physical space, and possibly cleaner water and air are features that are more likely in rural areas than urban (Looker & Dwyer). Nature and calmness and tranquility are often seen as prominent, positively valued rural characteristics when compared to living in cities.

In Rye’s (2006) study on young peoples’ perceptions of rurality, participants articulated reservations about rural life being less progressive than life in urban societies, or traditional rather than modern, or backwards rather than offering opportunities for the future. Reflecting
these sentiments, a popular explanation for the young rural-to-urban migration streams is young peoples’ quest for (formal) knowledge: the rural is thought to be the place for unskilled manual jobs rather than high-skilled and high-tech occupations. Rural young people seem to view the city as more energetic and vibrant than the countryside, which is seen as boring rather than exciting. However, this “rural dull” (p. 416) is not the only image of rural, it is also often viewed as idyllic, a view Rye terms the “rural idyll” (p. 416). Many participants thought about rural as an ideal version of the countryside, characterized by nature and a dense social structure with “feelings of neighbourliness and a spirit of cooperation” (Rye, 2006, p. 419).

Influenced by a cultural turn within social sciences, the debate on how to best understand rurality has generated a conception of rurality as a subjective and socially constructed phenomenon rather than solely determined by a set of objective criteria (Rye, 2006). Although descriptions of rurality are in part determined by concrete, tangible, and objective features, they also rest on the more abstract constructions; Rye observes that characteristics of social life such as traditionalism, dense social structures, feelings of community, and attachment to place are other constructions of rurality.

“Place” as a residential community can be understood in terms of multidimensional physical and psychological attributes (Pretty, Chipuer, Bramston, 2002). Location alone does not create place, rather, it emerges from the involvement among the people and between people and place. Understood as an environmental experience, a convergence of cognitions, affects, and behaviours; place includes the influences of meaning that residents construct through their personal, social, and cultural processes (Pretty et al., 2002). The notion of place is important for the current study because of the theory and research on place identity that signifies how these complex sets of “place” cognitions affect work and life planning.
**Location and migration.** Bajema, Miller, and Williams (2002) contend that the aspirations of young people in rural communities are vulnerable to the social influences of their community due to isolation, population size, and community culture. Physical isolation in combination with economic disadvantage can adversely affect educational trajectories and possibilities of mobility (Holland et al., 2007, p. 100). Moreover, a rural upbringing can be both a valuable experience and a handicap when transferring skills to an urban setting (Shepard, 2004). For example, the physical environment of rural communities provides unique opportunities to develop outdoor skills; however, rural young people have also expressed concerns about the transferability of such skills into conventional environments, which are more characteristic of urban settings (Shepard).

Challenges arise when attempting to meet the diverse needs of students in a small community and when introducing them to career paths not locally available. The work options available in rural communities and or resource-based industry towns typically involve training and employment for only a narrow range of occupations (Marshall, 2002). As a result, educational and occupational aspirations of rural young people must often be achieved beyond the local community (Bajema et al., 2002). However, travelling the distance to larger communities and the associated costs can restrict these educational and training opportunities. Without further schooling, young people may remain in their rural community, lacking the skills and financial resources to make a transition out of their community (Haller & Virkler, 1993; Shepard, 2004).

Locker and Dwyer’s (1998) study of rural young people in Australia revealed that those who moved to an urban centre encountered problems such as dissatisfaction with public transportation and the time it took to travel to school; increased difficulties managing finances;
and feelings of isolation from people from rural areas now living in an urban area. Similarly, Canadian young people in Locker and Dwyer’s study felt the city was a place with more options and opportunities but also more crime and violence, and a lot fewer of the community ties they identified with back home. Rural young people also report difficulty finding housing as well as poor housing conditions (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; Looker & Dwyer, 1998).

Economic outlook for the local community often motivates migration and to some extent, poor economic conditions drive rural young people away from their home communities (Garasky, 2002). Rural young people tend to leave their parents’ home at a younger age compared to their urban counterparts. A higher rate of unemployment may cause young people to leave home and their local community in search of employment opportunities elsewhere; however, a higher rate of unemployment lowers the probability that youth will secure a job that pays a wage high enough to support independent living. Interestingly, the quality of life for residents of many communities seems to be tied to the ability of the community to maintain a viable base of younger adults, as young people are often the most motivated and skilled (Garasky); these results “support the contention that brighter and more educated youths are more likely to leave the home community” (Garasky, 2002, p. 426). In summary, the state of the local economy and the industrial composition of the local labour market effects migration decisions.

Quantitative studies of both internal migration in Canada and international migration showed a strong link between education and the propensity to migrate (Corbett, 2005). In general, results indicated that people who possessed higher levels of education were more likely and able to leave rural communities, while those with higher education credentials who stayed often did not “reap significant economic benefits from their schooling” (Corbett, 2005, p. 54). This suggests that there is a lower “payoff” for formal education among those who remain in
rural communities. For those who wish to remain in rural communities, the decision to forego higher education may contain elements of economic rationality.

Schaefer-McDaniel (2004) contends that a sense of belonging forms a significant part of the conceptual framework of young people’s social capital. Holland and colleagues (2007) define “social capital” as the values that people hold and the result of collective and socially negotiated ties and relationships. There is a growing recognition of the struggle young people face between their community attachments and their attainment goals (Johnson, Elder, & Stern, 2005). Findings from Johnson and colleagues suggest strong attachments to community can be detrimental for young women because they were related to an increased likelihood of unemployment. These findings hint at the negative effects of strong community attachments for women from rural areas under economic pressure. Similarly, Corbett’s (2005) and Ommer and team’s (2007) data from a communities on the east and west coasts of Canada suggest that young people from small coastal communities (and perhaps, many rural and northern communities) often face a more restricted set of options and opportunities.

The mismatch between rural/working class homes and post-secondary schooling has been well established by educational sociologists (Corbett, 2005). Moreover, additional factors such as rising tuition costs, the centralization of education and other services in rural areas, the high cost of leaving, and the expansion of low-wage, low-skilled work in the rural service economy may help to explain continuing high dropout rates and low post-secondary participation rates in rural communities. Life in a known community among family and friends may look better to many young people than “taking a very expensive shot at an educational journey that represents an expensive, unproven, and uncertain path” (Corbett, 2005, p. 65).
Migration is a centuries-old and “visible part of the ‘community’ experience and family history of rural areas” (Jamieson, 2000, p. 204). Although negative stereotypes do not dominate popular images of rurality, many recent studies of rural areas have noted that, for a proportion of young people, staying locally is devalued by the sense that to “get on,” with its implications of the middle-class good life, you do have to “get out.” Families in coastal communities understand that their children need education, but the source of this need is ironically nested in the very forces that are conspiring to destabilize the life they know (Corbett, 2005; Marshall, 2002).

Formal education sits uneasily with corporate concentrations in resource industries, unwanted development, the denigration of landscape, pollution, rural depopulation/disembedding, and other unsavoury features of late modernity. In other words, young people’s need for formal education has been created by the same global change forces that are seen to jeopardizing the traditional way of life in coastal and rural villages. Thus education, along with other forms of state intervention, has “come to be viewed with scepticism and ambivalence” (Corbett, 2005, p. 66).

Jamieson’s (2000) study of young people’s views about migration and attachment demonstrated a complex pattern for those young people who remained in their rural communities and those who migrated to urban areas. The study highlights how both social class and family history of migration or rootedness play into young peoples’ sense of social divisions, community, and attachment or detachments from the locality of their childhood. Feelings of attachment to the community of their childhood were expressed by the majority of those who left and some migrants were more positive about their home town than some peers who stayed. The negativity of those who stayed was expressed as embitterment at being trapped in a place without choice, especially in areas of economic decline offering no future relief from a disappointing
work history that failed to match ambitions or created a sense of being unvalued. On the other hand, some young people weathered setbacks in employment without losses of regard for either themselves or their locality to which they remained thoroughly attached. They were predisposed to accept lower aspirations concerning their work life because of the benefits of being surrounded by family and friends who had no plans to leave. Some were negative about the place where they once lived and emphatic that they will never return there or anywhere like it. Others remained advocates for their former or current homes and expressed openness to the future possibility of a rural life-style. Articulated and represented in various ways, place has implications for the formation of young peoples’ identity and, for work-life supports and barriers.

**Supports and Barriers**

Young people are faced with various supports and barriers when managing work-life transitions. The majority of the studies in the literature focused on supportive factors that facilitated successful, smooth, or uncomplicated transitions patterns; fewer studies discussed barriers that have influenced complex transition pathways. This section presents a review of selected literature on young peoples’ work-life supports and barriers categorized into the following themes: internal factors, relational factors, educational factors, and structural conditions.

**Internal factors.** Psychological readiness, the worker role, internalized flexibility, strong sense of coherence, achievement strategies, depression, attributions style, and agentic personality, have been identified as constructs that influence young adults’ transitions. Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, and White (2002) defined psychological readiness as generalizable work skills, clearly developed realistic plans for the school-to-work transition, optimism about that
plan, and being able to negotiate obstacles in one’s life as essential factors for an adaptive transition. Ng and Feldman (2007) contend that young adults’ ability to identify with the “worker role” (p. 116) was a decisive factor in determining the success of the school-to-work transition. The work role identification was described “as the extent to which a person spends a large amount of time in the work role, feels positively towards the work role, and is able to express his/her personal values within the work role” (Ng & Feldman, 2007, p. 116). Young adults who were found to have a high level of worker role identification and few other salient life roles were suggested to be able to transition more easily and more quickly into demanding organizational environments while those who had lower levels of work role identification or greater identification with other roles (such as parent) may not as readily fit into such intense organizational environments.

Learning associated with experiences during non-straightforward transitions represented a particular supports theme. “Retrospective reasoning” was observed when young adults used the phrase “everything works out in the end” (Devadason, 2007, p. 214) and discussed how the hurdles and setbacks experienced during transitions were overcome and ultimately strengthened their determination to succeed in the end. In a later study by Bradley and Devadason (2008), a similar supportive construct involved young people demonstrating and accepting an internalized discourse of adaptability and optimism about life-long learning; this was called “internalized flexibility.” And, similarly, positive attitudes, despite negative transition experiences, were identified by young people as effective coping techniques (Bramston and Patrick, 2007).

Luyckx and colleagues (2008) suggested that individuals with a strong sense of coherence were cognitively and emotionally capable of confronting daily problems by using adaptive and flexible coping strategies qualities bearing resemblance to other personal
characteristics such as self-efficacy and agency. Maladaptive achievement strategies such as passivity increased the likelihood of problematic transitions whereas the deployment of adaptive achievement strategies, such as expectations of success and active coping helped individuals to manage transitions (Maatta, Nurmi, & Majava, 2002). Attributional styles such as lack of internal attributions after failure “led to success in transition from school to work, whereas a reversed attributional pattern seemed to cause problems” (Maatta, et al., 2002, p. 308). The internal attributions of failure were found to moderate the impact of success in dealing with the transitions and led to increased depressive symptoms among young adults.

Depression (Bynner & Parson, 2002; Maata, et al., 2002) and lack of confidence (Devadason, 2007) were barriers experienced by young adults during work-life transitions. Results from a Canadian national survey indicated people in rural areas had a lower prevalence of major depressive episodes (Wang, 2004). However, rural participants were also less likely to have contacted health professionals for mental health problems, so these findings may be more reflective of the availability of mental health services rather than mental health status itself. Interestingly, in a German study that addressed the transition from university to work-life, Buhl (2007) found that socially competent as well as conscientious young adults were more likely to experience a decrease of well-being during their transition to work-life. The reason for the out of the ordinary direction of this finding is not obvious. Post hoc, Buhl speculates that this negative association between conscientiousness and increased well-being “can be interpreted due to problems of more scrupulous beginners in their first employment ... and perhaps the desire for social integration is not as fulfilled while working compared with the previous situation (i.e. studying)” (p. 566).
Parker et al. (2006) found that emotional intelligence positively correlated with academic retention, which is consistent with a range of issues involved in successful post-secondary transition. In a study Schwartz and colleagues (2005) conducted across three ethnic groups in the United States (defined in the study as non-Hispanic Whites, non-Hispanic Blacks, and Hispanics), an “agentic personality” (p. 212) was implicated positively in information-based identity strategies, including exploration and commitment and negatively with avoidance-based strategies. An agentic personality included measures assessing self-esteem, purpose in life, internal locus of control, and ego strength. These findings support the contention that agentic functioning is an important component of individualized development and thus an effective adaptation to post-industrial societies in young adults (Schwartz, et al.).

**Relational factors. Family.** Shepard’s (2004) Canadian study of young rural women described empowering and disempowering relationships. Support in families was indicated by emotional and financial support in addition to the transmission of moral values. Participants suggested that being listened to by their mothers was central to family support and decision making. Buhl (2007) suggested that intimacy with a mother and to a higher degree, conflicts with a mother reduced the likelihood of increasing well-being after the transition to work-life. Intimacy with a father during university increased the participants’ likelihood of improved well-being by the time they were employed. Buhl contends that a frequent familial conflict associated with more problematic transitions is not a surprising finding. Moreover, in-depth case studies of work-life transitions among young adults with learning disabilities demonstrated that family process variables and patterns of family interaction had a greater influence on employment outcomes than family structural characteristics (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007).
Family influences such as parental interests, hopes and goals, and employment are crucial supports and barriers of young people. For example, Bynner and Parsons (2002) contend that a lack of parental interest in children’s education in the home was associated with young people who were not in education, employment, or training. Parents with low aspirations, limited or vague hopes, and “simply [wanting] their children to ‘be happy’ or to have a ‘good job’” in the future, were correlated with young adult’s narrow career options and interests (Lindstrom et al., 2007. P. 363). Shepard (2004) noted the influence of family in the development of young rural women’s personal values, sense of support, and skill base. Specifically, the young women suggested that observing their families at work contributed to the development of their work ethic and work skills (Shepard).

Family networks are also crucial for maintaining and generating social capital. Holland, Reynolds, and Weller (2007) highlighted the importance of sibling relationships, diasporic and transnational family networks, and the pull of family loyalty to geography place. Family members living in different cities may be a supportive factor for some young people from small communities because they may feel a sense of belonging living in new geographical locations that includes other family members. Unfortunately, many young people may not possess the necessary cultural linkages to easy prepare for out-migration (e.g. family living near post-secondary institutions or traditions of leaving home for higher education).

Social groups. Young people use social networks while negotiating transition passages. Holland and colleagues (2007) found that social capital was an important mechanism during transitional phases that helped to bridge across and into networks and opportunities. Strong social ties foster not only caring communities in a good sense but also “a culture of strict social control” (Rye, 2006, p. 411). Some young people experience tight social networks as highly
constraining. In Holland and colleagues’ (2007) study, networks allowed young people to “get by” but they stifled individual progression and social mobility; and as such, education became a means to “escape the bubble” (p. 102). Similar results from Shepard’s (2004) study of rural young women suggested that those “who wished to remain near to family found themselves trapped in the community they loved” (p. 85) and as result, experienced low-paying employments with limited options and struggled to be self-supportive.

Devadason (2007) contends that a lack of encouragement from social networks is a considerable barrier in work-life transitions. Shepard (2004) found that disempowering relationships, such as the formation of cliques, negatively impacted work-life. Cliques separated and excluded young people from employment and extracurricular activities at school. For example, in one study with participants from a Norwegian industrial rural community, “everyone knows everyone” was more often as a negative feature of a small community than a positive (as cited in Rye, 2006). Rye contends that the negative side of the transparency of the rural social fabric is felt most strongly by young females.

**Adult role models.** Relationships with adult community residents can provide mentoring opportunities that create “powerful means of ... supportive adult contact” (Shepard, 2004, p. 82). Lapan, et al. (2007), Phillips et al (2002), and Shepard have found that the availability of work-based learning, encouraging adults and over-all support from a variety of sources enhanced career development during high school and positively influenced transition experiences. Shepard highlights the importance for rural youth to feel challenged with encouragement and guidance by teachers and school counsellors. Unfortunately, limited by the geographical and cultural context of their communities, rural young people may lack inspirational role models (Haller & Virkler, 1993). Bramston and Patrick (2007) research on rural adolescents experiencing an urban
transition found that when specifically asked what could make the transition from a rural community into urban education helpful, respondents suggested being “buddied” with someone older at the new location and being connected with someone else moving before the transition. These findings demonstrate that role models are important, and a supportive factor, for young people during periods of work-life transition.

**Educational factors.** According to a nationwide survey published by Statistics Canada, over 90% of Canadian 15 year-olds reported that they would like some kind of postsecondary education (Cartwright & Allen, 2002). Rural-urban differences become noticeable when it came to the decision to aim for a university rather than college education. Moreover, rural students in all provinces had significantly lower career aspirations than their urban counterparts (as measured by the occupational status of the job they expect to have when they are 30 years-old). Corbett’s (2005) research supports these findings and emphasizes that schooling in coastal communities remains a significant challenge for youth and for those who educate them. To the extent that schools do focus on post-secondary schooling, the emphasis tends to be on university preparation; however, more rural than urban youth do not go university but rather go to some other form of post-secondary schooling (for example, trades programs). Corbett argues that this emphasis on university preparation differentially disadvantages rural youth.

Cartwright and Allen’s (2002) educational research paper illustrates why urban schools in Canada performed significantly better in reading than rural schools. Among school, family, and community, the most consistent and influential differences explaining the rural-urban reading gap was community background. In the study, relative to urban communities, rural communities were characterized by lower levels of education, fewer jobs, and jobs that were, on average, lower earning and less likely to require a university degree. As such, the rural-urban reading
differences are in fact linked to the levels of adult education and the nature of work in the community. While family background is an important and influential factor, it is the background of the community where students learn that actually explains the rural-urban reading gap. For example, the research findings suggest that a child of someone in a professional occupation will likely perform well in either an urban or rural school, but will perform even better in an urban community. As such, every child would likely do better in an urban community due to the nature of the urban labour market and overall higher levels of education among the community adults. However, after controlling for socio-economic background and community conditions, the most important school factors related to the urban-rural reading gap were disciplinary climate, student behaviour, student-teacher ratios, teacher support, extra-curricular opportunities, and teacher specialization.

Although rural education has been argued by some to be inferior when compared to urban education, rural and urban Canadian schools are actually much the same when it comes to resources and learning environments (Cartwright & Allen, 2002). Much of what has been recognized as supportive factors includes what “happens outside the classroom in so-called extracurricular activities” (Bajema, et al., 2002, p. 61). For example, rural schools have a higher rate of participation in extracurricular activities and the resultant leadership and socialization skills that develop from such school-sponsored events are important instructional aspects for rural schools. Bajema and colleagues (2002) contend that the local coverage of these events by newspapers, radio, or other local media provides many rural students with recognition and positive attention. Consequently this credit generates feelings of self-worth, achievement, importance, and relevance in the community for young people. Other supports specific to rural
education, include the smallness of schools and close ties with teachers and other students (Shepard, 2004).

**Structural factors.** Though some will argue there has been a loosening of structural constraints, Bynner and Parsons (2002) emphasize that “much of the old determinacy remains: Individualization is still bound by class, gender, and ethnicity” (p. 290). Factors such as poverty and racism can create environmental stressors beyond the control of people, especially for young people (Solberg, Howard, Blustein, & Close, 2002; Devadason, 2007). Schoon and colleagues (2007) suggest that a polarization has been occurring in the patterns of young people’s transitions, resulting in problems of marginalization and social exclusion. While growing unemployment and shrinking labour force participation are combined with increasing time spent in education, access to post secondary continues to depend on social background and previous educational attainment.

The influence of class-based structural variables continues to persist over time and socio-economic status persists as the strongest determinant of educational and occupational attainment (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington 2000; Lehmann, 2005; Fouad & Brown, 2000). Similar research from the United Kingdom confirms the findings from Canadian studies; for example, level of education and social economic status (SES) have been found to be correlated with smooth transitions patterns (Bradley & Devadason, 2008; Furlong, Cartmel, & Biggart 2006; Walter & Plum, 2006). Specifically, young people from working class backgrounds were found to be less likely than their middle class background peers to remain in school beyond the minimum leaving age, to leave school with recognized qualifications, or to enter post-secondary education (Schoon et al., 2001).
In contrast, results from Lindstrom and colleagues (2007) research counter the widely accepted finding that low SES serves as a limiting factor among young adults. The majority of young adults in this study articulated a strong desire to succeed or achieve beyond family norms. Instead of serving as positive role models for achievement, parents in the low-SES group came to symbolize undesirable career and life outcomes. When asked if she had any role models in high school, a female participant replied, “My mom. She’s my role model to make myself NOT to be like her...” (Lindstrom et al., p. 357). Young adults from low SES families were asked to contribute to the family both through early employment and (for the young women) through caretaking roles for other family members. These early contributions appeared to promote career maturity and establishment of a work ethic. Secondly, growing up in low SES-families also motivated these young people to “be different” (p. 362) by obtaining steady employment and seeking a sense of stability often lacking in their childhood years (Lindstrom et al., 2005). Immersion in low-SES families did not seem to limit career outcomes but rather bolstered high aspirations, vocational identity, and maturity.

Gender has also been found to be a critical factor in shaping young peoples’ transitions (Schoon et al., 2001). In a British study that drew on life history data from two birth cohorts, more women than men were outside the labour force but were engaged in continuing education or involved in family care. Schoon and colleagues (2001) found that young women were more likely than young men to be in full-time education, while young men were more likely to be in full-time employment. Young women were also three times more likely than young men to be in part-time employment. In Devadason’s (2007) study of young adult workers in urban labour markets in the United Kingdom, female participants discussed the structural disadvantages they
face as women - a lack of progress in their careers and feeling constrained from pursuing their goals.

Despite the large body of evidence of structural impacts on school to work transitions, research has been criticized for “overemphasizing the capacity of institutional structures to reinforce social inequality and for lacking insight into the actual decision making of individuals” (Lehmann, 2005, p. 329). Lehmann argues that young people under investigation are “essentially treated as empty receptacles ... educational and occupational aspirations and socially reproductive processes are seen to happen to them” (p. 330). Evans (2002) suggests that the relatively recent emergence of the concept of agency in young peoples’ transitions research reflects the recognition that the influence of social structures is neither direct nor entirely deterministic, and that young people actively shape important dimensions of their work-life experiences.

Summary of Literature

The literature reveals that young adults’ transitions are largely influenced by the unpredictability and uncertainty of the changing world of work. This transformation to a postmodern society has led to expansive freedoms and a large range of social opportunities, particularly, for young adults in Western nations. The rise in ages of entering into marriage and parenthood, lengthening of time spent in higher education, and prolonged job instability during one’s twenties, characterizes diverse school-to-work transitions and work-life pathways.

Young people are faced with various supports and barriers while managing work-life transitions. Among the selected literature of internal factors, relational factors, educational factors, and structural conditions; it was not uncommon for a factor to be identified as both a support and a barrier. For example, in rural communities, strong social ties foster not only caring
communities, but can also cultivate a culture of strict social control. In general, however, little attention has been paid in the literature to implications of rurality in the school-to-work transitions.

**Coasts Under Stress Project**

A five year, interdisciplinary project that started in April 2000, “Coasts Under Stress” (CUS), investigated the long and short term impacts of socio-economic restricting on the health of people, their communities, and the environment (www.coastsunderstress.ca). Over 70 natural and social scientists and 160 research trainees worked together with local communities from the East and West coasts of Canada. The project had five research “arms”; the focus of Arm 5 was on the multiple determinates of health and well-being and how they are related to social and economic restructuring processes. Arm 5 researchers explored the following questions: what happens to people and their communities when restructuring occurs, for example, when the fishery is closed or downsized; where do people look for employment and how do incomes and working conditions change; how do these changes affect relations between and among members of households; and, what is the effect on the youth?

Within Arm 5, Dr. Anne Marshall, of the University of Victoria, was the lead in Case Study 2 that focused on issues in employment and education (Ommer and team, 2007). Dr. Marshall explored life-career development and planning for coastal youth in Prince Rupert, Port Hardy, Port McNeil, Hartley Bay, and Alert Bay in British Columbia. She and her research team investigated the following two research questions: what are the life-career issues, supports, challenges, and barriers for youth in small coastal communities, and what has helped and will help them access the supports and address the challenges and barriers? Through focus groups, individual interviews, and Possible Selves (Markus & Nursis, 1986) mapping, the research
focused on the ways young people came to construct a sense of themselves in their community and its impact on their life-career plans.

The results from this research identified problems such as unemployment, high rates of social assistance, poverty, lower rates of school completion, poor nutrition, health problems, substance use, depression, and family stress as problems related to restructuring (Jackson, Marshall, Tirone, Donovan, & Shepard, 2006; Marshall, 2002; Ommer and team, 2007). Assets and strengths included community solidarity, creative solutions, resiliency, parental support, and partnerships. Community strengths included place identity/attachment, family, and culture; while challenges included education access, recreation for youth, and employment opportunities (Marshall, Harrison, Guenette, & Atherton, 2006). Issues identified through the data themes included barriers such as limited opportunities for information and contacts, being disregarded and cultural or gender role expectations. Helpful factors included supportive relationships, role models, valuing oneself, and identity. Attachment to the environment and the physical setting encompassed problematic and positive aspects. The CUS findings demonstrated that youth from the coastal communities studied were aware of the impact that economic restructuring was having on them and their communities. There were mixed findings expressed about the future. Recommendations from the study included extending the project longitudinally in order to assess the changes related to restructuring over the long term, further research into topics such as employment opportunities and career barriers, and exploring youth beliefs about barriers.

Ongoing transitions for coastal youth project. In 2006, Dr. Marshall received a further research grant to follow up with the original CUS participants to find out more about their work and life experiences after high school. Entitled “Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth,” the project involved gathering new data from young people and adults previously interviewed in the
CUS project. Similar to the CUS study, the “Transitions” project also included individual interviews with parents, elders, educators, other community members, and focus groups with young people.

**The Present Study**

The present study encompassed individual interviews with northern Vancouver Island participants in the “Transitions” study. I conducted interviews with participants who were interviewed as youths for the CUS project and with additional age-matched young people. In exploring what the work-life experiences of young adults from a rural, coastal community include, my study focused on the following questions: What has happened since the end of high school? What were your thoughts and plans then about what you were going to do? What difficulties have you experienced moving forward with the plans you made in high school? What has helped you move forward with your plans?
Chapter III – Methodology and Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

My research question necessitates in-depth data and thus, a qualitative research design. In order to remain consistent with the method established in the earlier CUS study, and due to the naturalistic and descriptive approach of the present study, a semi-structured interview qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate to obtain a holistic, contextualized picture of participants in their community (Marshall, 2002). Moreover, prior research with college students and young adults across varied socioeconomic and ethnic groups suggests that a qualitative interview method can be helpful in capturing the multifaceted dimensions of a phenomenon (Kenny et al., 2007). In terms of the attitude of the qualitative researcher, Mason (1997) contends that conducting qualitative research requires one to be mindful of the variable contexts in which the research takes place. Qualitative research has a long and distinguished history in the human disciplines; although the meaning of qualitative research operationally changes across historical fields, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) suggest a clearly stated definition:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations ... qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (pp. 4-5)

In-Depth Interviews

The use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed me to explore what experiences the participants attributed to their work-life transitions. Professional, purposeful conversations, research interviews are based on conversations of daily life. Kvale (1996) states that “an
interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (pp. 5-6). A postmodern constructive understanding of the research interview involves a conversational approach to research. The interviewer embarks on “a route that leads to the goal” – the researcher structures and defines the situation (Kvale, 1996, p. 4). For example, I introduced work-life transitions as the topic of the interview and critically followed up on answers, often asking for specific information.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) contend that interviews involve the exploration of phenomena of interest, with the aim to uncover the participant’s meaning perspective while respecting how the participant frames and structures responses. Furthermore, as participants draw on their life experiences during the interviews varieties of motivations that informed their actions, meaning, associations, decision-making, and psychological processes, emerged. This process highlighted the social construction of the phenomena in a social and relational context (Maynes et al., 2008). The research interviews I conducted unfolded like stories and my follow-up questions served as conversational probes. Many of the interview questions were naturally answered or served as prompts to ask for more information. Ollershaw and Creswell (2002) suggest that stories have emerged as a popular approach to qualitative research because telling stories helps people to think about, and to understand, their personal, or another individual’s, thinking, actions, and reactions.

**Narrative influences.** The present study is influenced by what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe as characteristic of narrative research - the researcher emphasizing the importance of learning from participants in a setting and this learning occurring through stories told by individuals. Narrative approaches generally focus on stories that include a temporal
ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events in a personally and culturally coherent and plausible manner (Sandelowski, 1991). Narratives are not simply individual, but are embedded in social relationships and structures that “provide unique insights into the connections between individual life trajectories and collective forces” (Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008, p.3). In the present study narrative influence particularly came into play in the within-participant analysis, which is described below in the analysis section.

**Design Considerations**

The design of the present study aimed to value context while searching for a deeper understanding of participants’ work-life transition experiences. Marshall (2002) emphasizes the importance of physical, social, and cultural environment among residents living in small towns and coastal communities. Consistent with the social constructionist perspective, incorporating the focus of context when studying work (pathways) implied an awareness that multiple truths exist in the manner in which people construct their perceptions and ultimately narratives about their working experiences (Blustein et al.) Given the particular locale, the present study involved an ongoing attempt to place significant encounters, events, and understandings into the participants’ particular and meaningful context of a small coastal BC town (Tedlock, 2003).

**Context.** The geographic location of the present study was Port Hardy, which is located at the Northern end of Vancouver Island, British Columbia (see Figure 1). A rural, coastal community in British Columbia of about 3,800 people, the economy is largely based on forestry, fishery, agriculture, tourism, and small business. Recent cutbacks in some of these sectors, particularly forestry and fishery, have resulted in substantial job losses, unemployment, and out-migration (Ommer and team, 2007). In fact, British Columbia Municipal and Regional District
2006 Census population results indicate a 16.4% population decrease since the 2002 census.

Participants in the present study had all attended the local high school as youth.

**Figure 1. The Research Site**

Participants. As part of the longitudinal “Transitions” project, participants were initially planned to be original CUS participants from the Port Hardy arm; the intent of the current study was to follow up with eight of these CUS youth participants. In other words, intended participants had already been identified in the original CUS study.

Four to seven years had passed since the original CUS interviews, and finding the participants, unfortunately, proved to be a significant challenge. Using the contact information gained during the CUS interview, I was initially only able to get in touch with two participants - it was not uncommon, that previous phone numbers were now out-of-service. In an effort to find the remaining young people, I attempted to contact family members, well-known community members, and I asked the young people I was able to interview about other CUS participants’
contact information. I was told by one interviewee that another participant was living in Ontario, so I contacted this participant’s family member in that province. I spoke with the family member and then was given a phone number to an Alberta residence where I was able to contact an additional participant. In spite of spending considerable time pursuing these various avenues, I was only able to contact three out of the eight original North Vancouver Island young people who had participated in the CUS study. Together, with one follow-up interview already conducted by a research team colleague a year earlier, a total of four interviews were from original CUS participants. Initially interviewed as youth attending high school in Port Hardy, these follow-up participants were between the ages of 21 and 25 years old at the time of the present interviews, four to seven years later.

Although the “ideal method for monitoring an individual’s experience of change across time would be a proper longitudinal study where the person is followed across a lengthy span of time – years or decades” (Miller, 2000, p. 109), due to practical difficulties, longitudinal studies are rare. I experienced many of the difficulties common to longitudinal studies while collecting my data. Some of the difficulties Miller identified include: financial costs, difficulty locating participants, and keeping the participants committed to the study over a span of years -- “all [of which] conspire to keep true longitudinal studies rare” (p. 109). Moreover, with youth participants, keeping the participants not only committed but available to participate in the study can be a significant challenge. Because, for example, frequent moving (as suggested in the review of the selected literature) is not uncommon among young adults, difficulties are created in tracking and meeting with participants. In addition, the current economic climate and the prevailing need to move from small communities to find work or pursue education meant that most CUS participants and their families were no longer living in Port Hardy.
In order to increase my sample size, I included an interview already conducted with a new participant in the “Transitions” project. Additionally, I asked one of the participants, who was well-known in the community, to help with recruiting new participants who were similar in age to the original CUS participants and who were interested in being interviewed. This participant would explain the purpose of the study and then ask potential participants if I could contact them regarding an interview about their work-life experiences since high school (see data gathering section for detailed procedure). As a result of this process, I travelled to Port Hardy and interviewed another four participants. These “new” participants, who were similar in age to the original participants, had attended high school in Port Hardy and were between the ages of 21 and 25 years old at the time of the interview. In summary, four of the participants were follow-up, original CUS participants, while five participants were “purposefully sampled” (Padgett, 2007), similar age participants from the same community. The sample size of nine was large enough to provide a range of experiences while small enough to be able to gather the detailed, descriptive information.

**Preparation.** To become familiar with the CUS study and the participants’ community context, I reviewed dissertations, published articles and chapters, presentations, posters, websites, and the SSHRC final report on the research. I became familiar with the CUS interviews before conducting the follow-up interviews by reading the transcripts and creating summaries. Moreover, I gathered print materials such as newspapers, community websites, and statistics to gain information about the context of the community before the interviews. I also spoke with current and past residents of the community (i.e. previous high school principal, adult residents, and social workers) about the study and my entry into the community to collect data.
Data Gathering

**Semi-structured interviews.** In the CUS study, young people were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format and were given a Possible Selves\(^2\) Mapping task (Marshall, 2002 – see Appendix A). However, due to small number of CUS participants and the difficulty in contacting and meeting participants in person, I chose to conduct one-on-one, semi-structured interviews addressing the participants’ work and life experiences since high school. In person or over the phone, I asked a set of questions from an interview guide with some variation in the order and format of the questions (Kirby et al., 2006); see Appendix B, the Interview Questions Guide. Interviews ranged from half an hour to an hour. Combined with brief notes and observations when possible, the interviews allowed me to explore and comprehend the underlying meanings of the participants’ descriptions of their work-life transitions (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Occasionally, during the interviews, it seemed that a few participants seemed uncomfortable with sharing information; this could have been because I was a stranger or because they were unsure of the meaning of the questions.

**Phone interviews.** I contacted potential participants over the telephone (see Appendix C for Phone Script) and scheduled phone interviews. I encouraged participants to select a convenient date in which they could discuss their work-life experiences in a comfortable and confidential place. Before the scheduled interviews, I mailed a summary of the participant’s responses from his or her CUS interview along with a copy of the consent form. When I called the participant on the agreed upon date, I again described the purpose of the study and reviewed the consent form (see Appendix D). I used a digital audio recorder to record the interviews. The telephone interviews were more challenging to conduct than the in person interviews because it
was more difficult to develop rapport; as a result they were shorter as compared to the in-person interviews. Once the interview was completed, I mailed the participant a $10 honorarium and a thank you card.

**Field trip for in-person interviews.** In order to interview more participants and gain a personal experience of the community, I travelled to Port Hardy and stayed for three days in November, 2008. In preparation for the field trip, I contacted potential participants over the phone and scheduled interviews to take place in a private room at the municipal hall. Once in Port Hardy, I met each participant at the municipal hall for the scheduled interview. I reviewed the purpose of the study and, additionally, gave each participant a package that included a poster summary of the CUS study, a $10 honorarium, a thank-you card, and a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D) and interview questions (see appendix B). I used a digital audio recorder to record each interview.

Upon my arrival to Port Hardy, I was warmly greeted by a city councillor and then invited for a family dinner. I also was invited to a community award ceremony, which I attended on the last day of my trip. At the ceremony I met the mayor, as well as the parents of two of the participants. These activities gave me an increased understanding of the community structure, resident views, and types of activities that took place in the community.

**Observations and field notes.** My field notes, functioning as a form of representation that reduced just-observed events, persons, and places into written accounts (Mason, 2002), detailed the time period I spent in the community. I recorded my personal experiences and interactions with participants as well as observations and descriptions of events.
Data-Analysis Procedure

The analysis included two phases – a within-participant analysis and an across-participant analysis. Because the interviews progressed rather like stories, to honour the more holistic and narrative nature of the interview, for the within-participant analysis, I chose to construct narratives or stories for each participant that captured their descriptions of their work-life experiences. These stories made available rich descriptions of events within-participants’ life courses and were central in understanding peoples’ life paths. In the present study, creating the personal stories was influential in understanding the way in which the participants made sense of their work-life experiences and communicated meaning. Next, for the across-participant analysis, I analyzed the interviews for broad themes and created specific subthemes. My process of analysis in the present study included the following steps:

Step 1: Listening to audio interviews and recording holistic impressions

Step 2: Transcribing audio-recorded interviews as close to verbatim as possible

Step 3: Creating a summary of each interview

Step 4: Within-participant analysis - identifying and highlighting core information for each participant related to the focus of the study

Step 5: Writing a work-life story based on the core information for each participant

Step 6: Across-participant analysis - rereading all transcripts and identifying broad themes and labelling text segments with code words or phrases

Step 7: Examining codes for overlap and redundancy and then revising to final list of codes

Step 8: Identifying main themes across all participants and more specific subthemes along with supporting participant quotes

Step 9: Creating an across-participant table of themes and subthemes
Step 10: Integrating and linking findings to the literature

The first step of my analysis involved the transcription process. Kvale (1996) maintains that analysis begins during transcription. Lapadat and Lindsay (1998) state “the process of transcription is both interpretative and constructive” (p. 12). Moreover, Lapadat and Lindsay argue that transcription is inherently theory-laden and that it “represents an audiotaped or videotaped record, and the record itself represents an interactive event” (p. 21). Just as the research interview is understood as socially constructed, so too the transcript should be open to multiple alternative readings, as well as reinterpreting with every fresh reading (as cited in Lapadat & Lindsay). As such, I first listened to each interview and recorded my holistic impressions. Then, I transcribed seven of the nine audio-recorded interviews verbatim. (Two interviews had already been conducted and transcribed by a “Transitions” research assistant who followed similar procedures). Next, I created a one-page summary for all nine interviews.

As the first step of my within-participant analysis, I surveyed the transcripts for textual descriptions of the participants’ experiences. This stage of analysis involved reading and rereading the transcripts in order to identify the core information from each transcript. The core information was “relevant discourse from each participant’s transcribed interview” (Walker, Cooke, & McAllister, 2008, p. 85).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that thinking about stories in the data enables the researcher to think creatively about the type of collected data and how to interpret them. Sequence may be missing or not logically developed when individuals tell a story, and by re-storying, I provided causal links among the core information (Ollenrenshaw & Creswell, 2002). Ollenrenshaw and Creswell state that “a story in narrative research is a ... telling or retelling of events related to the personal or social experiences of an individual” (p. 332). I used the core
information to create a work-life story for each participant. Constructed using much of the participant’s language and words, I structured the narratives into a temporal, causal sequence. Each participant’s story describes a sequence of events that have happened and ends with hoped-for future plans (similar to “Possible Selves”). This structuring of experiences was analyzed alongside meanings and motives that initiated the across-participant thematic analysis (Padgett, 2008).

After rereading the transcripts I identified broad themes and labelled text segments relevant to themes with code words or phrases. I first identified the broad themes by examining the core information and noting textual descriptions. Next, I looked for overlap and redundancy, collapsing the data into themes and subthemes (Creswell, 2008). I created a table that represents the across-participant themes and subthemes (presented in Chapter V). I used participants’ direct quotes in the presentation of the findings that support the identified themes as well as to “capture the voice” of the participants (Creswell). The quotes used are largely verbatim; however, some minor editing was done for clarity and to improve readability. Each theme and subtheme is discussed and linked to findings in the literature.

In summary, the qualitative data analysis included both descriptions of the story and the themes that emerged across participants. The interpretations of the findings include a description of each participant’s work-life story (the within-participant analysis) and an overall thematic summary of how participants managed work-life transitions with links to findings from past studies (across-participant analysis).

**Trustworthiness**

Within qualitative research, “the researcher becomes the instrument of data collection and analysis and this is why special measures need to be taken to avoid research findings that are
narcissistic and insignificant” (Walker, et al., 2008, p. 83). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest specific criteria for the “validity tests” of qualitative research which include credibility, transferability, audibility, and confirmability and taken together connote the trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Padgett, 2008). I implemented various strategies for trustworthiness in this study. Contextual descriptions and detailed descriptions were recorded in my field notes during my time in the field and while analyzing the transcripts with the intent of seeking transferability. Audibility was achieved through consistent recording accuracy, data collection, analysis procedures and confirmability was addressed through the maintenance of reflexive journals and interview logs. Because this study is qualitative, findings are not intended to be used as generalizations beyond the participants’ context. However, general patterns and similarity of meanings would likely be experienced in other small coastal communities in Canada.

Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Bringing sensitivity to fieldwork issues, such as how to gain access to the field, giving back to the community, reciprocity with participants, and being ethical in all modes of the research were all key ethical considerations for me. An important aspect in conducting the interviews was conveying an “attitude of acceptance,” that all participants’ information was valuable and useful (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 80). Further, going to the research site involved respecting the daily lives of participants (Creswell, 2007).

Another ethical consideration surrounded the understanding that researching a small community can create issues of confidentiality; although I have attempted to maintain confidentiality, participants could be identified by their unique experiences. I have tried to address this through using pseudonyms, avoiding specific details, and not always identifying participant quotes.
Integrating aspects of a narrative approach into my methodology, I understood that my own personal background and context shaped my interpretations and observations, and I was thus required to be reflexive about the context of my own work-life experiences. It was important that I honour the fundamental assumption in qualitative research that the experiences in question should unfold as the participants’ views and not mine (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).
Chapter IV – Participants’ Work-Life Stories

This chapter summarizes the results of the within-participant interview data analysis. The stories presented are each participant’s descriptions of their work-life experiences since high school. Using the participants’ language, the stories are ordered into work-life since high school, supports and barriers, and future plans. The stories are temporal productions of the information solicited during the research interview. In order to protect participants’ confidentiality, I chose pseudonyms in place of the participants’ names. Moreover, identifying information and specific details about place of work are not included. Because the interviews varied in depth and detail, each story has varying amounts of information. Some participants shared detailed accounts of work-life events, while others provided more general summaries. The original CUS participant stories are presented first, in the order they were interviewed, and then the age-matched participants’ stories are presented in the sequence in which they were interviewed.

Erin

An original CUS participant, Erin is a young Aboriginal woman who was interviewed six years later, in person, by a “Transitions” research team colleague in Victoria. At the time of the interview she was in her fifth year of an undergraduate degree in linguistics. She planned to return to Port Hardy and work in aboriginal education once she completed her degree.

Synopsis of CUS interview. Interviewed when she was 16, Erin described passions for biology, languages, art, travelling, singing, sports, dancing, acting, being outdoors, and meeting new people. She excelled in high school; she was at the top of many of her classes. She was actively involved in church social and in school extra-curricular activities. At the time, Erin was most interested in pursuing sciences or fine arts. She hoped to attend a college where she could earn an international baccalaureate and then attend university on the Island, the mainland, or
even Harvard. Erin’s mother hoped that if she went into biology, she would return to Port Hardy and work as a biologist for her Band.

Described as “Possible Selves,” Erin said she was not interested in making lots of money or material things because she was brought up with the belief that people who have a lot of money are never satisfied. She described feeling supported, loved, and encouraged by her family. Erin dreamed about being a singer-songwriter and stated she would not want to be a housewife, even though she wants to get married, have kids, and own a house. She also discussed the desire to travel to places such as India, Japan, Europe, and France.

**Work-life since high school.** Now 22, Erin attended post-secondary directly after graduating high school. She had applied to three post-secondary institutions and was accepted to two universities: one in Vancouver and the other on the Island. She was disappointed that she did not get into her other college choice. However, she decided to attend school on the Island so she could go home frequently. Erin originally planned to pursue a degree in English but took a linguistics course as an elective because her grandmother had a linguistics diploma. She fell in love with linguistics and the idea of language revitalization. Erin plans to complete her degree in linguistics with a minor in Indigenous studies; she is at the end of her five year degree. She decided to go into language revitalization and Aboriginal education because she wants to make a difference in her community. Erin is very focused on her aboriginal heritage, participating in a native student council at university and in her home community. She returns home during the summers to work in the fish industry.

While going to university, Erin has been involved in various extra-curricular activities and through those experiences, has travelled; for example, to New Zealand for the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education. She is passionate about Aboriginal issues. At her
university, she worked on two research projects focused on Aboriginal education. Erin tends to take opportunities as they present themselves and then if it feels right, make a decision and not feel too bad because she thinks the things you learn are always useful no matter what you do. She feels she is always changing her mind and wonders if she is doing things that are the best use of her abilities. Erin needs to be passionate about work and likes jobs that combine her different interests. She also thinks about going into Aboriginal politics or treaty negotiations.

**Barriers and supports.** Erin thinks there are a lot of important things that young people are no longer learning from their parents. She believes young people once learned from their families how to be respectful, how to direct one’s own path in life, how to recognize one’s abilities, and how to give back to one’s community. Erin speculates that it would have been helpful if some of these topics had been addressed in her high school Career and Personal Planning course (CAPP). She wishes CAPP had encompassed different approaches to work and environmental sustainability. She feels strongly that these topics should be part of a curriculum no matter what grade.

Erin notices that some friends from Port Hardy that have moved to the city are struggling. She thinks they have odd priorities that only focus on making money and having nice clothes. She wonders if they are depressed. She notices they are interested in trendy things like going to Starbucks or drinking martinis. These friends have not found a “community” (of people) in their larger city. She believes coming from a rural community, young people have idealized notions about the city – i.e. being an adult, having money, and being able to party all the time. Most of her other friends still in Port Hardy have babies. She also notices other people struggling with family problems.
Growing up within her Aboriginal culture and going to the Band-operated school created a foundation of cultural awareness that she feels has done her well over the past few years. Erin feels this experience helped her to learn things about her culture, family, and herself. Having a close connection with family and coming from a small community, she developed good relationships and a desire to give back to her community. Erin grew up with family all around her. Being surrounded by family, she describes not being able to get away with much and learning how to get along with everybody. She learned about discipline and how to compromise her own desires for those in her group. Erin feels lucky that nobody in her family went to residential schools – which have been problematic for others.

Growing up in Port Hardy and spending a lot of time outside as a child were invaluable to Erin. She believes it bred an appreciation for the environment and for creating a strong sense of community. She believes she is more grounded coming from Port Hardy because a connection to the land is grounding. Erin describes developing so many values from spending time outside.

Currently, Erin talks to her boyfriend about the types of work that could be the best use of her abilities. She feels good being in a relationship with someone who has the same goals. Erin also describes being spiritual rather than religious.

Future plans. Balance is most important to Erin. She contemplates pursuing a law degree and thinks about backpacking across Europe or travelling in Africa. At present, she plans to complete her degree and return to Port Hardy to work on her reservation. Erin also plans to get married and have kids in a few years, after she gets some work done. She would like to buy land, in the middle of nowhere, and build a house and be self-sufficient (grow food and produce energy).
Kevin

An original CUS participant, he was interviewed six years later over the telephone. Living and working in Port Hardy, he is running a small business and plans to stay in the community.

Synopsis of CUS interview. Interviewed in grade 12, Kevin was working towards an apprenticeship. He was interested in mechanics, the same type of work as his father. Frustrated that his high school dropped the mechanics program, he felt limited by the lack of course choices. However, Kevin’s neighbour helped him to get a job in machinery and a high school teacher suggested using the job as an apprenticeship opportunity. He found school boring and CAPP a waste of time and useless. In CAPP he does not recall learning about career options, choices for the future, healthy living, or relationships but rather cutting stuff out and taping it on paper. However, he got a lot out of the apprenticeship program. He learned how to find and keep a job. He felt it was practical and helpful for his future.

In high school, Kevin described his hoped-for, future “Possible Selves.” He hoped to still be with his girlfriend, have a big garage, a big house, a boat, a steady job, and lots of money. He planned to stay working in Port Hardy.

Work-life since high school. Now 22, Kevin had completed his high school apprenticeship, attended intermittent periods of trades training down Island while continuing to work in Port Hardy, and earned his trades ticket. He has been running his own company for the past couple of years now. Kevin continues to live in Port Hardy as he had planned to in high school. He feels he is doing what he thought and hoped he would be.

Barriers and supports. The apprenticeship program paid for Kevin to attend school down Island and, once he completed it, he got a scholarship. Kevin’s boss was supportive of the
apprenticeship and that made it easy for him to take time off to take his courses down Island. Kevin feels good work experience makes him more employable because people want to hire guys that are good and who know what they are doing. He noticed his friends are now interested in trades but do not know where to start because they have no background due to a lack of exposure in high school. Kevin put in many long hours and hard work to complete his apprenticeship and start his business. Moreover, Kevin feels it is beneficial that in a small community everybody knows everybody, so if you have a good reputation it follows you. This has helped him get job opportunities.

**Future plans.** Kevin hopes to keep going with his business in Port Hardy and take vacations on the beaches of Mexico without any worries. (Kevin does not mention family or relationship plans).

**Angela**

An original CUS participant, Angela was interviewed six years later over the phone. Living in Vancouver, she is attending college in pursuit of a bachelor of science degree.

**Synopsis of CUS interview.** Interviewed in grade 10, Angela had recently moved from a large city. Even though she thought Port Hardy was boring she felt ready for a break from the city and Port Hardy felt healthier. Angela described doing her share of bad things but described herself as a good kid now who realized the importance of schooling and graduating. She had acted as a role model in her previous high school but found it different now because the teachers in Port Hardy took a very authoritative role. She described herself as independent and always working for her own money.
Interested in travelling and acting, Angela’s hoped-for “Possible Selves” included future plans to travel Europe and then take an acting program in a large city in BC. She also discussed a desire to move to California.

**Work-life since high school.** As soon as she graduated, Angela was ready to move. As she predicted in high school, Angela went travelling after high school and then completed two years of acting school on the mainland. Her career plans then changed and she decided to do the artistic, creative stuff more as a hobby and pursue an academic career in the sciences. Now 21 and currently enrolled at college, she is working towards an undergraduate degree in science and hoping to do some sort of community doctoring. Angela will always be involved in theatre but on the side, not as a career. She had felt talented and dedicated to acting but over the past few years found herself striving towards more academic goals and realized that theatre is not something she would like to make money in. Although she is not doing what she had thought and hoped she would be doing, she is happy with where she is going and with her new plans.

**Barriers and supports.** Both of Angela’s parents passed away since she graduated high school. She found that her biggest barrier was that she had to put her personal and educational life on hold to look after her ailing family members. However, she now feels much closer to the rest of her family and Angela is happy with this positive change in her family’s relationships. Looking back, Angela says she would have worked harder in high school in order to achieve better grades and be more successful.

Although she loves visiting and going on vacation in smaller towns, Angela is unsure whether she would ever want to live in a small town again. She does not have strong ties to Port Hardy; she describes feeling as though the community was a temporary place and had temporary good friends while in high school. Angela is in a little bit of contact with friends from high
school via the internet but doesn’t really hang out with anybody she hung out with in high school. She finds that most still live on the Island and feels they’ve grown in separate directions. Angela wonders if people feel stuck, because Port Hardy is so comfortable. Angela notices that when young people stay in community, they work the same job and settle down. She felt that wasn’t for her. Angela feels a strong bond to Vancouver and to the people that she has met there; she really likes living in a city.

Angela has found family to be very supportive as well as many people in the education circuit. College counsellors and college professors have helped her work towards her goals – they have been “leaps and bounds” more helpful than compared to her high school teachers. She speculates that the conditions in the public school systems make it hard to get help and prefers that at colleges in the larger cities there are specific helping professionals. Angela feels that everybody she has encountered has helped her in one way or another, whether it was positive or negative at the time; relationships have been sources of learning experiences.

**Future plans.** Ploughing away at a bunch of science courses, Angela is trying to finish her bachelor’s degree. With no concrete plan, she is hoping something will spark her interest. She knows she wants to do something community related, so she is just working towards that. She wonders how different things would be if she were interviewed again in another five years.

**Collin**

An original CUS participant, Collin was interviewed seven years later over the phone. Currently living in Alberta and doing volunteer rather than paid work, Collin plans to move back to the Island with his wife to pursue trades school.
Synopsis of CUS interview. Interviewed in grade 11, Collin had hoped to become an electrician and contemplated college in Alberta or BC. Because he stated his parents weren’t well off, he didn’t expect to have much money for college. This was a concern for him. He was interested in apprenticeships because you got paid well and that would make it easier for him to attend college. His high school offered an apprenticeship program at the time, however, he had asked a company but they already had three apprentices. He described not receiving much assistance for career planning and believed he could have got an apprenticeship if a teacher had asked the company. He doesn’t think the small high school offered a lot.

Collin wanted to move out of Port Hardy and try new things; however he wanted to stay in BC where there is a lot of nature. He felt his experience in Port Hardy has been cool but there was nothing to do and there weren’t enough people; he thought he was more of a big town person. However, he described the benefits of living in Port Hardy, including being near the woods, beautiful countryside, and being close to everybody so it’s easy to make friends.

Collin worked 20 hours a week at a fish plant while going to school. With regards to his “Possible Selves,” he hoped to finish high school, become an electrician, have a reliable job, own a house, get married, be close with his family and friends, and have children.

Work-life since high school. Dropping out of high school half-way through grade 12, Collin was more interested in making money and living on his own rather than staying at home and going to school. He decided he did not want to be an electrician because it involved more schooling than he wanted to do. Ever since high school, Collin has been in search of what he wants to do with his life and has tried various things. He tried doing construction and renovation, working in a warehouse, a fish plant, a pulp mill, and then being personal transport tire technician. Based on this experience, Collin decided he liked mechanical stuff and working on
bigger vehicles. He has recently become interested in heavy duty mechanics because it is a good career that makes good money and jobs will always be around.

Collin has also moved around a lot to try and find out where he would like to live. He moved out East with his girlfriend and lived with her family. He recently got married and moved to Alberta. Now 25 years old and on employment assistance, Collin and his wife volunteer for a Christian organization.

**Barriers and supports.** Wanting to party and do drugs after dropping out of high school, Collin says he totally screwed up with life in the beginning. He felt apathetic, lethargic, and unmotivated. He wonders if he had not done drugs, whether he would have done more interesting and exciting things with his life. Moreover, math wasn’t his strong suit and to be an electrician he felt he needed to do well in math. He realized becoming an electrician involved more school than he wanted to do and that he was only interested in the profession because it offered good money.

Collin feels that high school was a waste of time because he wasn’t taught about life, relationships, or respect. Moreover, he says young people do not get taught how to work in different work environments with different people, or about work ethics. He notices that other young people don’t understand how to work and focus on getting time off and how much money they are making. He is furious that learning about the most important things in life and having relationships with other people, was “totally obsolete.” Collin left high school because he felt he wasn’t learning the things he needed and thought that he could find work without high school. Collin felt teachers didn’t care and describes having teachers tell him he was useless and would never amount to anything. He found it difficult with no direction or guidance from teachers. He figures a teacher’s job is to motivate and help students find their way in life or go after a goal. He
observes that most people come out of high school with no clue about what they want to do and then half of those people go to college, waste thousands of dollars, still have nothing, and then work for eight dollars an hour. More recently, Collin feels the economy has made it difficult for him to find work.

Growing up Christian, Collin’s parents taught him about good morals, values, respect, work, and honouring people. He feels his parents have helped him with life; learning how to be a better person has helped make life easier for him. Collin’s ambition and the desire to make something out of his life have helped him move forward. Wherever he has lived, he has always known people, whether it be in Vancouver, Alberta, or Quebec. It has been easy for Collin to go anywhere, to make friends right away, and to enjoy a new place without feeling attached to anything. He feels all his life experiences have positively influenced his worldview.

If Collin’s wife pursues her aspirations to become a police officer, she’ll work while Collin focuses on school. Collin feels lucky the trades program he is interested in is not long (almost a year) and that he could make money while learning.

**Future plans.** After being away for a while, Collin has realized how much he enjoys BC and, particularly, Vancouver Island. He hopes to move back to the Island, perhaps even Port Hardy. He would like to go to school and get a good career. He wants to eventually buy a house, have a family, go travelling, and do really interesting things with his life.

**Chris**

A new participant, Chris was interviewed in person by a “Transitions” team colleague in Port Hardy. An active member of the community, he currently lives and works in Port Hardy. He plans to raise a family there one day.
Work-life since high school. Remaining in the community since high school, Chris has been actively involved in his community and has been working in the forest industry for over five years. Chris is 23 years old and a member on various committees that work to improve his local community. He actively volunteers with youth and is working hard to change the image of youth and give them a louder voice. Providing young people with a sense of community and helping to change peoples’ ideas about what young people can do is an aspiration of Chris’ that began in high school and that he continues to successfully pursue. In addition to Chris’ paid and volunteer community duties, he works in the forestry sector at job he has managed to hold since high school despite recent economic conditions.

Barriers and Supports

Chris felt that young people were getting blamed for community problems and images of youth were tarnished. Chris worked from the age of 14 years old to try and change adults’ unhelpful perceptions. The biggest problem for young people is “not getting sucked into drug and alcohol”; use is an increasing problem as young people are starting earlier and it is a concern in the community. Traditional sports such as hockey are expensive, especially because of the travel expenses. Not having many work opportunities due to living on the North Island makes it difficult to find out what one wants to do or be able to go and try new things. For example, Chris described not having access to trades training in high school for young people to test out whether it’s for them and something to pursue. Interestingly, a neighbouring smaller community has a trades training teacher, so Chris feels his community may slowly catch up. Financial barriers are a consistent issue, especially if one’s family all lives in Port Hardy; Chris feels it’s harder to go to other places where there is no family.
Chris notices a downturn but also thinks things are starting to pick back up. He thinks the economy is impacting people’s happiness and increasing stress. He sees people leaving, but some people slowly returning. He thinks Port Hardy is a little slow on the trend but he is also less aware of what is going on in the rest of the province.

Over the past five years, Chris feels there is less racism and feels that in every generation it is getting better. He thinks the community is more aware and is creating opportunities for different cultural groups to come together and be with each other in enjoyable activities. Safety, lower housing costs, ties to the community, and the friendly atmosphere of a small community bring people back. He feels growing up in a small community makes a person a small town person at heart and appreciative of the fact that everybody knows everybody.

This sense of community has been supportive for Chris as well as the youth he volunteers with. Being able to show off talent to community adults has helped young people to feel proud and has had an overall good effect on the community. In Chris’ volunteer group he has noticed the affects of older role-models and the positive interactions between younger and older youth. He personally tries to conduct himself in a proper manner when he is around young people and act as a role model. The volunteer group also provides a positive space for young people as many young people on the North Island complain there is nothing for young people. Being a part of a group at a young age has helped young people to feel more confident and has provided opportunities to be a part of something rather than rebelling. Chris thinks that such groups really effect people and help them to become happy, healthy, and productive citizens. Similarly, organized sports and youth drop-in centres are helpful.

Generally, Chris sees the community as increasingly accepting of youth issues. Being taken seriously and respected as a young person by prominent members in the community has
been significantly meaningful for Chris. He notices a good connection between young people and adults in the community.

**Future plans.** Chris is unsure what his future holds. He speculates he will probably leave one day but then return to raise a family because he feels the community is the perfect place—like heaven on earth. Ultimately, what he wants out of life is to be a happy, healthy, productive citizen and to take opportunities wherever they can be created.

**Sara**

An age-matched new participant, Sara was interviewed in person in Port Hardy. Although currently living and working in Port Hardy, she plans to move away to go to college in the next few months.

**Work-life since high school.** Sara’s high school aspirations were to become a massage therapist and to move to the Rockies to learn about adventure tourism. She wanted to combine her interests in nature and in helping people. However, with the costs associated with moving and higher living expenses in a city, Sara decided to work and take more time to figure out what to do next. Remaining in Port Hardy but moving out of the family home, Sara lived with high school friends and worked at a job she had started while in high school. Then working full-time, Sara could afford her own vehicle and to hang out and party. Becoming tired of the Port Hardy scene, she longed to move somewhere new to start a new life, to have new experiences, and to meet new people.

Sara moved to Alberta and lived in a city for a year where she again, hung out and partied while working two jobs. After the year away, Sara returned to live with her parents due in part to family health conditions. Back at home, she felt restless not working and contemplated her next
steps. Feeling influenced by her mom and not wanting to return to her previous job, Sara started a position where her mom was also employed. She promptly realized she did not want to follow somebody else’s footsteps and quit the job after two weeks. Sara strongly felt the urge to create her own path. She went back to her old job where they were always happy to have her back, even if she did not feel quite the same way.

Feeling stuck doing the same job she had when she was in high school, Sara started attending North Island College. Because she enjoyed working with children and wanted to pursue a helper role, she decided to work in social services. The local college did not offer the particular program that she was looking for, but they did offer a teacher assistance program that she thought could lead into social services work. She started the two-year program and a full-time position in that field. That work was short-lived, lasting only three months; difficulties arose, she felt, because she did not have a certificate much less a degree. In the last semester of the program, Sara dropped out. During this period of many changes, Sara broke up with her fiancé, left her job, and quit the program all at once!

Sara then found new work at a daycare. She felt working at the daycare was comparable to being a housewife. A novel and exciting experience at the beginning, the honeymoon phase soon wore off and Sara knew that working at the daycare was no longer for her.

Now 24 years old, Sara is back at her old job again. She feels happy that she is still living in the same house that she has been in for the last seven months after experiencing many moves along with the changes in employment. Searching the internet for new ideas, Sara decided to research the adventure tourism aspiration she had as a high school student. To her surprise, she discovered that there was a program in the North Island. Sara completed an application and phone interview and was accepted into the program. With excitement in her voice, Sara talks
about her love for adventure kayaking. She is now in the process of doing what she hoped she would be doing. Now five years after high school, Sara feels she is finally doing something for herself.

**Barriers and supports.** Life difficulties such as family illness significantly affected Sara’s work-life pathways. Moreover, the costs of living have been associated with many of her decisions. She also noticed that some friends who have gone to school have not progressed from their minimum wage jobs. Some friends come home to regular summer jobs, but not many. Expenses are the biggest challenge for those that have moved away; she thinks it’s cheaper if you have someone else like a boyfriend or a roommate. Being on her own, what she wants to do depends on how much money she has. She hopes future work will be high paying and feels that with a higher income she will truly be able to live her dreams. Sara explains that she has consolidation loans to pay off, perhaps the consequences of living beyond her means. She plans to take out a student loan for her return to school but worries because the approved loan amount might not even cover the cost of the program’s tuition. She is unsure if there are any scholarships or bursaries she can apply for to attend her new program.

Despite some significant barriers, Sara feels her own willpower has helped her move forward with her plans. Wanting to find a new path has motivated her to explore different work options. Sara likes change and dislikes staying in one thing for a long period. She appreciates new experiences and the feelings associated with learning something new. Sara feels passionate about being surrounded by nature and hiking, camping, or swimming. She says those friends who visit have lost that nature part of themselves, becoming more interested in city clothes, hair, and makeup. She finds her parents to be encouraging, though her dad says because she grew up in a small town with calm surroundings that she will not make it in a big city. Her mom has
always told her to do what she wants to do. She is hoping her parents will help her pay rent while she attends college.

Besides her parents, a woman she once worked with has been a wonderful support. This previous supervisor knew a lot about what Sara had gone through and was always available to talk. Sara feels this woman always positively encouraged her and continues to push her forward in whatever she does. Sara likes having people in the community who know her and give her positive feedback.

**Future plans.** Sara plans to move down Island to go to school and hopes to find a place with reasonable rent! After the Adventure Tourism program she wants to go to Hawaii. Going to Hawaii has always been a dream of hers and she recently found out she has been accepted to a massage therapy school. She feels her heart is calling out to live somewhere tropical, to live somewhere warm. Sara dreams of having a business in which she could charter out adventures and create a massage option as part of the deal. However, she says she also does not really know what will happen so far away in time.

**Robert**

A new participant, Robert was interviewed in-person in Port Hardy. With a long-term girlfriend, he is currently running a small business and renovating their newly purchased home in Port Hardy. He plans to stay in the community.

**Work-life since high school.** At the end of high school Robert was eager to start working full-time for his family’s company. He had no other goals and did not have any idea of what to do with his life – he cared most about having a pick-up truck and making money. He worked for about a year in the community and did some travelling overseas. Feeling sick of Port Hardy,
Robert left to see new things and go to college down Island. Taking a handful of general courses, college lasted a semester. Robert did not apply himself and felt he was wasting his parent’s money. Living in the city opened his eyes to what Port Hardy had to offer. He missed being able to walk out his front door into nature and the simpler life he once knew. He moved back to Port Hardy, picked up his old job, and moved into a trailer with his girlfriend. Then, earning some money flipping a house before the market turned, Robert and his girlfriend started a local business. Robert is 22 years old and says he never thought he would be running a small business!

**Barriers and supports.** When Robert was in high school he felt the push from teachers and school counsellors to go to university and move away from his community. He felt pressured into the university pathway and even worried that if he did not have post-secondary there would not be opportunities for him. However, he figures if he had completed a business degree in the city and then returned home to open his current business, he would be in the same position now, but also have a huge student loan to contend with.

Robert had decent grades in high school and this enabled him to go to the college and take his desired courses. It was helpful that his sister lived in that city and that made finding housing easier for him. However, Robert found living expenses high. He was only able to find entry level work, working at a considerably lower wage than at his job back home. Robert felt employers in the city looked more at one’s education than experience and found the job market more competitive. Moreover, he did not know anybody in the city besides his sister. He says he would not have been able to buy a house or start a business in the city because he would still be paying rent.

Robert has friends who have returned to the community. He has seen people return with degrees and struggle to find work; they are not using their education and are working in different
industries than expected. Robert has noticed that education does not always mean good work experience and that motivated people do not need education to prove they are hard workers. Friends have also returned home because they were not in school, could not find good jobs, and their parents no longer wanted to financially support them living in a city.

When Robert returned to Port Hardy, he went back to work at his family’s company. He was able to do better financially in Port Hardy than in the city. Having many connections through his family and meeting people through his involvement in sports as a young person, Robert found everybody knowing everybody to be helpful. He had predicted needing more education to be involved in business, but he had his foot in the door in his own community and getting started was easier than he had suspected it would be.

Growing up in a decent home, his parents supported him in whatever he did. Robert’s grandparents also live in the community and have connections that go far back. He feels knowing older people through his family has helped his business. Robert was able to talk to local business people about starting and running his business; he asked questions and was encouraged. He found that people were happy he was staying and investing in the community by starting a business. Robert felt supported by the community because members want to see the town grow and develop and for more young people to stay.

**Future plans.** Robert has noticed a change in his priorities since high school. Feeling “money-hungry” after graduating, Robert now appreciates nature and would like to work less, even if that means making less money. With plans to stay in Port Hardy for a while, Robert hopes to grow his business and enjoy life. He hopes to have weekends off and enjoy the simpler things in life.
**Donovan**

A new participant, Donovan was interviewed in-person in Port Hardy. He owns a home in Port Hardy but works about two hours away at mill. With ideas about going away to school, he plans to eventually settle down in Port Hardy.

**Work-life since high school.** Feeling torn between his dream of going to art school but wanting to get a trade at the end of high school, Donovan planned to take it easy for about a year or two before trying to go back to some sort of school. Remaining in the community at the time, it did not matter to him what job he was working, as long as it was good pay. He stuck out a job he had held in high school for a couple of years and then tried logging but was soon laid off. Donovan lived for a few months down Island and then in Vancouver, but soon returned to his old job in Port Hardy. He tried a different job in the community but was laid off so he went back, yet again, to his previous job. Sensing he did not want to stay in the job forever, he found work at an out of town mill. Donovan lived with his girlfriend at the time, got a dog, and rented an apartment. Living life like adults, Donovan got sucked into the working and paying bills life. After the relationship ended, Donovan purchased his own house and is now working to make sure he makes his house payments. Now 24 years old, he does art in his spare time and is not doing what he thought and hoped he would be doing.

**Barriers and supports.** Living in Vancouver, Donovan found it difficult to adjust to a large city. He had to learn new rules and learn to take care of himself in a new city. Now, back in Port Hardy, financial responsibilities have taken over Donovan’s main dreams of going back to school for arts or trades. Working a job that is notorious for double time, Donovan worked long days; feeling tired at the end of the day, he found it hard to focus on other goals. Stuck working now, Donovan cannot figure out how to go back to school because he is just getting by. He
cannot save money to go back to school because of his house mortgage and he does not want a student loan. Looking back, Donovan wishes he had not taken time off after high school and had instead found some way to go to school right away.

Donovan found his family and friends to be supportive, saying they were proud of him. Currently his family members are encouraging him to return to school. Moreover, Donovan has extended family down Island and would consider college in that community. Having his driver’s license and managing to hold onto it for the past six or seven years helped Donovan a lot. He feels life would be much harder without a car.

**Future Plans**

Not sure about his future plans, Donovan feels optimistic and is “amped-up” on the future. He wants to do something with art and has many different business ideas. With hopes to own his own business one day he would like to contribute to society at the same time. Donovan loves Port Hardy and could picture himself happy in the community after exploring other cities on the Island before settling back at home.

**Tom**

A new participant, Tom was interviewed in-person in Port Hardy. Currently living and working in the fisheries industry in Port Hardy, he suspects he will eventually move down Island to open a small business.

**Work-life since high school.** Finding high school tough, Tom dropped out in the second semester of grade 12 and started in the workforce. He worked in retail and although it was not necessarily the ideal job, he was happy to put money in the bank. From the time Tom was five years old, he wanted to work with animals. He has managed to accomplish that in several
different fields. He almost bought a small animal business in Port Hardy, however, that deal fell through. So he moved into the interior of the province to find a new job working with animals. Living with family, he stayed in the interior for about a year. He moved to Vancouver for a short time to work a management job in the animal retail industry. He left Vancouver to return home because he had been seriously ill. Now healthy, he is currently working in fisheries in Port Hardy. Currently 22 years old, Tom likes the field and feels not having his high school diploma has not affected his employment opportunities.

**Barriers and supports.** Moving to larger cities, Tom felt he had been sheltered coming from a small community. The shock of being around more people was scary for him at first. Moreover, describing himself as “a hick,” he felt he was not very trendy and that made city living more difficult. Looking at his friends who moved away to go to post-secondary school, he has noticed that it has been financially difficult for them to work while going to school.

Feeling blessed with a very good family, Tom’s parents have always been supportive. When he moved in the interior, Tom lived with a family member and felt lucky to pay reasonable rent. He feels confident in his abilities working with animals. He feels he is a desirable person in his field, and quite employable. Being good at noticing problems and having practical experience have been personal assets for Tom.

**Future plans.** Although he plans to stay on the Island, Tom doubts he will remain in Port Hardy. He plans to continue working in fisheries for the next couple of years and then hopes to eventually own a small business working with animals.
Summary of Chapter Four

In this chapter, individual participant’ stories were presented, largely using their own language. Each story is unique and multifaceted, providing understanding and insight about the varied work-life experiences of young adults from this small community. From the diversity of experiences described in the stories, it is clear that this is not a homogeneous group. Nonetheless, there are commonalities that the participants share. These common themes, identified through the across-participant analysis, are described in the following chapter.
Chapter V – Across-Participant Findings

This chapter summarizes the results of the across-participant analysis. As presented in Chapter IV, each interview, and consequently work-life story, revealed participants’ individual experiences; however commonalities, or themes, among the participants’ interviews were also apparent. There were also points of divergence, for example, one participant lived on the mainland, *loving* city life, while the all the other participants were either living on Vancouver Island or hoped to return, feeling connected with the environment there. Due to the array of work-life experiences and differences in amount of information provided by each participant during the research interview, the criterion for inclusion of across-participant theme was not that it was discussed by each participant, but that it was discussed by at least seven out of the nine participants.

Across the participants, the seven themes identified were: (a) life planning and goal setting, (b) work and education, (c) moving away, (d) rural living, (e) relationships, (f) internal constructs, and (g) hindsight and insight. There were also more specific subthemes associated with each theme (see Table 2 below). In this chapter each theme and subtheme is discussed and linked to the literature. Many of the themes are interrelated and connect with one another. The first theme presented is *Life planning and Goal Setting* because this theme influenced all aspects of participants’ lives. Then the last theme, *Hindsight and insight*, is not only a reflection of what was said during the interviews, but also encompasses the participants’ experiences of the research interview process. Direct quotes are included in the presentation of the findings and are italicized to signify and highlight the participant voices. In order to protect participants’ confidentiality, I do not always identify participant quotes using pseudonyms.
Table 2.

Across Participant Themes and Subthemes

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**Life Planning and Goal Setting**

All the participants had hopes for the future and visions of an ideal future and, naturally, the goals from high school for each participant were individual. However, at the end of high school seven out of nine participants were unsure of their interests and had non-specific work-life goals. While two participants headed directly to post-secondary after high school to pursue their interests (i.e. mechanics and teaching) others struggled with vague goals (i.e. take time off from school). In other words, non-specific future plans were common, and as a result, so were unintended outcomes. One participant said:

*I thought maybe I would just work for a year and save money and then decide where I wanted to go after that.*

**High school goal setting.** Goals from high school moderated participants’ transition pathways. For example, Erin had specific plans as to which university she would attend in order to earn a degree in education; while Kevin planned to complete his apprenticeship and then post-secondary for his trade’s ticket down Island. These specific and measureable goals were achieved. However, more general interests and vague goals were more commonly described by participants. One young man said:

*I just wanted to start working ... I didn’t have any idea of what I wanted to do with my life... I seemed to care more about having a pick-up truck and stuff. I didn’t have any life goals.*

Within the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework, Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2000) contend that one’s primary interests (e.g. entrepreneurial interest) are likely to prompt corresponding choice-goals (e.g. intentions to pursue business-type career) and goals, in turn, promote choice-relevant actions (e.g. applying for a training program related
Participants in the present study described broad interests when they were in high school, and as a result many had not formed specific choice-goals or determined relevant actions.

A young man comments that during high school it would have been helpful if he had been trying to figure out and focus on what he wanted to do with his life. Frustrated, he said:

*You should leave high school with knowledge of something that you want to do so you can go for it. Most kids that came out of my high school had no clue what they wanted to do and no idea about how to work or what work to do.*

Salmela-Aro, Aunola, and Nurmi (2007) discuss how personal goals play an important role in the ways in which people select different directions for their futures. For example, by comparing personal motivations and interests to opportunities that are available, people may set personal goals that satisfy their individual needs and provide a basis for their behaviour (i.e. choice-relevant actions). Moreover, by setting personal goals, people help to organize, guide, and sustain their own behaviour (Lent et al., 1996). These findings are important for high school career exploration activities. Learning about goal setting and practicing to develop goals is an integral aspect of career development and exploration in high school.

**Unintended outcomes.** Furlong and Cartmel (1997) suggest that work-life patterns are less predictable now, and this was particularly evident for participants in their social and economic lives. They described unintended and unpredicted outcomes. Many were not doing what they had thought and hoped they would be doing. Participants had different work pathways and educational experiences than they had expected as youth. For example, interviewed in high school, Collin identified one of his feared “Possible Selves” of failing school and being on welfare. He had hoped to be an electrician. Seven years later, he was on employment insurance
and struggling to find work. He had left high school half way through grade 12. Talking about leaving high school Collin stated:

*So I totally screwed up my life in the beginning there. I found out that math wasn’t my strong suit and I hate math. So to be an electrician you need to be well versed in math... So I decided not to go with that.*

This story and other participants’ experiences (i.e. family illness or death, moving home, changing relationship status, transitioning from work back to school) are similarly described in Molgat’s (2007) research on “reversible transitions.” Other researchers such as Horowitz and Brominick (2007) and Walther and Plug (2006) contend that these reversible or “yo-yo” transition patterns are not young people’s first choices but are rather a result of contextual influences (i.e. family need, health, financial need). It would appear that many young people are not well prepared for these unintended events and outcomes that affect their original work and life plans.

**Future plans.** In discussing their current future plans, again, participants had many unspecified, although hopeful, goals. Arnett (2004) maintains that emerging adulthood is a period of high hopes and great expectations and during this time young people are positively future-oriented. Many participants emphasized personal fulfillment and happiness. Chris enthusiastically described his future:

*Yeah know... just like every young person, I want to travel, to explore, to find myself, and to be happy!*  

He added:

*To be a happy, healthy, productive citizen. That’s all I want out of life.*
Other participants commented on continuing their current work or education but were unsure about the future. For example Kevin, who had specific plans in high school, on the contrary, had general future plans:

*Keeping going with my business and stuff so I can be on the beaches of Mexico and not worry about nothing.*

Another young man, despite not doing what he thought and hoped he would be doing, said:

*I’ve got a bright vision. I am just so amped on the future, I am just kind of stuck in one period right now.*

Other participants had scattered future plans, perhaps a reflection of exploring underlying identity questions (i.e. what kind of work am I good at? What kind of work would I find satisfying for the long term?; Arnett, 2004). Participants’ descriptions about their plans suggested that they viewed the future as having numerous options. For example, a young woman who had spoken about plans to attend post-secondary on the Island, commented at the end of the interview about her desire to move to Hawaii, a dream since elementary school. Surprisingly, she said with excitement:

*I was thinking if I want to go somewhere tropical and I want to actually live there, I have to go to school to stay for there for a long of time because you can’t stay there longer than two months or something...My heart is calling out to be somewhere tropical.*

She adds:

*I don’t really know where I am going to go after Hawaii. I don’t really know what will happen that far away in time. Hopefully I will have a business of my own.*

Many participants were in the process of making future plans based on what kind of work would be most satisfying for the long term and what type of work would be congruent with their
notions of a realistic and fulfilling lifestyle. These findings underscore the necessity of career exploration activities to prompt young people to investigate the social and “life” implications of different types of work. For example, one participant said:

*I want to grow a business but I also want Saturdays and Sundays where I can head out to the west coast for the weekend and surf, I would rather do that then a work a weekend if I can...I would rather go surfing than make six hundred bucks working that weekend.*

**Education and Work**

All nine participants discussed their desire to work or pursue education in areas of their interests. A significant period of identity exploration, Arnett (2004) posits that young adults explore their abilities and interests, particularly in terms of work. One participant commented:

*I don’t think I could ever do anything that I wasn’t very passionate about.*

**Post-secondary.** Seven of the nine participants in the present study were currently in education, had attended post-secondary, or had the desire to return to school. A young man who had planned to *take his time* after high school and then *eventually return to school* was interested in college and trades training, he said:

*I really want to go towards art business, that’s my dreams but I also want to get a trade. I am torn between following my dreams or getting a trade....I always wanted to go towards a trade.*

Researchers have documented that youth almost universally express the goal of college or university attendance and identify a range of career goals, many at the professional level (Kenny et al., 2007; Corbett, 2005). In fact, according to a nationwide survey, the vast majority of Canadian 15 year-olds reported that they would like some kind of postsecondary education (Statistics Canada, 2002). On the contrary, participants who did not attend post-secondary
directly after high school started (or continued) working. Some participants worked in the fisheries or forestry industries. Robert noted:

_Around here you normally get jobs around seventeen dollars an hour processing at the fish plant...so that’s not too bad when you are just out of high school and you are not really sure what you want...

Another young man said:

_I am not really doing a job that I really want to do. It’s right up my alley but it’s not, it’s not my first choice of what I really want to be doing.

Tom said:

_It was not necessarily what I wanted to do, but it was money in the bank!

These experiences suggest that working at jobs with wages higher than minimum wage and that did not require specific educational credentials, was somewhat “binding.” It was difficult for some participants to leave jobs that provided regular, _decent pay checks_ and to pursue different interests and educational aspirations that, although may more personally fulfilling, felt more ambiguous and uncertain.

**Frequent changes.** In the present study work histories were dynamic and complex. Just as Goodwin and O’Connor (2007), Furlong and Cartmel (1997), and Stauber and Walter, (2006) suggest, contemporary transitions are prolonged and ambiguous, riddled with short-term work positions, frequent changes in employment, or experience of unemployment. It was not uncommon for participants to change work or return to jobs they had while in high school. For example, Sara, although she tried many different types of work, often returned to the job she had started working at in high school, she said:

_I always go back, they always take me back!_
Schoon and colleagues (2001) noted that young people finish school at different stages and follow a variety of different work-life pathways due to the restructuring of the labour-market. In the present study, young people were not immune to this economic restructuring and several were impacted by lay-offs. A pattern that is not uncommon in small and rural communities, one young man describes the different types of work he had already done:

I started off loading fish boats in high school at sixteen and did that for a couple years after I graduated and then escaped to go logging. But then I got laid off so I had to go back to off loading fish boats, then I escaped from off loading fish boats again to go work at this work crushing plant ... got laid off from that so then I had to go back to off-loading fish boats.

He adds:

Yeah, off-loading fish boats was really good money, the plant I worked at was notorious for double time ... but after doing that for so long, I wanted to try other things and get experience doing other things.

Evidently, many of the participants’ stories of working were influenced by the precarious labour market illustrated by the length, complexity, and variability of transitions pathways. Bradley and Devadason’s (2008) study on the typologies of labour market influenced pathways demonstrated how the changing nature of the labour market has created an unstable economic environment. In fact, some of these stories were reminiscent of Bradley and Devadason’s “shifters” typology that describes young people with no chosen career and various changes between types of work and employment statuses. Moreover, all the participants who attended college changed their interests and programs. For example, Angela had completed two years of acting at college and then decided to attend a different institution for a bachelor’s degree. And,
Sara who had attended North Island College and started a vocational program quit, deciding she was more interested in a different program at a college down Island.

**High school influences.** Participants not in college or university were particularly interested in trades training or small businesses close to their community. However, they struggled with the emphasis during high school on attending university. Robert commented on the influence to go to university; he said:

> When you are going to high school everybody’s teaching you about going to university and getting out of town... but sometimes... people are meant to stay at home and some people are meant to go away... I could have went to school, got a business degree and came back and do the same thing and it would be five or six years later... and probably have student loans of a hundred grand or something.

He adds:

> There are different ways to look at things for sure. I think they definitely push you towards university. I did have a worry that if I didn’t have an education, like [a degree] that there is not a lot of opportunity

Another participant commented on exploring different post-secondary avenues:

> I’ve noticed a lot of young people, more people that want to take trades courses as their goals, instead of going to university and taking academics.

He adds:

> Well in some ways our education system for a long time has been geared for everyone to go to university, and that’s not really realistic and so it seems like young people are starting to, kind of, pushing that that’s not really the case.

When asked directly about barriers for young people, the same participant said:
Not having access to trades in high school, because high school is a place where you find out, you start to find out what you want to do. So it’d be nice to have an introductory trades training.

Chris suggested that the people in the community have noticed the increasing interest in trades and are trying to make changes in the high school. He said:

We’re working on getting trades courses in the high schools, and getting the youth ready for the work force when they come out.

Marshall’s (2002) and Corbett’s (2005) research support the findings that schooling in coastal communities has several challenges for youth and for those who educate them. To the extent that schools do focus on post-secondary schooling, the emphasis tends to be on university preparation; however, more rural than urban youth do not to go university but rather go to some other form of post-secondary schooling (for example, trades programs). Corbett argues that this emphasis on university preparation differentially disadvantages rural youth. This academic bias has been previously noted by Corbett and Marshall and warrants further investigation. Future research needs to explore the implications of high school educators specifically promoting university education among rural youth.

Past studies have suggested that there is a lower “payoff” for formal education among those who remain in rural communities (Corbett, 2005; Bollman, 1999). Johnson, Elder, and Stern (2005) maintain that there is a growing recognition of the struggle young people face between their community attachments and their attainment goals. Additionally Corbett (2005) contends that factors such as rising tuitions costs, the high cost of leaving, and the expansion of low-skilled work in the rural service economy may help to explain low-post secondary participation in rural communities. One participant said:
And people with education, people that have degrees in psych, degrees in this and that, and they come back and they don’t always have jobs here, you know, it’s not like there is a lot of psychologists in Port Hardy.

Money. Many participants commented on financial concerns. Consistent with research by Blustein et al., (2000), Fouad and Brown (2000) and Lehmann (2005), the influence of class-based structural and economic variables on educational and occupational attainment continues to persist over time. Going into debt or already having debt was a significant barrier for participants. For example, when asked about when he plans to return to school, a young man said:

I am stuck working right now until I figure out how to go back to school... I am just getting by.

He adds:

I can’t really save money for it [school] right now, I could try and apply for some kind of loan but I don’t want to take on debt because I just took on a house mortgage.

When asked about saving for school, another participant said:

I [already] have student loans, I [also] have a line of credit and I have been paying those off as well as a consolidation loan that I have had to pay off from having a visa and a line of credit. I will get a student loan, but my student loan doesn’t cover my whole tuition.

Leaving education early to work (to make money) was not uncommon. Robert had been attending post-secondary said:
I went to college and tried that out for a semester and I pretty much, well I didn’t really apply myself. And then I kind of thought, if I am not going to apply myself there is no sense in wasting my parent’s money. So I moved back to start working again.

Another participant shared:

I kind of dropped out of high school half way through grade 12. I was more interested in making money and living on my own...

Some participants expressed concerns about attending post-secondary and accruing debt and then working low-paying jobs. Obviously earning money was a significant factor that influenced work and educational decisions. Few participants had financial support from their families and this delayed participants’ entry into post-secondary programs. Participants hoped to save money before returning to school, but once started working found it difficult to save.

Moving Away

Even if only for a short or temporary period, eight of the nine participants had moved away from Port Hardy within the last five years. Garasky (2002) contends that it is the limited economic outlook for the local community that often motivates young rural people to move away for their home communities. Many of the participants grew up in small communities, getting away and exploring other places were other reasons for leaving (Pretty et al., 2003). Many participants were keen to leave Port Hardy after high school. Angela said:

As soon as I graduated, I moved away from Port Hardy, I was just ready to move.

Tom said:

Most people that I know moved away to go to school, opposed to me where I went away to find work.
Evidently, frequently relocating was common among participants who had moved away. Collin said:

*I moved around a lot trying to figure out where I wanted to be.*

Sara scoffed as she said:

*I have moved so many different times... but I have a place now that I have been for seven months, which is good.*

Many participants who had moved away lived in cities where family lived. Discussing plans to begin a post-secondary program, a participant commented:

*I know there are a lot of programs all over the place, but Courtney’s college – it has a course I want to take and it’s like my second home down there...that’s where friends and family are.*

Holland and colleagues (2007) emphasize the importance of sibling relationships and family networks and the consequential pull of family loyalty to different places. In the present study, several young people capitalized on moving to locations where siblings or extended-family members lived. At times, participants lived with family and felt more comfortable in the cities where their family also lived.

**Exploration.** Arnett (2004) maintains that young adults often try out different ways of living and different options available in their work and personal lives. Participants who had moved discussed how they felt as though they were exploring when they moved to a new place and commented on their desires to see new things. A young woman said:

*I wanted to move somewhere else, like a city that I had never been before and just have a new life, new experiences, new people, so I went and moved for year.*

Another participant said:
I am used to a small puny town, and then I go to the city that is like a huge jungle. I was lost but it was still an experience that I was loving...

City difficulties and values. Eight participants had experienced living in a city. Many spoke of the difficulties they experienced such as cost of living. Bynner and Parsons (2002) found that rural young people reported poor housing conditions while Looker and Dwyer (1998) suggest that rural young people often experience difficulty finding housing in the city. One participant noted:

My sister lived in Kelowna and there’s no way that they could have bought a house or started a family there. In the city housing is ridiculous.

Similar to findings from Locker and Dwyer’s study, young people in the present study felt like the city was a place with more options but also more crime and that it had fewer community ties. Looker and Dwyer revealed that those who moved to urban centres also encountered dissatisfaction with public transportation, the time it took to travel to work or school, and increased difficulties managing finances. In the present study, participants noticed and commented on many differences of living in a city. Chris commented:

I think in the city a lot of times, young people don’t get to go out and play as much... In the city everything is supervised and you have to be really careful.

Another young man said:

Everything in Victoria takes an hour to do right... and it costs money...

He adds:

Finding a job in Victoria is tricky, especially when down there a lot of people want to see what you’ve got in terms of education.

Donovan said:
It was challenging trying to adjust to a way larger town. Trying to follow the rules down there and trying to make sure I was able to take care of myself in the city...[it was hard] getting used to and being able to navigate your way through the city.

Participants also noticed different values among friends living in cities. Erin said:

*She has very odd priorities and is really focused on just making money and having nice clothes all the time and going shopping. That’s all she ever wants to do when we go out is ‘go shopping’, and do all the city things, right, like go to Starbucks and drink coffee and go out for martinis on the porch of Cactus Club or just all these really trendy things... she has all these notions of how a person acts in the city.*

She adds:

*I think she is really unhappy because of it. And really hasn't focused on finding a community, finding a community that she can be a part of in the city.*

**Rural Living**

All nine participants spoke of their experiences of living in a rural community. Most commonly, participants shared their passions about the outdoors. Looker and Dwyer maintain that nature, calmness, and tranquility were prominent and positively valued and features that are more likely in rural areas than in urban ones, as are physical space and a “clean environment.”

Among participants, rural living was often conceived as a subjective and constructed phenomenon (Rye, 2006).

**Nature values and interests.** Place identity involves complex cognitions characterized by a host of attitudes, values, thoughts, beliefs, meaning, and behavioural tendencies (Proshansky et al., 1983; Gustafson, 2000; Fried, 2000). This was clearly evident among the participants, as was the relationship between place identity and the natural surroundings. Pretty
and colleagues (2003) maintain that residential community can have personal meanings, and the experiences and images of the place constitute a symbolic expression of identity. Erin spoke about her appreciation of nature in the community:

*I grew up with the appreciation of nature and also with the idea that you just play outside all the time. When we were kids we were just always outside. Work was always fun, like if you had to plant a garden, well everyone gets involved in this fun thing. So, you’re always outside doing productive things with everybody else for enjoyment. I think there are so many values you get from spending time outside.*

She adds:

*Growing up in Port Hardy, being in a rural community, spending a lot of time outside, I didn’t even realize when I was a kid how valuable that was but it has bred so much of an appreciation for the environment and just a sense of community... I think coming from Port Hardy I’m a lot more grounded*

Rye’s (2006) study found that many young people perceived rural living as idyllic. Participants in the present study expressed their sentiments about the beauty of their surroundings and their interests in the outdoors. Robert said:

*The simplicity [draws people back to Port Hardy] more than anything, just quieter, if they are into outdoors it’s got ten times the things to offer. You can go away, hike your own trail, you can go away, get a lake to yourself.*

Donovan commented:

*I just love the tip of the Island, the ocean is right here, all forest around us, it’s like a paradise!*
Young people with these strong outdoor/nature interests may find urban living less desirable. However, conflicts could arise if there are more work, educational, or economic opportunities in urban settings. Such competing interests can affect decision making for rural young adults.

**Changing perspectives and returning.** Interestingly, participants commented on how their perspectives of rural living had changed since high school. A young woman said:

*I don’t think that I would say Port Hardy is boring I would say that it’s very different...I appreciate going there more than I ever would have when I was living there.*

Another participant said:

*In high school we all would say how much we hated [Port Hardy] and we wanted to get away, but you realize once you move away... I definitely like smaller [communities.]*

He adds:

*Moving to Victoria kind of opened my eyes about what Port Hardy had to offer.*

Seven of the nine participants expressed their hopes to continue living or to move back to Vancouver Island. Collin, who had moved the most out of all the participants, had lived in other cities on the Island as well as in Eastern provinces and Alberta said:

*I left BC and Vancouver Island for a while and I realized how much I missed it.*

Another participant, currently living in a city and going to school, looks forward to returning to Port Hardy; she said:

*I have a boyfriend, we’ve been together for a year, we’re definitely going to get married, he’s moving to Port Hardy. It’s funny I put ‘will end up in Port Hardy with a house and kids’ [on her Possible Selves map during the CUS interview]. We’re moving to Port*
Hardy next summer and we’re going to be either buying or renting the house that I grew up in.

She adds:

Once you spend a lot of time away from home you realize how nice it is to be home.

These above statements would sum to indicate some shift in perspective once these young adults had out of school and away from the community for a while. Such shifts underscore the importance of longitudinal and follow-up research – even a few years life experience seems to have resulted in some significant and priority shifts for the participants.

**Place attachment.** Place identity is a cognitive structure that contributes to the identity process (Proshansky et al., 1983, Fried, 2000, Gustafson, 2000). This is the construct of identity whereby people explore the “Who am I?” questions by answering the “Where am I?” (Cuba & Hummon, 1993). Just as Jamieson (2000) found, the majority of those who left still expressed feelings of attachment to their rural community. However, contrary to Jamieson’s other finding that some of those who stayed expressed embitterment, all the participants in this study really appreciated their rural community, especially with regard to raising families. A young man said:

You see people coming back to start families and once you have your ties here, people that you grew up with, and your family. Once you grow up in a small town, I think you’re always a small town person at heart. I always say once you live here, you’ll always come back. Always!

He adds:

This is just the most beautiful place on earth, it’s heaven on earth! And I really think it is! And I will probably leave one day, but I will be back because I’d like to, it’s the perfect place to raise a family.
In her research, Marshall (2002) also found that rural young people were strongly tied to their communities. Young people in the present study commented on mostly the positive aspects, rather than on the problematic, such as limiting work choices, which may have influenced their career decisions. Proshansky and colleagues (1983) contend that place identity is conceptualized as an individual’s strong emotional attachment and sense of belonging to a particular place or setting. Marshall and others such as Cahill and Martland (1996) have found that preference for place is a factor in career decision-making.

**Community benefits.** Participants described the benefits of living in a small community for their work and careers. Interestingly, while career opportunities can keep youth in their rural communities, having youth in rural communities in turn increases the quality of life for others; Garasky (2002) observed that the quality of life for residents of small communities seems to be tied to the ability of the community to maintain a viable base of young adults. Young adults in the present study discussed the benefits of *everybody knows everybody* particularly while searching for employment or while developing small businesses. A young man maintained:

*To get your foot in the door is a lot easier in a smaller community.*

He adds:

*You talk to older people that have been involved in business, especially when you are staying in their community and investing in their community rather than go out of town.*

*They think it’s huge.*

Chris described another benefit:

*You get used to the fact of knowing everybody, and just the friendly atmosphere of it all.*

Small communities were also seen as good places in which to raise families. A young man said:
It’s a safe place, I mean, you can let your kids go out and play, and you can let them go on the playground by themselves and walk around. You can’t do that in the city.

**Community restructuring.** Goodwin and O’Connor (2007) contend that local industries and companies are dwindling and that those jobs and trades that were once thought to be secure are disappearing. Marshall (2002) observed several major employers have laid off hundreds of workers on Northern Vancouver Island since the 1990s. Resource-based industries have been particularly affected. One participant noticed:

*Obviously fishing continues to get worse, but I mean it was going downhill five years ago. Logging in the last couple of years had got pretty bad... it hasn’t been steady for a while, like five years. But the community itself, real estate has changed a bit. A lot of people are leaving because of the fact that there is not a lot of good jobs around Port Hardy, logging and stuff. A lot of people are retraining or going up North... going to the oil sands and stuff.*

Another participant observed:

*Between economic times and a lot of job losses, people still manage to keep busy and working but a lot of people are getting screwed over with their jobs, getting laid off. But, I see the community always striving towards doing better, I know there are people always putting in their time towards volunteering towards programs or events that are happening.*

Given that resource industries are expected to continue experiencing difficulties and lack of growth, it is important that young people in their community be prepared for different work. Having multiple options would seem to be prudent.
Relationships

Family and relationships with community adults were described as supportive factors among eight participants. They felt closely connected to and supported by family and many community members. These observations are consistent with those found by other researchers such as Kapil (2008), Harrison (2005), Marshall (2002), and Ward (2009).

Family. In her study of young rural women, Shepard (2004) described family support as comprising emotional and financial support as well as the transmission of moral values. A young man said:

*My parents have always been very supportive, they are very, I was definitely blessed with a very, very good family. They support me in every way.*

A young woman comments:

*I grew up with family all around. You can’t get away with much; you have to learn how to do things well, to get along with everybody... And so you learn how to be more disciplined and also to compromise your desire for those of the group. Which is so useful, holy man, it’s useful later in life.*

Community adults. Research has shown that the availability of work-based learning, encouraging adults, and over-all support from a variety of sources can enhance career development and positively influence transition experiences (Lapan et al., 2007; Marshall, 2002; Phillips et al., 2002; Shepard, 2004). Although not described specifically as “role models”, in the current study, community adults were described as sources of motivation as well as information. For example, a young woman said:

*There was this lady that I worked with, and before she was my supervisor, she was my*
co-worker... She has always been a really good person to talk to; she knows everything that I have been through, and she always pushes me forward. She says just do it, do it!

A young man said:

Knowing other people through my parents and stuff, that helped, just local businessmen and stuff. They can help you out with certain questions.

**Internal Constructs**

Personal attributes and qualities were described by the participants as supportive factors in their work-life transitions. Participants described work related qualities such as work-ethic, work experience, problem-solving, and being overall employable. Specifically cited internal constructs were learning and motivation.

**Learning.** Participants discussed their learning associated with the difficulties they encountered during non-straightforward transitions. Robert said:

*I’ve learned just to slow things down because if you are trying to do too many things you can’t do one thing really well. So try and focus on one thing and have that dealt with before you start another.*

Angela said:

*Everybody I have encountered has helped me in one way or another whether it was positive or negative at the time... it was always a learning experience. Every person in my life has helped one way or another!*

Donovan said:

*The whole adult life just leaning to cope with other adults and trying to be responsible is really important I’ve found.*
Similar findings were described in Bradley and Devadason’s (2008) study. The researchers coined “internalized flexibility” to involve an internalized discourse of adaptability and optimism about life-long learning. Moreover, Bramston and Patrick (2007) described positive attitudes despite negative transition experiences as an effective coping mechanism.

**Motivation.** Most frequently, when participants explained supportive factors, they described personal motivation. Currently running his own business, Kevin said:

*Hard work and lots of hours...*

Another young man said:

*Just my own willpower!*

In the present study motivation was often discussed as a means of overcoming hurdles experienced during transitions. In Devadason’s (2007) study, when young adults retrospectively described how setbacks experienced during transitions were overcome, it was in relation to personal motivation and the hurdles were observed to ultimately strengthen young peoples’ determination to succeed. A young man who felt unsupported and undervalued in high school exclaimed:

*I pushed and I will show everybody that I will be better. So you just have to have your own ambition and want and desire to make something better out of your life.*

This finding is similar to results described in adolescent resilience research, which focuses on the assets and resources that enable to overcome the negative effects of risk exposure or avoid the negative trajectories associated with risks. Among resiliency researchers, assets are viewed as positive factors that reside within the individual, such as competence, coping skills, and self-efficacy (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005).
Hindsight and Insight

Looking back over the past 5 to 7 years, participants had a number of observations and insights. Commenting on the experience of being interviewed Angela said:

This is really interesting for me. Even rereading the interview, I was laughing at myself. Not because of goals but because I can see myself answering questions like a 15 year old – looking back you kind of realize [not to take things for granted]. I wonder what it would be like if you called me in another 5 years...

During the process of the interview, asking direct questions promoted participants’ to reflect on their decision-making processes and the manner in which they worked to achieve their work and life goals. A participant said:

You need to focus on the goals that you want. You’ve got to put time towards them and you’ve really got to make sure you follow your goals.

Responsibilities and becoming an adult. The relative freedom and large range of social options during emerging adulthood were evident among the participants. All of them explored various work-life possibilities and several were currently moving towards adulthood, making enduring decisions. Some participants were in either serious or marital relationships, owned homes, and/or were operating small businesses – Arnett (2004) considers these to be stable commitments in western contexts. Many participants discussed responsibilities; for example, a young man said:

I had a girlfriend and we ended up getting caught up with you know having to get an apartment. We got a dog, had to start paying bills and getting a visa and ended up living life like adults and it was really hard to get back onto my track because I was working all the time. I just got sucked into the whole working and paying bills thing.
He adds:

*Lots of responsibilities...I got a taste of reality, just trying to stay afloat and learn what it takes to be in the real world.*

**Regrets.** Although participants were generally optimistic about life-long learning and their future plans, they also reflected on what they might have done differently. A young man said:

*I would have rather just found some way, some way to just go to school right away.*

He adds:

*I regret taking time off. It’s kind of got me stuck.*

Another young man said:

*I never would have smoked dope... I wouldn’t have been so apathetic. I wouldn’t have been so lethargic. I would have been motivated a little more. I would have done more interesting and exciting things with my life.*

**Summary of Chapter Five**

This chapter has described the results of the across-participant analysis. The identified themes and subthemes highlight the commonalities among the nine participants’ interviews. Participants discussed a variety of influences on their work-life transitions; Kenny and colleagues (2007) articulate that “barriers and supports can be located within proximal influences, such as the family... and more distal influences, such as broader social, governmental, and cultural systems” (p. 336). The findings of the present study detailed supports and obstacles that have been recognized in existing research; as well as, address gaps in existing literature by highlighting the contextual experiences among young adults at varied levels of academic achievement and from a rural context. Challenges or barriers such as unformed goals, frequent
changes in work and education, financial concerns, and pathways influenced by the precarious labour market and local economic restructuring were illustrated, as were supportive factors such as relationships with family and community adults, positive perceptions of rural living, and learning experiences. Moreover, participants revealed optimistic future plans and, regardless of their current levels of education or past school achievement, expressed high educational and career aspirations.

The findings provide insight into life and work pathways of young people a few years after high school, and reveal the factors impacting their decision processes. Although consistent in a number of ways with previous research, these participants demonstrated differences that warrant further investigation.
Chapter VI – Conclusions

In this final chapter, the major findings of the present study are summarized. Following this is a discussion of the limitations of the study, implications for theory and research, and reflections on my growth as researcher. Finally, implications for counsellors and educators working with young rural adults in the field of life and career planning and in restructuring contexts are presented.

Summary of Major Findings

Findings from this study contribute to the understanding of the contextual supports and barriers to work-life transitions as perceived by young rural adults, a population whose experiences have historically been neglected by vocational researchers. The research question for the present study was: What have been young coastal adults’ work-life experiences since the Coasts Under Stress study? Illuminated in this study were the unintended outcomes, positive-future aspirations, and the supports and barriers experienced by the nine participants.

Unpredicted and unintended, work-life patterns were often meandering, gradual, and an individualized process. Characteristic of identity exploration, work-life pathways for young adults were moderated and prolonged by this process of development. Identity was continuously emergent, re-formed, and re-directed through various experiences. Consistent with the social constructionist perspectives, identity was constructed and reconstructed within relationships and across multiple contexts for these young adults (Blustein et al., 2004; Gergen, 1994, 1999). Exploring interests and abilities was the most evident feature of “emerging adulthood” suggested by the frequent changes in work and education among the young adults in this study. As Arnett (2004) and Konstam (2007) maintain, emerging adulthood is potentially a time to enhance
agnostic abilities and strengths and master of obstacles that had been presented in their social environment.

Regardless of current level of education of past school achievement, the young adults in the present study expressed high educational and career aspirations. Corbett (2005), Cartwright and Allen (2002) and Kenny and colleagues (2007), contend that youth almost universally express the goal of college or university attendance in order to achieve a range of career goals, many at the professional level. Moreover, young people emphasized personal fulfillment and happiness when describing future plans. Arnett (2004) maintains emerging adults are positively future-oriented and hold high hopes and great expectations.

There were ways in which the proximal and distal influences served both as barriers and supports in work-life transitions. Goal-setting, family, community adults, moving away, rural living, and internal constructs (learning and motivation) were identified as sources of support and barriers. Not surprisingly, family emerged as the primary source of support. Prior research has consistently emphasized the importance of family support across diverse populations (e.g. Kenny et al., 2007; Harrison, 2005; Marshall, 2002; Shepard, 2004). Moreover, encouraging community adults positively influenced the transition experiences and enhanced career development of these young adults. These findings suggest the importance of incorporating family and adult role-models into youths’ career exploration and planning processes.

As youth, many participants were keen to leave their small community after high school. Limited economic outlook, “getting away” and the desire “to see and experience new things” were mitigating factors that promoted out-migration. However, many of the young people found city living less desirable. Many returned or had plans to relocate to their community or other
small, coastal communities. Place identity was an apparent construct that significantly influenced young peoples’ work and educational choices (Marshall, 2002).

Participants commented on the social and economic restructuring in their community but overall, did not reveal a critical consciousness of the impact of these significant changes. Some participants discussed the structural inequalities related to pursuing higher education. Others observed that the population was in decline, but commented less often on the effects of this on their community. This is perhaps not surprising, given their ages and limited experiences. Strongly tied to “place”, young adults expressed positive sentiments about the rural community they had grown-up in and passions for the beauty of their surroundings. Many expressed personal feelings about coming from a rural community and described symbolic, idyllic images of the place, expressions which Pretty and colleagues (2003) consider to be tied to identity. Among coastal, young adults place identity was a cognitive structure that contributed to identity processes and consequentially work-life planning.

These major findings serve to complement existing research and also extend and deepen the understanding of how young rural adults manage work-life transitions.

Limitations

The findings must be viewed with the recognition of boundaries of the study. As with all qualitative research, the present findings are not intended to be generalized beyond the participants’ context. The findings of the present study are less applicable to urban young people; however, the findings could be representative of other youth from rural and small communities. Nevertheless, there could also be regional differences that should not be minimized. Other studies from small or rural coastal communities could be different, for example, in the present study there was only one First Nations participant.
The aim of the study was to follow up with participants who had been interviewed in high school as part of the Coasts Under Stress project. Due to difficulties in locating original CUS participants, I added new participants who retrospectively described their goals and experiences from the end of high school. Although the new participants attended the high school and reported similar experiences, these new participants did not have the CUS interview as youth.

The length of each interview was somewhat varied. I conducted three telephone interviews because participants were living in different geographical areas. Because I was a stranger to the participants and conducted the interview over the telephone, it was difficult to establish rapport. As a result, some interviews were significantly shorter and less detailed than the in-person interviews. Although I was close in age to most of the participants, some may have been less willing to express their thoughts with me as the interviewer because of gender and educational differences. Some participants apologized for foul language and others appeared tentative when describing educational difficulties. Moreover, six participants were male - they less frequently described the influence of romantic relationships during their interviews as compared to the three female participants.

**Implications for Theory and Research**

The study of working is embedded in complex layers of social, cultural, and political meanings (Bluestein et al., 2005). Young and Valach (2004) posit that within the last decade, qualitative research in career development has shifted from the margins into the centre of contemporary inquiry. Qualitative research has been pivotal in expanding the horizons of issues and problems within vocational psychology (Blustein et al., 2005). An excellent fit for this study, psychology of working perspectives seek to understand the experiences of everyone who works, not just those with hierarchical and orderly careers that reflect planful and volitional behaviour.
(Blustein, 2006). The present participants experienced a range of work-life pathways with diverse aspirations and outcomes, which is consistent with current theory and research with emerging adults. There are, however, some more particular areas illuminated in this study and corresponding implications for future scholarly investigation.

Career barrier is a concept that is conceptually related to Social Cognitive Career Theory. Swanson and Woike (1997) defined career barriers as “events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make career process difficult” (p. 434). Accordingly, proximal environmental variables can moderate and directly affect the manner by which people make and implement career-relevant choices. Currently, SCCT deals primarily with contextual variables related to making (formulating) and implementing (pursuing career choices). From the SCCT perspective, it is advantageous to conceptually distinguish between personal (e.g. low self-efficacy) and contextual (e.g. family disapproval) factors that impede career development. Developing theory and research into the personal barriers that impeded career development is a noteworthy future research investigation.

Although existing studies have sought to describe various pathways influenced by the labour market, fewer studies describe how young people manage the hurdles and set-backs of complicated transition pathways. Interestingly, in the present study participants less commonly described “barriers” even though they described “unintended outcomes.” Further in-depth research into experiences of work-life barriers would provide more information about (a) what personal barriers are experienced, (b) strategies to successfully manage these barriers, and (c) what could have educators done in high school to help prepare youth for unintended outcomes. However, perhaps other constructs may be more empirically useful. Swanson and colleagues
(1996) suggest that the barriers construct has a lack of a firm theoretical framework into which research findings could be incorporated.

In the present study there were obvious linkages between work and non-work issues. For example, one young woman discussed both her parents dying since she had completed high school and how she had to put life on hold during their illnesses. Delaying education and taking an absence from work is a clear indication of the relationship between work and life issues. Future research could further investigate the impact of significant psychological events (e.g. grief or illness) and how such events influence career development.

Finally, researchers (i.e. Rye, 2006; Pretty et al., 2003) have investigated the perceptions and meanings attributed to rurality by young adults; however, a particularly interesting finding in the present study was the change from negative to positive perspectives of rurality. As youth many participants found their small community “boring” and were keen to “get away.” Due to the longitudinal nature of this study, participants demonstrated a change in thinking about their small community. As young adults, the participants expressed positive sentiments and an attachment to “place.” I am curious to explore this further - was this finding a result of the participants’ processes of identity exploration? Much research has investigated place identity, but further longitudinal research could investigate why this construct becomes more significant as people grow older.

Longitudinal studies are challenging but extremely valuable for theory and research. Following a group of people from youth through adulthood, over years if not decades, provides considerable insight into the changing nature of work-life pathways. Moreover, comparing the differences between urban and rural peoples’ work-life pathways over time could be an important future research investigation.
Implications for Practice

Counselling psychology is well-known for articulating the central role that work plays in human development (Richardson, 1993; Savickas, 1993; Super 1993). The present research findings have implications for counselling practice and provide valuable information for career educators and policy developers. The major theme of life-planning highlights the importance of planning and goal-setting on young people’s work-life transitions. Counsellors, educators, and parents need to pay particular attention to the goals of students at the end of high school. Helping students learn how to set and create steps for large and small goals is important for transition planning. Goal-setting is also useful for other life issues, not just simply education and work. Demonstrating goal-setting strategies and following up on measureable steps is strongly recommended for counsellors working with youth or young adults on work-life issues. Techniques such as visualizing work-life five years later and exploring values with explicit links to setting goals would be advantageous. Marshall and Guenette (2008) recommend the use of “Possible Selves” mapping as an engaging and effective tool for career exploration with youth.

Counsellors must pay particular attention to young peoples’ preference for place – this may have specific outdoor/nature elements in rural and small communities. Moreover, counsellors must understand the economy, political power structures, value systems, and changes occurring within the region (Corbett, 2005; Marshall et al., 2006). The community’s context is central to helping rural young explore work-life options. More community and educational role-models and mentors are needed to provide information about the world of work as well as to provide personal guidance and support. Contact with slightly older young adults or at least information from them could help students prepare better for the inevitable changes and unintended outcomes that almost all will experience. Helping young people to consider multiple
options outside as well as within their communities would be a critical role. Students need to talk to and hear from adults with wide varieties of work and learning skills and experiences in order to learn about different types of work-life pathways. For example, learning and hearing that post-secondary education can take many forms, not just the university pathway. The findings of present study underscore the position that family is important in the process of career development. As such, work exploration and planning should involve family members and other significant adults who share knowledge regarding higher education and career pathways.

Development resources and supports needs to focus on aspects of life other than just work. Of note within the stories were “blurred lines” or a lack of distinction between work (or education) and non-work issues. Blustein (2006) posits that this distinction is increasingly fading because changes taking place in our current world of work are having significant effects on the manner in which people live their lives. Participants frequently moved for work or education and also returned to their community for work; they did not demonstrate “stable careers.” Undoubtedly, technology and globalization of the world’s economies are in turn changing the personal experience of work and careers. Savickas and colleagues (2005) speculate that “this globalization of economies affects where work can be found and who has access to it... An increasing number of world workers are seeking educational and vocational guidance for themselves and their families” (p. 78). The findings of the present study highlight the need for the development of career resources to support youth to prepare for a wide variety of work-life pathways and unintended outcomes.

Researcher Experiences

During this process I learned how my training as a counsellor influenced this method. For example, when I noticed tensions and discomforts I noticed myself employing my
empathetic listening skills and limiting my probing questions with the participants. With interest and experience in career counselling, I noticed my tendencies to want to provide support and an avenue for deeper exploration during the interviews. Through my personal researcher reflexivity, I gained insight into the complexity of the counsellor and researcher role overlap. Lastly, this thesis has triggered a keen interest in work-life counselling with young adults and future research aspirations to conduct a longitudinal study.

**Conclusion**

This in-depth study of the work-life transitions of young adults from a small coastal community revealed participants’ stories and major themes. The knowledge gained from this study underscores constructivist (and more particularly SCCT) perspectives that counselling and educational interventions must attend to the context in which work-life planning occurs. The participants’ stories illustrated that, more than ever, work-life transitions are multifaceted processes significantly influenced by changing socio-economic conditions.

The world of work is rapidly changing and research is needed in order to understand how to best support young people through the transition process to a fulfilling and productive working life. The findings from this study highlight the patterns and complexities of young peoples’ work-life transitions. Increasingly protracted and complex, work-life transitions are no longer a relatively linear process. Work-life transitions are more commonly gradual, meandering, and individual. Moreover, the fast-changing conditions of today’s labour market are having significant effects on the ways in which people live their lives. Nonetheless, young people are also optimistic and aware that they themselves are the architects of their future. It is our responsibility to offer relevant and positive support in order to assist them in their life journeys.
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Footnotes

1 The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed persons expressed as a percentage of the labour force. The unemployment rate for a particular group (age, sex, marital status) is the number unemployed in that group expressed as a percentage of the labour force for that group. Estimates are percentages, rounded to the nearest tenth (Statistics Canada, 2008).

2 Possible selves is a concept that refers to self-knowledge where individuals contemplate their potential for the future. The construct of possible selves was founded by Hazel Markus and Paula Nuris (1986) to study the role of the self-concept in individual differences, motivation, and change. These founders proposed that possible selves represent cognitive visions of our desires for mastery, power and affiliation and our fears of failure and incompetence. An individual’s repertoire of possible selves can be seen as cognitive manifestations of goals, aspirations, and fears for the future. Hoped-for selves, expected selves, and feared selves are all variations of this construct representing what is desired, anticipated and dreaded respectively (Markus & Nuris).
Initial Question for Rapport and Background:

1. What has it been like growing up in this community? Tell me about your friends, family, school, activities, and anything else that has been important for you growing up in this community. Use prompts and clarification as needed.

Life-Career Development:

2. The construction of concept maps gives you an opportunity to reflect on the key concepts or big ideas concerning the influence of this community on you. Begin by brainstorming the major influences on your life and then elaborate on your ideas. Try linking and cross-linking the big ideas and see what comes up. You can create flowcharts, concept webs, pictures, or whatever helps you to conceptualize your experience. Think about the things that have shaped you as you have been growing up. Please draw a map showing these influences.

3. As you are getting closer to finishing high school, you are probably thinking about your future. Think about how you see your future unfolding, with regard to work, relationships, and education, etc. Using another color of pencil, continue with your map and draw how you see your future unfolding with regard to each influence that you have indicated on your map.

   (probe if necessary)
   How do you see your work after high school?
   How do you see education after high school?
   How do you see relationships after high school?

4. What have you done in the course of thinking about planning for the future?

Effects of Coastal Community:

1. What beliefs has this community taught you?

   (probe if necessary)
   What skills have you learned in this community?
   What attitudes have you developed?
   What's most important to you?

2. When you think about your plans for the future, how has growing up in this community affected those plans?

   (probe if necessary)
   How has it affected your plans for work?
   How has it affected your plans for education?
   How has it affected your plans for relationships and family?
   What have been some positive points? Limitations?
Possible Selves:

I am going to ask you to think about your future. When we think about the future, we usually think about what kinds of experiences are likely to happen and the kinds of people we might possibly become.

At times we think about what we hope we will be like. One way of thinking about this is to talk about possible selves—selves we hope to become in the future. Some of these possible selves seem quite likely; for example, being a worker at a particular job, or being a car owner. Others seem quite unlikely, but still possible; for instance, being a world famous athlete or a lottery winner.

Besides having dreams that we hope for, we might have pictures of ourselves in the future that we are afraid of or don’t want to happen. Some of these feared possible selves may seem quite likely, for instance, being without a job or being very sick. Others may seem quite unlikely, such as being a homeless person.

Take some time and think about all the dreams you have for yourself in the future. Write your hoped-for selves on the green cards, one hope-for self per card.

Besides having hoped-for possible selves, we may pictures of ourselves in the future that we fear or dread.

Take some time to think about what don’t want for yourself. Write your feared selves on the yellow cards, one feared self per card.

Now spread out all the green cards that are hoped for the future. Think about how important each of these hoped-for possible selves are to you. Which of these would you most like to happen? You can number that card one. Continue to order your cards. Tell me about each of your cards and what each means to you.

Now spread out all the yellow cards that are your fears for the future. Think about how important each of these feared possible selves are to you. Which of these would you least like to happen? You can number that card one. Continue to order your cards. Tell me about each of your cards and what each means to you.

(prompts if necessary)
How capable do you feel of accomplishing or preventing this possible self?
How likely do you think this possible self is to come true?
Can you tell me some of the things you done in the past year to bring about this hoped-for self?
Or to prevent this feared-for self from occurring?
Which selves would your community judge to be successful (unsuccessful)?
Which selves do you feel you can achieve (or prevent) in this community?
Which selves have you been unable to develop in this community?
Appendix B

Interview Questions Guide

1. a) These are some of the things you spoke of in the interview you did with us when you were in high school. (go over summary of participant’s past interview) What goals, plans, and possible selves have remained the same? Which have changed and why?

OR

b) What was it like for you at the end of high school? What were your thoughts and plans then about what you were going to do?

2. Tell me about your life, educational, and work experiences in the time since you have left high school?
   How have things been working out for you?
   Are you doing now, what you thought and hoped you would be doing?

3. What difficulties have you experienced moving forward with the plans you made in high school?

4. What has helped you move forward with your plans?

5. Describe some things that parents/guardians, elders, and other community adults have done that either helped or hindered you to move toward your goals.

6. What changes have you noticed in your community over the past few years?
   What have you heard?

7. When you compare your experiences with your friends that have moved away, what do see as the main differences?
   What sorts of challenges do you see those who moved away faced?

8. What is the most important thing you have learned since leaving high school?
   What would you change if you could?

9. How do you see your future now? What are your next steps? Do you have specific plans?

* Prompts and open questions will be used to facilitate the interview process where needed.
Appendix C

Initial Contact Phone Script

Hello, my name is Breanna Lawrence and I am a research assistant at the University of Victoria. I am working with Dr. Anne Marshall on a study called “Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth” and I am looking for ________________ who was an original participant in the Coasts Under Stress Research project.

Hello ________________ (participant) I was wondering if you would be interested in participating in a follow-up research interview regarding the “Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth” study? You were interviewed in 2002, for the Coasts Under Stress Research project and we would like to follow-up with you and see where you are now and what your work-life experiences have been since the last interview.

(If participant (or parent to gain contact info) wants more information...)

The purpose of the research project is to provide longitudinal data on the life-career planning process and outcomes for youth in coastal communities. The research question is: “What have been youth life-career experiences since the Coasts Under Stress (CUS) project and how have their situations, goals and aspirations changed?” Research of this type is important because the results will help improve career education and counselling support for youth. You are being asked to participate in this study because you were a participant in the original CUS research.

(If participant agrees to follow-up interview...)

Agreeing to participate means I will call you back at an arranged, mutually convenient time and I will ask you a series of questions. I will audio-tape the phone call. The questions are about your experiences since the original interview and what goals, plans, and what supports and
barriers you have experienced. If you agree to participate, I will mail you the participant consent form which outlines the purpose of the project in more detail, contains contact information, and discusses confidentiality. I will also include a summary of your past interview responses. Furthermore, to compensate you for your participation, you will be mailed $10. **What is your mailing address? What time works best for you, for me to call you in about two weeks?** Hopefully you will have received the consent form and interview summary by the time I call you for the follow-up interview. **The interview will take approximately 40 to 60 minutes.** At the beginning of the call I will review the informed consent form and obtain verbal consent from you.
Appendix D

Participant Consent Form

Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies, 
Faculty of Education 
University of Victoria

Individual Interview 
Consent Form

Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled “Ongoing Transitions for Coastal Youth.” The research team for this project is led by Dr. Anne Marshall, a faculty member in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria. Other team members include: Francis Guenette and Breanna Lawrence, research assistants for this project. If you have any questions or concerns about the project, you may contact Dr. Marshall at (250) 721-7815 or amarshal@uvic.ca, Francis Guenette at (250) 361-1298 or francisg@uvic.ca, or Breanna Lawrence at (250) 884-6221 or breanna@uvic.ca. This research is being funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

The purpose of this research project is to provide longitudinal data on the life-career planning process and outcomes for youth in coastal communities. The research question is: "What have been youth life-career experiences since the Coasts Under Stress (CUS) project and how have their situations, goals, and aspirations changed?” Research of this type is important because the results will help improve career education and counselling support for youth. You are being asked to participate for one of the following three reasons:

1. You participated in the original CUS research
2. Your son or daughter participated in the original CUS research
3. You have volunteered to participate or have been identified as someone who is knowledgeable about the research topic

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will consist of one audio-taped interview with one of the above researchers (about 60 minutes). The focus of the interview will be on how you view life and career experiences and opportunities for youth in your community and how these have changed over the past few years. If you have previously taken part in the CUS or Transitions research, you will also receive a summary of that past interview when we meet for this interview.

We do not anticipate that involvement in this research would involve any substantial inconvenience for you other than the time to travel to and participate in the interview. There are no known or anticipated risks to you through participating in this research. The potential benefits of your participation in this research include contributing to the knowledge and development of partnership practices in career development. Your participation will provide new information on the career development process of coastal youth.

As a way to compensate you for your participation, you will be given a $10.00 gift certificate at the time of the interview. It is important for you to know that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants and, if you agree to be a
participant in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. If you would not otherwise choose to participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline. Should you withdraw from the study at any time the honorarium is yours to keep.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time, or refuse to answer certain questions without any consequences or any explanation. In the event that you withdraw from this study, your taped interview will be erased and the transcript and all field notes or data associated with you will be destroyed. In the event that you withdraw from the study part way through you will be asked if you want the data you have contributed to be part of analysis. If you agree your data will remain in the study, if not your taped interview will be erased and the transcript and all field notes or data associated with you will be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be protected by storing interview audiotapes and the transcribed data in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researchers will have access to the data. The audio-tapes from your interview, the transcribed data, and any notes taken during the interview will be destroyed after five years.

To preserve your anonymity, your name will not be recorded on the transcribed data, a code or pseudonym will be assigned and used in place of your name. The key to the coded names will be kept separately from the interview data. Signed consent letters will also be stored separately from any data.

Research findings will be communicated to coastal residents and interested professionals through interactive workshops. The results of the study will be published in peer-reviewed journals, in various scholarly publications, and will be presented at professional and/or scholarly conferences, as well as community/school meetings in your town. Summary results will also be posted on an internet website.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher and/or research assistant as above, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice President Research at the University of Victoria 250-472-4545. You may also email ovprehe@uvic.ca with any questions or concerns.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

_________________________  __________________
Participant Signature           Date

Participant Name (please print)

I have received an honorarium of ______ for participation in this research.

A COPY OF THIS CONSENT WILL BE LEFT WITH YOU, AND A COPY WILL BE TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER

My signature below indicates I received $10.00 from ______for participating in this interview.

Signature: __________________________