POSSIBLE SELVES, INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS, AND YOUNGER ADULT LEARNERS

by

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study, using quantitative and qualitative tools, studying younger adult students (aged 18 to 25) at a college in Ontario and proposes that younger adult notions of possible selves are strengthened through engaging with models for possible selves by conducting informational interviews with them. Research was conducted in the classroom and outside of the classroom (but on campus) using a methodological framework informed by the scholarship of teaching and learning. Anticipated outcomes include a further understanding of the researcher’s own practice in order to improve it, a further grounding of the researcher’s personal theory of practice, and useful data for other researchers interested in using possible selves as a lens to understand their teaching. The results of the study indicate that there are other issues and concerns related to notions of possible selves, including goal-setting and a sense of having choice and control over one’s fate. Implications for practice include recommendations that more opportunities and tools for the development of possible selves be offered to students and that these opportunities can be found in existing courses and programs.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

My research is motivated by a comment made to me, a college teacher, by a first-year business student. “I think I might be in the wrong program,” she said. When I asked why she felt that way, she replied, “What if I don’t want to be this for the rest of my life?”

It can be easy to forget the pressures of youth and instead, as we get older, to remember ages 18 to 24, late adolescence, as a time of new experiences and experimentation, excitement, few commitments, and a world of possibilities. However, a lamentation I often hear is that there is enormous pressure not just to select a program of study (with little or no guidance), but to pick the right program of study. The right program of study, the students believe, will lead to the right career or profession, and their selves, naturally, will, in whole or in part, be defined by their professions.

My student, above, was struggling with the development of her own concept of her “possible self” while, at the same time, coping with a rapidly changing world, one that does not allow for more traditional, stable life patterns that her parents and teachers have relied upon. Modern, western society no longer supports a linear, predictable life pattern (education, work, sex/marriage, family creation/procreation, retirement, and so on) but instead offers a life pattern in which any possibility (sex, work, education, and so
on) can happen at any time, in any order, and many possibilities, assumed to occur by previous generations, may not happen at all (du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

While this new life pattern offers my younger students’ generation more options and possibilities, it makes informed decisions virtually impossible. What industry will grow/collapse in the next twenty years? Will I need a career that allows me to have and raise children? Will I need to stop my career to go back to school? Will I be the same person in twenty years? While uncertainty is nothing new, younger adults today are experiencing it to a degree not experienced by previous generations (du Bois-Reymond, 1998).

It has been my experience that because a college business program is a very general program, especially in its first year, it tends to attract younger adults who are not yet focused with concrete career goals. Also based on my experience teaching in other programs of study such as nursing and hairstyling, these students tend to express more concern than do others that they may not be in the right program. Responding to these concerns, I decided to integrate assignments into their first-year communications courses that I thought might help students develop and articulate their notions of their possible selves.

As part of their first communications course, these students are required to conduct two informational interviews. The first is with an upper-year business student, and its purpose is to allow students access to peers who can potentially help orient them to college life and, more importantly for the purposes of this study, to give them some
practice in conducting informational interviews (defined below). The task of the second informational interview assignment is to find and interview business professionals of interest to the students. Students then report on those interviews in the form of an informal (memo) report. The students are encouraged to “include themselves” in this report and discuss the impact of the interview on their sense of themselves, their confidence in having chosen the business program, or in any other way.

In very basic terms, I developed the informational interview assignment because I wanted to help the students understand themselves and their reasons for pursuing post-secondary education. I have asked myself, does this assignment make a difference to students and their understanding of themselves and their future selves? However, there was more informing my approach to this assignment and to the course. As I explained in a published article that detailed the informational interview assignment,

As a new communication teacher in the business department of an Ontario college tasked with delivering an introductory business communication course, I was handed the standard text for all incoming business students. It was a thorough, detailed, 400-page tome. It was, I was told, the “Bible,” and all business students for the past several years had been ushered into their business education with it. I struggled with it; my students struggled with it. For three years, I stood by it, doling out readings, activities, and assignments from it. I noticed that students were not bringing the book to class. I noticed a large pile of the texts in the school bookstore (returns desk), and I started to hear students whisper to each other that they thought the text was “useless” so they simply gave up on it. By the end of each semester, I would hear many boasts that the textbook had never, ever been opened.

I wondered what was wrong. My students could read and write. They were not “illiterate.” And yet they refused to touch the textbook. It had no value to them.

And then I noticed another problem. Many—if not most—of my students had trouble making eye contact when they spoke with me, were
fumbling and awkward when I reached out to shake their hands, and had no idea how to approach me to discuss anything. I listened to them fumble through their voicemail messages, I tried to read email messages that did not seem to ask for anything at all, and I watched in dismay as they barreled into my office without pausing, knocking, or even greeting me with a simple “Hello.” I was even more dismayed by many of my students’ inability to make simple decisions—decisions that would have little, if any, impact on anything. They lacked manners, initiative, and confidence. They were breaking my heart.

I threw the textbook into the recycling bin (literally). My students could read and write. They were functionally literate. However, although students could read to find information, they could not do what they needed to do with it once they found it. Skills were present; effective behaviour was not. A link was missing, and that link represented an aspect of their literacy that was missing too.

So the textbook was out, and a simple, effective assignment was in. Initially, I was worried that my department would not support my decision to drop the textbook, but I pointed out that virtually no one was reading the textbook anyway and that there were other readings (from newspapers, magazines, and journals) made available to the students, and my decision was supported. Also, I am in the unique position of being the only full-time communication instructor in my department, and I teach all five sections of the introductory business communication course. Not every instructor has the privilege of this kind of freedom in his or her courses. (Decarie, 2010, pp. 306–307)

Purpose

This study examines younger adults’ notions of their possible selves and the impact, if any, that informational interviews with professionals—or models for their possible selves—have on younger adults’ notions of their possible selves. Does the process of interviewing, reflecting, and reporting on this experience impact the students’ own sense of their possible selves and if so, how? As my student’s comment “But what if I don’t want to be this for the rest of my life?” indicates, younger adults do wonder what their future selves will be. As educators, we need to know our students. Part of knowing
our students is knowing how they imagine themselves in the present and the future and so we need to ask them how they see their possible selves. A first-semester communications course assignment, the informational interview, may impact their notions of their possible selves.

For this study, I proposed that this insecurity or inability to choose confidently is a problem fundamental to young adults in college, traditionally attended by students seeking specific job and skills training rather than students seeking the ideal of an education for more abstract growth and development, such as students attending university for a liberal arts degree. How can students in late adolescence be confident in their educational choices if they do not know the world or the possible selves for which they are preparing? How can educators assist students in making choices if we do not know what the students’ possible selves are? If we don’t know what the possible selves are, how can we know if the work we do with students impacts them—either positively or negatively?

The population studied was first-year, first-semester core business and core business administration students at an Ontario college (commonly referred to as a community college or simply as college). These students had not yet chosen a major (i.e., human resources, marketing, or accounting) and were taking courses in all areas of business studies, including business communications. Also, many of these students had not decided if they were pursuing a two-year diploma (business) or three-year diploma (business administration). For all of these students, their first year at college is a
“common year”—administration and faculty are not treating the students differently based on decisions (regarding major and diploma) yet to be made.

My research was informed by this question: “How are younger adults’ notions of possible selves impacted by conducting information interviews?” This question may be the first step in developing a deeper understanding of our students and being better able to help them understand and focus their reasons for pursuing a post-secondary education. It may also help determine if using informational interviews is an effective and useful assignment for first-year business students.

**Introduction to Key Terms**

Terms to be defined in this section include adult education, younger adult learners or younger adult students, possible selves, and informational interviews.

**Adult Education**

While adult education can encompass a wide variety of situations (from on-the-job training to full-time, residential graduate school), my research is interested in the kind of adult education that occurs in programs of study at Ontario community colleges (or more formally, Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology [CAAT]). Therefore, when the term “college” is used, it will be used to describe those schools in the Ontario community college system.

**Younger Adult Learners**

While there are many possible terms to use in order to discuss people aged 18 to 25, I settled on the term “younger adult” for three reasons. Firstly, teachers and
administrators in the Ontario college environment describe its learners as adults, regardless of age. (Some college students are as young as 16; there is no upper limit on age.)

Secondly, other options, such as “adolescent” or “late adolescent” may offend the people in question, as those terms imply that they are not adults and therefore are children. For people who have achieved many of the markers of adulthood—have finished secondary school and very often no longer live with their parents or guardians, work to support themselves, and may live with a romantic partner and/or have a child—to be described as “not an adult” would not be accurate.

Thirdly, and finally, other options, such as “emerging adulthood,” discussed later, may not be familiar to most readers or in common usage. A term that requires extensive explanation would not be efficient. My reasons for choosing the age range of 18 to 25 are discussed more fully in the Method chapter, but the discussion in the Literature Review supports my use of that age range as a distinct development stage.

**Possible Selves**

The idea of possible selves was developed in the 1980s by Markus and Nurius and is particularly concerned with the relationship between motivation and social cognition (Erikson, 2007; Markus & Nurius, 1986). The original definition described possible selves as “conceptions of the self in future states” and as “cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, threats” (Markus & Nurius, cited in Erikson,
In lay terms, this is simply how we imagine ourselves being in the future—what we will be doing, how we will be doing it, what we will be like, and so on.

However, it is easy to oversimplify this concept, as will be discussed later in terms of a broadly defined adult education, and so Erikson (2007) argues this definition needs to be further delineated. One, the possible self should include an “experience of what it would be like to be in a future state in question,” and two, the construct of possible selves should be seen as a “part of the self” and not as a mere “representation of the future” (pp. 348–350).

**Informational Interviews**

According to Booth (1994), Croft (1995), Crosby (2002), Mulvaney (2003), and Sheppard (1989), informational interviews are, very simply, opportunities for students—and, in fact, anyone looking for a job, especially in an area new to him or her—to have conversations with business professionals. While informational interviews can lead to job opportunities, they are not job interviews and the students should emphasize that this is a research opportunity when making a request for an interview. In colloquial terms, an informational interview is a chance to pick someone’s brain about a profession, business, or industry. The student (or job-searcher) asks for the professional’s time and together they schedule an interview that will happen either by phone, email, instant messaging, or in person. Typically, informational interviews last about 45 minutes or an hour, during which the interviewer tries to learn as much as possible, without crossing the lines of confidentiality or security, about the interviewee’s industry, position, education, and
other areas of knowledge and expertise that link to that industry or position. For example, a student who is raising a child on her own and is studying accounting might interview a single-mother, chartered accountant in business for herself to learn more about what chartered accountants do on a daily basis; what it is like to be in business for yourself; running a business and raising a child on your own; what education a chartered accountant needs, how long that education takes, and how much it costs; how much demand there is in the marketplace for a chartered accountant; the future of accounting; ways in which a chartered accountant contributes to society, such as through charitable donations or pro bono work; and more. Based on the results of the interview, the student may find that the attributes of a chartered accountant fit nicely with her ideas of herself in the future or she may find that they do not match at all. The interviewee serves as a model for the student’s possible self and all the details of the life of a chartered accountant gives the possible self a context.

**Overview of Thesis**

This thesis is organized into five chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Method, Results, and Discussion and Conclusion. Chapter 1 (Introduction), discusses the rationale and background of the research, the purpose of the research, and offers definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 (Literature Review) reviews relevant literature and is comprised of four major sections: Possible Selves and Adult Education, Related Studies, Informational Interviews, and Other Tools Used to Explore Possible Selves. Chapter 3 (Methodology) describes the focus of the research, sampling methods, the quantitative
research tool used, the qualitative research tool used, the development of questions for research participants, the role of the researcher, and the scheduling of the research.

Chapter 4 (Results) provides a review of the rationale, questionnaire results, and interview results (in terms of possible selves, informational interviews, goals, and other themes). The final chapter, Discussion and Conclusions, reviews the questions motivating the discussion, the impact informational interviews on younger adult learners’ notions of possible selves, limitations of the study, and recommendations for practice and for further study.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter begins by discussing younger adult learners and then reviews the literature related to the conceptual framework of possible selves, with emphasis on the relationship of possible selves to adult education. Empirical studies using the theoretical framework of possible selves are then reviewed, giving this study context. Also, some examples of tools and techniques that are used by educators and others to develop possible selves are reviewed. Then, a selection of non–peer reviewed papers about informational interviews is discussed. Finally, there is a brief overview of what tools—other than informational interviews—are used in career counseling.

Younger Adult Learners

I examined two articles to help me understand the 18- to 25-year-old demographic and to supplement and clarify my perception of that age group based on my experience teaching it. The first, “Emerging Adulthood: A Theory of Development From the Late Teens Through the Twenties,” by Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000), is interesting in that it offers not just a description of this age group, but also offers a newer, more accurate title for it.

It was interesting to compare and contrast this article, which is American yet discusses the implications of its findings in terms of various cultures, classes, and other socio-economic forces, with a recent (2007) article by Warren Clark, “Delayed Transitions of Younger Adults,” which relies on census data from Statistics Canada to
show the changes in the same age group between 1971 and 2001, exclusively within Canada.

Both articles describe an age range that begins at 18, but Clark (2007) allows for the age range to extend to as high as 34, while acknowledging that most 25-year-olds have already made many, if not most, of the transitions to adulthood. Interestingly, while Arnett (2000) defines the group as being comprised of 18- to 25-year-olds, he also writes that adulthood is not fully achieved until the thirties, leaving the range of 25 to the mid-30s ill-defined.

Both Arnett (2000) and Clark (2007) select age 18 as a turning point in development, since that is the age at which most North Americans exit secondary school. According to Clark, at 18, very few people have made any changes that would signal their entry into adulthood (see below). Arnett explains how a person’s demographic status in adolescence and adulthood can be predicted based on age alone (for example, 95% of adolescents aged 12 to 17 live with one or more parents) and finally explains that the qualities of an 18- to 25-year-old cannot be predicted based on age. Put simply, the only thing that 18- to 25-year-olds have in common is that they have nothing in common—except their age!

Both articles also emphasize that in earlier generations, younger people acquired adult responsibilities at a much earlier age (marriage, parenthood, full-time work, for example) and that a separate, transitional stage did not exist until relatively recently. Demonstrating this, Clark (2007) details the changes, for men and women, in Canadian
society between 1971 and 2001. Clark argues that there are five major transitions that people make to achieve adulthood: to have finished school, to no longer live with parents, to work full-time, to be married or living in a common-law relationship, and to have at least one child. Between 1971 and 2001, Statistics Canada data reveals that young people achieve those transitions at significantly later points in life. For example, “a 25-year-old in 2001 had gone through the same number of transitions as a 22-year-old in 1971, and a 30-year-old in 2001 had made the same number of transitions as a 25-year-old in 1971 (Clark, 2007, p.15).

This stage of development is described by both articles as being distinct from the preceding and proceeding age groups. Arnett (2000) argues that emerging adulthood is “neither adolescence nor younger adulthood” and that this is because its members have “left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and [have] not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood” (p. 469). It is a time period, according to both authors, of freedom, exploration, and experimentation. Arnett puts it very well, stating that emerging adulthood is “characterized by a high degree of demographic diversity and instability, reflecting the emphasis on change and exploration” (p. 471).

Arnett (2000) is quick to emphasize that this transitional stage, sometimes referred to as a prolonged adolescence, is only possible in an industrialized culture. This means it is typically found in western and especially North American culture. However, it is also impacted by social class, geography (rural/urban), membership in a minority
culture within the west, and more. In other words, a middle-class urbanite who lives within the dominant culture of North America is more likely than a working-class child of farmers or immigrants to have the luxury of a prolonged time period of experimentation and exploration before settling down to a permanent full-time job and family responsibilities.

Both Arnett (2000) and Clark (2007) emphasize the impact education has on this age group. Clark explicates it most fully, showing the statistical relationship between increased and prolonged post-secondary education and the delay of transitions into adulthood, and “since most younger people defer marriage and parenthood until they have completed their education, the extended period of schooling undertaken by today’s younger adults puts almost all other transitions to adulthood on ‘hold’” (Clarke, 2007, pp.16–17).

The reasons for these delays in transitioning to adulthood are more complex than simply living in a culture that allows for it. For most younger adults, the single greatest factor is the competitive labour market and the need for a post-secondary diploma or degree at a minimum. As a result, in Canada for example, in “1971, three-quarters of younger adults had left school by age 22 whereas only half had left by that age in 2001....they are much more likely than the previous generation to go on to a master’s or doctoral program where the median age of graduation is 29 and 33, respectively” (Clark, 2007, p. 16) This, combined with the higher costs of education, poorer working conditions with fewer benefits, and the increase in women pursuing higher education
(and the well-documented link between a woman’s socio-economic status and the age at which she has her first child—if any), and more, has created this new transitional stage of development (Arnett, 2000; Clark, 2007).

Arnett often uses language that is interesting in terms of my research and my interest in the construct of possible selves. When discussing this period of exploration and experimentation, he often uses the phrase “try on.” For example, he writes, “they try on possible occupational futures, discard them, and pursue others” (Arnett, 2000, p. 474). This use of language will be reflected in the discussion of the possible selves literature below.

Finally, one further point is of interest to me specifically in terms of my research. Both authors make the point that this is a time period in which transitions are made non-linearly. For example, the traditional (i.e. earlier generation’s) pattern for people in this age group was to leave home and not return. In 2001, that is no longer true (Clark, 2007). Also, and more interesting in terms of my research, for this age range, currently, “college education is often pursued in a nonlinear way, frequently combined with work, and punctuated by periods of nonattendance” (Arnett, 2000, p. 471).

These two articles reinforce not only my experiences as a teacher of 18- to 25-year-olds, but my experience as a younger adult using the age range of 18–34, as Clarke (2007) does, which only ended, for me, five years ago. Younger adults today are transitioning to adulthood later and more slowly than their parents did. The model of adulthood that younger people have then, as provided by the previous generation, does
not serve the new reality. The expectations that they and others may have for them, based on the model, are not realistic or useful. Notions of possible selves need to be based on a model of adulthood that serves and reflects reality. A new model of adulthood needs to be understood.

Understanding the forces that are at play for these younger adults will, I believe, help understand their abilities to persist in their post-education and commit to the possible selves that can imagine for themselves.

**Possible Selves**

While career counselors use a wide range of tools in their practice—self-assessments, résumé workshops, mock job interviews, informational interviews—possible selves theory can be particularly useful in career counseling. In this context a possible self is more than simply something to be—such as a specific occupation, like a carpenter—but someone to be—such as all the attributes, professional and personal, who is that person who is also a carpenter. We are defined by more than just our careers, and work and personal lives overlap and intersect. In order to imagine our future selves, we must imagine more than simply ourselves performing occupational tasks. As we change occupations, our roles in life change, not just our daily tasks. We imagine ourselves being the *whole* person—not just the person who does something for a living—in the future (FutureSelves, 2007, p.5; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007, p.62). Tools used to explore possible selves in career counseling typically include interviews, visualization, goal-
setting, and story-telling (e.g., Ibarra, 1999; Meara, Day, Chalk, & Phelps, 1995; Whitty, 2002).

The areas of career counseling and college education are not so disparate. Most students are attending college not for the sake of an education—like some may be who are attending a liberal arts program at a university—but to be trained for a specific vocation—in the case of the program I teach in, to be an accountant, marketing or sales professional, or human resources professional.

According to Markus and Nurius, possible selves can serve two important functions. One, they can “serve as incentives for future behaviour” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p.955); and two, they can help an individual understand behaviour in the present as the possible self provides “context of possibility” (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p.955). Having a possible self can help the individual strive for a future goal while also helping the individual understand present actions. The more thoroughly described and richly imagined the possible self, the more likely a person is to access all the information and opportunities needed to become that possible self. For example, a person who imagines herself becoming a doctor will be apt to notice advertisements for job vacancies for doctors. The person who does not imagine herself as a doctor is less likely to notice such advertisements (FutureSelves, 2007, p.12; Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007, p.66). Having a possible self and understanding the needs of the possible self allows goals to be developed. The actions required to achieve those goals, in turn, are more likely to be undertaken if the relationship between the actions, the goals, and the possible self are
clear. For example, a student may be bored or intimidated by a course, but if she knows that course leads to a diploma which in turn leads to a desired possible self, she is more likely to persevere (Oyserman & James, 2009, p.378).

Interestingly, the possible self does not need to be rooted in reality the way a concept of the self in the present ideally should. The possible self also does not need to be much like the current self. The possible self is just that—possible (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 959). However, the more realistic possible self—the one that does have some possibility of actually coming to be—is more useful for successful goal-setting than one that has no chance—or no perceived chance—of coming into being (Oyserman & James, 2009, pp.379–380).

Possible Selves and Adult Education

Sarah Fletcher (2007) and Marsha Rossiter (2007a, 2007b) explain that the possible selves construct can have a role in adult education; it can be a tool, through using narrative and employing imagery, metaphor, and visualization, to imagine future selves and work towards them (Fletcher, 2007; Rossiter, 2007a, 2007b). Rossiter (2007a) emphasizes goal-setting and goal-attainment and uses the idea of possible selves, in the form of using visualization techniques to maintain a course set to achieve a goal, such as graduation. So while possible selves and goals are not one and the same, goals can be a part of realizing the attainment of a possible self.

Citing a 1991 study by Cross and Markus examining possible selves across age groups, Rossiter explains that younger adults’ focus on possible selves is different than
that of older adults. Younger adults’ possible selves focus on career and family (over which, according to Rossiter, they have more control) while older adults focus on health (over which, according to Rossiter, they have less control). Interestingly, the younger adults, while focusing on things over which they should have more control, report feeling less able to make these possible selves real than do older adults, who report feeling more able to make possible selves real, despite having less control (Rossiter, 2007a, p.7). There are other ways in which older adults’ possible selves differ from those of younger adults. Older adults have fewer (and more narrowly defined) possible selves and may feel that they have fewer opportunities than younger adults because they have more obligations (such as to family); older adults may feel they have less time or are running out of time; and older adults are less likely to compare themselves to others but more likely to compare themselves to the self they are working to become and to be very aware of the way their roles—not just their tasks—are changing (Plimmer & Schmidt, 2007, p. 62, Rossiter, 2007a, p.7).

Related Studies

Research examining the relationship between informational interviews and the potential for the development or articulation of possible selves was not found. However, there are examples of empirical studies using the theoretical construct of possible selves that help put this study in context. They include studies examining possible selves and positing how understanding possible selves can help shape educational programs and the development of strategies to attain possible selves (Meek, 2007); how possible selves
change over time and with age (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000); how notions of possible selves can be used to develop educational tools (Horneffer-Ginter, 2008); the impact of educational relationships on possible selves (Rossiter, 2004); how different strategies for developing possible selves can be used by people about to undergo career transition (in the form of potential job promotion) (Ibarra, 1999); the impact of social identities and context on the development of possible selves (Cameron, 1999); the relationship between persistence and possible selves (Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiosseoglou, 1998); and using possible selves as a tool to improve school involvement (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002).

Meek (2007) examined the possible selves of young fathers in prison in the UK. Using a Parenting Possible Selves Questionnaire (p.373), the researcher categorized the respondents’ possible selves into three categories: present parenting selves, hoped-for parenting possible selves, and feared parenting selves (pp.373, 375). The study indicated that possible selves were a useful tool for learning about and describing how incarcerated fathers understood their possible parenting selves. Results of this study were to be applied to developing parenting education programs in prisons and helping incarcerated fathers develop parenting goals (Meek, 2007, p.378).

Another study, consisting of face-to-face interviews, explored the possible selves of older adults and how their possible selves may or may not change over time (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000). The study’s results indicated that while certain domains become more dominant with age—such as health, control over health, and
independence—possible selves, at their core, remain stable (Frazier, et al., 2000, paras. 25–28). Echoing the 1991 Cross and Markus study cited by Rossiter (2007a), above, there is a difference between younger and older adults. Younger adults’ possible selves focus on the things they believe they have control over, such as their careers. Older adults’ possible selves focus on things they believe they have less control over, such as health (Frazier, et al., 2000, paras. 25–28). This suggests to me that since my students are in my program for career training, they seem to be the right people in the right place at the right time to look at possible selves. Moreover, since they feel they have control over their careers, looking at goal-setting and other aspects of possible self theory could be interesting areas to explore for younger adult learners.

In a study examining American college students, researchers used two conceptual frameworks as tools, one of which was possible selves and was used to better understand how college students imagined themselves and their health in the future. This knowledge was to be used, in turn, to learn about what would motivate these students to be ready to make changes that would improve their health (Horneffer-Ginter, 2008, p. 351).

According to Hooker (as cited in Horneffer-Ginter, 2008, p. 353), adults who report a hoped-for possible self that is healthy are more likely to engage in behaviours that benefit their health. However, Horneffer-Ginter found that college-age students tend to not mention health-related issues when describing their possible selves and health-related concerns only appeared in two to four percent of the responses (Horneffer-Ginter, 2008, p. 355). While the results of the study were inconclusive, there was found to be a
relationship between the presence of illness in the possible self and a desire to make changes that would help avoid that sick possible self (Horneffer-Ginter, 2008, p. 356). Desire to change exists if the change is necessary to achieve a hoped-for possible self or to avoid a feared possible self.

Rossiter (2004) conducted research exploring the impact of educational relationships on the development of possible selves and application in the career development field. Rossiter reports that students’ relationships with teachers serve as “point[s] of origin” (Rossiter, 2004, p. 146) for the development of possible selves and the establishment of goals that lead to hoped-for possible selves. Rossiter emphasizes that what she is describing is not merely “bolstering self-esteem” but “a process of detailing a possible self and developing specific efficacy beliefs in relation to that future self and in relation to the steps toward the goal” (p. 150).

While Rossiter’s work is concerned primarily with the teacher–student relationship, her work draws on research by Ibarra (1991), which suggests that three areas of activity characterize a model for the development of possible selves:

1) Observing role models to develop a repertoire of possible selves;
2) Experimenting with possible selves; and
3) Evaluating the new self-conceptions against internal and external standards (p. 764).

With the goal of generating theory, Ibarra studied junior financial advisors who could be considered for senior positions with their firm, if they were able to successfully represent themselves to clients as confident, competent, trustworthy financial advisors. The study examined the ways in which the junior advisors observed, evaluated, and mimicked (or
chose not to mimic) their superiors in order to help them define and develop their own possible selves as senior advisors. Ibarra found that junior advisors used senior advisors as role models and evaluated, experimented with, and accepted and rejected aspects of the senior advisors’ styles in developing their own style in preparation for becoming senior advisors themselves, and Ibarra described the relationship between possible selves and role models or mentors explicitly (Ibarra, 1999). Interestingly, Ibarra used a very-opened research method in order to “allow unplanned themes to emerge from the data” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 767) and analysis of the data was inductive (Ibarra, 1999, p. 771).

As stated above, the development of possible selves is relational. It needs contact with models and exists within and is shaped by a context. Another study (Cameron 1999) proposed that psychological well-being (in this case of university students) depended not only on what social identity allows for people in the present but also on what it allows for people in the future (their possible selves) (p. 179). Possible selves, according to Cameron, are not “free-floating” but are shaped by social identity (influenced by such things as inclusion in a social group) and that possible selves exist because of a particular context (Cameron, 1999, p. 187).

Leondari, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou (1998) examined the potential relationship between possible selves, beliefs about the impact of hard work or luck on success, and academic achievement. The students they studied—high school students aged 14 to 15—who reported detailed, positive possible selves and who imagined themselves achieving their hoped-for possible selves through hard work rather than luck reported higher grade
point averages and greater persistence than those students who had vague hoped-for possible selves and believed success resulted from luck rather than hard work (Leondari, Syngollitou, & Kiossseoglou, 1998, p. 222).

Finally, a study by Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee focused on middle school students’ development of possible selves as successful adults and the impact that had on their attitudes toward school, academic achievement, behaviour at school, and ability to develop strategies to achieve their possible selves as successful adults (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002, p. 313). The results were positive: after nine weeks of engaging in the study, students had more detailed possible selves and also had higher grades and better behaviour and reported more positive feelings about school and about their own abilities to achieve the positive possible selves as adults that they had developed (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002, p. 324). Researchers credited a few reasons for the results. Generally speaking, children did not have to transfer notions of their possible selves from one context to another and activities and discussions focused on positive ideas rather than problems and deficiencies (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002, p. 323).

Means of Developing Possible Selves

A review of the literature reveals that to develop possible selves, one explores possible selves. Development and exploration seem to be one and the same. Four means of exploring and developing possible selves emerge: 1) using questionnaires or conducting structured interviews; 2) through journal writing and self-reflection; 3) through observation, practice, and evaluation; and 4) school-based programs.
Researchers can use a questionnaire such as the Possible Selves Questionnaire (PSQ) or the Possible Selves Questionnaire–Qualitative Extensions (PSQ–QE). The PSQ was developed by Oyserman and Nurius in 1990 and asks participants to describe three hoped-for and three feared possible selves (Freer, 2009, p. 342). The PSQ–QE survey, building on the PSQ, asks respondents to give their possible selves a narrative in the hopes of adding meaning to their possible selves (Freer, 2009, p. 342; Kortsch, Kurtines, & Montgomery, 2008).

Also, structured interviews can be conducted, such as the Possible Selves Mapping Interview. Researchers note results on index cards and then later code the cards for themes (Sheppard & Marshall, 1999). Sheppard and Marshall report using this tool with adolescents to explore life and career possibilities and found that the interviews would be useful in personal and career counseling.

Finally in this category of possible selves development tools are journaling and self-reflection. Participants are asked to keeps journals in which they reflect on how their behaviours relate to their possible selves (Hoppmann, Gerstorf, Smith, and Klumb, 2007).

Possible selves can also be explored and developed by observing possible role models for possible selves, practicing the observed behaviours of the role models, and then reflecting on the experience and evaluating whether or not the behaviours were desirable (Ibarra, 1999; Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008).

In addition, school-based programs can be used to explore and develop possible selves. These programs, such as the School-to-Jobs program, which focuses on
adolescents who are at risk of not continuing in school, can last several weeks, if not an entire school year, and use discussions about possible selves and role models, small group activities, and individual activities, such as creating a timeline for one’s future (Freer, 2009; Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 2006; Oyserman, Brickman, & Rhodes, 2007).

My study and others posit that possible selves can be explored using informational interviews. However, informational interviews are traditionally used as career development tools. While I am not a career counselor, I do teach in a vocational program—a course of study that is geared towards preparing students for a specific job or career—and so it is appropriate for me to try to help students explore and understand their future careers while developing skills. I have chosen to use informational interviews to do so, but many tools other than informational interviews are used by career counselors to help their clients prepare for or change careers.

These tools are too numerous to list here, but generally include 1) surveys and questionnaires (Hill & Spokane, 1995; Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, p. 482); 2) mentoring and peer counseling (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2004, p. 478–479; Lee & Johnston, 2001, p. 183; Packard, 2003); 3) exploring and developing goals (Bolles, 2011; Dik, Sargent, & Steger, 2008); 4) career coaching (Hansen, 1993; Jenscious & Rainey, 2009); 5) training in job-search skills, such as writing resumes and cover letters and preparing for job interviews (Bolles, 2011; Jenscious & Rainey, 2009); and holistic approaches to counseling that considers all aspects of the client and his or her life, such
as Personal Career Theory (Lee & Johnston, 2001, p. 179). Some of these tools also appear in my courses, such as writing resumes and goal-setting, but most would not be appropriate, such as career coaching or mentoring. Moreover, I am not a trained career counselor and attempting career coaching or mentoring would not be appropriate or professional.

**Informational Interviews**

While no peer-reviewed articles about informational interviews were found, in professional journals, magazines, and newsletters, there was found to be a healthy discussion of informational interviews and advice for conducting them amongst educators.

Informational interviews, as learning tools, can be used in a wide range of ways. For Booth (1994), informational interviews are used to shape an entire semester-long course, involving multiple interviews and written and oral reports. For others (Croft 1995, Crosby 2002, Mulvaney 2003, Sheppard 1989), informational interviews are used as stand-alone assignments within the context of a much broader course.

Several of the articles reviewed describe a learn-as-you-go approach to informational interviews; however, all offer basic advice for students, such as respecting interview participants’ time limits; following up with a thank-you card or letter; asking permission before recording an interview; and carefully researching an industry, profession, or topic (Booth 1994, Crosby 2002, Mulvaney 2003, Sheppard 1989). Croft (1995) recommends a great deal of preparation for students before engaging in
informational interviews, including a full course in public speaking, a textbook, the
opportunity to practice, record, and review mock interviews, and several weeks’ training
in interpersonal communications. Croft also describes a goal that is predominantly geared
towards the development of a universal interviewing skill set, one that foresees students
encountering various interview situations in their careers (as journalists, as the subject of
journalists’ queries, as a company spokesperson, and so on).

Informational interviews are commonly seen as effective career-preparation tools,
increasing knowledge about a certain field and what is needed to enter that field, allowing
the interviewers to make more informed choices regarding career preparation, career
choice, and even which employers are more preferable or suitable (Crosby 2002,
Mulvaney 2003), but other skills are improved as well. Sheppard (1989) and Booth
(1994) describe, for their students, an increase in confidence, poise, writing and editing
skills, interpersonal communications skills, research skills, critical thinking skills, and
expertise with business document formats.

The value of informational interviews for adult learners becomes even more
apparent when they are viewed in light of adult learning principles and when the needs of
younger adult learners are considered. According to Lieb (1991) and Richter-Antion
(1986),

1. Adults are goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, and have a foundation of life
experiences to draw on. The interviews are about connecting with real people who can
give practical advice and assistance to the students in succeeding at school and building
their lives outside of school. The interviews with professionals lead to job and placement contacts and offer insights into the work world. Students are encouraged to network with each other and share contacts and advice (based on their life experiences) for the interview with a professional.

2. Adults are autonomous and self-directed. There are many opportunities for students to shape the direction this assignment will take them; they determine who they will interview and why and how. Activities in class can support the assignment (workshopping, brainstorming, peer evaluation, and so on) and can give students opportunities to guide each other rather than be guided by an authority figure.

3. There are many differences between younger and older adult learners, such as presence of an age cohort, a sense of social acceptability, and their amount of life experience. By having the students work together and by emphasizing the value of life experience, older adult students can see themselves as a valuable part of the classroom, despite the lack of an age cohort and the common (mis)perception that they are “in the wrong place at the wrong time.” Younger adults can work and learn with older adults and see in the older adults models of adult learning styles.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided a detailed overview of the literature that informed the definitions of younger adult learner and possible selves, followed by a discussion of the studies that were found to be related to and useful to this study. Then, this was followed by an overview of the ways researchers and educators help others explore and
development possible selves, other than using informational interviews. Then, informational interviews were described, including an explanation of how they are used as learning tools for adults. Finally, in order to give my choice to use informational interviews some context, there was a brief listing of the kinds of tools, other than informational interviews, that are used in career development. The next chapter reviews the study’s methodology, including an overview of the focus of the research, the sampling method, the questionnaire delivery and scheduling, the selection process for the interview participants, the scheduling of the interviews, and the development of the interview questions. Finally, the role of the researcher and the scheduling of the research are discussed.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter contains a description of the focus of the research, which includes an overview of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that informed the research; an explanation of how students were selected to participate in this research; a description of the questionnaire and how its questions were developed; the scheduling of the questionnaires; the selection process for the interviewees; and a description of how the interviews were conducted and how the questions and themes were developed. Finally, the role of the researcher and the scheduling of the research are described.

Focus of Research

I am, primarily, a teacher, and possible selves is a lens that helps me understand what and how I teach. Informational interviews are a type of tool that helps me teach.

The theoretical framework of my research was informed by the notion of possible selves, more fully discussed in the Literature Chapter, but very simply, the concept that we have imagined future selves. This notion of possible selves is a lens through which I can view my students; the work I have them do; and the impact, if any, that work has on them.

The methodological framework of my research is informed by the notion of scholarship in teaching and learning, defined by Hutchings as Shulman as “sustained inquiry into…teaching practice and…students’ learning….in ways that contribute to
practice beyond [the] classroom” (1999, p. 12). Scholarship in teaching and learning involves classroom research—involving and including one’s students in the research and placing, in equal measure, responsibility for learning with both the teacher and the student (Cross, 1998).

I feel I am well placed to undertake such research. I teach the same courses in the same program year after year, allowing me to know the “personality” of the program and its students very well. The students and I spend a lot of time—inside and outside of the classroom—talking about things that are not, strictly speaking, course- or program-related. I get to know the students—their hopes and fears, expectations and disappointments, talents and shortcomings. When I teach them, I go into the classroom knowing all these things about them. Similarly, they know a lot about me. In sum, we have taken the time to develop trust and rapport. They offer feedback and I ask for advice about the courses I teach them. We try things they suggest. After trial and error or simply after consideration, we accept and reject their suggestions on a regular basis. We collaborate.

As scholarship in teaching and learning and classroom research describe, my research is focused on collaborating with my students to further understand their understanding of their possible selves and their possible selves’ development.

This research fits within the boundaries of scholarship in teaching and learning as it “entails….classroom assessment and evidence gathering,” “is informed by…ideas about
teaching in the field,” “invites peer…review,” and is public and “open to critique and evaluation” (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999, p. 13).

I am fortunate to be working in a department that not only encourages formal peer mentoring between teachers, but also supports mentoring relationships in a number of informal ways. We are each assigned, formally, mentors, to meet with and discuss challenges or ideas regarding our teaching. The physical layout of the department allows us to speak with each other often and spontaneously. There are no poisonous or destructive personalities in the department. As a result, we ask each other questions, often ideas and solutions, help each other understand our teaching practice. We have many opportunities (on campus and at external conferences and workshops) to present our best practices or results of research and invite critique.

The goal of this research was to examine and explore younger adults’ notions of their possible selves and the impact, if any, informational interviews with professionals have on these notions. The study was comprised of a questionnaire, with quantitative and qualitative questions, followed by individual interviews. The results of the questionnaire were used to understand—to “paint a picture” of—the interviewees and help further develop the draft questions of the individual interviews. The participants were chosen using convenience sampling for the questionnaires and participants for the interviews were those who volunteered as a result of having filled out a questionnaire.

As a result of this research, two outcomes were anticipated:

1) To further understand my practice so I could improve it;
2) To provide useful data for others who use possible selves as a lens to understand their teaching or to add to the body of knowledge regarding possible selves.

**Sampling**

The population studied was first-year business students at an Ontario community college (more formally College of Applied Arts and Technology), in a small city of approximately 120,000. There are approximately 5,000 full-time students at the college, 250 of which are in the first-year core business program. Most of the college’s students are from the immediate area, which is typical for colleges. However, there are many new Canadians and international students at the college and there is a growing number of students from Hong Kong and China, Japan, Russia, Mexico, Bermuda, and other countries. A core business program classroom would typically be comprised of from five to ten percent international students and new Canadians.

Because part of the research question hinges on doing informational interviews, an assignment in first semester for first-year business students, participants were selected, using convenience sampling, from the first-year business communications courses. There was no recruitment notice; students were asked to fill out questionnaires while they were in regularly scheduled classes, during Week 14 of a 15-week semester. I explained to the students that I was doing research in support of my Master’s degree. I then left the room and one of the two colleagues who were assisting me (neither of which teach in the same program of study as I) distributed and collected the questionnaires and questionnaire consent forms. Participation was voluntary and there were no rewards or incentives for
participating. One hundred thirty-three students completed questionnaires. They were aged 16 to 59; however, 81% of the students were between 16 and 25. Fifty-nine per cent overall were female; 41%, male. For reasons explained in Chapter 2, the target research group is aged 18–25. However, some students in my classes are as young as 16. Some are high school students participating in a “dual credit” program; some have skipped a grade in elementary or secondary school; some are simply younger than their peers because of a fall birth date. I decided to include them in the study because they are a valid and vital part of my classroom. To ignore them would ignore the reality of my classroom.

**Questionnaire**

The business communications courses run for 15 weeks each, one per semester (fall and winter); there are two informational interviews assigned in the first semester (one with an upper-year business student and one with a business professional), and there is one informational interview assigned in second semester (with a business professional working in an international context). There were five sections of students surveyed; four sections had started their program of study in September and were finishing their second semester of study; one section of students had started their program of study in January and they were finishing their first semester of study.

There are classes scheduled during Week 15; however, typically, no content is introduced, reviewed, or tested during Week 15, and as little as possible is planned for class time during week 15 to allow for course overruns, make-up tests or assignments for the few students who need them, and so on. Often, there are no classes held in Week 15.
The questionnaire was delivered, in class and by colleagues of mine that are not the students’ teachers, in Week 14 of the winter semester. Questions were developed within the framework of theories of possible selves and based on my experiences and interactions with students, drawing on ideas about goal-setting, exposure to models for possible selves, and the relationship between a program of study and a path to a possible self. Questions asked about reasons for attending school; attitudes towards learning, community college, and the business program; short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals, both academic and personal; sense of an ability to commit to ideas of the self or a future self; ideas of the self now and in the future; the variety of possible selves; whether or not there is a connection with or a concrete sense of possible selves; and whether or not there is a sense of being on a pathway (program of study) to a possible self or if the current pathway is limiting in terms of possible selves.

Two of my colleagues conducted the questionnaires. I was not present. One colleague was a graduate student in education at a Canadian university and does not teach in the same program of study as I. The chances of his ever being assigned to teach these students are very slim, if not impossible. The other colleague was filling in, on a part-time and temporary basis, for the School of Business Student Success Facilitator. She does not teach.

Again, participation in both the questionnaires and interviews was voluntary and students were told there were no rewards or incentives for participating. I was not present when the questionnaires were being filled out and the questionnaires were
anonymous, using a name/code system. (After the questionnaires were completed, the interim Student Success Facilitator separated the sheet of paper with name and contact information and then created a code number for it, copying that code number to the questionnaire.) The questionnaires, waivers, and sheets with names and contact information were held in a locked filing cabinet by the Associate Dean of the School of Business. Waivers, giving informed consent to use the data for the purposes of the research study, were developed in conjunction with Queen’s University and the research services department at the college. I did not have access to the questionnaires until after final grades for the course were determined by me, distributed to the students, and formally submitted to the college. (See Appendix A: Letter of Consent [Questionnaires], Appendix B: Letter of Consent [Interviews], Appendix C: Letter of Information [Interviews], and Appendix D: Questionnaire.)

**Developing Interview Questions**

Data from the questionnaires was analyzed using inductive analysis, looking for themes and emerging patterns. Questions for the individual interviews were developed from those results. Before the questionnaires were developed, potential themes and questions for the interviews were explored. After analyzing the questionnaires, more concrete themes and questions were planned. However, the interviews were allowed to develop individually and independently from any preconceived notions. While some themes were pursued purposefully, others were explored as they emerged.
My approach allowed for a non-linear approach to developing my interview questions (allowing the interviews themselves to lead the interviewer and interviewee to the themes to be discussed) and for the acknowledgement of the values of the participants rather than those of the researcher. My approach was also influenced by the work of Herminia Ibarra, specifically in her study detailed in “Provisional selves: Experimenting with image and identity in professional adaptation.” In this study, she explains, she was interested in developing theory rather than testing it, and “the study design was open-ended, to allow unplanned themes to emerge from the data” (Ibarra, 1999, p. 767).

Based on the results of the questionnaires, I developed loosely structured questions to pursue in the interviews.

*Is this your first program of study or have you started or completed other programs of study?* For both age groups, questionnaire results indicated that most students in this study had been in other programs of study. Since a possible self is a dynamic, ever-changing concept, influenced by many factors, it seemed to me that programs of study—and the act of choosing or rejecting them—would be a factor in the shaping of a possible self.

*Did you choose this program of study/this school/to attend post-secondary education?* While the questionnaire results indicated that the participants, in general, felt they had chosen this program, this school, and to pursue post-secondary education, some of their comments on the questionnaire indicated otherwise. Since creating a possible self is about choosing a possible self, I thought choice was an important element to my
research and the disconnect between the question results and the comments deserved further examination.

*Can you describe how you will be in the future? What will your job, home life, values, daily routine, and so on, look like?* Since this research is about exploring notions of possible selves, exploring this question in the interviews is a natural choice. Moreover, some of the questionnaire results indicated a wide range of the level of detail in describing possible selves, and I wondered if I would see the same results in the interviews. I wondered if the shorter answers on the questionnaires were the result of time constraints or the format (in writing as opposed to conversation) or if they were the result of lesser-developed notion of possible selves.

*Do you set goals for yourself, your education, your career, and so on?* While goal-setting and having a possible self are not the same thing, they are related. One way to move towards a possible self is to set goals.

**Individual Interviews**

The interim Student Success Facilitator distributed an email to the students aged 18 to 25 who had expressed an interest in being interviewed and then scheduled interviews with eight of the students who responded that they were still interested and available to be interviewed. Two students who were older than 25 volunteered to be interviewed. They were aware that the study was focusing on students aged 18 to 25; however, they were interested in and enthusiastic about participating. After discussing this with my advisor, it was agreed that interviews with older adult students could add
interesting and important comparisons to the themes that emerged from the younger adult student interviews and their offers were accepted. The table below describes the interview participants.

**Table 3.1: Interview participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Previously discontinued office administration program of study; interested in studying law and becoming NHL player agent; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaynne</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Completed early childhood education program but not interested in working in that field; planning a career in human resources; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Started business program immediately after finishing high school; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tessa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Started business program immediately after finishing high school; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacopousie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Took a year from school to work and travel with Canada World Youth; business program is first program of study; from a different Canadian territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyla Rose</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Discontinued fashion business program; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verissimo</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Discontinued program of study in his home country of Brazil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Took a year off after high school to work before attending college; from the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smitty</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Discontinued and later completed a graphic design program; back at school due to layoffs at work; from another Canadian province.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Discontinued university program in his early 20s; back at school due to work injury; from the area.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I conducted the interviews one month after the questionnaires were completed, over the course of two weeks. The interviews were conducted in the School of Business boardroom and were recorded on a digital voice recorder. I invited participants to suggest their own pseudonyms.

Initially, I had planned to transcribe the interviews myself, but I misjudged how much my transcription skills had declined since I had worked as an office administrator, and after consulting with my advisor, I hired a professional medical office administrator,
experienced handling sensitive information and working with the utmost discretion, to transcribe the interviews.

After the interviews were transcribed, the interview participants were invited to review their transcripts and make amendments if necessary. For example, if their words were mis-transcribed, they were invited to point out my error and I was given the chance to make that correction. Their roles as empowered participants, rather than powerless subjects, with respect to the interview process and the record of the interview, was explained and explored before and after the interviews.

I read the interviews analysed them using inductive analysis, I identified themes, and I coded the interviews to identify those themes.

**Role of the Researcher**

I am sensitive to the fact that I, at the time of the interviews, was not only a former teacher of the interview participants but might be their teacher in a later semester (they may fail or withdraw from a communications course or may enroll in the Bachelor of Business Administration Bridge Communications course, which I sometimes teach) and I am the series editor of the book project on which they may work or in which they may be published. Moreover, I may be asked by students at any time to write letters of reference for them, to introduce them to business people outside of the college, or may coordinate events or activities that students work on. While I will likely perceive my influence over them and their academic career as negligible, I am aware that my
understanding of the situation and their understanding of the situation may be different. Moreover, neither understanding may be “true” or “real.”

Again, I took many steps to ensure that I did not exploit or appear to exploit my position of power over my students. I did not see the questionnaires until after I had submitted final grades to the college; my colleagues who assisted me were the only ones who had access to the name/code record on the questionnaires; I was never informed (and the students were told this by my colleagues) who volunteered or even how many students volunteered to be interviewed—I was given a list of those who had been selected from a pool of volunteers.

**Scheduling of Research**

The reason for choosing to do this study at the end of the winter semester and the beginning of the spring semester becomes clear when it is understood that the pressures on students in the last weeks of the semester are enormous and how those pressures differ if they are in the fall or winter semester. If I were to do this study at the end of the fall semester, Week 15 would fall approximately one to two weeks before the winter break (i.e. Christmas), and the students would not likely have the time, energy, or focus to spare for the study. In fact, many students schedule travel for Weeks 14 and 15 of the semester, and are no longer on campus before the end of the fall semester. Also, there is a January-intake for the business program and approximately 45 new students begin their first semester then. By waiting until the end of the winter semester, I surveyed all the first-year business students, not only the ones who started in September.
Most of the first-year students were still available to me in the spring semester. The January-intake students were still on campus, and most the college students lived in the area. Even if they were not attending classes on campus, they lived and worked nearby.

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided an overview of the focus of the research, the sampling method, the questionnaire delivery and scheduling, the selection process for the interview participants, the scheduling of the interviews, and the development of the interview questions. Also discussed were the role of the researcher and the scheduling of the research. The next chapter discusses the results of the research, including a review of the rationale and the questionnaire results. Interview results are discussed participant-by-participant, as well as from the perspective of possible selves, informational interviews, and other themes that emerged from the interviews.
Chapter 4
Results

This chapter begins with a review of my reasons for pursuing this area of research and the questions that were in my mind I used to examine the questionnaire and interview results. The results of the questionnaires are reviewed, with tables showing a question-by-question breakdown of results that also reflect differences based on age group. Comments left on questionnaires are also discussed. The interviews are described one-by-one, as narratives, describing the results of the interviews as well as my reactions to the interviews and how my decisions for further interviews were informed. The results of interviews are then presented in relation to three concepts or themes: possible selves, informational interviews, and goal-setting. Finally, less-directly related, but still important, themes are discussed, including “detours,” “college is valuable,” and “lifelong learning.”

Review of Rationale

I decided to integrate assignments into first-year communications courses that I thought might help students develop and articulate their notions of their possible selves. I developed the informational interview assignment because I wanted to help the students understand themselves and their reasons for pursuing post-secondary education. Does this assignment make a difference to students and their understanding of themselves and their future selves? The primary rationale for this study is to be able to better understand younger adult learners so that I, and perhaps other teachers, can be more effective when
working with these students. Being a more effective teacher can mean many things, from helping students with different styles and needs learn, to facilitating student interaction with each other and their future colleagues, and includes assisting students in selecting and then persevering in a program of study.

**Questionnaires**

One hundred thirty-three students were surveyed. Eighty-one per cent were aged 16 to 25; 19%, 26 and older. Overall, 59% were female; 41% male (see Table 4.1). Although this is a study primarily interested in younger adults (aged 18 to 25), the questionnaire results for both younger and older adults were compared. This was done because seeing the differences between younger adults and older adults might shed light on some of the realities that are unique to younger adults and further aid in developing interview questions for them.

Some themes that emerged from the participants’ comments were common for both age groups. These common themes included a desire for a traditional family (marriage and children); the desire for a stable, nine-to-five job; and an expectation of experiencing financial problems in the future.

Not unexpectedly, a higher percentage of older adult participants had attended a program of study other than their current one (as they have had more time to do so): 76% of older students had at least started another program of study as compared to only 38% of younger adult students (see Table 4.2). However, the younger adults were more likely to have not completed their program of study than the older adult students and to have
engaged in more than one other program of study. The younger adults were more likely to have started more programs of study—engaged in developing more possible selves via education—and not followed through to completion of the program of study—or possible self (see Tables 4.3 and 4.4).

Table 4.1: Other post-secondary programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the [the college] Business program the only post-secondary program you have been enrolled in?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>#</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=133

Table 4.2: Other post-secondary programs and program completion

| If no, what other post-secondary program(s) of study have you been enrolled in? Please indicate whether or not you completed the program. | | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| College | University | Not indicated | |
| 16–25 | Completed | 4 | 4 | 5 | 23 |
| Not completed | 14 | 18 | 5 | 22 |
| 26+ | Completed | 6 | 6 | 1 | 13 |
| Not completed | 6 | 4 | 1 | 11 |

n= 60
Note: Totals equal more than 60 as more than one program of study could be indicated.

Participants were asked to answer a series of questions meant to assess how much self-determination they felt they had in terms of their current program of study at the college and whether or not they felt their education was going to help them become their possible selves. There were only negligible differences between the younger and the older adults. The responses indicated that the participants did feel that they had been the ones to choose their program of study and they felt that their program of study had value. This was interesting because based on conversations with students over the years, I had
an assumption that the younger a student is, the less likely he or she would feel he or she
had autonomy in making a decision (see Table 4.3).

Amongst the younger adult participants, 95% of participants stated that it was
their choice to attend post-secondary education and to attend their current college and a
slightly smaller percentage, 90%, stated it was their choice to study business. However,
97% reported that they felt studying business has value and 97% and 95% reported that
post-secondary education and studying at the college, respectively, has value.

The numbers dropped when asked about plans to persist in their current program
of study or at their current college. Eighty-seven per cent reported a desire to continue
studying at their current college, 93% reported a desire to continue studying business, but
only 85% reported a desire to continue studying business at their current college in the
immediate future. Interestingly, 93% reported a desire to finish their current program of
study at their current college, suggesting that some students are planning to take some
time off or “stop out” of college or their program or that there were some inconsistencies
in how participants answered, as 10% reported an intention to continue to study business
at a different school and 3% reported an intention to continue a different subject at a
different school.
Table 4.3: Choice and intention regarding [the college] and the Business program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It was my choice to attend post-secondary education.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was my choice to attend [the college].</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was my choice to study business.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think post-secondary education has value.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think studying at [the college] has value.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think studying business has value.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to continue studying at [the college] in the immediate future.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to continue studying business in the immediate future.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to continue studying business at [the college] in the immediate future.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to finish this program of study at this school.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to finish this program of study at a different school.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to discontinue this program of study and enrol in a different program of study here or at a different school.</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=133

The next series of questions asked participants about their ability to imagine themselves in the future and the value of and plans for their education at the college (see Table 4.4). The numbers do not indicate that younger adult students have a strong sense of what their future selves will be, but they do indicate that this has increased as they
progress through their program of study. Only 49% indicated that, before enrolling in college, they knew what kind of job or profession they would want when finished. After one or two semesters of college, the number has increased to 64%, however. When asked if they could imagine what their daily tasks in a profession would be, the numbers increased from 61% to 83% reporting that they could imagine those tasks before enrolling as compared to how well they could imagine them at the time of the questionnaire.

The percentages are slightly higher, with slightly less variance, when asked if they could imagine the kind of person (values, attitudes, and so on) they would be in their future: 72% before enrolling in college and 80% at the time of questionnaire.

There was a significant increase in the students reporting they knew of at least one person engaged in activities similar to their imagined future selves: 63% before enrolling and 82% at the time of the questionnaire.

When asked if students felt that a college diploma program would help prepare them for their future career or profession, 87% of younger adults responded positively. Asked if how they felt about same question had changed since beginning their program of study, they indicated a decrease in positive responses (82%). (Anecdotal evidence suggests this response may have something to do with the current economic crisis. Several class discussions about the recession had taken place during the weeks leading up to the delivery of the questionnaire and a common student lament was that nothing—not an education, not connections, not perseverance—could help them weather the current economic crisis.
economic conditions.) Older students reported an increase in their confidence that a college diploma would help them achieve their possible selves—88% to 94%.

For some of the questions, results were similar for both age groups. Differences appeared when considering questions about whether or not one could imagine what career or profession one wants or what the daily tasks of that profession would look like; younger adults were less likely than older adults to be able to do so (61% of younger adults as compared to 94% of older adults). Both age groups indicated an increase, over the course of their first semester or semesters of study, to imagine the daily tasks of a profession; however, the older adults still reported they were more likely than younger adults to be able to do so (100% of older adults as compared to 83% of younger adults).

Similar results were reported for the questions about whether or not one knew or now knows someone engaged in a desired profession or career. Fewer younger adults (63%) than older adults (75%) reported knowing someone engaged in a desired profession or career before beginning their program of study.
Table 4.4: Imagining a future self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>16–25</th>
<th>26+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before enrolling in the [the college] business program, I knew what kind of job or profession I would want when I finished.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now, I know what kind of job or profession I want when I finish.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=133
(The following questions were only answered by those who answered Strongly agree/Agree to the first question, above.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>16–25</th>
<th>26+</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before enrolling in the [the college] business program, I could imagine what the daily tasks of that job or profession would be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now, I can imagine what the daily tasks of that job or profession would be.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before enrolling in the [the college] business program, I could imagine what kind of a person I would be when engaged in that job or profession (such as values, attitudes, actions towards myself and other people, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now, I can imagine what kind of a person I will be when engaged in that job or profession (such as values, attitudes, actions towards myself and other people, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before enrolling in the [the college] business program, I felt a college diploma program would prepare me for that job or profession.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right now, I feel a college diploma program will prepare me for that job or profession.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly disagree/Disagree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree/Agree</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not indicated</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=70
When participants were asked about their career and education expectations, many responses were similar for both age groups. Most agreed that they wanted as many options or choices for their career as possible, they wanted to know what they would be doing and when in their careers, having a post-secondary education will give them more choices, and they plan to complete their program of study within two to five years.

Amongst younger adult participants, 87% expressed a desire to have as many options as possible and 95% believe a college education will give them more choices, 66% want to know exactly what they would be doing and when, 84% believe goals are important, and 90% plan to finish their current program of study within five years.

One interesting difference between the younger and older adults was in regards to the value placed on having a plan or goals. Younger adult participants were less likely than older adult participants to report that they felt having a plan or goals was important for a successful career (84% as compared to 96%) (see Table 4.5).
### Table 4.5: Career and education expectations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree/Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree/Agree</th>
<th>Not indicated</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>I want as many options or choices as</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>possible for my career.</td>
<td>26+</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>When it comes to my career, I want to</td>
<td>16–25</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>know exactly what I will be doing and</td>
<td>26+</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>when.</td>
<td></td>
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<td>To have a successful career, it is</td>
<td>16–25</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>important to have a plan or goals.</td>
<td>26+</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>will give me more career choices.</td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>I plan to complete my current program of</td>
<td>16–25</td>
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<tr>
<td>study within two to five years.</td>
<td>26+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
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n=133

At the end of the questionnaire, participants were invited to add comments. They were asked, “Take a few moments to imagine yourself in five or ten years. What will you do for a living? For fun? What will your daily life look like? What values or ideals will you have? What problems will you have? Describe this person and this life that you imagine below.” Eighty-two of a possible 108 younger adult students (76%) and 16 of a possible 25 older adult students (64%) completed this part of the questionnaire.

This was an invitation to describe a possible self, but the length and detail of responses varied. Some participants specified what occupations they would have (such as accountant) but did not offer any other details. Some participants described future daily
routines, values, activities, and relationships. Some interesting similarities between the younger and older participants emerged: the desire for a traditional family (marriage and children); the desire for a stable, nine-to-five job; and an expectation of experiencing financial problems in the future. Some examples of comments that illustrate the range of length and detail of comments and also demonstrate the themes that emerged are

I hope to be working for the government in some type of job. I want to be happy. I would to be living in Vancouver, working for a business sustainable initiatives in mind. I want to be promoting music, playing music, living in my own place. Possibly having a girlfriend. I will be socially and environmentally aware. I could be facing economic challenges and dealing with a family loss. [age 16–25]

I imagine being an accountant. [age 16–25]

I will be working the government or a large company in a desk capacity. Go to work, sit at desk knowing that I am getting paid. Go home. Same as now—work for $15. Have fun when I’m not there. Money and son come first. My girlfriend otherwise will be my biggest issue. He’s [this imagined self] a happy fellow who enjoys himself a bit too much. [age 26+]

Accountant. Big $. [age 26+]

Forty-three per cent of younger adult students and 47% of older adult students reported themselves either imagining or desiring a traditional family, namely being married with children. Twenty-one per cent of younger adults and 24% of older adults reported the desire for, very specifically, a nine-to-five job, often adding that stability and the ability to spend time with family and friends was desirable. Only one respondent (in the 16–25 range) indicated the expectation that he or she would not have a “desk job” and one other (also in the younger adult age range) seemed to be lamenting that his or her
daily life would “be really boring” and would involve having to work “more than eight hours a day” with “not a lot of vacation.”

The most commonly cited imagined future problem was financial, often specifically regarding student debt load. Twelve per cent of younger adults and 6% of older adults reported foreseeing financial problems in their futures.

A percentage of younger adults (10%) did report foreseeing themselves seeking another diploma or degree after completing their current program of study. None from the older adult cohort did.

On the final page of the questionnaire, participants were invited to “Please feel free to comment further on any of the above questions or comment on anything that you feel you should have been asked about, but weren’t. Use the back of this page if you need to.” Few participants took advantage of this, but the three comments made by surveyed students that informed the development of the interview questions were

- Maybe ask about a dream job and why you aren’t pursuing it?
- How much skills/knowledge do you think you can bring to your future career from studying in [the college]?
- At the beginning of the year, I really thought I knew what it is I wanted to do. But after attending school and going to class—learning about the business material and my options—my mind was changed. I thought for sure I would going into accounting, but after attending the ACCT class, I realized I did not want a career in accounting. I still am unsure of exactly
what my plan is, so I am continuing the general business [program] and hopefully the BBA program.

**Interviews**

In this section, I will first describe the findings from each interview, in the order in which they were conducted, in order to illustrate how each interview shaped the next. Next, participants’ descriptions of their possible selves, their feelings about informational interviews, and their attitudes towards goal-setting will be discussed. Then I will highlight three themes indirectly related to my research question that emerged from the interviews.

**Overview**

Ten interviews were conducted: eight with students aged 18–25 (five female and three male) and two with students aged 26 and older (both male). The two older students, while understanding that the purpose of the study was to learn more about younger adult students, told me they volunteered for two reasons: one reason was, in one interview participant’s own words, to “create some momentum” and encourage his younger peers to participate, and the other reason was to offer some points of comparison with the younger adult students. After discussing this with my advisor, I decided to include their interviews in the study. See page 40 for a table describing the interview participants.

**Ashley (Female, age 19).** My first interview was with Ashley, a student that I knew fairly well. She had been a student for the past eight months and had excellent attendance and engagement with her courses with me, chatting often with me in my
office, in the cafeteria, on Facebook, and so on. She struck me as a hard-working and high-achieving, yet low-stress, student. She appeared to know exactly what she wanted for herself, both short-term and long-term, and to easily handle the stresses of college. I considered her to be one of the most “together” students I knew and I assumed that her academic career had been without any bumps or turns.

I began the interview with questions that were intended primarily to initiate a conversation. First I asked Ashley (as I later asked all interview participants) about the questionnaire she filled out in class. I wanted to remind her about the questionnaire and connect it to me more concretely, as the questionnaires were administered by a colleague. I expected this question would help to start the conversation and would also help her see a bigger picture of the study and my goals.

I then asked Ashley about her immediate plans for study, even though I thought I already knew the answer. I wanted to learn whether Ashley was doing anything now to lay the groundwork for her possible self. Her response reinforced what I already knew: she sees herself as an NHL player agent and has a very specific, well-informed plan for her education and career that will help her become a player agent.

Asking her, next, about any previous programs of study was a bit of an accident, but her answer surprised me. She had started and discontinued an office administration program at a different college. Based on what I knew of Ashley, and having taught in a similar program and worked in that field, I would not have thought that program suited her at all. As we discussed it further, I realized I had been making assumptions about her
that did not match her reality. Yes, she was very together, but she had not always been
and she had made choices that did not seem wise. I also realized that the things she had
learned about herself and what she wants for her future were affected by this
discontinuation of a program of study. I decided to ask all the interview participants the
same question in order to see if others were similarly impacted.

Later, I asked Ashley how she felt about having discontinued a program of study
and about any stigma attached to being a “drop-out.” I wondered whether she was
motivated to continue with her current program by the vision of a possible self or by the
desire to avoid further regret or stigma. She did express regret, stating,

I kind wish I was finished it. It was probably the easiest year of school I’ve had
since elementary school. In saying that, I didn’t even finish it. I could at least
have something to show for that year that I went away, but at the same time it was
good learning experience.

She stated that she would probably persist with any current and future program of
study because, as she said, “I never want to feel this way again.” But she also stated that
she would continue with her current program of study because she felt it would help her
get to her desired possible self.

Another group of questions I asked Ashley was about her choice to attend college
instead of university. I wondered why she was attending college if she really wanted a
law degree; I was curious about this path to her possible self and wondered how well-
chosen it was. She expressed sound reasons for choosing a college education and
explained that she would pursue a university education later. Her comments revealed an
awareness of some assumptions about college that are not necessarily accurate and that
her initial desire to attend university right after high school were based on those assumptions and not based on what she actually needed:

Actually I kind of placed a stigma on college when I was younger. That’s how they push it in high school. It’s university, like they don’t really talk about colleges. It’s like when you go to university you do this and when you go to university this happens, so for the longest time I was like, “No, I will just take a couple of courses over the summer and I will go to university” and my dad was like, “Why don’t you look at colleges?” So we had a long discussion. We actually started fighting about it for a week because I was like, “I don’t know” and it was probably the best choice I made.

The discussion with her revealed some issues around the fundamental differences between college and university (practical vs. theoretical), student perception of the differences, and how students are choosing to make their way to their possible selves. I decided to ask later interview participants about college and university as well. Just like my reasons for asking about stigma and regret, I wanted to know if it was the possible self creating the path or if ideas about college and university were creating the path.

I asked Ashley about what she was thinking when she chose college and this program of study because I wanted to know if she had had a sense of a possible self before she started school and if this sense had influenced her educational choices. It would be important, I decided, to ask all interview participants about their past decisions, so that I would have some sense of what their possible selves were and what they were doing to achieve (and even to develop) those possible selves over the course of several months, not just on the day of the interview. As it turned out, Ashley had been using informational interviews outside of college as an effective tool for developing her possible selves.
As the conversation continued, the ordering of the questions became less clear, but I wanted to understand whether or not Ashley had any models to look to when she was forming her possible selves. I asked whether she had known anyone working in office administration prior to enrolling in that program. She said she had, and that she had even worked as an office administrator, though she had not conducted an informational interview. She knew she did not want to emulate the models she was familiar with but, still, she had enrolled in the program. Although I meet many students who have chosen a program they clearly do not want, it did surprise me that Ashley had made such a choice despite all the contact she had with a model of a possible self that she did not want to emulate and the experience of living a possible self that she did not enjoy.

Ashley did report having informational interviews (both assigned by me and done outside of the course) with people who could be models of her desired possible selves. She interviewed a player agent and a politician, and she reported significant learning about what she wants for herself in the future and about values she has and wants to have for herself in the future. The informational interviews appeared to be helping her develop her possible selves and she reported being aware of that. She said she planned to do more in the future.

The final questions I had for Ashley were about goals and goal-setting. In my course, I ask students to read articles about and discuss goal-setting because I believe (as do many of my colleagues) that goal-setting will help them succeed in their program of study. While goal-setting may be done without regard for a possible self, becoming a
possible self could be seen as a goal. And so I was curious about my students and their relationships with goal-setting. Ashley reported that she wrote down goals, revisited them, felt comfortable changing them if they no longer suited her or her plans, and reported that, in general, she found goal-setting to be very useful to her:

So with most of my goals I like talking about them because if you tell somebody then you’re more apt to, like you have to because somebody else knows, instead of like before when you write it down nobody is going to see this. Now my parents don’t pressure me but I know that they know and it’s just a lot easier, I find, when you have somebody else just kinda…well, you keep your word…. [But] you have the freedom to change them.

I felt the interview with Ashley was very successful and so I used it and its questions as a model for the remaining interviews. I decided that my reasons for choosing the following categories of questions were sound and that I wanted to gather similar categories of information from the remaining participants:

- whether or not there had been a previous program of study or time off from school;
- if there was any stigma or regret attached to discontinuing a program of study or from taking time off from education;
- whether or not there was a sense of a possible self and if there were any models for or interviews with models for the possible self;
- if college and [their current college] were helpful in achieving a possible self; and
- goal-setting.
Shaynne (Female, age 20). Shaynne had been my student for the last eight months, and like Ashley, she had always struck me as a high-achieving, confident student. Her confidence and competence was especially apparent in her public-speaking assignments.

I began the interview conversationally, asking her to recall the questionnaire and then asked if she had done any other programs of study. She reported having completed a two-year early childhood education program (ECE) despite not being happy with the program almost from the outset. Moreover, she reported that she did not want to work in the field because it is too physically demanding for her and the pay is so low (at or close to minimum wage). She did not do any informational interviews with anyone in the ECE field before or after beginning the program of study.

Shaynne had experience working as a veterinary technician (vet tech) and considered studying to be one in college, but her experience at work helped her decide not to pursue it. The pay is low (also close to minimum wage) and she did not feel well treated or respected when she worked as a vet tech. Being a vet tech was a possible self that she knew from experience (not models as she did not conduct informational interviews with any vet techs) she did not want.

I wondered if doing informational interviews with ECE workers would have helped her in choosing a program of study, and meant to ask her about that, but the conversation quickly turned to her new program of study and I wanted to know if she had sought out any business or human resources (HR) models for that area. (She reported that
she would probably pursue the HR diploma.) She had done an informational interview for her course with me with a marketing professional, and that helped her decide that she not think she was suited to marketing, but she had not yet sought out a HR professional in a formal way. She said she had met some HR professionals and had casual conversations with them that had reinforced her belief that this was a possible field for her.

She explained that the interview with the marketing professional, on the other hand, was useful because it revealed to her that a marketer’s values and the values she sees for her possible self (explained later), do not match:

Well, I just don’t think it’s for me. Like to me it kind of, it always kind of seemed to me like they were tricking people, you know what I mean? Like you were always trying to persuade people to do things they wouldn’t naturally go with. To me it was just kind of weird. I don’t think I would enjoy doing that at all.

And while the interviews with HR professionals had, so far, been casual, they had also been helpful:

Sort of, in a very casual context, not really like an informational interview or anything like that, but sort of talked about like, “Oh so you’re doing that. Oh, that’s neat,” but not really asking them questions. More letting just whatever they happen to say about it....I definitely think it’s something that I could see myself doing.

Shaynne said the only other possible self she could see for herself was as a medical office administrator because that supported the values she saw her possible self as having (being of service). However, she had only one informational interview, and that was casual, with a medical office administrator, and she felt she had not chosen someone who liked her job so perhaps was not getting an accurate picture of that field.
When talking about her possible self, Shaynne did talk about a few concrete things, such as owning a home and having a family, but she also talked about being of service and the kinds of values her possible self would have. She feels that, based mostly on what she is learning in her classes, that working in HR would support the values she wants her possible self to have.

I’m hoping friendly and sort of someone to come to as a middle person. Because I worked in places that are absolutely horrible as far as having no communication with the boss, like you can’t say anything to them because they get easily offended, so then you’re kind of like stuck being like, “Oh I guess I won’t say anything then,” even though it’s a major issue.

Shaynne reported a bit of a laissez-faire attitude when it came to talking about reasons for choosing to go college and choosing college over university. Her over-riding reason for choosing to pursue post-secondary education was because she felt it was expected of her, mostly from family—“I think it was expected, they expected me to [go to college] and my extended family definitely expected me to [go to college]”—and she chose college over university because she felt the hands-on approach (rather than theoretical approach) of college better suited her:

I think it was just because it always seemed so theoretical and I always hated things like that in high school, so I don’t think I’d be able to. I love sitting in a small classroom, having discussions and I don’t think I’d be able to do giant three-hour lectures every day. That would drive me crazy.

She did not say that college or post-secondary education served her plans for her possible selves and she did not discuss knowledge of the programs of study available to her in business at university. She said she hoped her current program of study would get her to where she wanted to be, but she did not say that she thought it would. She said did
not know for sure if her program had a good reputation, but that she trusted her teachers when they said it did.

By the time I asked Shaynne about goal-setting, I was getting the sense that Shaynne’s decisions for her education and development of her possible self were based on little or no information and that she was “going with the flow” more than anything. I was not surprised to hear that she does not like goal-setting, mostly because she is aware of how much things at her stage of life can change and that setting goals when things change so much and so quickly is like setting herself up for failure. When she does complete or plan to complete goals, it is less about what is important to her and her achievement of a possible self and more about fulfilling others’ expectations and avoiding their reactions to her changing her mind. For example, she described her family’s reaction to her decision to not work in ECE and pursue a different program of study, a reaction that Shaynne seemed to find stressful:

I like remember telling them that I was taking business and they’re like, “Why?” Everyone just assumed it was because I wanted to start my own daycare and not because it was something that I didn’t like to do. It just wasn’t even...like I remember my family being like, “So, you don’t like kids” and no that’s not it at all. It’s so much more than that. It’s the least of the reasons why. I love kids. It’s just so many other reasons....

We finished the interview by talking a little bit about how she pushed herself to take this program, knowing how much it would ask of her in terms of networking and interacting with other people. She described herself as having been too shy to even answer the phone at her previous job. This part of the interview was less about my research question and more about my own curiosity about Shaynne. As I stated above,
she shone in her presentations and public-speaking assignments, and so I was interested in knowing about her transformation. In my experience, the students who report the most initial fear and discomfort of public speaking (even to the point of requiring professional counselling) end up being the most dynamic, interesting public speakers. Because she reported such shyness and had clearly transformed into a gifted speaker, Shaynne’s story was interesting for me as a teacher.

The biggest surprise for me, when comparing Ashley and Shaynne, was that I assumed that students who had done a previous program of study and had rejected it as not suitable for their possible self would be transformed into someone who was focussed and informed about their new choices. Shaynne seemed happy with her new choice, but she did not seem very informed and her future self seemed vague. This experience reminded me to work harder to identify and be wary of my assumptions.

**Dexter (Male, age 20).** By the time I interviewed Dexter, I had settled into a pattern for the interviews. I started out by making conversation, and then began gathering background information: Had there been another program of study? Why choose college (at all or over university)? Is this the right path for the possible self? Is goal-setting used? I thought this would help me understand the foundation or development of the person I was interviewing. This, in turn, would help me make sense of what I really wanted to know about: what is the possible self (and how concretely is it imagined) and are informational interviews helping with understanding the possible self.
In many ways, Dexter reminded me of Shaynne—he seemed to be choosing a path to a fuzzy possible self without much information or guidance—and I was wondering if Ashley’s focus on and thorough research into her possible self was unique.

Also, it seemed to me that all three interview participants did not seem to be the ones making the decisions as to whether or not to attend post-secondary education. None of them complained that they were doing anything against their will, but a definite sense of “because it was expected” was emerging. Dexter was the most explicit, so far, of the three interview participants, saying that he had wanted to travel for a year after high school, but then said he had to follow his parents’ wishes and take advantage of an education savings plan and so did not travel. When he was asked if college was his choice or not, he replied,

Well, it was partially my choice because I was told I had to go to post-secondary [school] and [this college] had always been in the back of my mind. So maybe subconsciously it wasn’t my choice, mostly sort of mine, partially maybe not.

Choice kept nagging me as being important. How can others choose your path to your possible self for you, especially if you do not even know for sure what that possible self is?

Dexter chose the business program because he had enjoyed his business classes in high school, but he did not do any informational interviews with business people because he only knew HR professionals and he did not plan on majoring in HR. As it turned out, he enjoyed his college HR courses so much that he did consider majoring in it after all. Eventually, however, he settled on marketing and did do an informational interview with
a sales professional. He said he found the experience of interviewing him very useful and he could see himself living a similar life, being a similar person.

When asked about his possible selves, Dexter was vague and most of the answers needed to be teased from him. He only got as specific as saying he would like a comfortable salary, a house, a car, and vacations. He can see himself working for someone else or as an entrepreneur. He also said he could see himself owning a bakery, but it was hard for me to pin down why he wanted that or what he was basing this idea on. He did not have any experience with bakeries or know any bakery owners. He does know, however, an employee at a large industrial bakery.

Later in the interview, he did say that his possible self included someone who cared about the work he did, stating, “I don't want a job where it's kind of not caring and just getting it done because if I have to do that my whole life I want to care about it.” This was something reinforced by his informational interview with the marketing professional; he felt his interviewee was the kind of person who cared.

Dexter reported that he was not very interested in goals and goal-setting. In fact, he said that during an in-class exercise with me several months earlier he had avoided the task of envisioning himself in the past, present, and future (as a first step in goal-setting) and had done something completed unrelated. This statement summed up how Dexter feels about goal-setting:

[I]f I set a goal then it’s kind of like, I set one that’s really low that I would achieve it doesn’t really say yes I did the goal, but it’s a simple goal, whereas if I set it really high and don’t get it I feel bad. Goals I find limit you.
I found his lack of information about his program and his options for his future disconcerting. He expressed interest in another program of study, advertising, but said he did not know anyone in advertising that he could interview or use as a model. He did not know much, even, about the program of study was currently in, stating, “Well, I thought I was in a three-year, but apparently I’m in a two-year, according to my parents.”

This was another blow to my assumptions. Dexter had been my student for the past eight months and had always seemed on track—enjoying the work, caring about his involvement and his performance, attending and participating with enthusiasm. After the interview, I wondered if Dexter could see the track he was on. I felt that information, not just choice, must play a part in possible selves and asked myself, If you don’t have any information of what your possible self can be and how to get there, how concrete can it be? This underscored my belief that informational interviews with models for possible selves could help in the development of possible selves.

**Tessa (Female, age 21).** Tessa had been my student for eight months and had excellent attendance and engagement. She seemed high-achieving and very serious—sometimes I was concerned that she might be a bit too serious—so much so that I had been surprised when her final presentation for my course showed her to be very funny and even goofy. She seemed to have a healthy balance between commitment to her education and her desire to enjoy herself while pursuing her diploma.

I asked her the standard questions about the questionnaire done in class and whether or not there had been a previous program of study. While she had not had a
previous program of study, she had followed a slightly unconventional path by taking an extra year to finish high school and doing a co-op program. What surprised me about this was her description of herself as the “easy-way-out girl”—this did not match the Tessa I knew. Like Dexter and Shaynne, she said she chose business with very little information; she did not know anyone working in business and the possible self she described before starting the business program was simply that she wanted the achievement of a diploma and to make more than minimum wage. She also stated that she chose college over university not because it was the right path to a possible self, but because she thought college would be easier. However, by the end of the interview Tessa stated that she did not think she could become the person she wanted to be without college.

Her informational interview for my course was with a marketing professional, and while she did not report that he helped her develop her possible self per se, the experience did change her thinking about lifelong learning and as a result she has begun thinking about her education beyond her current program of study. Speaking of the value of education, she compared herself to friends who are not in post-secondary education, and she said, “I think that I feel like a better person, you know? Like I’m doing something with myself.”

She reported that she conducted informal informational interviews with her uncle, a successful, affluent businessman living in California. This experience seems to have had the most effect on Tessa, impacting her development of a possible self (strongly modelled on him) and her work ethic (her desire to not take the easy way out).
My uncle. Actually, my uncle who lives in California. I went to see him two years ago in April, and he has a lot of money. Like, he’s wealthy. He’s a scrap metal dealer, so he owns his own company. He’s the CEO, the president, the whatever, and then back here in Kingston, like with my family, you know it’s not like that. It’s like trying to get by, trying always working at this and that trying to make it work and my aunt and my uncle they have never had very much money and I always knew, like I didn’t want to struggle through life, like I didn’t want that at all. So that’s when I think I went out to visit my uncle and I saw the difference and I want that instead of this.

She reported using informational interviews since the assigned interview and said she found them very useful and would continue to use them:

I didn’t know that you could just call someone up and set up an interview and ask them. So yeah, I always thought about it and I’ve done a couple since then.

*What have you done? You don’t have to tell me their names, but what field were they in?*

Well, they were here at [the college], so it was just professors and we just talked to them about what they have done and they were open to tell us, definitely, and it’s neat, like you find out what other people are doing, maybe I can do that.

*Do you ever find out stuff that you think, “Oh, I don’t like that. I’m glad I talked to you because I don’t want that”?*

Kind of, yeah. Well, with the marketing, with [the local minor-league hockey team], I asked him like what his daily thing is, because I thought it was going to be fancy—I do meetings and do this—but he doesn’t really do that much—web site this, web site that—I didn’t think that a marketer would be all the web site stuff, but I don’t know, you get surprises that you’re not really expecting.

Despite the impact of her relationship with her uncle, she reported that she still had a lot of uncertainty when it came to describing a possible self. Like Dexter, her description of a possible self was vague (having a house, a car, a family, and to not be “struggling, ever”) and she had not stated a program major, choosing instead the two-year general business program option, leaving the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA)
She reported a strong aversion to goal-setting, saying that she doesn’t want to make a decision about something until she “knows.” When asked her, “When will you know?” she replied, “I don’t know.” Later, she further explained that she felt that goal-setting can either set you up for failure or be limiting, preventing her from exploring other options.

**Jacopousie (Male, age 22).** Jacopousie had been my student for the past four months, beginning the general business program in January. Typically, students who begin at this unconventional time of year are themselves unconventional—often they are older, have discontinued previous programs of study, have taken time off after high school to work or travel, or are returning to school because of major life changes such as divorce or widowhood or children growing older. Jacopousie stood out as being unconventional at this college because he was exceptionally positive and gregarious and because he is Inuit and people tended to respond to him as being exotic. (While there are many Aboriginal students at the college, most are from southern Ontario nations, with a few from northern Ontario or Northern Quebec nations.) Jacopousie sees himself as a leader and he seems to carry this role with ease. He also speaks often—and demonstrates through his words and actions—a strong sense of responsibility.

Almost immediately, we began to talk about why he chose this town and this college. As far as I knew, he had no family or other history here, and so I was curious to
see why he saw this college and this town helping him with his development. From that
discussion, he reported that he thought college would serve him better than university,
partly to help him ease back into the habit of going school after so much time away (with
volunteer programs) and he felt college would be more hands-on than university. He
thought college might be easier than university and that it was a bit of step down, but he
changed his mind as his first semester progressed:

A number of issues—when I heard the term university you think a lot of fears, a
lot of class time where you do not have the opportunity to actually get your hands
dirty and get the college aspects of this, so initially when I first decided I was like
okay college seemed like a step down, but now that I’m here I feel like it’s a step
up from [the local university].

Interestingly, despite his drive to obtain post-secondary education and the
enormous support he feels from his family and community up north, he said he was
confident he could be successful and become his possible self with or without college.
His sense of his possible self was the most concrete of any of the students I spoke with,
even more concrete than Ashley’s, and it was interesting to me that so little of his
possibilities seemed dependent on anything external.

I know that whatever I decide to do my community is always going to be waiting
for me with arms wide open. They never put any pressure on me to do anything,
that’s what I love about it, is that regardless I am never pressured into anything
that I don’t want to do and I know regardless of whatever I do I can always go to
Nunavut and feel this reassurance that I’m appreciated there....I guess every time
that I think of my future or anything at all I know I have the support. Like the
way I see it is I am in front of the line and every time I look behind there is
territories expanding, there is friends, close relatives that are looking right up at
me and giving me the thumbs up and saying go for it, whatever you want to do
just go for it and regardless of anything that I filled out, like the questionnaire that
you did, I think of the people that I will initially help at the end of the day if I
accomplish what I want to do.
However, he is not immune to fears that choices he makes now may impact his future. When discussing the pressure he felt to choose a program major, something he had not initially realized he would need to do, he did say part of the pressure he felt was because he knew his choice would alter his future and he did have some fear it would be the wrong choice.

When describing his possible self, he described his actions, the impact of those actions, and his values:

I want to open up my own non-profit organization and I want to not only get Nunavut, but all of Canada involved to allow them to continue having the numerous amounts of opportunities that are out there....I want initially when I see myself doing this I picture myself being really involved with it but also having this responsibility that I have to ensure that this program runs the way it should, so I see myself usually kind of dressed casually so that I would not want to be intimidating so people will not feel intimated to come up to me. Also I just want to be able to, the reason why I really want to get my hands dirty with my future plan, so that at the end of the program I can see the participants that participated in this program and see their reaction and just have a chance to see how they felt and how we can continuously improve this....I feel really responsible not only to my friends and family, being the oldest out of nine, also it’s to prove to myself that I have the drive inside in my heart and my mind to succeed and to accomplish something that is realistic because everybody dreams, but I feel responsible in the sense that if I do not accomplish this then I will let myself down more than anything and as being a part of a community I would like to continue that and I feel it’s my responsibility to make the first step in showing that people out there actually do care.

Jacopousie, like Ashley, reported using informational interviews in various situations and for various reasons, not just for an in-class assignment, and reported finding them very useful. As a result of one done with a leader in his home community, he discovered a role model for his possible self. In the case of learning more about the
BBA program, which is something he feels will be a part of his becoming his possible self, he did several mini-informational interviews. For his assignment with my course, he chose a leader in volunteering in [this city] and as a result, expanded his vision of what it can mean to be a leader and be of service at the same time. Even the informational interview he did with a fellow student was impactful:

I do not see things the same way. What has changed is when I first came here I thought it was just going to be easy as pie, just come here, get this piece of paper stating that you know this and that you’re good to go. I did not think about the nitty-gritty that you had to do within the process, example like networking is essential in today. I thought if I knew every person than I’m good to go, but it’s the other way around, it’s who knows me.

In closing, Jacopousie repeated that he felt he was on the right path to his possible self, stating, “I feel like what I’m doing now is a stepping stone. Everything that I’m doing here is a stepping stone for what I’d like to accomplish in the future.”

Nyla Rose (Female, age 21). Nyla Rose, like Jacopousie, had been my student for four months, starting her program in January. Like many of her January-intake peers, Nyla Rose had hit a speed bump in her education, choosing to discontinue a previous program of study and starting a new one. Nyla Rose was a high-energy, highly committed student, always positive and very participatory.

Immediately in the interview, her perception of her possible self emerged. When describing why she had left the fashion business program at a different college, she described it as being a toxic environment, saying many of her classmates had eating disorders, and she realized that was not what she wanted for herself in the future, it was not part of her possible self. When she did describe her possible self, there was an
emphasis on the values she would have. In fact, even when discussing the actions her possible self would do (assisting manufacturers make ethical choices), the emphasis was still on values.

For my class, she did an informational interview with a local retailer, and she reported that she found the experience useful because she learned about both what she did not want to do as her possible self and what her possible self’s values would be:

[T]hat was not appealing to me go to the store, work at the store, then be a hairdresser and I think even she at one point took on a waitressing job just to make ends meet, but she made a good point when I was talking to her, long before the interview, you do what you have to do to get it done and this is what I want to do, this is what I have to do to get it done. I respected that and I value that, but I really don’t want to have to do that [multiple jobs].

When discussing another interview with a fashion industry professional in New York City, Nyla Rose emphasized what she learned about values:

I’ve always admired the fact that she just works her butt off. She makes it work. She didn’t get there easily but she got there and still getting to wherever she wants to go and she is supportive of the people around her who has the same idea of whether it is directly related to fashion...

As for her path to her possible self, Nyla Rose reported being happy with college for the time being but thought that university, later on, would serve her as well. Again, she was not describing her possible self in terms of concrete career goals or professional roles or material achievements. Her possible self’s development was described in terms of values. Her path to a possible self involves personal growth:

Yeah, I think some classes give you a lot of, they make you question who you are and I think that in my eyes that’s really healthy and I think that I’m not given that opportunity a lot, I am given it, but not a lot and I think university offers a lot of those classes where they let you be who you are not so much on an academic
stand point, but more on a unique stand point, like there’s more room to be really, really creative...

Nyla Rose admitted she was not settled on a concrete possible self and that things changed for her “every five months” but that she was very comfortable with that. She reported that she used to write down her goals, but doesn’t feel the need to do so anymore. Again, she is comfortable with change. Something she had learned over the past few months, she said, was that “if that doesn’t work out you can always come back. Like it doesn’t have to be cookie cutter anymore and that’s okay and people accept the fact that it’s not ABCDE.” Explaining further, she said,

I felt like I had to go to college, get a job, get a house and everything is going to be peachy keen, that’s the way it works and you know you work your way up, you get your salary, you get your pension, you get your dental and that’s the way it’s supposed to be. Even if that wasn’t really what I wanted to be. I wanted to be always changing jobs, I wanted never to be content and I’m really happy that in my class that people supported that, people supported change, supported uniqueness, supported individuality, we supported each other and I think my class the teacher really, really helped me realize it’s okay to not be 100% sure on what you’re doing and it’s okay to fall just as long as you want to pick yourself back up again. So I think my mentality changed in the beginning, very pessimistic, like even if I don’t want to do it, to like you know what it will work itself out, the chips will fall into place and even if they don’t I can take my chips somewhere else and try again.

Of all the students I interviewed, Nyla Rose seemed the most comfortable with the process of discovering and learning about her possible self. Despite not knowing exactly what the future held—or wanting to describe the future as though she knew exactly what it held—she still pursued informational interviews with people who represented parts of what she wanted to be and learned from the experiences.
Smitty (Male, age 44). Smitty was one of two older adult students that I interviewed. Initially, the study was not comparative of younger and older adults and I had no intention of interviewing older adults. However, Smitty and John, two older adults, volunteered to be interviewed when my colleague announced to the class that I was seeking interview participants. When I asked them why they had volunteered, they both replied that they felt that if they put up their hands, other (younger) students might be motivated to volunteer as well. They were keenly aware of their positions as leaders in their class. They also said they thought I might find the comparison of younger and older adult students interesting.

After discussing with my advisor the option of including older adults in the interview process, I decided to interview Smitty and John. I decided to focus much of the interview on asking them to reflect on their days as younger adult students and to explore the evolution of their possible selves over the years.

Smitty had been my student for four months and had consistently been an optimistic, enthusiastic member of the class. This is especially noteworthy as he was a member of the first cohort of older adult students to return to school since the financial crisis in the previous fall. He was not, like many of his cohort, returning out of choice, but out of lack of choice. He explained,

I think it was again that’s sometimes I think that some of the big decisions I’ve made in my life have been spur of the moment, it’s unbelievable that this decision really was a spur of the moment for me when I made because I knew there was nowhere else to go.
When Smitty had first graduated from high school, he had entered a graphic
design program, and despite enjoying it and having a strong sense of a possible self (but
no mentor or source for an informational interview) that he could achieve with that
program, he discontinued the program to pursue a music career. During his music career,
he was very successful—he had a hit country single—and had a strong model that he
could draw on in order to envision his possible self as a star. Again, despite the support
and sense of a possible self, Smitty left his career. Smitty said his model for success in
the music industry was a good one, but that perhaps the nature of fame was just too much
for a strong possible self and model to help overcome:

[H]e was a six-time country male vocalist of the year, so he has been all over TV
and radio and he was famous actually. So we would be on the bus and we would
pull in somewhere in a restaurant at a truck stop and sit down at a table and
people would recognize him and come get autographs and stuff signed. So yeah,
hed been through it all....[M]aybe I didn’t take it enough to heart.

I think most of us are not equipped for [fame]. For example I have met lots of
famous people in doing that for a living, playing on the same stages with a lot of
them, so we got to know each other in some cases and I always was one of these
people that was totally opposite from others where I’m not really all that excited
by stardom and fame, so when I met famous people I always was just like,
“Whatever,” and I don’t know why I’m like that, maybe that’s a part of my
personality that caused all that to happen.

Smitty left his music career and after a string of unsatisfying and menial jobs, he
returned to school, finishing his original program of study. He said that in that period of
transition he felt as though he was living the wrong life: “I felt like I was absolutely a fish
out of water. I was like Eddie Van Halen pumping gas.” Moreover, at this time, he said
he had a sense of a possible self but did not have a path to that possible self: “I always
had a vision beyond but whether or not I think I can actually get there sometimes can come into question.” As it turned out, his possible self that he had for himself the first time around in that program was a good one: he enjoyed being a graphic designer, ended up in the kind of atmosphere in which he originally envisioned himself, and found it suited him. While this career was successful, factors (which included the financial crisis of the fall of 2008) led him to return to school.

His decision to study business was in some way formed by his relationship with a mentor who works in sales and marketing—something he said he did not have when he started his first program of study:

He was the guy I wanted to be, he had everything going on and he was our marketing manager, he probably gets paid very well, he has a big oak office with a library in it and it was just something that I looked up to and thought you know because it does relate to a lot of the backgrounds that I’ve had why couldn’t I go ahead and go into something like that, it interested me anyways and it has a lot to do with the public and people and as well as all the other aspects of it. He was a mentor and he is what got me there.

When asked to explain why he found the mentor relationship so valuable, Smitty said,

I guess because I can see him personally in his element and I can watch him in his day-to-day, I can see what he actually has to do for some of his tasks, some of the responsibilities he has and even to go more personal he is driving a BMW or whatever and I’m like that would be so awesome.

When talking about his decision to leave his successful music career, Smitty said something that made me think again about the relationship between possible selves and choice. He was trying to explain why he left music just when he was on the verge of all the things he thought he wanted:
I was starting to go there and there were people that were trying to put me on track, they were trying to find a place for me with Sony music because at that time I knew a guy in big places and he had already won awards right, left and centre. He knew who to talk to, what we had to do to get there and they basically put me on track, they were gonna record here, then release here, but that would change me. Now your schedule becomes owned almost because now you have every town you go into you’re going to have to talk to radio stations, every time you go here you’re going to make a public appearance. Suddenly I began to get a little nervous about that whole part.

Smitty said he felt that he was now on the right path to get to his possible self, and his final comments were very interesting to me. I thought they illuminated a big difference between the older adult and the younger adult experience. I asked him what felt different for him now as compared to when he was 19 years old. He said,

Well I’ve got cousins and brothers and people in [another city] right now just waiting, so it’s a totally different perspective. Like my cousin saying whenever you’re ready we will place you, it’s just a matter of where that will be.

When you were 19 was anyone waiting for you to graduate?

No. Are you kidding? Only me. And of course I never made it anyways. Somebody else gave me a better offer.

What stood out for me, especially, was the incredulous tone of “Are you kidding?” It made me wonder, What if someone had been waiting for him? A mentor or a model? Would that have been the anchor his possible self needed to persist in his first, and ultimately successful, program of study?

Verissimo (Male, age 19). Verissimo had been my student for the past four months. He had recently arrived in Canada from Brazil. Unlike many international students, his English was extremely well-developed—I would even say he is fluent in English. He was an earnest, serious student and several times came to me asking for
advice on developing relationships and networking in Canada, concerned that he might make a cultural blunder. For example when his new Canadian friend’s mother died, he wanted to send a sympathy card, but did not want to do so until he knew that would fit with Canadian convention.

More than any other of the interview participants, Verissimo seemed driven and determined. He had a strong sense of his possible self and what he wanted to do—and did not want to do—to achieve it. He is actively seeking a model for his possible self. When I asked him about whether or not he knew anyone who had done what he had done—left Brazil to study in another country, he said no. He also lamented that he didn’t know anyone who was doing and being how he saw himself in the future:

I actually don’t know anyone like that. I wish I knew someone....I just don’t know where to find them....I thought this would be a good place, international centre right here would be a good place. It kind of is, it kind of gets me closer to the kind of people that I much need, but still no.

He had interviewed, for my course, a successful businessman in Brazil, and even though this interviewee was not exact match for his possible self, Verissimo said he still found the exercise useful:

He got a lot of wisdom from his own company and his attitude is really different. I kind of see myself in him, but of course there are some differences.... Yes, it makes me feel more secure definitely because I would know that I’m not alone and I would know it is possible to do it, but right now it’s not.

He said he had never done informational interviews before and he would be hesitant to do formal ones again for fear of wasting other people’s time. However, he did say that he would consider informal informational interviews with people should he meet
them and that he thought he would find such conversations very useful. He said if he could find someone who fit the model for his possible self, the experience would go from an 8 out of 10 to a 10 out of 10.

Verissimo said he also found the informational interview with the upper-year student useful, and in this case, his focus was more on values than on superficial similarities to himself or to his possible self as a student. He interviewed a Canadian student majoring in a different field. Despite these differences, he found aspects of his interviewee valuable:

Yes, I think it kind of did make a difference. I was thinking that maybe this college would be like regular, but as soon as I saw how ambitious she was, how she does it, how she goes and does it I thought maybe it would be really more character building.

Verissimo had started a university program (economics) in Brazil but had chosen to leave it because he wanted a more technical, practical education. He expressed general dissatisfaction with Brazil, both culturally and opportunity-wise. In his words, he wanted “something else,” so he came to Canada:

At about when I was 10 years old I started growing up, you know something that I knew I didn’t like some stuff, some customs, some types of behaviour. I just knew that I wanted something else.

He also said that he could not imagine himself being what he wanted to be in Brazil. In fact, he does not even see his possible self operating in Portuguese. He feels that the path he has chosen in Canada will get him to his possible self. However, he said the achievement of a diploma was not that important to him and, during the interview, when asked if he would continue with the program, even if his view of its value changed
for him, he said he would not and he would leave to start his own business. A few days later, he emailed me to qualify that statement. He added that he would stay in the program because his student visa depended on it. So, again, choice and a path to a possible self came up. His path to his possible self is, to some extent, not his choice, but determined by his status in Canada.

Verissimo said he had tried goal-setting, but that if he didn’t achieve them, “It makes me feel very miserable when I cannot accomplish something and I kind of have to set really low goals for myself.” He wanted to continue to try to set goals, but felt he was lacking skills.

**John (Male, age 57).** John had been my student for four months and had told me early on in his first semester that part of his reason for returning to school was because while he was nearly ready for retirement, his wife was younger than he and not ready for retirement at all. He wanted to keep busy, physically and mentally, to avoid “becoming boring” in retirement. While we discussed his age and he said, as other older adult students do, that he was very aware of the age difference between him and his fellow students, as a teacher, I find having a scattering of students in their forties, fifties, and sixties is common. In other words, while it feels extraordinary for the students, it feels commonplace for the teachers. John described being very sensitive to this age difference and concerned about the impact it might have on the classroom:

I wasn’t sure about integration with the class, personal integration. I was also thinking about the mindset and how comfortable my fellow classmates would be because it was pre-identified to me what generally the make-up of a class is…. I
discussed a bit with my wife. She said I’m sure you won’t be a distraction to the class, but it would be very easy for that to happen.

Coincidentally, a few years earlier I had been John’s daughter’s teacher and it was a conversation with her during class that motivated and inspired me to do this research, as recounted in the Introduction. I had forgotten all about the conversation until a few months before this interview, when I was en route to my colloquium. I told John this and he seemed not only unimpressed, but as though he expected it. So, it was commonplace for him, extraordinary for me.

When asked about his current plans for himself, John was vague. He said he had some ideas about his possible self, but it was too early to pin things down. A theme that repeated itself throughout the interview was that he was very comfortable with risk and uncertainty. He did not report any sense of trying to discover who or what he was: “I really have an open-ended view of what comes after this. Whereas I’m not defined.”

Interestingly, like most of the interview participants, John had hit a speed bump in his youth. Right after high school, he had gone to university but discontinued his program of study very quickly. He blamed this failure on his lack of preparedness and maturity, but when asked, he also said he did not have anyone to model his possible self on. He had no one to ask about what academic requirements were needed, how to adjust to post-secondary education, and he did not know anyone working in his potential future field. He did express regret for not finishing, saying,

I still have a personal deep soul, passionate for the environment and to me this looked like a good way to work in an environment that I felt passionate about. To
this day there is a part of me that wishes I could have finished it, but it wasn’t possible.

For many years, most of his adult life, he then worked as a long-haul truck driver, owning his own truck and being an owner-operator for some time. Despite his current comfort level with uncertainty, he cited uncertainty as being one of the reasons he stopped being an owner-operator.

Like Smitty, and for that matter, like many older adult students of mine, John did not truly choose to come back to college. Due to an injury, John was sent back to school by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) of Ontario. People in John’s situation have very little autonomy. Not only does WSIB decide whether or not you are going back to school, it decides for you which school, which program of study, and for how long. Your desires are not considered. Moreover, it monitors your attendance and marks while in school, confirming details with teachers and administration, and if you fail to conform with its expectations, your funding—your only source of income (and because of injury, you are unemployable in your field)—is withdrawn.

I found it interesting that the big difference John saw between his younger self and his older self was his risk tolerance:

We have a built in, every person has their own unique built in risk value assessment. Mine is dangerously high and whether it’s just trying new interesting short term things or long term, so I have to always be aware that it’s a fault and sometimes don’t take into account all the factors associated with the risk and live for the moment. That’s what my daughter says, lives for the moment. The risk factor is something that I keep in mind and try to, among other things, for about 30 years now, 28 years, when I assess something now I remember that I’m married, so my risk evaluations now are different than when I was 19.
Despite this mellowing, John is still someone with a high tolerance for uncertainty, and this stood out for me during the interview. When I thought back to some of the things the younger adults were imagining for their possible selves—homes, cars, marriages, children—they struck me as being very security-focused, whereas a desire for security was not an issue in John’s interview at all.

**Jacqueline (Female, age 19).** Jacqueline had been my student for the past eight months and throughout that time, I had assumed, based on her demeanour, that she was an older adult student. I was surprised to find out during our interview she was 19. She always presented herself as a serious, high-achieving student, and appeared to find school easy without seeming bored. I knew she worked outside of school in retail, and from conversations outside of the classroom, I thought she took her work very seriously as well.

Jacqueline took a year off between high school and starting college, and this was her first and only program of study. She is the first generation in her immediate family to go to college.

Like some of the other interview participants, such as Dexter and Jacopousie, Jacqueline reported that she did not know what options were available to her when she started the program—such as the difference between a two-year and a three-year diploma or the BBA. As a teacher in the program, I am surprised that we—my college—are not doing a better job of informing our incoming students, and I am also concerned that choices are being made, important choices, about possible selves without all the
information. Again, issues of choice and possible selves come up. If choice has a role to play in the achievement of a possible self, does information have a role to play in choice?

What helped her choose to study business, she said, was that she was good at retail and sales and had a professional salesperson, her father, as a model. Working alongside him in the family business, she said she had plenty of opportunities to witness and participate in sales. In him, she said, she has a mentor. She said this relationship was very important, and when I asked her why she thought she was so determined and on track and if having a model for her possible self was valuable, she replied, “I think that’s really important, I mean without having him I don’t know what would be my direction if I didn’t look up to him to see what he’s doing, to what I would be doing now.”

For her informational interview, she interviewed a professional working in marketing communications and while she said the exercise was useful, it was not exactly what she was looking for or what she thought it would be:

Some of the answers I feel she didn’t really answer them right and I would ask her again, you know what do you mean, I feel like she didn’t really, I don’t know, answer my questions very well, but I mean some of it was kind of interesting because she owns her own business, so I learned about that and how the benefits of that and the negative effects of that. That was kind of interesting to learn….I think it just wasn’t what I wanted. I think she just tried to answer them what she did, but I guess it wasn’t the answer I was looking for.

When asked about her possible self and whether or not it seemed tangible and possible, Jacqueline replied, “Yes, it feels very real to me, definitely….Yes, I feel it’s very possible.” Also, she described feeling very comfortable with making decisions about her future and not feeling hemmed in my decisions such as choosing a major. Even if she
were to change her mind in the workplace about what she wanted to do, she said she felt capable of making a shift, saying, “I think I could, it depends if your management allows it and depends maybe they need to have the sort of course or degree to get in there, but if I could I feel like I could adapt to anything pretty well.” When discussing goals, this sense of feeling comfortable was echoed in her sentiments about goal-setting: “You just set a new goal. If you can’t achieve a goal and you tried your hardest, then you just set a new goal, set a new standard.”

Though Jacqueline’s description of her possible self was never as detailed or tangible as Ashley’s, she did remind me of Ashley in her confidence and determination. They served as bookends, in a way, opening and closing the interviews, both mature, confident, with a strong sense of themselves in their futures.

Possible Selves

The descriptions of possible selves that emerged from the interviews are as varied as the students themselves. Some students described their possible selves in terms of career goals, some in terms of values and ethics, and some in terms of how their appearance and what their daily actions would be. The level of detail varied as well, with some students clearly having a picture in their minds of their possible selves, while others described vague goals, and then only when pressed to do so. Multiple possible selves were sometimes described, and sometimes, possible selves were described in terms of a process rather than a goal or static ideal.
In general, descriptions of possible selves were vague, regardless of the age of the participants. John, the oldest participant, was almost determinably vague, stating, “I really have an open-ended view of what comes after this. Where as I’m not defined.” Other descriptions of possible selves were typically to be “comfortable.” When the meaning of comfortable was teased out in the interviews, it usually included such things as being married, having a house and a car, enjoying vacations, and not having to worry about money.

Jacopousie reported the most concrete idea of his possible self, going so far as being able to describe how he would look and act as his possible self:

I want initially when I see myself doing this I picture myself being really involved with it but also having this responsibility that I have to ensure that this program runs the way it should, so I see myself usually kind of dressed casually so that I would not want to be intimidating so people will not feel intimated to come up to me.

Nyla Rose’s description of her possible self differed from others’ as well, as she described her possible self primarily in terms of her possible self’s values and personal development. In some ways, her possible self seemed to be more like a process than a static image:

I have like a rough idea. What I’d like to do is be able to be like a middle man for an apparel company or cosmetic company and help them find alternatives to sweat shops and animal testing…. I want to be proud, like American Apparel, would be a company I would love to work for because I believe in what they’re doing, maybe not necessarily the advertising part of it, but more that they are paying everybody fair wages and giving everybody the opportunity equally I think would be really good. That’s kind of what I’d like to do. Everything changes every five months.
Ashley described her possible self in terms of professional duties and values that her possible self would act on, but she did not describe the personal life of her possible self. As a potential player agent, Ashley was able to describe the daily activities of her possible self, such as taking calls from players, meeting with clients, and going to court. Another of her possible selves would be to work in politics, not necessarily as an elected official, but more likely as someone who works on a politician’s election campaign. In this area, values were important. She expressed disappointment with politicians who do not follow through on promises and admiration for those who are committed to representing and improving their communities. Her possible self would be to be “a part of the voice behind that [ethical, committed] person.”

Shaynne also used values to help describe her possible self, and in fact, the descriptions of those values overshadowed the description of her possible self’s daily tasks. She described two possible selves, one working as a medical office administrator and the other working in a human resources department. In both cases, being of service to others was key in choosing and describing that possible self. She also described what her possible self’s personal life would look like, but that description, like the other descriptions of a possible self’s personal life in the interviews, was bare-bones: having a house, a family, and living in a different town.

Dexter’s description of his possible self was perhaps the most vague of the interview participants, and some of the basic details needed to be drawn out. He described wanting to be an entrepreneur, but acknowledged he would probably start out
by working for someone else. While he said he would be interested in owning a bakery, what seemed more important was being independent by being an entrepreneur and working only a few days per week and being successful, defined as being “comfortable” and being able to afford a home, a car, and vacations.

Tessa’s description of her possible self was marked by a desire not “to be struggling” as her family had. More than any other interview participant, the possible self that she described was a result of knowing what she did not want, and it still remains vaguely defined, however. It is informed by her knowledge of her uncle’s success in business:

He’s the CEO, the president…and then back here…it’s not like that. It’s like trying to get by, trying always working at this and that, trying to make it work…and I always knew I didn’t want to struggle through life….I went out to visit my uncle and I saw the difference and I want that instead of this.

Of all the interview participants, Jacopousie’s possible self was the most concretely described and detailed. Not only could imagine how he would be dressed (casually) and how he would interact with others (without intimidating them), he could also describe what actions he would take and how those actions would reflect his ideals and values: “I want to open up my own non-profit organization and I want to not only get Nunavut but all of Canada involved to allow them to continue having the numerous amounts of opportunities that are out there.”

Nyla Rose’s possible self, while not quite as detailed as Jacopousie’s, also described examples of actions and how those actions would be informed by ideals and values. She described her ideal role in business as being someone who helps
manufacturers find ethical, socially responsible options: “I’d like to be the middle man for an apparel company or cosmetic company and help them find alternatives to sweat shops and animal testing.” Nyla Rose, more than any other interview participant, described her possible self not as something static but as something that was a process and she stated that not only was she comfortable with changing her ideals and plans, but that she expected to: “It just changes every so often because I learn more. I realized what’s better, what’s worse.”

Verissimo, like Dexter, described a possible self that is entrepreneurial:

I imagine myself as a businessman. I don’t imagine myself working for anyone else. I imagine being independent, working for myself and I think accounting would be the best branch to accomplish that.

And like Tessa, described it terms in what he does not want. In explaining why he chose to leave Brazil, he said, “…I knew I didn’t like some stuff [about Brazil], some customs, some types of behaviour. I just knew that I wanted something else.”

For Jacqueline, there was more balance in being able to describe her possible self in terms of what she does want and what she does not want, explaining, “I don’t want to be a sales person. I really like the home industry…and I want to work in an international basis, so my plan is to work in the business where they make homes and sell them overseas.” She also has the advantage of having, more than any of the other interview participants, of having a close relationship, both personal and professional, with someone who is already doing exactly what she sees her possible self doing (her father).
Informational Interviews

The ten individuals I interviewed reported satisfaction with the informational interviews they had conducted in their business communications courses and felt that they had value. Some had been using informational interviews successfully before they were assigned one in class. Some reported they would continue to do them, some reported that it had not occurred to them to do more, and some reported a hesitancy to do more for fear of wasting professionals’ time.

Most reported using informational interviews outside of the classroom, and two had been doing informational interviews before learning about them in class. All found informational interviews to be a useful tool in helping them understand who they were becoming and how their current actions (such as their program of study) could help them become those possible selves. One participant, Tessa, had not considered doing informational interviews before the course but had used them successfully since. She commented, “[Y]ou find out what other people are doing, maybe I can do that.”

Others, while they reported finding informational interviews useful, said they were hesitant to use them outside of the classroom; they reported they were hesitant to waste professionals’ time. However, were they to find themselves in an informal setting with a professional, they would try to learn as much as they could about that professional’s life. Verissimo summed up this attitude towards informational interviews, explaining that he had wanted to do informational interviews at other times, but hesitated
because, as he said, “Well I think it would be a waste of time for them and I didn’t want to bother anyone and I did not know anyone.”

**Goals**

While goal-setting is not the same thing as having a possible self, it can be a useful tool in developing and pursuing a possible self. For this reason, participants were asked about whether or not they practiced goal-setting and how they felt about goals (achieved or not achieved).

There was a wide range of responses when it came to attitudes and approaches to goal setting. Some participants felt that goal-setting was limiting, either setting you up for failure or limiting your choices, and so therefore avoided goal-setting. As Tessa commented, “What if it doesn’t work out? Then I’m letting myself down. So by not having a specific solid plan, it’s just, ‘Oh well, I could kind of maybe go this way instead and not have to stick to a plan’. ” Some found goal-setting to be an effective tool for staying on track or would like to have the skills that would allow them to use goal-setting as an effective tool. Verissimo lamented his lack of skills in this area, while Ashley stated, “I like talking about them [goals] because if you tell somebody then you’re more apt to [do it].” And finally, some were comfortable setting and changing goals as time passed. Nyla Rose described a great deal of comfort with shifting goals, stating, “[T]he chips will fall into place and even if they don’t I can take my chips somewhere else and try again.”

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Other themes

The following three themes are not in direct response to my research question, but they are interesting to note, as they were themes that emerged spontaneously, played an important role in the interviews, and can be seen as underscoring some of the above findings. For example, choices made in coming to college, such as choosing to take a year off to work or starting and discontinuing another program of study, impact the development of the possible self. Also, the desire (or lack of desire) to pursue further education also impacts the development of a possible self. All of the themes, regardless of how obviously they are linked to the primary focus of this study, were impacted by interactions with models during informational interviews.

1. “Detours” (either not continuing to post-secondary education immediately after completing secondary school or starting and/or completing another program of study before the current program of study)

2. “College is valuable” (articulating the belief that a college education has value, either to the individual or to society, either on its own or in comparison to other post-secondary educational options, such as university)

3. “Lifelong Learning” (the desire to pursue further post-secondary education, after the current program of study is completed, and/or the acceptance that lifelong learning will be a reality for the interview participant)
Detours. Within this theme, there are other sub-themes, including feelings of regret and attending post-secondary school because it is seen as “the thing to do” or because it is expected.

All the interviewees but one (Tessa) reported that they did not begin their current program study immediately after leaving secondary school. It might be stretching the definition of “detour” in one case, that of Dexter. He did not take time off between secondary and post-secondary school, but he did complete a “victory lap” in secondary school. This means that he spent an extra year in secondary school, despite having completed all the requirements to graduate. Moreover, he had wanted to take time off between secondary school and college in order to travel and had been making plans to do so with friends, but financial considerations (namely an education fund) restricted his ability to take time off. Also, it should be noted that while Tessa continued on to post-secondary education immediately following completion of secondary school, because she did a co-op program, she also took, in her own words, “an extra year to graduate.”

Amongst the younger adult participants, three had started other programs of study but had discontinued them, one completed a program of study, one worked for a year, one spent an extra year in secondary school, and one volunteered with various youth programs for a year. Similarly, the two older adults interviewed reported beginning but not persisting with or stopping out of the programs of study they had begun when younger adults.
Feelings of regret. Participants did not report feelings of regret or disappoint in terms of taking extra time before starting a post-secondary program of study. However, virtually all reported feelings of regret or disappointment when discussing the earlier programs of study, whether or not the program was completed.

For example, Shaynne had completed an earlier program, a two-year program in early childhood education (ECE), despite knowing, as she said, within the first semester that she did not like the area of study, found it too physically demanding for her, and was disappointed by the low earning potential of graduates. She expressed regret at having completed it and said she would not persist with her current program of study if she were to start feeling about it the same way she did about the ECE program:

I would say I would probably leave. I’d probably find something else because like I said, I already feel like I spent so much money on school and having to pay that back later that I don’t think I would spend the money to finish a program that I’m not going to use….I think I should have left [the ECE program] as soon as I had any question of it, but I think at the time I was not ready for that. I didn’t realize what the consequences would be.

Jacqueline anticipated feeling that she might regret spending money on a program of study she wasn’t interested in persisting with and this was part of her motivation for taking a year off to work between secondary school and post-secondary school. Her parents and grandparents were initially concerned that she would never return to school if she took time off, but eventually they became supportive of her decision. As Jacqueline said, they came to understand that if she didn’t know what she wanted to do, she shouldn’t “waste her money on something you don’t know.”
Some participants who had not persisted with a program of study expressed regret that they had not continued, such as Ashley, Nyla Rose, and Smitty (reflecting back 25 years or so).

Ashley did not complete a one-year program in office administration, and despite not liking the area of study at all, had this to say about not finishing:

I kind of wish I was finished it. It was probably the easiest year of school I’ve had since elementary school. In saying that, I didn’t even finish it. I could at least have something to show for that year that I went away, but at the same time it was a good learning experience….I was really upset with myself and just very disappointed really….That’s what made me come back to school. I never want to feel this way again.

Dexter, while he had not started and discontinued a program of study, echoed a sentiment that Ashley had also expressed: the desire to prevent the feeling of regret or disappointment by not persisting with a program of study. He said, regardless of how he felt about his current program, he would persist, stating, “I’d continue just to finish and then I can say, ‘Yes, I graduated…’”

Nyla Rose discontinued a program in fashion business at a different college, feeling that the focus on fashion was too limiting, and switched to a more general business program. Despite feeling that the first program was not the right program for her, she still felt regret:

Before I came here I was quite upset that I had dropped out of a program that I thought I wanted to do for five years with my life and I was really upset at myself….I kind of thought that there’s a timeframe in your life where you can get an education; anytime after that is not valid anymore.
Smitty, one of the older adult interview participants, reflected on his youth, remembering when he had discontinued with a program of study. He did so despite enjoying the subject (graphic design) and having a strong sense of who he would be and what he would be doing once he had finished. He reported not liking the stigma of being a “drop out,” and explained further by stating, “Not only did I feel like I was just dropping out of school, but I felt that I may be throwing away stability for something that I had no idea what was ahead.”

*Post-secondary education not as a choice but as “the thing to do.”* There was a sense, running through many of the interviews, that the participants were attending a post-secondary educational institution because it was simply the thing to do. Shaynne, for example, stated, “Of course, there are always people who don’t go to college, but it was kind of like the mass majority of people were and also my mom went to college….I think it was expected. [My parents] expected me to [go to college]….” For Dexter, money played a role in the assumption or expectation that he would attend post-secondary school: “I had an education fund that couldn’t wait; my parents felt they’d lose the money, so I had to go to school.”

For some of the participants, the time off between secondary school and post-secondary was reported to have had an impact on their ability to choose a school and a program of study—even the decision to attend post-secondary school at all.

Jacopousie, who spent a year travelling with two youth volunteer programs, drew on his familiarity with different towns to choose his current college:
As I was traveling, I observed all the schools and [this town] so happened to be one of the towns that we passed by and I looked at the success rate of [this college] and [the local university] and I really liked how it wasn’t a huge city, but yet not too small. It had this good balance of it and I felt like I could prosper and develop better leadership skills and at the same time receive an education.

Tessa used her experience working in retail (during a co-op program that extended her secondary school education by one year) to realize that she did not want to work at a low-paying job and would therefore need an education to avoid that: “I know that I didn’t want to go and just work and minimum wage….”

Shaynne decided, as discussed above, that based on her experience, not to persist with a program of study in which she did not see a future for herself.

And Jacqueline, also discussed above, knew she had no idea what she wanted to study and viewed working for a year as a means to help her figure it out.

**College is valuable.** Several of the participants reported that they felt a college education had value. Some participants reported having opinions about the value of college in comparison to university and said they had chosen college over university, further explaining they had assumptions about college and university (both negative and positive) and were happy with their decision to attend college. Some participants reported that they saw value in a post-secondary education because it was improving their quality of life in different ways, not always directly related to skills acquisition or career preparation.

Several participants explained that they thought of college as being more hands-on and less theoretical than university (such as Ashley, Shaynne, Nyla Rose, Tessa, and
Verissimo), and they saw this as being desirable. Ashley, for example, explained she had several friends who had tried university but were switching to college so they “can learn how to actually physically do” what they are learning.

Some participants reported that university was not desirable to them. They thought it would be either too theoretical (Shaynne: “I don’t think I’d be able to do giant three-hour lectures every day”; Verissimo: “I found out [university] wasn’t really what I wanted. I wanted to learn technical, practical stuff.”), too challenging (Tessa: “I thought it would be way too much work….So, I’m like, definitely not university and if anything it’s going to be college because it’s easier.”; Jacopousie: “[I chose college over university] because as I said I was in the volunteer programs before. I wanted to reassure myself that I knew how to be in the study format and follow the criteria.”; Dexter: “My marks weren’t really high enough to go to [the local university].”), or the wrong atmosphere (Dexter: “I find it very pompous.”).

Two participants, Jacopousie and Ashley, struggled with the weaker reputation of a college education as compared to a university education, but have since come to see a college education as valuable. Jacopousie stated, “College seemed like a step down, but now that I’m here I feel like it’s a step up from [the local university].” Ashley explained that she had always thought she would go to university, and explained she probably would in the future (for a law degree), yet her current program of study at a college still had value and would help her achieve her vision of herself in the future.
College is seen by many participants as assisting them in reaching their possible selves, achieve goals, and as enriching their future careers and current personal lives.

Ashley explained that college enriches her personal life and will enrich her professional life because it’s good to have different views, I guess. The more you know the more valid your ideas are because you’ve had more experience in different situations and stuff and even if you go into something that you don’t necessarily want to do, and if it interests you, then you’re able to use that.

Tessa, too, saw college impacting the quality of her personal life:

This might sound awful and I’m going to be totally honest here. When I started here I kind of noticed that I almost felt better than my friends who didn’t go to college. Even try to have a conversation with them, try to talk business with them…and it’s like talking to someone who doesn’t go to school, doesn’t take on further education, just doesn’t know very much.

Jacqueline, commenting on her family’s attitudes towards higher education and the value college has for enriching one’s professional life, stated, “They know it’s important to get a degree. They know that a lot of things you can’t get without even a basic college diploma.”

Interestingly, Jacopousie sees his college education as having value and as being necessary to his future, and he states, “I definitely think I am on the right path [by attending this college, in this program of study].” But, he also stated that in order for him to be successful in his home territory of Nunavut, he does not necessarily need a post-secondary education. When asked “But if you don’t get this piece of paper, you can still have a successful life in Nunavut?” he replied, “Definitely.”
**Lifelong learning.** Another theme that emerged from the interviews was the participants’ attitudes towards further education after the current program of education is completed. The responses, however, were not uniform and there was a full range of opinions on the theme. For example, one participant, Shaynne, expressed concern about the amount of time and money she was spending in post-secondary education. She stated she felt older than her fellow classmates and so did not feel as though she fit in. She also said she was eager to start life and that the financial costs of further education were a concern:

I did think about [the Bachelor of Business Administration program]. I’m not sure that I want to be in school that long. It’s hard going to school with people that are younger than you, even if they’re not much younger, it seems….[My boyfriend and I] want to talk about starting a family, having a house and all that. You can’t really do that when you’re in school, if you have no extra money.

Her family’s reaction to her decision echoed her own sentiments regarding pursuing more education and what that costs: “They were kind of apprehensive, like, ‘Why are you spending so much money? You just went to school for two years to become something, so why don’t you do that?’ ”

In contrast, Ashley reported that she fully expected to be in school for the rest of her life and seemed very comfortable with that. She explained how she foresees the next ten years of her life:

[I will] probably continue with school for a long time….People are like, “Well, that’s a lot of school.” I’m 19, and when I’m done, if I went through and got my law degree for a couple of years, took some time in between my BBA and my law degree, I’d be 30 when I’m done….
Jacqueline had initially planned on doing only the diploma program at the college, but stated she now intended on doing the BBA degree program when she finished her diploma. She reported seeing the value and necessity of lifelong learning—but only if necessary. She stated, “It depends. If I really wanted to [go back to school after starting work] then of course I would; there’s no question. But if I was sort of iffy and I was okay with where I was [in my career], probably not right away.”

Verissimo seemed the most ambivalent, stating that he would go back to school if he saw value in it. While his words do not express a distaste for further education, his body language during this statement was very dismissive: “Maybe if I find it very valuable. If I think that over my career I think that there’s something else that I might be able to learn that could be valuable to me, I will definitely come back.”

For the two older adult participants, age and funding were impediments to lifelong learning. Both see their careers as being limited, since they are starting out so late, and both are constrained by the government programs that are funding their current programs of study. According to Smitty, “I haven’t really approached anyone on the BBA to find out more about it and right now I’m being feder ally sponsored, so I don’t think they would sponsor that kind of thing.” And John stated, “Would I be allowed to take [the BBA] because being under the WSIB [Workplace Safety and Insurance Board] confines, they may or may not allow it.”
Conclusion

This chapter began with a review of my reasons for pursuing this area of research and the questions that were in my mind as I examined the questionnaire and interview results. The results of the questionnaires were reviewed and those results informed the development of the interview questions. Interview questions focused on other programs of study previously pursued, reasons for attending post-secondary education, notions of possible selves, and goal-setting. The interviews were described one-by-one, as narratives, describing the results of the interviews as well as my reactions to the interviews and how my decisions for further interviews were informed. Results from the interviews indicated that most participants had pursued other programs of study or taken time off from school before entering their current program of study. While there was a wide range of detail in the description of possible selves and in the use of goal-setting, informational interviews and college education were reported as being valuable in the possible selves’ development and achievement. Less-directly related themes of “detours,” “college is valuable,” and “lifelong learning” were also discussed.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the above results in terms of possible selves and goal-setting, the development of possible selves and informational interviews, and the role of choice and sense of the ability to control one’s fate in all of this.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

In this chapter, I will review the questions that motivated my research and then discuss the impact informational interviews have on the development of students’ notions of possible selves. I will then discuss whether or not younger adult students exercise choice in their pursuit of a possible self or even if they feel they have control over their own fates and how notions of possible selves can impact notions of choice and control. Finally, limitations of the research and implications for practice and further research will be discussed.

Questions Motivating Discussion

In order to discuss the results of the questionnaires and interviews in light of the Literature Review, I considered the question that speaks to the heart of my research and my reasons for doing it: “Can conducting informational interviews help younger adult students develop a possible self?”

Examining this question while reviewing the interviews led me to consider issues about choice and free will in the development of the possible self. From this, two important points emerge. The first point centres on how well developed younger adults’ notions of possible selves actually are and if these notions can be improved by conducting informational interviews. The difference between the students who discuss their possible selves in terms of values and those who do not is explored. The second point centres on younger adult students’ sense of their level of choice and of control over
their fates or their ability to determine the outcome of any attempts to shape their possible selves. I will also discuss how choice and sense of control impact possible selves (and vice versa) and how informational interviews impact choice.

Development of Notions of Possible Selves and Informational Interviews

How well defined are the students’ notions of their possible selves? Have notions of possible selves changed over the course of the program of study? How? Have informational interviews played a part in that? How?

As discussed in more detail in the Results chapter, the younger adult students’ descriptions of possible selves in the interviews were diverse. Possible selves were described in terms of values (Jacopousie, Nyla Rose, Shaynne, Ashley), daily actions (Jacopousie, Ashley, Jacqueline), creature comforts (Dexter, Shaynne, Tessa) and what they do not want (Verissimo, Tessa). For each of the participants, however vague their possible selves may be, they did report changes in their notions of their possible selves over the course of their current program of study and as the result of informational interviews, which supports the results of the questionnaires.

The questionnaire addressed notions of possible selves by asking, “Before enrolling in [the college] business program, I knew what kind of job or profession I would want when I finished” and “Right now, I know what kind of job or profession I want when I finish.” Younger adult students responded positively at a rate of 49% for the first question and 64% for the second, indicating that notions of possible selves had become more formed or clearly defined. Subsequent questions (see Appendix D: Questionnaire)
addressed ideas about notions of the daily tasks and values of the possible selves and how much those notions had become more informed over the course of study. The results also indicated a significant increase in the formation of possible selves. Significantly, the questionnaire results also indicate that the younger adult students’ exposure to models of possible selves and the perceived value of college education in preparing for a possible self have increased. This was a relationship that Oyserman, Terry, and Bybee (2002) also reported: more fully formed possible selves leads to viewing school more positively.

In sum, notions of possible selves have become more fully formed, students now know more people who can serve as models for possible selves, and college is more likely to be seen as a path to a possible self: This can be seen as reflecting Horneffer-Ginter, who reported that desire for change is the result of contact with a reality: people will not make changes to achieve or avoid a possible self if that possible self is seen as impossible or unrealistic (2008). Contact with a model of a possible self makes that possible self tangible, real, and more likely than if it simply existed in their imaginations.

The interview results reinforce the questionnaire results and suggest a relationship between more fully formed possible selves, exposure to models of possible selves, and the perception that college has value in achieving a possible self:

- Ashley described how a new possible self had been added to her already well-established possible self as a player agent: a possible self as a politician. Her ideas surrounding this new possible self were informed by interviewing an MPP and by reading his book, both done as part of her course with me. She also said
she had recently added other possible selves (as a teacher or a counselor), less fully developed, but also discussed in terms of values (helping others), as her possible self as a politician is described (being honest, making a difference, helping others).

- Shaynne, when she began her current program of study, had recently rejected the possible selves of early childhood educator and veterinary assistant or technician but had only a vague notion of a possible self somehow involved in business. Over the course of her first two semesters, and influenced by an informational interview, she had refined her possible self to be not a marketer but probably a human resources professional. A very shadowy possible self as a medical office administrator was described as being still in its infancy. One informal informational interview had been done with a medical office administrator that Shaynne suspected did not much like her job, and Shaynne had not found the experience useful for that reason.

- Dexter did not report having a possible self before starting his current program of study; he chose business because he had done well in his business courses in high school. He leaned towards marketing but did not know any marketers who could serve as models for his possible self. His informational interview with a small business owner who is, essentially, in sales and marketing, helped Dexter decide that marketing, in fact, was the right field for him to study. However, he has other ideas for possible selves, such as bakery owner and advertising
professional, for which he does not have models and has not conducted informational interviews. These possible selves are extremely vague and Dexter did not indicate that he was taking any steps to put himself on a path to those possible selves (such as changing his program of study).

- Tessa described her possible self almost exclusively in terms of what she did not want—to not struggle financially—and she began her program of study because she knew that without a post-secondary education, she would remain in low-paying jobs. The informational interview she conducted with the marketing manager for a local sports team gave her a start in describing her possible self in terms of what she does want or what her possible self will do: continually pursue education in order to progress in her career. The informational interview not only impacted the value she placed on her current program of study, it introduced to her the idea that her possible self will pursue even more diplomas and degrees after her current program of study is complete, an idea that further refines her notions of her possible self.

- Jacopousie reported having a strong sense of possible self before beginning the program, and he had already been using informational interviews as a tool to help him define who he wanted to be and how he would get there. He reported doing many mini-informational interviews with teachers, students, and professionals in the community over the course of his studies at the college, all
of which influenced and further refined his possible self and his path to his possible self.

- Nyla Rose used informational interviews effectively to help her more clearly define her possible self, which was almost exclusively defined in terms of values and was clearly, for her, not static but ever-changing, and she was comfortable with that. Her belief that her current program of study has value had increased as well, but she attributed that to the exposure she had to her classmates and their varied life experiences.

- Verissimo, when he began his program of study, would have described his possible self almost exclusively in terms of what he did not want (to be in Brazil, to study at university). His informational interview gave him a model for a possible self that, when he describes the experience, almost sounds like a relief to him. While his primary motivation for persisting with his program of study will probably be to retain his student visa, an informational interview with an upper-year did impact his attitudes towards college and made him think it would be more challenging and character-building than he had previously thought (both of which are qualities that Verissimo clearly values).

- Jacqueline’s informational interview with a marketing communications professional impacted her possible self in that it did not add the possibility of being a marketing professional to her roster of possible selves. In fact, Jacqueline seems to have a fairly solid sense of her possible self working in
home improvement or construction. She reported that the informational interview’s value, for her, was that it improved her interviewing skills, which she thought she would use in the future.

The possible selves described by the younger adult interview participants ranged from being very detailed to vague, but most were vague and still forming. Despite this, what they reported supported the questionnaire results: notions of possible selves were becoming more fully formed and informational interviews and contact with models for the potential possible selves were valuable.

Reflecting back on the literature reviewed earlier, these results are supported by the findings of Rossiter (2004), who found that educational relationships (such as those between mentor and mentee) impact possible selves; Ibarra (1999), who found that professionals undergoing or anticipating career change look to mentors to help them form new possible selves; and Cameron (1999), who found that possible selves do not exist in a vacuum, but in a social context, and need points of comparison (i.e. models) in order for them to form and develop.

Interestingly, it seems that the more emphasis the student placed on values (i.e. describing their possible selves in terms of what values their possible selves will espouse), the more clearly defined or envisioned the possible self is. For example, Nyla Rose and Jacopousie often talked about their possible selves’ values (such as working to facilitate ethical manufacturing and buying practices or working to serve a community) and their possible selves were very clear to them. The more Shaynne described how
important it was for her possible self to be of service to people, the more she seemed to know what she wanted. In fact, it was in deciding that a possible self as a marketing professional would not serve people, but might actually exploit people, that she was able to decide that a marketing professional was not a good possible self for her. Dexter, who had perhaps, the most vaguely described possible self, did not discuss values at all when describing his possible self.

Choice and Control over One’s Fate

Many of the students I surveyed and interviewed were not comfortable with goal-setting or making choices. The students who said they were not comfortable with goal setting explained that goals felt static and they could not be changed. Also, they felt that goals, if not achieved, would make them feel like failures. One student, Tessa, said explicitly that there were too many options and that prevented her from making goals. Conversely, the few students who said they were comfortable with goals said goals could easily be changed or adapted to suit other changes in their lives and articulating goals motivated them to follow through and did not make them feel as though they were setting themselves up for failure. Interestingly, the students most comfortable with goal setting, such as Ashley and Jacopousie, had more detailed, concrete descriptions of their possible selves than did those who had vague or shifting descriptions of their possible selves (such as Tessa and Shaynne).

When considering the students’ relationship to goal setting, choice emerges as something that must be considered. While the questionnaire results stated that students
did feel they had been the ones to choose their school and their program of study, when pressed in the interviews, many of the participants revealed that they were attending their current program of study was not fully their own choice. For example, Dexter did not truly choose to attend post-secondary education but only did so to take advantage of an education savings plan. While Tessa had made her own choices, she admitted she had made choices with almost no information and for less-than-ideal reasons (such as choosing college because she thought it would be easier). (The two older adult students were in school not by choice; one was in school because he had lost his job and the other because he had been injured at work.)

Not only, then, were possible selves vague, but so was choice-making. This makes sense. If there is no strong sense of a possible self, why feel compelled to make your own choices or to make choices that are informed? If you do not know what your goals are or you choose to avoid having goals, what choices are there to make? If you fail, and you did not make the choices that put you in the failing situation (or made the choices randomly or on a whim), could that be through any fault of your own? Or could someone or something else be blamed? Meek (2007) found that there is a relationship between goal-setting (a form of choice-making) and possible selves, and Leondari, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou (1998) similarly found a relationship between the impact of hard work on success (as opposed to luck) and possible selves. This research, and the findings of the two studies cited above, finds a link between goal-setting, choice-making and possible selves.
A strong possible self, goal-setting, and choice all play a role in the interview with Ashley. Despite having a clearly defined, well-informed sense of her possible self (an NHL player agent), she drifted into a choice (studying office administration) that did not further the goals that would get her closer to being a player agent (studying marketing and law). Shaynne’s story reinforces this pattern, despite her lack of a possible self as clearly defined as Ashley’s. She chose a program of study (early childhood education) without a sense of her possible self as an early childhood educator. That decision is tinged with regret.

Those with strong possible selves use goal-setting effectively and, in turn, make choices and have control over their fates. Those with weak possible selves do not use goal-setting and, in turn, do not make choices or exercise control over their fates.

A question posed above about failure and responsibility is related to the next theme: control over one’s fate and the ability to determine the outcome of attempts to become a desired possible self.

The literature posits that younger adult students and older adult students perceive control differently. Rossiter (2007a) stated that younger adult students, while desiring things that can be influenced through hard work and determination, such as a good career, a family, and a stable home life (although it is easily argued that luck has much to do with these things as well), believe that these things will be the result of good fortune, not as a result of their own actions. Older adult students’ goals are very different and their ability to achieve them is perceived differently as well. Their desired possible selves are
healthy and happy, things that, unfortunately, are often out of our hands (although it could equally easily be argued that we can take action to affect our health and happiness). Leondari, Syngollitou, and Kiosseoglou (1998) stated, more convincingly and simply, perhaps, that younger adults place more value on outcomes that are the result of hard work rather than luck. Rossiter’s claim intersects with the assertion that younger adults do not believe hard work will have as much of an impact as luck. In sum, younger adults place value on outcomes that are the result of hard work yet still resist the belief that hard work will bring results for them.

It is interesting to note that Smitty’s experience echoes the findings of Frazier, et al, (2000) that found while possible selves may shift focus as people age, the possible selves, a their core, remain the same. Despite taking off several years to pursue a different career, Smitty eventually returned to school to complete the creation of his original possible self—that of a graphic designer—and one with which he was very happy.

The above, like so many of the results of this research, brings the discussion back to choice. Those younger adult students who expressed discomfort with goal setting, finding it limiting, seem very comfortable—to the point of being almost unaware of it—with the choices other people are making for them or that they are making without determination. They are not believing in their own choices—which is hard work—and letting luck—other people making choices for them—call the shots. This attitude was reflected in comments like the ones made by Dexter and Jacqueline about how little they knew about the program they were enrolling in (even such basic information as program length). If
other people make choices for you, then how can you be held responsible for the outcomes of those choices? Not surprisingly, the disconnect between choice and taking responsibility is more apparent with the younger adult students, as responsibility is a common marker for adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Clark, 2007).

**Limitations of the Research**

As was explained in the proposal for this study, the goal was to further understand the students’ possible selves and the impact an assigned informational interview has on them.

The study was limited to first-year business and business administration students. It did not make observations of or recommendations for students in other years or programs of study. However, the questions and answers were not specific to the study of business nor were they specific to first-year students, as inclusion of students who had been in other programs of study shows.

The results of this study offer a further understanding of a small aspect of the impact of one type of assignment done by first-year students; it is not a complete picture of the development of students’ possible selves.

**Implications for Practice**

Earlier, I stated that I had two anticipated outcomes from this research, the first of which was to further understand my practice so I could improve it. I believe I have done that.
When students begin a program of study, it cannot be assumed that because they have chosen a program of study, they know why they have chosen it, or what kind of possible self they are developing into because they have chosen it. Choosing a program of study is often done with very little (or any) information about the program, what kind of future it prepares students for, and whether or not that future matches the students’ desires and values.

Moreover, possible selves and the goals that help people achieve their possible selves are not static; therefore, the reasons for being in a program of study (or choosing to discontinue a program of study) can change as well. There should be no shame in not persisting with a program of study. Indeed, changing goals and changing the way in which one persists with the achievement of a possible self should be encouraged and facilitated. One disadvantage, from the institutional perspective, of this approach is, of course, that students discontinue with one program (your program) and begin a different program (the competition’s); however, it is also just as likely that, if other programs were to approach student development in this way, your program could gain students who have left other programs. But more dangerous (for students, colleges, and society as a whole) is that students are not given the opportunities and tools to develop strong possible selves and so drift in their program of study, eventually discontinuing it or not pursuing meaningful employment in their area of study, and they feel college was a waste and they never return to it and encourage the next generation of students, perhaps their own children, to not pursue a college education.
It was once suggested to me that this assignment would be more appropriate for a graduating class. My instincts told me, and this study has borne this out, that to begin learning about a possible self at the end of a program is far too late. (The horror of discovering you were in the wrong program for all these years, just weeks before graduation!)

As stated in Chapter 4, being an effective teacher means many things, including facilitating student interaction with their future colleagues and assisting students selecting and persevering with a program of study. Informational interviews can help do both. The interviews allow students to interact with possible, if not probable, future colleagues, and the informational interviews help the students form their possible selves, helping to illuminate a path to a possible self, which includes a program of study.

There are opportunities in courses—throughout a program—to help students explore, develop, and refine their possible selves, and the informational interview assignment is one way. Communications courses are often light on content—often focusing more on skill development than on learning material—and so there is plenty of room to introduce material that allows students to learn about themselves and their path to their possible selves—while simultaneously improving communications skills. Content does not need to be sacrificed for make room for the development of possible selves, and entirely new preparatory programs do not need to be developed; the opportunity is already there, waiting to be taken.
What this research has taught me is that while I am teaching my students the “how” of communications, I can facilitate their deeper understanding of their possible selves and provide them opportunities to interact with models for their possible selves. And if they can imagine who they want to be, perhaps they can better know how to get to be that person, perhaps they can be better informed when making the choices to get there. I believed, instinctively, that doing informational interviews would help my students better understand themselves and want they wanted for themselves. I feel more confident now that is so.

If clarifying values plays a role in helping students clarify and describe their possible selves, as discussed above, this is an area to explore in my teaching. I could offer to my students not just a chance to explore the mechanics of performing a job or pursuing a career, but a chance to explore what implications this job or career would have on their community, their world, themselves, and their families. How does that make them feel? Is it something they could live with? A discussion of values could be encouraged with their informational interview subjects.

I also learned things, aside from notions about possible selves and the usefulness of conducting informational interviews, that I take to my practice now. At the end of each interview, I would ask the participants if they had anything to add, if I had not asked a question that they were expecting, or if there was anything important, even if it was off topic, they felt needed to be said. When asked this, Dexter paused thoughtfully and said, “What have you learned so far?” I said, “Well, so far, this has been the most interesting,
stimulating thing I have done at any job, ever, in my lifetime.” Dexter replied, very wisely, I thought, “Maybe there’s a lesson for you in that.”

Doing this research coincided with the end of my first three years of teaching. It was the first time I felt I could stop paying so much attention to the material and start noticing my students. Dexter pointed out to me, before I even knew it myself, that what matters to me is interacting with students and exploring with them in a meaningful, honest way, what their hopes and fears are, what baggage they bring with them to school, what matters to them, and more. In between all that, we can review the comma and revisit memo formats. My focus with my students, much more than it was before, is to ask honest, open-ended questions, and let them talk, or write, or go out and find the answers. I believe most (if not all) of their learning comes from this. (Then I make them write a memo so I have something that resembles business communication to mark.)

**Implications for Further Research**

The second anticipated outcome of my research was to provide useful data for others who use possible selves as a lens to understand their teaching or to add to the body of knowledge regarding possible selves. I hope I have done that, and I see some possible directions I could take to further the work I have started.

Several areas that this study’s findings touched upon would bear further research, including the amount of knowledge (or lack of knowledge) students have about a program of study and the future it is preparing its students for; other opportunities for exploration and development of possible selves; student, faculty, administration, and
college staff attitudes towards discontinuing a program of study and ways of measuring student success beyond simply whether or not a student persists with an original program of study.

I would like to conduct further research in my classrooms about possible selves and other tools the students and I could use to explore them. It would be interesting to explore the possibility that we can have possible selves without being aware of them—or can we? My literature search did not yield anything that touched upon this idea. Perhaps some of my students’ notions of their possible selves are so vague and undetermined that they do not even have any? Perhaps their possible selves have simply not been articulated.

While it was not surprising to learn that students had chosen their program of study with very little information and for reasons that seemed insufficient (because of high grades in that subject area in high school, because a boyfriend or girlfriend was attending the same college, without knowing anyone who worked in that field or being familiar with the day-to-day realities of that profession, for example), it was surprising to learn the extent of the lack of information and how it persisted, even after several months’ exposure to the program. Two participants reported being unclear about the length of their program (two or three years), which is fairly basic and important information. How can students be successful in a program of study when they are not really sure why they chose it, where it is leading, and what it entails to complete it? Faculty, administration, and staff are, I believe, unaware of the extent of this lack of
information. A more thorough understanding of this aspect of our students would help us better serve them. I would suggest that, at my college at least, this would be an area of interest for our Student Success Facilitators, Counseling Services, and our Registrar.

Perhaps it would help students if they were given other opportunities and tools for developing their possible selves, not just one informational interview assignment. One assignment (which may be skipped or not done properly) in one course (from which a student may, for different reasons, be exempt) is not much. What about those students who miss that opportunity? Moreover, a possible self is an ever-changing, ever-evolving thing; it is not something that can be checked off a list and declared “done.” As students progress in their program of study and their knowledge of their subject area becomes more refined, so too should their possible selves. There are other courses that would be well suited to assigning informational interviews, such as courses in career preparation, leadership and professionalism, and more. It would be interesting to know if conducting informational interviews at various stages of study and in the context of different kinds of courses allowed students to even further develop their possible selves.

Learning more about one’s possible self, of course, may lead students to choose to discontinue their current program of study, begin a new program of study, or leave college altogether. Currently, if a student does not complete a program of study within a certain time frame, that student is seen as unsuccessful by the college. What is not measured is why the student made a change and whether or not the change was, in fact, a better choice for the student than persisting with the current program of study. As a
result, the change (for the better) is viewed as a failure, and the student internalizes this failure (as revealed in the interviews with students who had discontinued previous programs of study). In order to avoid feeling like a failure, a student may persist with a program of study that does serve a possible self. This too can lead to negative feelings, a sense of wasted time, and greater student debt (as reported by a participant who had, with great regret, persisted with a program of study she knew did not serve her possible self). Success, currently, is viewed from the college’s point of view (retention of students) rather than from the student’s point of view (attainment of a possible self). This system is at odds with the college system’s assertion that it is “student-centred.” Further study is needed to understand how a shift in focus can be made. Again, this research would be of interest to anyone interested in student retention and perseverance: counselors, registrars, student success facilitators, administrators, and so on.

**Conclusion**

The questionnaire results (see Table 4.2) indicated that since beginning college, students’ knowledge of how they imagined themselves in the future had increased and that they now knew, as compared to before beginning their current program of study, somebody who is engaged in the work they see their possible selves doing. There was no mention of the impact of the informational interviews in the questionnaires. However, the interviews with students did discuss the impact of the informational interviews.
The questionnaire results indicated that notions of possible selves had improved and contact with models for potential possible selves had increased. Supporting these results, interview participants reported that the informational interviews did help with the formation of their possible selves. Sometimes, the informational interviews gave students a better idea of how they wanted to be in the future; sometimes, the interviews gave students a better idea of how they did not want to be in the future. Whether giving the student something positive to strive towards or something negative to avoid, the informational interviews did provide models for comparison. As discussed by Fletcher (2007) and Rossiter (2007b), possible selves can be comprised of both hopes (to achieve) and fears (to avoid).

In sum, younger adult students with strong possible selves make choices in the form of goal-setting. Those with weak possible selves side-step issues of choice by avoiding goal-setting and letting others make choices for them.

This study has implications for practice, and there is room in existing programs of study, specifically in communications courses, to give students opportunities and tools to develop their possible selves. This study also has implications for further research, and there opportunities to learn about how much students actually know about their programs of study, other ways in which students can develop their possible selves, and new directions for college to take in measuring student success.
References


Appendix A
Letter of Consent (Questionnaires)

I agree to participate in the study entitled “Possible Selves, Informational Interviews, and Younger Adult Learners”, conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

The administrator of the questionnaire has explained the purpose of the study to my satisfaction.

I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that, upon request, I may have a full description of the results of the study after its completion.

I understand that the researchers may publish the findings of the study.

I understand that I may be asked to participate in an interview at a later date as a result of my participation in this questionnaire. Participation in an interview is voluntary and the selection process will protect my identity until I choose to reveal it to Christina Decarie.

I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences.

I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Christina Decarie, at 613-544-5400 ext. 1148, if I have any questions about this project, and I am aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca).

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Student’s name (Please Print): ________________________________

Signature of Student: ________________________________

Date ____________ Telephone number: ________________

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to the administrator of this questionnaire. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix B
Letter of Consent (Interviews)

I agree to participate in the interview portion of the study entitled “Possible Selves, Informational Interviews, and Younger Adult Learners”, conducted through the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information and the purpose of the study is explained to my satisfaction.

I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that, upon request, I may have a full description of the results of the study after its completion.

I understand that the researchers may publish the findings of the study.

I understand that participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without negative consequences. I can withdraw any portion or all of my data.

Confidentiality will be protected by the use of pseudonyms, the protection of data using password protection (for electronic files) and locked filing cabinets and offices (for hard copies of data).

I understand the interview will take approximately 45 minutes but no more than 45 minutes.

I am aware that I can contact the researcher, Christina Decarie, at 613-544-5400 ext. 1148, if I have any questions about this project, and I am aware that for questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at erek@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 (chair.greb@queensu.ca), or Christina Decarie’s academic advisor, Dr. Susan Wilcox, at 613-533-6000 ext. 77091 (wilcoxs@queensu.ca).

I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THIS CONSENT FORM AND I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

Student’s name (Please Print): ____________________________________________
Signature of Student: ________________________________________________

Date _______________    Telephone number: ____________________________

I AGREE TO ALLOW THE INTERVIEW WITH ME TO BE RECORDED (AUDIO ONLY). I UNDERSTAND THAT CHRISTINA DECARIE WILL BE THE ONLY PERSON TO HEAR THIS RECORDING, THE RECORDING WILL BE STORED IN A LOCKED OFFICE AND BE PASSWORD PROTECTED. EVENTUALLY, THE RECORDING WILL BE DESTROYED.

Signature of Student: ________________________________________________

Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return to Christina Decarie. Retain the second copy for your records.
Appendix C

Letter of Information (Interviews)

Title: Possible Selves, Informational Interviews, and Younger Adult Learners

I am Christina Decarie (Instructor, Communications), your instructor for [course name], the course about which this research is focused, and I am writing to request your participation in research aimed at young adult students in post-secondary education. It is the Informational Interviews from [course name] that are of particular interest to this research. The ultimate goal of my research is to learn about young adult students’ ideas about their possible (future) selves.

I am also a graduate student in the Faculty of Education, Queen’s University. This research has been cleared by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board and also by [the College].

In this part of the research, I wish to document the views of young adult students in the business program at [the College] about their ideas about their possible (future) selves and the influence that conducting informational interviews may or may not have had on these ideas. To do this, I am planning to conduct several interviews. I am inviting you to participate in one of these interviews. These interviews will be conducted by me.

The interview will be conducted at a time that is convenient to you. The location will be neutral—it will not be a classroom or my office and if you do not feel comfortable in the location, you can ask for a different location. The interview will be for approximately 45 minutes and will be audio recorded (digitally). The recorded interview will be transcribed, and then the recording will be destroyed. None of the stored data (electronic or hard copies) will contain your name. Data will be secured in a locked office or password-protected file and confidentiality will be protected to the fullest extent possible.

I do not foresee significant risks in your participation in this research. There are, however, risks related to the power imbalance between teacher/student and emotional issues (as you may be asked personal questions).

Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do volunteer to participate, you may or may not be chosen to participate as the final selection of participants is random. Therefore, if you choose not to participate, I will not know if you have declined or if you accepted but are not chosen. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable, and you are assured that no information collected will be reported to anyone who is in authority over you. You are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of all or part of your data.

Understanding students’ notions of their possible selves will help educators more fully understand the students, their needs, and so on, allowing for better-informed course development and planning and interaction with students.
This research may result in publications of various types, including journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, books, and instructional materials for schools. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, neither will your name be known to anyone tabulating or analyzing the data, nor will these appear in any publication created as a result of this research. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data are made available to other researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent possible, but if your identity is disclosed, you will be informed.

If you have any questions about this project, please contact Christina Decarie at [phone number] or [email address]. For questions, concerns or complaints about the research ethics of this study, contact the Education Research Ethics Board at ereb@queensu.ca or the chair of the General Research Ethics Board, Dr. Joan Stevenson, at 613-533-6081 or chair.greb@queensu.ca, or Christina Decarie’s academic advisor, Dr. Susan Wilcox, at 613-533-6000 ext. 77091 or wilcoxs@queensu.ca.

Sincerely,

Christina Decarie
Instructor, [the College]
Appendix D

Questionnaire

CODE: ________________________
     (to be provided)

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire.

Your instructor will not have access to the completed questionnaires until after final grades for this course have been submitted to the college. Then, your instructor will be the only one to see the completed questionnaires and your name (as linked to the code on this questionnaire), will only be revealed to your instructor if you circle “Yes” on the final question, on page 4.

Background Information
Please circle the most appropriate answer.

1. What is your gender?
   Female    Male

2. What is your age range?
   16 – 25     26+

3. Is the [this college’s] Business program the only post-secondary program you have been enrolled in?
   Yes       No

4. If no, what other post-secondary program(s) of study have you been enrolled in? Please indicate whether or not you completed the program.
5. If you did not complete a program of study or chose to not work in that field of study, please explain why.

Please circle the most appropriate choice in the scale provided.

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<th></th>
<th>1 Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2 Agree</th>
<th>3 Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>4 Disagree</th>
<th>5 Strongly Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>It was my choice to attend post-secondary education.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>It was my choice to attend [this college].</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>It was my choice to study business.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>I think post-secondary education has value.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>I think studying at [this college] has value.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>I think studying business has value.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>I want to continue studying at [this college] in the immediate future.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>I want to continue studying business in the immediate future.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>I want to continue studying business at St Lawrence College in the immediate future.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>I plan to finish this program of study at this school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I plan to finish this program of study at a different school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>I plan to discontinue this program of study and enrol in a different program of study here or at a different school.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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Please circle the most appropriate choice in the scale provided.

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<th>1: Strongly Agree</th>
<th>2: Agree</th>
<th>3: Neither Agree nor Disagree</th>
<th>4: Disagree</th>
<th>5: Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Before enrolling in [this college’s] Business program

18. I knew what kind of job or profession I would want when I finished.  
   I feel the same way now.  
   1 2 3 4 5

19. I could imagine what the daily tasks of that job or profession would be.  
   I feel the same way now.  
   1 2 3 4 5

20. I could imagine what kind of a person I would be when engaged in that job or profession (such as values, attitudes, actions towards myself and other people, etc.).  
   I feel the same way now.  
   1 2 3 4 5

21. I knew at least one person already engaged in that job or profession.  
   I feel the same way now.  
   1 2 3 4 5

22. I felt a college diploma program would prepare me for that job or profession.  
   I feel the same way now.  
   1 2 3 4 5
Please circle the most appropriate choice in the scale provided.

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<td>Agree</td>
<td>Neither Agree nor Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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</table>

23. I want as many options or choices as possible for my career.  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

24. When it comes to my career, I want to know exactly what I will be doing and when.  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

25. To have a successful career, it is important to have a plan or goals.  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

26. Completing a post-secondary education will give me more career choices.  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

27. I plan to complete my current program of study within two to five years.  
   [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5

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Take a few moments to imagine yourself in five or ten years. What will you do for a living? For fun? What will your daily life look like? What values or ideals will you have? What problems will you have? Describe this person and this life that you imagine below.
Comments

Please feel free to comment further on any of the above questions or comment on anything that you feel you should have been asked about, but weren’t. Use the back of this page if you need to.

Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion with your instructor, about the topics in this questionnaire, in the last week of classes, during class time? If you circle “Yes”, your identity will be revealed to the instructor.

Yes  No
Appendix E

Questionnaire Comments by Younger Adults

Take a few moments to imagine yourself in five or ten years. What will you do for a living? For fun? What will your daily life look like? What values or ideals will you have? What problems will you have? Describe this person and this life that you imagine below.

I will be married with kids in ten years, have a job making 80-plus thousand dollars a year. Prepare myself for owning a cottage. Play pick up hockey. A job that I would love is an analyst for sports.

I hope to be working for the government in some type of job. I want to be happy. I would like to be living in Vancouver, working for a business sustainable initiatives in mind. I want to be promoting music, playing music, living in my own place. Possibly having a girlfriend. I will be socially and environmentally aware. I could be facing economic challenges and dealing with a family loss.

Within the next decade, I hope to have a job in an international industry that will allow me to travel and meet an array of people. For fun, I will spend time with friends and family, travel socially and give back to the community by volunteering at a seniors home, which is something I have always enjoyed doing. Preferably, I would like a 9–5 (ish) job (except business trips, of course) so that I can come home and be with my family. I think that I will be the type of person who will often feel the need to work late, and that could be a strin on life at home. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “Maybe ask about a dream job and why you aren’t pursuing it?”]
I will live in a warm beach community. I will be an entrepreneur and own my own company. My values and ideas will be to be the best person I can be, always stay positive, and respect everyone. I will surf, skateboard, and snowboard as frequently as possible.

For a living, I plan on working in the even co-ordination field. For fun I plan on keeping in touch with my friends, and getting together every few weeks. My daily life with consist of work, work, making food, and back to work.

I want a solid career in some sort of accounting. I want to be completing/working towards my CGA [Charted General Accountant designation]. I want a family started or at least the possibility to be there.

Working in HR [Human Resources]. I will horseback ride for fun. Probably be married and start a family. I will be a happy person.

Owner and buyer for retail store. Travel for fun. Run the store and look for new items day-to-day. Help local artists just livin’ the dream.

I’m not exactly sure. I want to work for a well-known business. Have a good salary. Not sure what I will do for a living. Nor can I imagine it. The reason for not knowing what I will be doing in 5 or 10 years is because I change my mind a lot. Therefore things will most likely change a lot.

I see myself doing one of two jobs. After I graduate here I plan on getting work experience in a number of different areas. Back to one of the two jobs, either a paramedic or a correctional officer. For fun I plan on participating in adrenaline rush-type activities. Plan on having a new truck, a beautiful wife, and maybe even a few children.
In five to ten years I hope to be finished my bachelor’s degree and have a stable job with a good income. I hope to have a job in HR [Human Resources] or health and safety. I want to be married or engaged and own a home.

I hope to run a very successful bar in the mountains somewhere. I will uphold all my ethical views and beliefs that I learned at [this college].

I imagine myself as a successful company own or a CEO or CFO of another. I am still single and my career is the most important thing in my life. I spend my free time reading books and my disposable income goes to fund other students who want to work and study in countries outside of their own.

In five to ten years I would to be graduated from [this college] with a degree in Business Administration. I am not sure what I want to do for a career right now, but I would like to do something in accounting. I can’t predict the future; I just want to go through life day-to-day and hope that one day I will be doing something I love.

I will be an accountant. My life will be my successes in my career. I don’t foresee a family, although it might just be difficult because it’s difficult to foresee. My biggest problems will be of a social nature.

In five to ten years I will have a career in a business field, living in Canada. I will go to work daily and when I come home I will have a small house to work on as a hobby. I will value friendship, vacation time, good work ethics and strong finances. I will want to travel, and may consider travelling to another country to work in the next 15 years (from today).
Have a career as a business professional. Starting a family. Married. I want to be working in the investigative forensic accounting field either with a private company or with a government agency. For fun I enjoy sports and anything to do with technology and construction. I hope I won’t have too many problems but I know if I have problems then they will never be financial. I hope my daily life will be working and then fixing up my home and caring for my family.

I imagine I will be working for a small company and have children, a house and have flexible hours. I hope to be hanging out with friends and family because that is important to me. I think I will be having a hard time financially because I want to have kids and a house soon, but will still have student debt.

My daily life will probably consist of a 9–5-type job throughout the week with weekends off for spending time with family.

Middle to high class. Be doing what I want, something along the lines of event management or marketing. My job won’t seem like a job because I like and it’s what I choose. For fun I’ll go get drinks with friends, movies, travel, have fun with my family. Problems will be finding my perfect job. I’ll be the same person; I don’t see why I’d change. Fun, kind, generous person. Daily life, work, coffee, kids if I have any, husband, friends.

Hopefully I will be happy, hopefully I will be married with children and be happy. Hopefully I will have a job that will make me happy. As long as I am secure financially, and I am extremely happy, then that is all I can ask. I really don’t care what job I have as long I enjoy it and it pays well! [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “The mental health of the student, the effect of school and the home life meshing together.”]
Within ten years I hope to have a job in the business field—preferably a small or independent one where I will have some freedom and autonomy on my job. I love travel and travel a lot so I plan to continue that (when I can) in my future lifestyle. I hope to have a family eventually, although not for awhile. Problems I foresee in my future are my ability to commit to a career. I have a hard time making decisions. Finding employment could be a challenge, although I would like to work in an alternative food or energy source industry, which is rapidly expanding.

I think I will be working as a human resources manager, or at least I’d like to be. I also ant to do hairstyling and take it here at St. Lawrence. So maybe I’ll just be doing that for fun. I believe that working and establishing my career would be very, very important to me. I don’t believe I’d have many problems except possibly relationship problems and perhaps having to move away from my home town for a good job or a better job than I currently have. That would, of course, be hard. Although, I still think I’d be in touch with friends and have equal balance of my social life and work.

I imagine that I will have started my career at this point and hopefully been working for two years. Shortly after I would like to start thinking of my future with a family. I feel I will be a mature, responsible adult. My daily life will be stable and hopefully routine. I will value beginning a family. Problems will probably be debt.

Strong family values. Job in business—small- to medium-size firm. Would like to make over $50,000. Would have a busy life.

For living I have no clue. For fun, sports and having an active lifestyle (biking, rollerblading).
I am unable to answer. Don’t know what I want to do or how I want my life to be like.

I think I will have a work and have a good time with my friends. My life will be very busy, but that is ok for me. Problems for me I think is how to have good time on my work.

If I stay with the program I’m in then in five years I should be done. I will most likely still be living at home but looking for my own place. I hope to be the same person I am today but anything could happen in five years. I’m not sure what job I will have which can be seen as a problem but I’m not worried about that. Maybe I just don’t care.

I think I will work for a bank in five or ten years. Daily life will be really boring. Have to work over 8 eight hours a day. Not a lot of vacation. I will have some funds for my families, knowing more people from my work. However, may not be able to take of my families (parents, relatives). Not a lot of time to go out for a trip or entertainment. Maybe in five years I will have a lot of experience towards banking system or not. Maybe promoted in ten years. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “I think the question, ‘How much skills/knowledge do you think you can bring to your future career from studying in [this college]?’ should be included in the survey.”]

I don’t have plan for my future career. The program I study is just should to learn. I should graduate from the college and get a diploma. But I don’t find my future purpose. I don’t know what I can do.

Hopefully I will be a police officer.
I will hopefully be doing consulting for real estate/contracting companies. I will hopefully not be living in Canada anymore and be based somewhere a bit warmer. I want to work for an international company so that I’m guaranteed to be travelling. I will be married with children, with a mix of Canadian and Arab, Christian values enforced in the house. My family will travel a lot and some of these trips will be to serve people who are less fortunate than us and try to help them. Living abroad if the language or culture is drastically different would be a challenge—same with so much time away from the family. I do hope to be an “upper-class” wage earner.

Family. Work. I want to have a family and kids some day. So I will have to look after them. Fun will be going places and spending time with friends and family. Work will be an important part of my life that I would like to have a five-day work week and weekends off. I know that doing what I want will make me happy.

Not sure of what major I’ll be doing. Hopefully not a desk job. Good career, good money. I would really enjoy my job and it will be fantastic!

Hopefully a good job in a management position. Travel, hang out with friends. Mon–Fri job, family. Hopefully this person I hope to be is overall successful: good job, family, house, enjoying extras.

The only thing I can imagine is working in the professional sports industry. All other aspects of my life I will day-by-day.

I want to start a non-profit organization for volunteers to travel around the world. It will be geared towards the younger generation.
Right now, I have no idea. I know I want to be an accountant but that’s it. I’m currently suffering from some mental health problems that make it practically impossible to think more than a day into the future.

In five years, I should have just graduated. I hope to be working—making good money—doing something I enjoy. I know I do not want a professional that requires a uniform and I want to pay off my debts sooner rather than later. Family will be considered only when I am financially stable. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “At the beginning of the year, I really thought I knew what it is I wanted to do. But after attending school and going to class—learning about the business material and my options—my mind was changed. I thought for sure I would going into accounting, but after attending the ACCT [accounting] class, I realized I did not want a career in accounting. I still am unsure of exactly what my plan is, so I am continuing the general business [program] and hopefully the BBA [Bachelor of Business Administration] program.]

I plan to have a solid job with a solid company, golf regularly and go on hunting trips. I want to get married. My girlfriend and I have been together for four years. Problems will be choosing what part of Canada we want to live in.

My future plan as of right now is to be a human resource manager. I will enjoy my daily life in this profession that is ever-changing and fast-paced. I hope to have similar values to the ones I have now, strong family values and friends. A problem I have is finding a career in my field due to the current recession. For fun I will be enjoying my time with friends and family and remaining physically active.

I will be an accountant living in a small city, perhaps travelling a short distance to work daily. I want to work Monday to Friday and have quality evening time and weekend time
with my family (that I may have by then). I would continue living an active and healthy life. I would probably be considering getting my CGA [Chartered General Accountant] in the next five to ten years. Problems may occur in my life isn’t exciting enough...outside of my career.

I will hopefully own a store and have a tax business on the side. For fun I’ll be with family and go on vacation and do crafts. My daily life will be full and chaotic. Hopefully same ideas, strong ones, “do unto others” and what no. Problems will be finding time.

In ten years I will be settled into a career as an event planner for a large stadium in Montreal/Toronto/Ottawa. My daily life will involve going to my job and putting together presentations to make large events come to my stadium. My values will revolve around my job but also the possibility of a family. The problems that I will have are having a busy schedule, trying to juggle a job, a social life and at least a partner. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “I think this is a very interesting study. When I graduated from high school I planning on becoming an art major and was accepted to Algonquin College. I think that many of the business students will have interesting stories.”]

I hope to be successful at whatever it is I do. I hope to either work for a large company in the field of marketing or own my own business. For fun, I plan on doing pretty much the same as now—hockey, work out, run, and travel (just more). I’m sure my daily life will be busy, but enjoyable. I doubt my values will change very much, so it will still be family & friends. Everyone wishes there weren’t any problems in life, but we all face them. Who knows what they will be? Money, relationships, or career maybe. I plan on being content, creative, and caring, enjoy life every day, and not take things for granted.
I will be working in a marketing firm for my career. My daily life will look like going to work and taking care of my family.

In five to ten years I see myself as a successful CA [Chartered Accountant] raising a family living in a decent house. For fun I will be reading outside on my hammock listening to the birds sing. My values will be my education and the knowledge it has brought me in these years that I am living now. My problems will be making sure that student loans are paid off before I want to send my children on to college.

I will be director of marketing and player relations with the MLB. I will have a financial stability living with friends, downtown NYC. I will have a sense of happiness that I have finally gotten my dream job.

In five to ten years I plan to be a successful accountat. My life will hopefully consist of a significant other and/or a family. My daily life will consist of work, family, and leisure time. I will value comfort, career, success and happiness. I hope to have no problems but that’s not going to happen. Hopefully I will have the strength to overcome these problems.

Band manager for my reserve or sit on council. You oversee all decisions made about community members and the community itself.

Hopefully working in the accounting field and if not some kind of business area. I don’t want my daily life to be too stressful.

I will be an esthetician full time, hopefully managing or owning something of my own. A daily life would look like having what I wanted out of life, the place I wanted to be, and sharing it with the man I want to marry. This life will be enjoyed because I am doing
what I love and working with people that I love. Sure, I will have problems along the way with getting started with a business and saving for my wants. However, I hope to overcome those problems and go through with my dream of today. I want to be a leader of my dream and not follow someone else’s. This person I see as happy and gets want they want out of life. This person will enjoy their life to the fullest and take what comes one step at a time.

I will be living in Calgary with my wife and daughter. I will go to work from nine to five with some travel involved.

In five or ten years I imagine myself graduating from [this college] with a BBA degree for accounting. I see myself working for the government as a CGA. I see myself waking up in a nice house and driving to school in a nice black SUV. I can see myself having lots of debts because I love to shop, to decorate. So I see myself buying crazy stuff for my home and myself. Oh, and also my tuition debt! But still happy.

Five years—Graduated, still in Kingston, hopefully a house, good job. Ten years—house, family (kids), career/job with good income (accountant), living in the country, helping out my family financially, have a boat, maybe a dog, go on trips with the family, work from home or close to home in order to raise my kids. A cottage. Problems?—That depends on the economy and if I get the job of my choice. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “One of the main reasons why I love [this college] is the teachers. You make the experience enjoyable and have innovative teaching methods.”]

I hope to be working as a marketer in some facet of sports. In ten years I will hope to have a very stable income, a decent house and hopefully a family.
I want to be in a position of positive influence where I can help others.

Working as an accountant in the accounting field. For fun, what I do now. Maybe a little more upscale. Work Monday to Friday, fun/family Saturday and Sunday.

For a living, accountant. I think I will have the same values and ideals as I do now. I’ll just be older, hopefully an accountant, maybe married with kids, and NO problems.

Accountant. Golf and family time. Very busy with work and family to make money to support my family and prep for future. High values of professionalism and try to bring new ideas to the table whenever I can. I can’t see any problems. Making lots of money, happy family. Calm and cool person.

I hope to have a job in HR or marketing. Somewhere within an hour of my home. I will horseback ride and create art for fun as well as enjoy the outdoors. My daily life will probably be busy, and I will have traditional/professional values and ideals.

In the next five to ten years, I will be located here in Kingston working at a bank or accounting firm, working a nine to five job.

I want to be an accountant. I don’t think my values will change any. I try to live without regrets.

I hope a nine to five career (or regular hours) in a city with a short commute (if any) in the accounting track, possibly working with many people, no kids, just getting out of debt from student loans and starting to really make money and planning for the future.
Profession—financial consulting for individuals, small business consulting. Values—organized, benefitting others, fairness, family, relationships/friends. Fun—travel, making a positive difference in the community. [When this student was asked on the final page to add any final comments, he/she wrote, “I’m more of a one-on-one interaction type of person than a writing type of person.”]


Working in the finance field, married.

In five to ten years I imagine myself working for either an accounting firm or in a bank. I would like to have a Monday to Friday job, though the hours of the day are not that important. I would like to have a family and like somewhere in the country with lots of land. My ideal daily life would be getting up in the morning and spending time with my family, going to work and then coming home and spending time with my family again. I would like to be able to afford to travel and enjoy nice things in life.

In five years I hope to have finished college, have a home, a career and possibly start a family. My daily life will be to go to work seven to three, five days a week. Sometimes bring work home to finish it that way I can spend with family and friends on the weekends. My problems will mostly be in the financial department.

In the next ten years, I hope to be either completing or have completed my master’s in law, specializing in corporate law. After that, I want to be an NHL player agent. For fun, I plan to take part in my favourite hobbies (sports, music, reading). My daily life will hopefully include a husband and children, a job that I love, and good friends. I will value
my family, friends, have pride in my accomplishments. Probably have money problems, relationship issues, conflict in finding a job: “Women aren’t player agents!”

I will be employed in human resource management, living a very comfortable lifestyle. Family will be a priority before work, always. I will also, however, value being successful.

I imagine being an accountant.

I will be an accountant, hopefully with my own firm. I will enjoy the outdoors and outdoor activities. My daily life will consist of as close to a nine to five job as I can then come home and spend time with my family.

No idea what I will be doing. Video games and soccer, possibly a family. Intense. Same values as always. No idea.

I hope to have a steady, well-paying job that I am satisfied with. I would like to have a job in the area of HR. For fun, I will go to my cottage that I have been going to since I was a little girl. My daily life will be working during the week and having time with family and friends on the weekend. I also hope that I can fit in some time to travel around the world.

I hope to have a business job working with sports teams. In ten years I hope to have a family and do a lot of fishing and hockey when I have time.

I tried to imagine that before, but I really cannot get that.
Five years: Graduated from three-year marketing program, graduated from the one-year BBA additional course. I hope to have a business-related job in the government, a nice place to live, a car, being very successful.

I will either be a fashion buyer at a clothing store or own my own store. I will probably stay in Kingston, at least for awhile. By ten years from now, I may even be starting a family.
Appendix F

Questionnaire Comments by Older Adults

Take a few moments to imagine yourself in five or ten years. What will you do for a living? For fun? What will your daily life look like? What values or ideals will you have? What problems will you have? Describe this person and this life that you imagine below.

I will be working for the government or a large company in a desk capacity. Go to work, sit at desk knowing that I am paid. Go home. Same as now—work for $15. Have fun when I’m not there. Money and son come first. My girlfriend otherwise will be my biggest issue. He’s [this imagined self] a happy fellow who enjoys himself a bit a too much.

To be honest I’m not naïve enough to state absolutely what I’ll be doing or even if I’ll be alive. But I’ll probably be involved somehow in music, and family and exercise will be hobbies. I may be living in the UK or at the very least a bigger city like Toronto. I can foresee time management being a problem if I’m successful in my career. I’ll believe and hope I’ll be richer, more confident and happier.

Full-time, 9 – 5 job for a living. Playing hockey for fun.

Self-maintained bike store chain manager and owner. I want the ability to ride a couple times a week.

I don’t know what I’m doing tomorrow but I hope in 5 to ten years I’ll still be very active and social, married with kids and have a job that provides me with freedom and a chance to be creative.

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Accountant. Big $.

For a living be head of an accounting firm or a team leader in charge of 6 – 8 individuals. More outings with the family unit as financial [con]straints should be lessened. Lond days, but unless I choose my work will not have to come home with me. To treat my job and the people I work with to way I wish to be treated. Hopefully no problems, but realistically keeping track of every penny and any problems my children cause. I hope to be a well-rounded, friendly, helpful, organized individual. I would like to be living in a rebuilt home with the family members I have on April 15, 2009.

I see myself with a stable job, with a stable economy, with a family and kid. I would have regular problems, economy, etc.

In five years I will be working a HR role hopefully with a successful business. For fun, I will be skiing in the winter and biking in the summer. Daily life will include work, play and family.

As I already had my job and my experience in the career I feel confident to start in Canada because what I need is to be fluent in English.

I plan on being an accountant. In the future I plan on opening my own business building furniture and various other “crafts.” I will spend as much time with my kids as I can. I don’t have time to write down all my values, ideals, problems I might face or what my daily life will look like! Sorry…

Working in an office and enjoying life.
I will have a great job planning, coordinating events. I will be also managing accounts in the advertising and marketin field. I will have a home of my own and the ability to take my children on vacations. My daily life will be busy with kids, teenagers, and clients maybe or should I and a partner (husband). For fun I don’t know, can’t imagine what it would be.

I will be a certified tax accountant. I will do travelling and sight-seeing for fun. I want my life not to be pressuring. My values will be never give up and keep learning. I try not to imagine my problem, just cross that bridge when it comes.

In ten years I hope to be an HR manager. For fun I will be woodworking in my shop. My daily life will be as follows: I will go to work then come home to my big house and relax in my shop doing woodworking.

Now I’m 28 years old. Within 5 to 10 years from now I imagine I will have a family, government job or high-end sales job, customer service. For fun hopefully model a great upbringing for my family, travel, work hard to provide my family with the tools to succeed in life. Enjoy every day of my life, good or bad days. You never get a second chance to re-live. Life is what you make it. Enjoy it. Live, laugh, love.