

**COUPLES' CAREER NEGOTIATION DURING THE SCHOOL-TO-WORK  
TRANSITION: AN ACTION-PROJECT PERSPECTIVE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

In existing research the dynamics of career development, the school-to-work transition, and couples' decision-making have been explored. However, few researchers have explored these independent processes as they occur simultaneously, especially within the context of committed romantic relationships. In the present study this deficiency is addressed within vocational psychology literature by examining the influence of romantic partnership on the career development process, specifically during the school-to-work transitions of emerging adults. Research questions addressed were: (a) What kinds of projects do couples identify as being important as they jointly negotiate and plan around the school-to-work transition? (b) How do couples act and interact in conversations about their future careers, and (c) What common actions and projects are present across couples? Using the Action-Project method, six couples' data were drawn from a larger study and their actions and projects were analyzed within couples and across cases. Two common projects emerged from the analysis: (a) obtaining appropriate/satisfying occupations, and (b) negotiating specific topics of difference. The actions that couples engaged in tended to be idiosyncratic and unique, with only two repeatedly occurring patterns (cathartic laughter; physical contact). Participants' actions were also examined in terms of those that promoted joint negotiation and those that impeded it. The issue of where the individuals fell on the school-to-work continuum (e.g., pre-graduation or post-graduation) appeared to be important in distinguishing the types of projects and actions in which couples engaged. Overall, the findings revealed that young adult couples can, indeed, act jointly in planning their future careers during school-to-work transition periods.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iii
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	4
School-to-Work Transition .....	4
Couples' Decision-Making .....	7
Theoretical Framework and Research Questions .....	10
CHAPTER 3: METHOD .....	14
The Action Project Method .....	14
Paradigm Assumptions .....	14
Research Team .....	15
Participants .....	20
Recruitment.....	23
Data Collection Procedures .....	23
Primary interview. ....	23
Preliminary data analysis. ....	25
Member-checking interview. ....	25
Transcription .....	26
Data Analysis Procedures .....	26
Preliminary data analysis. ....	26
Thesis-related analyses. ....	28

Rigour and Validation .....	30
Consensus-based analysis. ....	30
Multiple sources of information. ....	30
Grounding findings in the data. ....	30
External Audit. ....	31
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....	32
Couples' Joint Projects .....	32
Within-Case Analysis of Projects .....	32
Couple 001. ....	32
Couple 002. ....	33
Couple 003. ....	35
Couple 004. ....	36
Couple 005. ....	37
Couple 006. ....	38
Cross-Case Analysis of Projects .....	40
Obtaining appropriate occupations. ....	41
Negotiating specific areas of difference. ....	43
Additional Project-Related Findings .....	47
Economical/financial influence. ....	47
Relating to others, as a couple. ....	49
Couples' Project-Related Action .....	50
Within-Case Analysis of Action .....	50
Couple 001. ....	50

Couple 002. ....	52
Couple 003. ....	54
Couple 004. ....	56
Couple 005. ....	58
Couple 006. ....	59
Cross-Case Analysis of Action .....	60
Cathartic laughter. ....	60
Physical Contact. ....	61
Additional Action-Related Findings .....	62
The Timing of the Transition into the World of Work .....	63
Projects and the Timing of the Transition .....	63
Action and the Timing of the Transition .....	66
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION .....	67
Couples' Transition Projects .....	68
Emergent Patterns of Action .....	72
Timing of the Transition .....	74
Contributions to Counselling Practice .....	77
Limitations .....	79
Sample Size .....	79
Size of Team .....	79
Action-Project Protocol .....	80
Timing of the Transition .....	81
Financial Compensation .....	81

Future Directions .....	82
REFERENCES .....	85
APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENTS .....	95
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS .....	97
Telephone Screening Interview Protocol .....	97
Interview 1 Protocol .....	101
Interview 2 Protocol: Member-Checking Interview .....	104
APPENDIX C: NOTES FROM THESIS RELATED ANALYSIS .....	107

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participating couples. ....	22
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The completion of university is a time of enormous transition in the lives of many young adults, with the shift from post-secondary education to the world of work offering many challenges and new beginnings. Young adults in the midst of experiencing this endeavour typically face a complex decision-making process, which encompasses many factors. Work prospects are only one element among a plethora of significant factors. Deciding where to live, in and of itself, contains many components worthy of consideration - occupational opportunity, climate, cost of living, community, and recreational opportunities. Other factors may also be present in this decision-making process, such as salary, proximity to family and friends, cultural expectations, availability of schools for children, career goals of romantic partner, and other future aspirations and goals. Each component may play a substantial role within the process of the school-to-work transition, resulting in a transition that is as unique for each individual as are the conditions and life history that surround it.

This already complex decision-making process may become even more complicated when it occurs in the context of a romantic relationship. Relationships themselves are not static entities, and offer many components of negotiation despite the demands produced by transition. This is particularly important to consider because, by the time that many emerging adults reach the point of graduation, they have already entered into committed romantic relationships. Reiter, Krause, and Stirlen (2005) indicate that courtship occurs quite readily on university campuses. They also suggest that romantic relationships in university frequently lead to engagement or marriage. For these reasons, school-to-work transitions often have romantic relational components. People in



this relational context make decisions together, rather than by themselves (Adams, 2004). This is evident for both married and unmarried couples (Elizabeth, 2001).

The history of career counselling and existing literature on career development and the transition from school to work has focused primarily on autonomous, individual decision-making. For example, Pope (2000) described the progression of career counselling over the past century, revealing a noticeable gap in the literature in terms of attending to or including relational components within career counselling. In the same way, Savickas (1999) investigated career development theories as they related to the transition from school to work, and again it was observed that these theories focus on autonomous career development with minimal consideration of romantic relational components. Additionally, most of this literature focuses on decision-making outcomes, while neglecting the elements by which those outcomes are attained; that is, the process of negotiating and jointly acting to achieve plans for the future.

In addition to the gap in the literature, there are personal reasons for conducting this thesis: The importance of romantic partners in the transition process resonates strongly with my own personal experience.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, I have experienced two major school-to-work transitions so far in my life, and my romantic partner has been an active participant in both of them. Making decisions of where to work and what to do after completing my education has certainly not been an individual process in my own life but, instead, something that my spouse and I negotiated and discussed together, taking into account each others' plans for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the qualitative nature of this thesis, permission has been granted by the thesis committee to use first-person voice when referring to the author.

With all this in mind, it becomes important to empirically explore the process of how the transition to work occurs when the person transitioning is partnered in a romantic relationship, exploring the ways through which emerging adult couples negotiate and discuss the future, amidst their school-to-work transitions. In the present study, I explored this issue qualitatively, using the action-project method. This is a qualitative, process-oriented approach to social research that is well suited to the phenomenon being investigated. The remainder of this work is described in this document, beginning with a discussion of relevant literature in Chapter 2, a detailed overview of the action-project method and the way it was implemented in this study in Chapter 3, the findings resulting from this analysis (Chapter 4) and a discussion of the meanings and implications of these findings, along with the limitations inherent in this study, in the final chapter.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### School-to-Work Transition

Transitions are an inevitable part of normal life development. A transition is typically defined as a passage from one state or stage to another in life, a shift away from the past state of things. It includes processes and events that require a degree of adaptation and change in roles and behaviour (Arnett, 1997; Thomas & Kuh, 1982). The process of transitioning through significant life changes is impactful, and can manifest through many different events, including occupational change, marriage, birth, divorce, relocation, traumatic events/accidents, and death (Brammer, 1992). Research has shown that personal actions can have a reciprocal effect on the course and impact of life transitions (Bauer & McAdams, 2004; Brandtstadter, Wentura, & Rothermund, 1999; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001).

One sphere of life in which most people will experience several transitions in their lifetimes is the domain of career, which can be broadly defined as encompassing both education and occupation. A career transition has the potential to affect many other areas of life, including family role and structure, geographical location, social life, occupational role/responsibility, and monetary income (Benjamin & Eigles, 1991; Sales, 1995). However, there is wide variation in the degree of impact that such a transition may have on people's lives, ranging from a need for minimal adjustment to a need for extensive adaptation to the new situation. Regardless of the associated effects, career transitions typically require individuals to be agents in their lives, becoming actively involved in decision-making, choosing goals, and acting to achieve them (Ebberwein, Krieshok, Ulven, & Prosser, 2004).

Perhaps one of the most important career transitions is the shift from being a student to joining the world of full-time work. Tchibozo (2004) characterized this transition as a highly complex process, and found that it involved deterministic, stochastic, and chaotic variables. He explored these variables for predictable qualities in a study on the dynamics of school-to-work transition processes of university graduates, and concluded that predictability could only be determined through systemic analysis. Tchibozo concluded that the underlying structural system and type of transitional process (e.g., deterministic/predictable vs. chaotic/unpredictable) strongly determined occupational trajectories and opportunities. Similarly, Post (2001), examining the career decision-making processes of women in transitions following university graduation, found that relational influences played meaningful roles in the process, and that personal values were a strong guiding force when facing transitional decisions. This shift in roles usually entails novel expectations, responsibilities, and experiences in both personal and professional arenas, and requires adaptive socialization (Lau, 2004; Rayer, 1998).

The world of work itself has undergone substantial transformation over the last two decades, which renders classical theories of employment in need of revision or replacement (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). One major change has been the demise of the traditional family model of work, which assumed a single-earner income and a stay-at-home caregiver. This model no longer represents the dominant demographic of the workforce. Dual-earner households have become the norm, and are often an economic necessity (Halpern, 2005).

This transformation has had an impact on traditional gender roles and individuals' career development, with both genders currently spending more time completing tasks

within their non-traditional role environments than they had in the past (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Specifically, there has been an increase in domestic/home responsibilities for males, and a growing involvement in the workforce for females. Adopting multiple roles has become the adaptive norm for successful functioning of dual-earner/career households (Halpern, 2005; Hirsch & Rapkin, 1986). Thus, for an individual within a committed romantic relationship, a career transition will impact not only the individual's occupational future, but also his or her family roles and structures.

It must also be noted that relational aspects of life can influence career development in a reciprocal manner. For example, Schultheiss and colleagues (Schultheiss, Kress, Manzi, & Jeffrey-Glasscock; 2001; Schultheiss, Palma, Pedragovich, & Jeffrey-Glasscock, 2002) indicated that career development was influenced by relational and multidimensional social support functions, such as: (a) emotional, esteem and information support; (b) tangible assistance, and (c) social integration. Furthermore, Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, and Gravino (2001) found that the career decision-making process was an interpersonal endeavour, rather than solely an individual one; that is, career development occurred within a social context. As Whiston and Keller (2004) revealed in their review article, there has been a substantial body of research attesting to the influence of family relational factors on career development. Their review indicated that families did influence individuals' career development through family structure variables (e.g., parental occupation and level of education) and family process factors (e.g., attachment, parental expectations, encouragement of autonomy). In contrast, research on romantic partners' relational influences on career development has been much more limited, although there has been research focusing on the career paths of

dual-career couples (Parker & Arthur, 2004), and how couples cope with the challenges of home and work demands (Biernat & Wortman, 1991; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003).

At their root, career and romantic relationships are separate developmental processes. However, it is evident from the existing literature that these processes intersect in important ways when individuals align their future goals with other people (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Barnett & Lundgren, 1998; Haddock & Rattenborg, 2003; Halpern, 2005; Parker & Arthur, 2004; Zimmerman, Haddock, Current, & Ziembra, 2003). Despite recent recognition of the need for research frameworks that can account for the interlocking career paths of the partners in couples (e.g., Moen & Sweet, 2002), a gap remains within the research literature: The *process* of career decision-making within couples remains under-explored. This is somewhat surprising, given the myriad of empirical studies in which the researchers examined how individuals made career-related decisions (e.g., Blustein, 1999; Gottfredson, 1981; Hesketh, Elmslie, & Kaldor, 1990; Krumboltz, 1993, 1994; Sampson, Lenz, Reardon, & Peterson, 1999). Fortunately, there is research on couples' joint decision-making processes in domains other than career (vocational psychology), which may be relevant to this issue.

### Couples' Decision-Making

Adams (2004) noted that career development researchers have approached couples' decision-making in three ways: factors that affect decision outcomes (Barnett & Lundgren, 1998; Erci, 2003; Zimmerman et al., 2003), the connection between decision-making and types of relationships between partners (Houlihan, Jackson, & Roberts, 1988), and the decision-making process itself (Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Krueger, 1982).

Although there are many factors that impact decision-making in couples, Zimmerman et al. (2003) suggested that the key factors for successful joint-decisions include negotiation, compromise, equality, and the right relational climate and context. Barnett and Lundgren (1998) also stressed the importance of social context, especially macro-economical, socio-structural, and attitudinal contextual components. They further emphasized the importance of accounting for a couple's demographic and psychological characteristics. In both of these studies the importance of individual needs, wishes and opinions was recognized within this relational decision-making structure. Erci (2003) revealed that gender played a large role in decision-making, and that the male partner typically had more power within heterosexual dyadic relationships. Results of her study also suggested, however, that if the female partner had higher educational and occupational status than the male, the perception of power might shift in her favour. Equity also seems to play a significant role in couples' decision-making. Houlihan et al. (1988) categorized couples' relationships according to levels of equality and satisfaction, and perceived difficulty of decisions at hand. They found that high levels of equity (that is, consistent consideration and fairness in attending to each individual's needs) facilitates the process of decision-making in couples.

Unfortunately, research is far more limited on the *processes* that romantic couples engage in as they jointly make their decisions (e.g., interactions and behaviours, thoughts and feelings, mutual pursuits). The limited research that does exist is somewhat dated. For example, Krueger (1982) qualitatively investigated the decision-making process of one couple, and discovered that they engaged in a number of idiosyncratic and counter-productive decision-making behaviours, such as one-upmanship and appeasement.

Godwin and Scanzoni (1989) found significantly different ways in which cognitive, affiliative, and coercive types of communication were used within joint decision-making processes. They also discovered that couples behaved differently depending on the issues that were being discussed, and that stable or consistent patterns of couple behaviour and feelings cannot be assumed across the range of discussed issues. They suggested that the processes and outcomes of couples' decision-making must be analyzed separately for different domains of functioning, and not be treated as unitary. Evidently, there remains much to be understood about the process dimensions of couples' career decision-making.

In summary, researchers outside the field of career development have demonstrated that decision-making processes within romantic relationships may take many forms, ranging from highly collaborative mutual engagement to reach consensus, to uncooperative, conflictual, and highly disjointed. Many factors influence a couple's joint engagement in the decision-making process. Berg, Johnson, Meegan, and Strough (2003) found that collaborative, high-affiliation decision-making exchanges (e.g., warm, friendly speech acts) were characterized by constructive elaborations, explorations of the situation, and initiations of joint-action. Joint-action was hindered by low-affiliation exchanges (e.g., cold, hostile speech acts) such as commanding, rejecting, countering, and resisting. For example, high-affiliation exchanges produced more in-depth exploration of information, and had more collaborative and efficient joint-action outcomes, whereas low-affiliation exchanges produced more independent, disjointed outcomes resulting in less effort devoted to decision-making strategies.

Despite the presence of these few studies, the bulk of existing research on couples' decision-making focuses on factors that affect outcomes rather than the



processes by which these outcomes are achieved (Adams, 2004). There is a clear need for additional research that (a) addresses couples' decision-making specifically within the career domain, and (b) reflects the nature of careers and relationships in the 21st century. Further, there is a need to explore the processes by which couples jointly negotiate and act to make decisions about their career futures.

### Theoretical Framework and Research Questions

A first step in addressing this gap in the literature is to explore the actions and interactions that couples engage in together, during the process of making career decisions. In this thesis, the *action-project method* (Valach, Young & Lynam, 2002; Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005) was used to conduct this exploration. This qualitative method is grounded in Young and colleagues' *action theory* approach to career development (e.g., Valach, 1988; Valach et al., 2002; Young, 1995; Young, Antal, Bassett, Post, DeVries, & Valach, 1999; Young, Ball, Valach, Turkel, & Wong 2003; Young, Lynam, Valach, Novak, Brierton, & Christopher, 2000; Young, Paseluikho, & Valach, 1997; Young, Valach, et al., 2001; Young, Valach, et al., 2005). This framework for researching events in everyday life focuses on the intentional, goal-directed actions of human beings (Young, Valach, et al., 2005).

According to action theory, human action consists of intentional, purposeful, goal-directed behaviour, internal processes, and constructed meanings. Young and colleagues perceived action to be defined and directed by the goals of the actors (Valach et al., 2002); that is, peoples' goals motivated their actions. Actions are energized by emotional processes, steered by cognitions, and directed by communication with others within the social context (Young, Valach, et al., 2005). Consequently, action involves

more than just observable behaviour. It encompasses concepts, rules, language, and prescriptions. In Action theory the importance of social context is stressed when formulating understandings of any given actions. Action is believed to be constructed, perceived, and interpreted through social representations and language. This qualitative approach involves investigation of both external behaviours and internal processes and experiences, and generates in-depth descriptions of processes that occur when people act together to achieve their goals.

Young, Valach, et al. (2005) conceptualized action as having three levels of organization: (a) action elements (e.g., observable verbal and non-verbal behaviours), (b) action steps/functions (e.g., combinations of elements in sequential order), and (c) goals, which are derived from functional steps. Goals represent the meaning of action processes (e.g., motivations, intentions, purposes). The theory also proposes three perspectives through which action may be understood: (a) manifest behaviour, which is the overt, observable activities that people engage in to achieve goals (e.g., a couple having a conversation about purchasing a new vehicle); (b) internal processes, which are the subjective thoughts and feelings that individuals experience while engaging in activities (e.g., the male member of the dyad feels apprehensive as he contemplates how they are going to pay for a vehicle; the female experiences excitement at the prospect of having a new vehicle that will not require as many expensive trips to the mechanic); and (c) social meaning, which is the explanations individuals provide when describing their behaviours and internal processes to others (e.g., the couple may discover that they provide somewhat different explanations of their needs for a new car to their friends than to their bankers).

The concept of *project* is also important in action theory. Within this framework, a project is defined as a series of goal-directed actions that occurs over time that are related to the same underlying goal (Valach et al., 2002). Although projects can be individual, people in close social contexts, such as romantic relationships, are theorized to develop joint projects that are mutually constructed, and which are pursued together (by both members of the couple). These projects may have goals that are primarily focused on one member of the couple (e.g., for the female to find a satisfying job) or goals that encompass both members of the couple (e.g., deciding when to have children). However, they can be considered to be joint in the sense that the goal is one that both members of the couple have developed, and are pursuing together.

The research method associated with action theory (i.e., the action-project method) is a good fit for an empirical investigation of couples' career decision-making processes during transitions from post-secondary education to the world of work; that is, *how* emerging adults in romantic relationships engage together about their future careers when at least one of them is at the point of finishing his or her education. This method fits well with this investigation, as it results in in-depth descriptions of the processes in which couples engage, from three distinct levels of processing: observable actions and interactions; internal thoughts, feelings and motivations; and socially constructed meaning and understanding.

Using the action-project method to explore this topic in a descriptive, qualitative way, I addressed three questions in this thesis:

1. What kinds of projects do emerging adult couples identify as being important as they jointly negotiate and plan around their school-to-work transitions?

2. What actions emerge in the process of formulating and working toward their transition projects?
3. Are there common patterns of action and projects that tend to be present across couples, or are these processes idiosyncratic to each particular couple?

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

### The Action Project Method

Young, Valach, et al. (2005) described the action-project method as being a qualitative, holistic, open, and flexible approach to counselling psychology research, based on the conceptual framework of action theory. It was designed to describe social phenomena as they occur in daily life, and has previously been used to explore career development in parent-adolescent dyads, and among pairs of friends (e.g., Young et al., 2003; 1997; 1999; Young, Valach, et al. 2001).

#### *Paradigm Assumptions*

The action-project method is grounded in the paradigm assumptions of action theory (Valach et al., 2002; Young, Valach, et al., 2005), which has its own ontological and epistemological assumptions. The ontology of action theory accepts the existence of realities that are external to the perceiver, rather than assuming that all human phenomena exist only as social constructions. Unlike other social constructivist approaches, which are based primarily on relativism and do not accept external realities, action theory assumes that some human phenomena exist independently of perception and, consequently, it is possible for people to form incorrect understandings of the world around them.

The epistemology of action theory is much more closely aligned with traditional forms of social constructionism. Although there may be an externally present reality, it can only be apprehended through interpretation. Thus, action theory assumes that the research process is inductive, with meaning and interpretations being induced from people's actions as they engage in everyday experiences. Consideration of social and

historical context is also crucial in this epistemology, which assumes that generation of meaning involves interpersonal systems, as well as subjective and intrapersonal systems of agents. Therefore, the action-project method goes beyond typical constructivist approaches and accesses data not only through social meaning but through observation and consideration of manifest behaviour, and internal processes. These perspectives provide an enriched platform on which to access phenomena under investigation.

The action-project method uses consensus-based analytical techniques, where researchers assume active roles in the process. Screening and selection of participants, data collection, transcription, analysis, and validation are all perceived to be interpretive processes within action theory. The team of researchers is the primary instrument of interpretation. Rather than attempting to eliminate biases and preconceptions, the action-project method assumes that each researcher's perspective will enter the analytical hermeneutic, with multiple perspectives being discussed, until consensus is reached. The presence of multiple researchers, each bringing his or her own perspective and interpretations into the analysis process, is assumed to prevent any single person's biases from overwhelming the information that is evident in the data.

#### *Research Team*

Data presented in this thesis were collected as part of a larger study on couples' career development during emerging adulthood. The research team for the larger study consisted of six researchers, including myself. All team members who participated in the larger study are described below, although only two conducted the analyses to address the three research questions posed in the present analysis.

I was the principal investigator for this thesis, participating in both the larger study, and the thesis-specific analyses. I entered the research role as a 28 year old, Caucasian-Canadian of European ancestry, in a heterosexual marital relationship. As a couple, my wife and I had experienced a number of school-to-work transitions. In 1998, we simultaneously transitioned (as a dating couple) from a two-year college diploma program into work in fields unrelated to our educational training. I re-entered full-time education in the fall of 2000 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology in 2003. At the time, my wife and I jointly negotiated the decision of whether to continue on to further education or to defer graduate school. There was an opportunity to pursue a work opportunity for a year outside of Canada, to gain multicultural experience working with youth in both domestic and educational settings. After a year in South America, I entered graduate school. At the time of this thesis work, I was approaching the end of my master's degree and once again found myself in the process of negotiating the school-to-work transition with my wife. Our specific projects primarily involved location of residency and work opportunities for me in particular. Our decision-making process was significantly shaped by financial considerations and constraints, as well as the desire to remain in proximity to family and friends. We elected to remain at our current residence and tentatively decided that I would continue to work in a paid position at the counselling organization where I completed my internship requirements.

In my own romantic relationship, my assumption is that joint decision-making and negotiation are integral, inevitable aspects of any functional romantic relationship. More specifically, career decision-making in couples requires reciprocal actions and interactions between intrapersonal and interpersonal processes. It involves joint processes

which are influenced by a plethora of factors (e.g., historical, contextual, relational), especially through the agency of involved romantic partners as they stand to experience the impact of decision outcomes in significant and personal ways.

Dr. José Domene was the principal investigator for the larger study from which the data for my thesis were drawn, and was involved in all stages of that study. As the supervisor for my thesis, he was also involved in the analyses that addressed my specific research questions. Dr. Domene is a 35 year old male with a background in vocational psychology, family therapy, and research methodology. He is an immigrant to Canada, of Mexican and Chinese descent. He has been in a committed romantic relationship for 11 years, having married after two years of dating. His marriage occurred at the time of his first school-to-work transition. He has experienced two school-to-work transitions in his life, one after the completion of his master's degree at which time he entered the world of work for three years. He then decided to return to school to complete a doctoral degree and, subsequently, experienced another school-to-work transition after completing that degree. On both occasions, the transition process was foreshortened because he had obtained long-term employment several months prior to completing his degree requirements. In terms of his pre-existing perspectives on the research topic, Dr. Domene is an action theorist with a background in family therapy and developmental psychology. As a result, he believes that many human processes occur in the form of joint projects that involve not just the individuals in question, but also significant others in their lives (e.g., family members). Although he is not currently in a period of career transition, his partner was actively involved in the process of making both of his school-to-work



transitions. This has contributed to his opinion that, when one is in a committed romantic relationship, career development is, indeed, a jointly negotiated process.

A paid research assistant for the larger study was Ashley Cavanaugh, a 23 year old female. Specifically, she participated in conducting interviews with participants and the preliminary stages of data analysis. She was not involved in the analyses to answer my thesis questions, except to review the preliminary descriptions of findings. Ms. Cavanaugh is a graduate student in the Counselling Psychology program at Trinity Western University, with a background in couples research and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology. Her bachelor's thesis involved a quantitative examination of how relationship theories play causal roles in relationship perceptions and conflicts. At the time of her research involvement, Ms. Cavanaugh was single, but had been in two serious dating relationships within the previous 6 years. She is European-Canadian, and has lived most of her life in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Having been through an individual journey regarding career and life transitions, she believes that many aspects of life can play roles in decision making. Her bias is, therefore, that romantic partners indisputably influence each other's choices.

Another team member for the larger study was Serita McLelland, who was involved in conducting interviews with participants and the preliminary stages of data analysis. She also used the same data set for her own Master's thesis on gender and compromise in couples' career development. She was not involved in the analyses for this thesis. Ms. McLelland has a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, with a minor in biology. At the time of this research she was 27 years old and in her second year of a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology degree program at Trinity Western University.

She was born in Sri Lanka, and immigrated to Canada at the age of nine. During the course of the larger research study, she was involved in a romantic relationship. Her expectations about the links between romantic relationships and career development are that many aspects of one's life play significant roles in the career decision making process, including romantic relationships. She believes that interactions between one's career development and one's romantic relationship are very complex, and the manner and degree to which they affect each other depends entirely on the couple and the context.

Also employed as a research assistant on the larger study was Jessica Nee, a 24 year old female graduate student pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology at Trinity Western University. She was involved in conducting interviews with participants and the preliminary stages of data analysis. She was not involved in the analyses for this thesis. Ms. Nee previously completed a Bachelor of Science in Psychology (honours) degree and a general Bachelor's degree in biology at Queen's University. She was born and raised in Canada, and is of Chinese and Scottish decent. Her previous research experience has been in the field of biopsychology. This was her first time studying couples or vocational psychology. Ms. Nee's primary experience with the career negotiation process in the context of a relationship has been through observation of the romantic relationships of close friends and family members. Additionally, she has some experience negotiating current and future plans in a long-distance romantic relationship, although she was single at the time of her research involvement. From these experiences, she has come to the opinion that, in committed romantic relationships, career-related decisions are often negotiated jointly in couples.

Another team member for the larger study was Chris Tse, a 26 year old male researcher with a background in adolescent development, trauma/grief, and counselling psychology. At the time of this study he was in his second year of the Master of Arts degree in Counselling Psychology at Trinity Western University. His undergraduate degree was in biopsychology and education. Chris was born in Canada and is of Chinese decent. During his involvement in this study he was in a stable relationship lasting approximately 6 months, and was planning on working as a school counsellor. Chris' interest in the career development process was focused on school counselling, especially on the transition between secondary and post-secondary education, which he believes lends itself to the larger study on couples' career development and transition. His interests and experiences led him to the perspective that career development, within the context of committed romantic relationships, is a balance between compromising and achieving one's own personal goals.

### *Participants*

The participants for this study included six couples in committed romantic relationships. At least one member of each couple was required to be a post-secondary student pursuing a terminal post-secondary degree or training program, or a recent graduate of such a program. Although at the low end of the range, a sample size of six dyads is within the acceptable limits for action-project analysis (e.g., Turkel, 2003; Young et al., 2003). Inclusion criteria for the study were that (a) both members of the couple self-identified as being committed to the relationship; (b) both members were between 18 and 28 years of age at the beginning of the study; (c) neither member of each couple had children; and (d) both members were dealing with issues associated with

transitioning from school to work (either in the form of discussing future transitions, or having graduated and remaining currently engaged in the process of transitioning). No limitation was placed on the nature of the romantic relationship (heterosexual or homosexual; co-habiting or living apart). However, all six couples who qualified for inclusion were heterosexual, and three were co-habiting at the beginning of their research involvement. The length of the couple's relationships ranged from 1 year to 6 years, with an average of 3.5 years. Additional demographic information is presented in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1.

*Demographic characteristics of participating couples.*

	Age	Ethnicity	Immigration Status (time in Canada)	Annual income	Employment Status
Female	26	European	Work Visa (< 1 year)	\$15,000 – \$29,999	Employed: Administrative Assistant
Male	27	European	Work Visa (< 1 year)	\$15,000 – \$29,999	Employed: Sales Administrator
Female	20	South Asian	Student Visa (1 year)	< \$5,000	Full-time Student
Male	24	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$5,000 – \$14,999	Full-time Student
Female	26	European-Canadian	Immigrant (10 years)	\$45,000 - \$59,999	Employed: Counsellor
Male	28	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$15,000 – \$29,999	Student & Employed: Plumbing Apprentice
Female	25	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$30,000 – \$44,999	Employed: Receptionist
Male	26	Jewish/Latino	Immigrant (19 years)	\$30,000 – \$44,999	Employed: Spanish Interpreter, Inventory Control Specialist
Female	27	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$15,000 – \$29,999	Partially Employed: Research Assistant
Male	25	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$60,000 – \$74,999	Student & Employed: Garage Door Installer/Contractor
Female	20	European-American	Student Visa (3 years)	< \$5,000	Full-time Student
Male	20	European-Canadian	Canadian-born	\$5,000 – \$14,999	Full-time Student

*Recruitment*

All participants were drawn from a larger study on career development projects in romantic couples. The recruitment process for the larger study included word of mouth, advertising in local newspapers, and online recruitment through Dr. Domene's Web site and other Web sites, such as 'craigslist.org' and 'facebook.com'. Participants were provided \$100 compensation for their involvement in this study. See Appendix A for samples of the advertising material. Interested couples provided contact information to the research team (telephone or e-mail). They were then contacted by members of the research team who described the study in greater detail, addressed their questions, and conducted brief screening interviews to ensure they met all the criteria for inclusion. Refer to Appendix B for the telephone screening protocol. Participants who remained interested and qualified for participation were then assigned to two members of the research team, for interviewing and data collection.

*Data Collection Procedures*

Data used in this thesis were collected during two interviews per couple, consisting of a primary interview and a briefer member-checking interview, conducted after a preliminary analysis of the data. Participants were given the choice of being interviewed in their own homes, at Trinity Western University, or at alternative, mutually-acceptable locations. Three couples were interviewed at home, and three were interviewed at Trinity Western University. I conducted one of the six interviews, and the remainder were carried out by other members of the larger research team.

*Primary interview.* The two interviewers assigned to the couple introduced the study, described its purpose, addressed any questions that participants had, and obtained

their signed consent to participate in the study. After obtaining consent, the interviewers turned on the audio-recording equipment and began recording. The initial, *warm-up* portion of the interview was conducted with all four people together, and involved gathering demographic information, rapport-building, and general questions about the couple.

When the couple appeared to be comfortable with the research process and prepared to discuss their future goals, they were asked to engage in a 15 to 20 minute *joint conversation* about their future goals and plans, without the interviewers present. This portion of the primary interview was video-recorded using two video-cameras. After approximately 20 minutes, if a couple had not spontaneously finished their conversation, the interviewers returned to the room to ask them if they required more time. All couples finished their conversations either prior to, or within 5 minutes of, the interruption.

Immediately following their joint conversations, participants were separated and brought to different locations for *self-confrontation* portions of their interviews. This involved semi-structured discussions between one member of the couple and one interviewer, during which participants reviewed the video footage of their joint conversation. They were asked to describe their internal processes (e.g., cognitions and emotions), and their goals and intentions throughout the joint conversation. Specifically, the video-recorded conversations were played back via portable media players and participants were asked to stop the playback at significant moments to comment on their goals and internal processes. If a minute passed without a participant spontaneously halting the playback, the interviewer would halt the video and prompt a participant to reflect and comment on his or her internal processes and intentions. The self-

confrontations with separate members of each couple were conducted simultaneously. Upon completion of the self-confrontation portion of the interview, participants were asked how typical the form and content of their joint conversation seemed of their usual interactional behaviour. See Appendix B for a copy of the interview 1 protocol.

*Preliminary data analysis.* After recordings from the primary interviews were transcribed, the two interviewers who were involved with each couple conducted preliminary analyses, using the principles of action theory, to identify the couple's actions, clarify their opinions and intentions during joint conversations, and identify the transition-related projects in which they were engaged. See the "Data Analysis and Interpretation" section of this chapter for further details. Three narrative summaries were produced for each couple from this analysis: two that reflected the individual perspectives of each member of the couple, and one that focused on the joint goals and actions of the couple as a single unit.

*Member-checking interview.* The narratives were then presented back to the couples in subsequent interviews (see Appendix B) to obtain each couple's feedback about the preliminary analyses and confirm/disconfirm the joint projects that had been identified. These interviews were audio-recorded but not transcribed. Member-checking began with the two interviewers sharing procedural information and re-establishing rapport with the couples. Participants then met individually with one of the interviewers to review the accuracy of his or her own individual narrative, provide feedback as to the accuracy of the interpretations, and make corrections as necessary. Subsequently, the two interviewers and both members of the couple met together to review the content of the third narrative. Again, couples were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the



results of the preliminary analysis and make corrections to the content of the narrative, this time focusing on the current projects of the couples.

### *Transcription*

The audio- and video-recordings generated in the primary interview were transcribed by a professional transcriber, using a verbatim transcription strategy. For the joint conversations, the transcriber also coded non-verbal communications that were evident on the video recording. Prior to the preliminary data analysis phase of data collection, transcripts were reviewed and corrected by the interviewers to ensure that they reflected the researchers' interpretations of the interview, rather than the transcriber's.

### *Data Analysis Procedures*

In the action-project method, the process of analysis involves multiple members of a research team constructing consensus interpretations of the data. These constructions involve attending to (a) the explicit content presented by participants, (b) team-members' own perspectives and preconceptions, and (c) the tenets of action theory. Data analysis occurred in two phases: A preliminary data analysis for each couple, conducted between the two interviews, and subsequent analysis of data across the six cases who met the inclusion criteria for this thesis. Because the preliminary data analysis was conducted as part of the larger research study from which my data were drawn, the entire research team participated in that phase of data analysis. The analysis team for the subsequent analysis, designed to address the specific questions posed in this thesis, consisted of myself and Dr. Domene.

*Preliminary data analysis.* The two researchers who conducted any given interview also completed the preliminary analysis of that interview. The analysis began

with an initial review of the material to obtain an overall sense of each couple and the components of their conversations. Next, the joint-conversations were divided into smaller sections, each representing a particular focus or topic of conversation. These sections were analysed by the researchers in sequence. Initial coding began with assessing the manifest behaviours that participants engaged in, coding it according to basic action elements (e.g., 'laughs'; 'asks a question'). Once the elements of action were coded for a section, it was reviewed as a whole in terms of its inherent meaning, specifically identifying the functional steps and goals that were present. This interpretation of meaning was facilitated by incorporating information from the self-confrontations, such as a participant's belief about her partner's motivation during that section of the conversation. Alternative interpretations were raised and discussed between the pair of interviewers until a consensus decision was reached regarding which interpretation was most suitable. The results of this analysis were written in a series of three narrative descriptions. Each narrative was one to two pages in length.

The narratives were then reviewed by the entire research team. Each team member reviewed the transcripts and narratives individually, and then met to discuss their interpretations in a group meeting. In this group analysis, the team discussed alternative interpretations and possibilities, made corrections to the narratives, and constructed a project statement that best captured the salient career-related goals and tasks that they believed the couple was engaged with. Typically, the researchers who constructed the narratives would offer suggestions of what they thought the project statement might be, and the remaining group members would offer their own insights and interpretations. Ideas were discussed until the research team arrived at a consensual understanding of the

data and decided on appropriate wording for the narrative summaries and project statements. The products of these team analyses were presented back to participants in their member-checking interviews.

*Thesis-related analyses.* After the member-checking interviews were conducted for all six couples, Dr. Domene and I began another round of analyses, this time aimed at addressing the specific questions posed in this thesis. We individually reviewed all the data for each couple, including video recordings, transcripts of other portions of the primary interviews, narratives, and notes taken during the member-checking interviews. Upon completion of our independent analyses, we met to discuss our interpretations and came to mutually acceptable understandings of what was occurring in each of the participating couples, in terms of their actions, projects, themes, and other patterns relevant to the thesis questions. See Appendix C for a summary of the findings of this first stage of analysis.

A further analysis was then conducted to identify relevant themes across the entire sample. Consistent with existing action-project research (e.g., Young et al., 1999, 2003; Young, Valach, et al., 2001), the focus of this stage was to identify the themes and patterns that could be considered common across couples, and those that were unique to particular dyads. The process for this analysis across cases was similar to the first stage of the thesis-specific analysis. It began with the two individual researchers re-examining the data and results of the previous analysis. Each researcher identified the goals, projects and communication styles that he or she deemed to be present across the dyads. Subsequently, we met together to discuss these interpretations, raising new possibilities and challenging each other's ideas until consensus was reached about what actions,

projects, and patterns of interaction could be considered common across participants. The criteria used to decide whether a particular finding was “common” were those proposed by Domene and colleagues (Domene, 2005; Domene, Arim, & Young, 2007): (a) the frequency of occurrence of a theme within the sample, (b) the subjective importance of that theme, as reported by participants themselves (primarily revealed through the self-confrontations), and (c) the presence/absence of negative cases (i.e., experiences that contradicted the patterns that were initially identified). The result of this analysis was the identification of two dominant types of projects, two commonly found project-related themes, two patterns of action that could be considered typical, and one unanticipated pattern related to the importance of the timing of transition to understanding participants' transitions. These findings are described in Chapter 4.

The final stage of the analysis consisted of returning to the original data sets, to confirm that the findings of the cross-case analysis remained consistent with the actual experiences of participants. I conducted this validation stage of the analysis alone, by repeatedly reviewing the content of the transcripts and video-recordings to ensure that each reported result from the cross-case analysis was, indeed, evident in participants' actual experiences, and by finding specific examples of each emergent finding within the data set itself. This confirmation process revealed that the findings of the cross-case analysis were evident, and supported by examples throughout the data sets. They helped to further refine the manner in which findings were reported.

*Rigour and Validation*

A number of procedures were undertaken at different stages of the study, to maintain the rigour of the research process and to improve the trustworthiness of the findings.

*Consensus-based analysis.* To reduce the possibility of the findings becoming overly influenced by the biases and preconceptions of any individual researcher, multiple researchers had input at all stages of the analysis process. Note however that, in contrast to the quantitative technique of calculating interrater reliability, the approach used in this thesis was to have the different analysts discuss their interpretations together until a single, mutual understanding of the phenomenon emerged. It was assumed that the process of considering different people's interpretations of the data would protect against the possibility of drifting too far from the data.

*Multiple sources of information.* The use of multiple sources of data (i.e., interview information; direct, video-recorded observations of couples' behaviours in their joint interactions; constructions that emerged by having participants reflect on their experiences) provided a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of transition than could have been obtained from interview data alone. These multiple sources permitted the researchers to confirm the presence and nature of theme as they were present in participants' manifest behaviours and their subjective self-descriptions. Additionally, multiple information sources permitted dissonances between behaviours and self-perceptions to emerge.

*Grounding findings in the data.* The final stage of the analysis process involved returning to the original data-set to compare the findings against what participants

actually said and did, and to find concrete examples of each of the findings. Findings that were not evident in the data itself were assumed to be artefacts of the analysis process / researchers' biases and, consequently, were eliminated. For example, the potential effect of age differential between partners was unsubstantiated within the original data set and therefore was considered an artefact. As such, it was not accepted as a relevant finding.

*External audit.* An external auditor also reviewed the results of our analysis, to provide feedback regarding how well the findings reflected her own understanding of the data. The external auditor, Ashley, was a research team member from the larger study. She reviewed a draft description of the findings and provided feedback about areas that failed to ring true for her. Although there was a strong degree of consistency between Ashley's feedback and our original analysis, several changes were made to the findings, based on her recommendations. Specifically, further evidence from the data (e.g., participant quotes) were incorporated, and the wordings of some descriptions were revised.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The findings that emerged reflected not only the questions that guided the research (the joint projects that emerged; the joint actions that couples take together), but also several additional, unanticipated themes. In particular, the timing of couples' transitions appeared to have an important influence on the nature of their projects and actions. This chapter is organized into three sections: (a) description of the findings related to participants' joint projects (e.g., research question 1, part of research question 3); (b) description of the patterns of action that couples engaged in (e.g., research question 1, part of research question 3); and the unanticipated findings about the importance of the timing of transitions for understanding the projects and actions that emerged.

## Couples' Joint Projects

*Within-Case Analysis of Projects*

*Couple 001.* The project statement that emerged for couple 001 was: "We are working together to explore options, and maintain happiness and satisfaction in our professional lives". This project captured a number of different goals that the partners in this couple were trying to achieve as they negotiated their future career plans. The most important aspect of their project for both of them was to achieve satisfactory and fulfilling employment.

Male: See (laugh) actually, this is, um...we are both in a different situation.

Because, I'm pretty happy with, with my job I got, I found here. Um. But she's not, she's really unhappy with her job. And ah, this, I have the feeling, and also the, during, over the, the last, last couple of weeks, actually that's, that she is not

really happy with her job, and this is, but this is a very crucial part. . . I'm really interested that the, that she now finds something better, something that suits her, her better. . . And I, I, I guess that um, that she doesn't really know what she wants to do. And I do, I do understand that because I've been there too...just before I came here.

As can be seen, there was a strong indication that the male was content in his current work position, and was interested in supporting his partner in moving toward occupational satisfaction, as they negotiated options for her and explored how she might use her educational training while pursuing her occupational interests and dreams.

The partners in this couple further demonstrated commitment to assisting each other achieve their occupational desires through encouragement and support, as they collaboratively investigated career paths that would enable them to maintain a healthy relationship. For example, they brainstormed opportunities for networking in order to connect the female partner to people who they hoped could move her toward obtaining a more satisfactory occupation.

*Couple 002.* The project statement that most adequately described the partners in couple 002's most pertinent project during their joint conversation was: "Discovering the appropriate direction for [male's] career, in order to make plans for our future together." Although the primary focus was on the man's career direction, there was also negotiation regarding their mutual future together, as his decisions concerning occupational training and direction impelled the woman to question his intentions and interject her own concerns and future desires. This couple was exploring options for earning money, both in the short term and in terms of future employment, when they finished their schooling,



while honouring their commitment to maintaining a flexible lifestyle. They were also thinking about where to live and work in the long term that would satisfy their mutual goals. One of the woman's goals in the project was for her partner to not drop out of school, as this would drastically influence their future plans. Additionally, the man's self-confrontation revealed that commitment to the relationship itself was an important component of the project for him.

Interviewer: So what are the wheels that are going on (laughs) there behind the pause?

Male: Kind of like, well, how could we, you know, if I did decide to change direction, how could we manage that [unclear] um, because I don't know. I wasn't really sure how to answer that.

Interviewer: And what were you feeling as she was saying, if you wanna marry me, you gotta be here (laughs), you gotta stay.

Male: Um....what was I feeling....um (long pause) I don't know, like I, I don't, I don't know what.....I don't know, I don't know, how [unclear] you'd even manage that, really, like. (laughs)

Interviewer: It's almost beyond....

Male: I haven't really thought about it. Um, I haven't thought about, having considered going there, seriously enough, to think about how that would happen, and I guess I just, more or less was thinking more of, if I had to do that, then I guess, you know, we would, perhaps we'd have to wait longer, and maybe we'd have to deal with being apart for a year or so, or even um, I even thought of um, working [unclear]. I considered, because of the, the debt that I'm accumulating

now...Um..I could even work, you know, for a couple years and then go to seminary. But yeah, so that's something that's crossed my mind, but I didn't spit it out. (laughs)

Overall, there was a sense that they were negotiating a balance between wanting structure and clarity about the future while maintaining flexibility and openness to whatever new possibilities might emerge. Although this couple discussed potential possibilities for future shifts, they seemed not to establish any firm commitments that deviated from their current direction.

*Couple 003.* The partners in couple 003 described their joint project as “Actively pursuing long-term goals for balancing work and life together by coming to an agreement about the specifics and timing of those goals.” Both members of this couple were already on occupational paths that interested them, and gave no indication that they intended to deviate. The woman was content with her recently found employment as a counsellor for a government agency, and the male indicated that he wanted to remain with his current employer throughout his plumbing apprenticeship, and into the world of full-time work.

However, they remained actively engaged in negotiating a number of different factors related to their future careers and lives together. They shared the same goals for the future but differed in their desired timing and implementation of those goals. Their joint goals of travelling and having children created some challenges for maintaining their career directions. For example, their discussion revealed that, although having children was clearly a joint goal, they were still figuring out how to balance parenthood, childcare issues, and their financial situations. The couple brainstormed potential solutions that would allow them to maintain their current occupations, establish care for

children and maintain adequate financial income. Finances proved to be another factor of deliberation as they explored the realities of paying off student loan debt and building equity by purchasing a home. They were exploring options regarding establishing their finances in a manner that would enable them to save enough money to buy a house and support children. Negotiation of these factors was complex, as their financial goals conflicted with their goals of travelling and having children.

*Couple 004.* The project for this couple was related to practical issues of preparing for the partners' lives together: "What to do about friendships as a couple, planning for future travel given financial constraints and work demands, figuring out new ways to relate to parents as a couple, and supporting each other in career transitions and planning." Their project was relatively diffuse and unfocused, revolving around various aspects of blending their lives together. Even though neither member of the couple was satisfied with his or her current work, and both planned on pursuing other occupational opportunities, career seemed secondary in their future planning. The priorities for the partners in this couple were on goals related to the transition into married life and negotiating new ways of relating to their parents (especially each others' parents) after marriage. They also discussed topics related to religion, the timing of children, friends, travel, and potential options for caring for their pet rabbit. Concerns regarding the acceptance and tolerance of friends were raised by the woman in hopes that she could reconcile differences between her fiancé and her best friend in order to maintain close relational contact with both people. She also indicated that she felt external pressures from her peers to have children sooner than the two of them had envisioned. This couple also expressed interest in travelling, but had different ideas of where their travel time and

money would best be spent. They also discussed the realities of her conversion to Judaism and the potential challenges they might face from people around them (e.g., family, rabbi). In short, their project appeared to go in multiple directions, without a clear focus on future occupations.

*Couple 005.* Couple 005's project could best be summarized as: "Discussing goals and plans for housing and work while considering our differing preferences, priorities, and needs." Two clear topics of concern emerged from their discussion: (a) disagreement about whether to buy a house or not, and (b) the challenge that the woman was experiencing in finding a satisfactory job to coincide with her interests and education. Both members of the couple believed that it was important for the woman to pursue a job that she found satisfying and purposeful, even if that pursuit required further education.

Interviewer: How does that make you feel when she wants to just stay in the, um, public sector, when it might be better if she's in the private sector?

Male: Um...kind of indifferent, ah...I don't try to tell her what to do, 'cause I know she wouldn't be happy. Ah, I know she's a strong advocate for the elderly. So I wouldn't try to push her out of that. (pause) But, I still like to tease her a bit.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. (laughs) Yeah... Um, so, she wants to go for her Ph...do her Ph.D. right?

Male: Mm-hmm.

Interviewer: So you would probably have to go back to the role of, like, being the sole supporter. How does that, when she was saying that, how did that make you... what were you thinking about that?

Male: I'm fine with that.

In this couple, the woman demonstrated an underlying concern related to financial security and stability. This was evident through her reservation to commit to a mortgage, her desire to pay off their accumulated debts, as well as her uncertainties regarding the inconsistent nature of her partner's employment (construction). The man was unwilling to share in her concerns. He expressed that he was content with his current work situation, and that he was not interested in pursuing a more predictable hourly wage position.

Their views differed dramatically as they discussed their perspectives on job security and the issue of buying a home. Even though they seemed to share the mutual goal and desire of living on an acreage one day, they had conflicting ideas of how they were going to achieve it, and were somewhat unyielding in their positions. The man viewed buying a home as an opportunity to invest and a means to climb the real-estate ladder in order to obtain their desired home, while the woman hoped to continue renting and save money before purchasing a house. It seemed that the friction between opinions was grounded primarily in the woman's desire for financial security and stability, and the man's opportunistic sense of investment. She viewed assuming a mortgage as a potential risk, and was unwilling to sacrifice her desire for country living to move to an urban setting to invest in the real-estate market. In contrast, he viewed renting as a poor investment and a waste of money.

*Couple 006.* The project that emerged for couple 006 was: "Structuring and refining a vision for the future that is mutually acceptable for both of us, and trying to appease both sides of the family as much as possible." The members of this couple were both committed to their future career directions, but were completing their educations during their research involvements, and had not yet found long term employment. They

shared mutual goals and dreams, and even seemed to create them spontaneously together. For example, they each validated and built upon the novel ideas and dreams expressed by the other.

Male: So. I kinda wanted to like, buy a place like, and then kinda also buy like, a house that attaches to it....

Female: Yeah. Sounds good.

Male: And, so we kinda buy the house for us, and we buy like a small kinda cottage.

Female: Hm...

Male: That's attached to it. And then, of course, I'm pretty sure your parents will wanna come to it a lot.

Female: (gasps)

Male: And my parents will wanna come to it a lot.

Female: You mean like, it's a guest house?

Male: Yeah.

Female: Oh my gosh, I love that... I totally love that!

One of the main issues of discussion was where to live and work following their graduations. Most of the conversation focused on finding a mutually acceptable location to live after graduation, a decision that would be influenced by many factors. They discussed their desires to remain in proximity to geographical elements such as beautiful scenery, mountains and lakes, as well as proximity to their parents. The availability of job options and ability to quickly obtain work in their fields of study also shaped their negotiations, as did affordability of housing. Other factors included immigration issues,

because one was Canadian and the other from the United States. One member of the couple would be required to obtain citizenship or landed immigrant status wherever they eventually decided to live. Other topics that emerged included when to get married, when to pursue involvement in church-related missions, and how to maintain connections with their families.

Male: ...But there's also two stages, like, we kinda wanna have fun for a little while. And then eventually, after we are married, we wanna settle down and actually start, start a family or whatever and have kids. We don't wanna move around a lot ...we plan on doing something fun for a couple of years. And then we'll come back and live somewhere, so we're deciding where we're gonna live. And, family's really important to both of us. So, just through the process of elimination, we're deciding where to live...

They both appeared to be committed to their relationship for the long term, and were moving in the same direction regarding dreams and aspirations.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis of Projects*

At this point, it is evident that couples' joint projects are characterized more by diversity than commonality. Each couple had unique configurations of goals, priorities, and salient life circumstances. There was no aspect of the projects that was shared by all six couples. Nevertheless, there were two types of projects that could be considered common within the sample: (a) obtaining and/or maintaining occupations that were suitable/appropriate and/or satisfying, and (b) negotiating and achieving greater harmony to resolve areas of disagreement in future lives together.

*Obtaining appropriate occupations.* The first identified project that was evident across couples reflected the goal of obtaining and/or maintaining occupations that were suitable/appropriate and/or satisfying. There were two identifiable themes that emerged in this type of joint project: (a) finding work related to education, interests, and/or dreams, and (b) best-fit options for mutual satisfaction.

For many of the couples, an important aspect of their joint projects was to find work related to their education, interests, and other life plans; not just any job, but work that was appropriate for them. For example, all of the couples sought employment related to their fields of training/education, and those who were unable to achieve this experienced varying degrees of frustration and distress.

Female 005: OK, and I feel frustrated because I know you really want to buy a house...But I don't feel like I'm getting a job, because I've put resumes out there, CVs out there. And I haven't got call-backs because I either don't have enough experience or I'm not a nurse or a social worker. And I know that you wanna move, you wanna buy a house, and I don't feel that we're financially stable enough to buy a house, or I don't wanna take on a mortgage, because that feels like a huge responsibility.

Another interesting dynamic that related to this project was the potential conflict between education and dreams.

Female 001: ... in the other discussion that we had, um, he was actually, he threw that on, he was like, why don't you do that whole bakery dream that you had. And you keep talking about it. And he actually put that in my mind. I had never thought about doing that, really doing that, anywhere in the near future...I wasn't



really thinking about it, because I have an academic background, so I'm thinking about putting up a bakery or something. That's kinda silly. You know, it's a silly, romantic idea of having this little place ...it doesn't mean that I cannot, if it makes me happy, ... do something that's more, not so much, head stuff, and more practical work ....yeah, I hold myself back, I would never cons-, would have never considered it, because I think, "Well, I've got a degree. What am I doing, thinking about opening up a bakery?" or something, you know.

On the other hand, long term employment in occupations that were congruent with participants' educations, interests and dreams seemed to be personally fulfilling for those who were able to achieve that. In fact, during the joint conversations, those who were working in environments related to their interests and education or training subtly indicated their contentment, while the majority of the couples' energy was devoted to achieving a similar state for the dissatisfied partner.

In the same way, couples sought options that would allow for the greatest degree of mutual satisfaction. Although partners in the couples were exploring ways to achieve individual occupational satisfaction, they also actively supported each other in the process, in order to attain equal levels of occupational satisfaction within their relationships. Some evidence emerged to suggest that imbalanced occupational satisfaction creates tension and/or stress within the relationships of romantic partners.

Male 001: ... when you talk to her... something is really, really, I don't know... there's a pressure there, or something like that, she's not really, really, um, enthusiastic, or... she can be, very different, and very, very positive, and very energetic, and, she has that in her...and actually this is not... what she used to be.

So, I experience her right now ... in a situation where she is kind of lost somewhere, right. And I, I experience that in her, her behaviour...like this is very, like, passive behaviour, ...it's always hard, and she's...yeah, it's, it's hard to talk to her about that, like that.

It appears that imbalanced occupational satisfaction motivates the partners in romantic couples to work together, to explore options that may provide more satisfaction for their partners who are not content with their work situations. The members of couples mutually explored concepts, and provided encouragement and support in a way that would move their partners who lacked suitable jobs in the direction of attaining more appropriate work positions resulting in a sense equilibrium and more similar levels of occupational satisfaction within the relationship.

*Negotiating specific areas of difference.* The other aspect of projects that was consistent across the couples was the engagement of the partners in negotiating and achieving greater harmony to resolve areas of difference in their future lives together. Specific areas of conflict that emerged for these six couples were: (a) familial influences/factors, (b) financial arrangements involving housing, (c) location of residence, (d) travel, and (e) timing of having children.

All partners in the couples attempted to achieve greater harmony as they explored their future lives together. These attempts were evident in all conversations. In some cases, mutual agreement was not obtained, but the desire to obtain it was evident in the discussions. Participants also all expressed commitments to both their partners and to their relationships as they planned for their futures. Despite significant differences that some partners in the couples experienced, they actively participated in conversations to

bring clarity and achieve harmony. Members in all of the couples demonstrated efforts to resolve their differences. This resolution was not always achieved, but there was a clear effort by the partners to convey their differences and face the realities of those differences together. For a few couples, this resolution took the form of coming to accept the fact that they were at opposing ends of the spectrums concerning some issues.

For a number of couples across the sample, family contexts seemed to be a significant source of conflict that partners were attempting to negotiate. It seemed that family influences were most strongly experienced in couples in which the members were discussing the potential of marriage (e.g., engaged to be married or on the verge of becoming engaged). Their dialogues were characterized by many comments and negotiations related to family, especially to each others' parents. In particular, parental involvement strongly influenced the manner in which members of these couples made decisions.

Male 004: Right. You gotta understand one thing...that I don't wanna argue with my mom because she just lost her mother. And this [wedding] means everything to her. This is all she's looking forward to, all she talks about to me is... "the wedding this, the wedding that".

Female 004: But I think that's what bugs me, because when we got engaged, she didn't care. She didn't wanna be involved. She told my mom and me that, you know, "oh it's up to you guys because I don't, I just can't handle it." And then, you know, turn around a month later, her and your dad....

Male: [same time as female] Mm-hmm. I know.

Female: ...have taken over the entire thing and it's just, like, my parents feel

really left out now, because they don't get to make any of the decisions because your parents just decide.

Another area in which families needed to be considered was in negotiations about where to live in the future. For most of the sample, close proximity or availability of access to family was a determining factor.

Male 006: My parents also want us to stay here, which doesn't make sense at all.

Female 006: Why?

Male: Because, I think my mom's kinda realising that, she's like, "Hmmm. If they stay here now, they might stay here later. And then I'll have [unclear] grandkids' soccer games to go to. Yay"!

Female: But wouldn't she want us to move away and then maybe someday come back here? Because she has to know we're gonna move eventually, like. We might not live in the same country for the rest of our lives.

Male: Yeah. I don't know.

Female: Hmm. Like, I know my parents really want us to come down there.

Male: They do?

Female: Like, they would love that. Except they know it's not gonna be in Oregon. But the only problem is, they also really, really like it out here, like, every time they're out here, they wish that they lived here. So...

Male: Yeah.

Female: They might wanna move closer to the border some day. Like, up north.

Differing perspectives on committing to a mortgage and purchasing a house also proved to be an area that required active negotiation. Although most partners in the

couples were in contemplation phases in terms of purchasing homes, none of them were investigating or actively pursuing the real-estate market. What emerged from their discussions, however, was differing perspectives about the affordability and type of housing they desired. A number of financial barriers emerged, as members discussed the possibility of home ownership and acquiring mortgages, student loan debt, work income, and factors related to other goals (e.g., expenses associated with travel plans).

Male 005: I would like to buy a house, because I don't think paying rent is.....a good financial decision. Because you don't build equity. You spend over...nine, almost ten thousand dollars a year, in rent. You get nothing back from that except a place to stay.

Female 005: But it just seems like such a big deal to, to buy a house. To take on, like, a huge mortgage, because we don't have a down payment. And, I know it's like throwing your money away but it just, then, if something goes wrong, you have to pay for it. And we already have debt from our educations...both of our educations. And so it just feels like adding another debt, It would just be too much (pause) And I just think it's, like, it just feels like way too much of a responsibility.

Male: (long pause) I wanna house. (laughs)

Affordability of housing also influenced location of residency, as couples sought to balance their housing aspirations with financial realities. A plethora of other factors were presented as couples discussed their future locations of residence (e.g., familial proximity, geographical elements, population size, work opportunities, further education).

Like housing, travel was contemplated and desired, but did not appear to be an immediate pursuit. Even though most couples desired to travel, disagreements emerged as they discussed the specifics of what travel might look like (e.g., when and where) and its affordability. As the woman in couple 004 put it, "When we talk about travel, it's... sometimes it's really frustrating." The final area where couples commonly needed to actively negotiate their differences was the topic of having children. All partners in the couples that mentioned children in their discussions seemed open to having them sometime in the future. As such, the main negotiation revolved around the timing of children rather than discussions of whether to have them or not.

#### *Additional Project-Related Findings*

There were also two additional findings related to couples' projects that emerged repeatedly across the sample: (a) economical/financial influences, and (b) learning to relate to others as a couple. These two underlying themes appeared to shape participants' projects and the manner in which decisions were made. These themes appeared to be important parts of the environments/contexts in which the couples' actions occurred and, as such, served as boundaries for participants' projects.

*Economic/financial influence.* Economic and financial factors seemed to influence the majority of couples' projects. Income seemed to reciprocally influence the impact of these factors. Specifically, couples who were set in their occupational pursuits and achieved higher incomes had broader parameters within which they could negotiate projects in relation to economical and financial factors.

The economic/financial theme was evident in the project of finding appropriate and satisfying jobs (i.e., appropriate and affordable/realistic) and also in negotiations of

differences between the partners. It was recognized that an appropriate and satisfying job was framed not only in terms of fit with education or training and interests, but also in terms of providing sufficient income. It seemed that a job could not be considered appropriate and satisfying unless the wage earned was consistent with the training and experience that an individual possessed. In fact, it was apparent that frustration was experienced when individuals failed to receive suitable financial compensation for the work they did.

Male 005: (pause) So...career choice. Are you...frustrated that you went into counselling?

Female 005: (sighs)

Male: When you could have made it just fine being a music teacher?

Female: (pause) Hm...(pause) Actually, yeah, right now I feel kind of pissed off.

Because we've spent a heck of a lot of money for me to get a master's degree.

And it's not even enough, like, I need to go on for my Ph.D. (pause) So again, a position where – well...hopefully I'll get scholarships again - but a position where you're gonna have to...support me. But it takes so many years to do what I wanna do, and even then, the pay is crap. And...

In essence, economic/financial factors shaped the negotiation of couples as they weighed their financial responsibilities against their work incomes.

In the same way, concerns about money were the source of much of the disagreement between partners. It was these differences that sparked the need for discussion and negotiation. As such, financial concerns shaped the manner in which negotiations were conducted, in terms of how travel was pursued, debt was managed, and

how purchases of homes and location of residences were considered. The issue of what was realistic, given the couple's incomes and debt-loads, influenced the discussions of all these topics. Even the dynamics of having children seemed to be determined by income (e.g., cost of childcare, impact on hours of work/income). In some cases, financial considerations were linked to levels of personal security and stability.

*Relating to others, as a couple.* Learning to relate to others as a couple, rather than as two individuals, was an important part of the process of negotiating areas of difference. It was also an issue that tended to remain unstated between partners during their joint conversations, emerging primarily in participants' self-confrontations, as they reflected on their conversations. Relating with others impacted partners' abilities and levels of willingness to manage negotiations. For example, couple 004 was limited in their ability to negotiate wedding plans, as the male seemed to value his mother's desires and perspectives above his partner's. Another example was the manner in which couple 006 negotiated their ideal location of residence. They both viewed where their parents lived as an important consideration, as they discussed the best-fit options for their own residence. Proximity to parents was particularly a concern for couples who discussed having children in the future. Relationships with parents/in-laws seemed to be of greatest concern, while friends and other loved ones seemed to have similar yet less impacting effects. Learning to relate to work colleagues as a couple also occasionally emerged in discussions around occupational/career satisfaction (as demonstrated by the woman in couple 001, who desired a more social group of cohorts with which to work).



## Couples' Project-related Action

*Within-Case Analysis of Action*

*Couple 001.* Couple 001's conversation can best be described as a delicate dance, with the female partner pressing for advice from her male partner concerning her current work dilemma. He responded to her push for consultation by processing her concerns through dialogue, rather than providing direct answers. This pattern of pushing and responding through more questions rather than providing answers persisted throughout the conversation, but in a close and caring way. The woman reflected on their dance, stating "Ah, I feel like he was giving me, um, options that were, I w-, I was happy with, like, OK, consulting." Even though the man occasionally offered her suggestions and potential options, he facilitated her own exploration through questioning, and seemed aware that it might be more meaningful for her to arrive at a satisfactory answer on her own.

Male: Yeah, and the thing is, I don't know what, what is best for her, right. I don't know what, what really makes her happy in her job. I have an idea what that might be, but I can't tell her. I can't, can't tell her, "Okay you should do that and that and that." I rather would want to, want to ask her. So that, asking her questions, that she, that she finds her own answers in that. This is my intention. Because I, I believe that, um, you can, you can't be told by others what you actually want to do, and what's best for you...

It was as though he was attempting to help her maintain her place as the expert concerning her own experience.

Female: I'm more like, "OK, this is what I wanna do". You ask me, you get an answer now. Before, I was asking him... "What should I do? What do you think I could do?" I don't know what I could do, and now he's pushed me so far with his questions (laughs) and not giving me an answer. He can't of course, because he's not me. Um, but, I think I'm at this point I'm like, yeah, well, he's, just, he needs to ask long enough and then, get me to this point where I'm all, yeah, wh-, what do I wanna do? I wanna do this and that, and now I'm giving him answers. I'm giving myself answers because he's, he's pushing me, to, to think, to make decisions, in a way, and, yeah...so I think I have switched, to more, yeah, like, defining myself, and, finding, finding out.....starting to be a little bit "active thinking". (laughs) Yeah.

Both members contributed to the conversation, although the male partner facilitated ongoing attention to the underlying core issues as the bulk of the interactions were focused on helping her explore visions for her future occupation and the implications of potential choices. The woman indicated that, even though they were primarily focused on her work exploration during this conversation, there were times when the roles were reversed. The dance of brainstorming and discussing ideas was sometimes directed toward the man's concerns. Likewise, the man also experienced their interaction as supportive, mutually explorative conversation that could be focused on either partner.

Male: ... and this is actually something that we both have in common and that we both did. And I've been in the situation where I didn't know where to go and what to do. And ah, H. was, the, the part that I'm playing right now.

Overall, they were responsive to what the other partner was communicating as they both actively engaged in the discussions. They also both initiated topics and carried them through, and their dialogue was observed as quite seamless and fluid. A degree of comfort was displayed as they challenged each other, while maintaining a tone of respect, empathy, care, and support. It also seemed that the male partner was more tempered in his emotional experience, as he appeared more subdued and contemplative, while she was somewhat animated and laughed periodically to relieve emotional tension.

Female: I, I feel like a plant that is not being watered when I'm at my job. I'm actually excited about every word I exchange with any one of them. (laughs)

*Couple 002.* Couple 002's patterns of action during the partners' conversations were somewhat hierarchical in nature, despite leaving some room for mutual discussion and exploration of future plans. The woman seemed to take a more subordinate role in the decision-making process. She would make suggestions and convey her desires, but not with enough conviction to immediately alter the decision-making process. For instance, during the conversation she deferred her concerns, in order to maintain the traditional hierarchy in the relationship.

Female: Whatever's gonna happen is just gonna happen, so...yeah, he has like, very different ideas, and...not that I'm like, one of those people who wants to be like, the 'behind-the-scenes wife' in the future or anything like that, but....and I'm not like a feminist, angry person who wants like. I'm happy like, you know, just like, looking after my husband, kind of thing. Yeah, so...um...I will not disagree with something that he says, unless I really, really, really, really have something

against it, and there's not a lot of things in my life that I have, you know, like real, I mean...

In contrast, the man exhibited a high degree of ambivalence about the issues being discussed. The woman tolerated his ambivalence, tentatively stating her desires and using physical touch to maintain connection during the conversation. She perceived their age difference to be important in determining their interactional style.

Female: Yeah I think he's just trying to make me, like, I think he doesn't entertain those, stupid silly jokes because um, he just wants to like get me out of that habit, maybe. 'Cause I think he knows. And at the same time, he's like, well, let me just tell you, you know (laughs)... You know, he is quite a bit older than me, he's twenty-four, and I'm twenty. And he'll be twenty-five this year, and I just turned twenty, what, in June. So, and I've always been aware of that, and I c-, because of that I, respect him a lot, because, you know. And, so it doesn't bug me at all. It's just like...yeah, at this stage of my life right now, where I am, is that I'm trying to um ... I'm just trying to be more grown up.

Despite this, the woman remained the primary energizer of the conversation and the initiator of topics. She encouraged her partner to elaborate on his comments even though he ignored her efforts, and avoided offering any indication of assurance regarding issues that were emotionally unnerving for her. He minimized or deflected her attempts at sharing at a more emotionally vulnerable level, perhaps to the point of provocation. The male avoided delving into significant issues, and responded to topics and ideas primarily with contemplation rather than by making any firm decisions or commitments to decisions he was unsure of being able to fulfill.

Male: N...n-, I don't know how to say it more, just...I'm being very indirect, I guess, and, yeah.

Interviewer: Skirting the issue sort of a thing?

Male: Mm-hmm.

Further indications were:

Interviewer: OK, that's kind of an elephant in the room that nobody's mentioning, hey?

Male: Yeah. Yeah, and so she's laughing here. She says, "Why?" Because there's a particular [educational institution] there. (laughs) And then, so, she even avoids saying it, directly herself. (laughs)

His overall demeanour was quite closed, guarded, and hesitant in this conversation, and came across as avoidant.

At the same time, this couple's nonverbal communication was dynamic, intense and revealing, but their verbal communication seemed reserved and restricted, as though they were concealing internal processes. This was evidenced by the self-confrontations and video recordings. They revealed much more about the conversations than the "conversation transcripts" allowed.

*Couple 003.* Couple 003 mutually initiated, and collaboratively discussed, topics in a relaxed way that flowed naturally. The woman asked probing questions and listened as her partner explained and described his thoughts. Similarly, the man supported her when she described and explained her perspectives. One difference between the partners was that the woman tended to talk about, and consider, her partner's point of view as well as her own, while the man focused primarily on his own perspective.

The woman openly expressed her emotional experiences and attempted to get her partner to do the same. However, her attempts at drawing out his emotions about the issues being discussed were resisted, and she was unable to pull him toward her deeper emotional level of communication. The man seemed to minimize and disregard his emotional experiences, or perhaps he was oblivious to her emotional prompts and their emotional experiences. His emotions seemed to be expressed primarily as pauses and moments of introspection.

Male: I had [a plan] that I'd be outa the house, at twenty. For example.

Female: Mm-hmm.

Male: Twenty-five, I mean. I'd probably be married by twenty-six.

Female: Mm-hmm.

Male: But that didn't happen.

Female: [unclear]

Male: (laughs) Ah well.

Female: So you're frustrated.

Male: (pause) Well, you can't *make* stuff happen.

Subtle emotions were expressed, but overall the verbal and nonverbal communication was fairly reserved, as the woman gradually adopted a more cognitive form of communication that mirrored that of her partner's. They discussed the details of issues, not the emotions attached to them. They explored, planned, and searched for clarification at a cognitive level, which made for a relatively balanced interactive dialogue.

The man was also somewhat intense and succinct in his behaviour, a style which his partner responded to with humour, to soften his demeanour. He was also direct, and

maintained a firm tone, while she maintained a soft-spoken, agreeable, and candid demeanour. Whenever there were pauses in the conversation, the female would initiate further topics or elaborations, and interjections were more like the completion of each other's thoughts rather than interruptions. They also engaged in physical contact periodically throughout their conversations.

*Couple 004.* This couple's conversational pattern featured some incongruence. They seemed to be attempting to hit each other with "dialogue arrows" but consistently missed their targets. If they did happen to notice their partner's statements, it was while the comments flew past their heads without their receiving the full intent or message of what their partner was attempting to convey. This was evident during certain moments in the conversation as they engaged in discussion about topics but did not negotiate the details to a point of reaching a decision or resolution. Their pace of dialogue seemed to be at different levels and frequencies, as the man shifted topics tangentially and the woman spoke constantly.

Overall, this couple's conversation had a rapid pace and it did not seem to slow enough for options to be fully explored. They paid only partial attention to each other's comments. They each appeared to be preoccupied with his or her own thoughts and experiences, responding to elements of comments, rather than the comments as a whole. At times, the female partner appeared oblivious to the man's shifts in demeanour, and acted as though she was interacting with someone who was fully attending to her. Both partners occasionally expressed emotions, but the rapid pace of their interaction appeared to bypass those emotions without processing them.

The woman instigated meaningful topics and elaborated on her ideas and desires. She attempted to get her partner to do the same; however, at times he responded with minimizations such as, "No, that's fine," or "Don't worry." He also tended to make tangential statements, and interjected comments that were irrelevant to the flow of interaction. For example, as the conversation proceeded on the topic of care for their pet, the man made the following comment:

Male: Hey, I have an idea. (pause) My dad has, like, a really tall thing we used to use for bugs. That blocks, yeah, he can use, yeah, that's a good idea. We can try that. And also, about the travelling thing we talked about...I got no disagreements.

Female: (pause) What do you mean (laughing) you have no disagreements? About what?

They both brought energy and humour to the conversation and were both hyperkinetic, with frequent movements and shifts in posture. There appeared to be a lot of nonverbal communication and commotion that was not elaborated upon verbally. They also used intentional physical contact in their interactions. For example, the woman placed her leg on her partner's lap, while he played with her sock and pant leg as they talked.

Despite these idiosyncrasies, the couple seemed to be very comfortable with their style of interaction, and although no negotiation or resolution of concrete decisions and solutions were observed by the analysts, the participants reported that the conversation was effective in helping them move towards necessary outcomes.

Female: Um, I thought [the conversation] was really good, and I do...you know, like there are still things that we have to work out. And we both know that. And we also know that those things are gonna take time, that it's not a "quick fix," and



it's not something that's just gonna happen overnight, so. We still can talk about them, over and over and over again, and eventually there will be a solution. And we're okay with that. It's not something that we worry about.

*Couple 005.* The patterns of action demonstrated by couple 005 seemed somewhat imbalanced and fragmented. The woman appeared to be doing all of the work in the conversation, initiating topics of discussion, attending to her partner's reactions, and probing for elaboration. In contrast, the man presented as laid-back and minimally responsive. He paid attention without actively engaging in the conversation. He was able to describe his own opinions and desires, but rarely responded to, or demonstrated, consideration for his partner's. His physical presentation was casual, with guarded posture (e.g., leaned back, crossed arms, and slightly raised chin). The woman engaged in the conversation through self-relation, expressing her concerns and using "I" statements. Additionally, her partner's passive, "listening but not responding" pattern of action appeared to energize the woman, as she sought but failed to obtain a reaction from him. For example,

Female: I need to get a job. But I don't feel like I'm getting a job ... I don't feel that we're financially stable enough to buy a house, or I don't wanna take on a mortgage, because that feels like a huge responsibility. And, like, more than I wanna take on.

Male: (long pause) All right.

Female: Doesn't that bug you?

Despite these attempts, the man responded in only a limited way, especially when strong emotions were evoked. The man remained very cognitively focused, while the woman

attempted to interact at an emotional level. When she expressed an emotion, her partner would respond using cognitive reasoning and explanations. This, combined with the minimal nature of his responses, had the effect of invalidating the woman's experiences, causing her to withdraw from the topic at hand. The couple did, however, use humour to relieve tension, and physical touch to maintain connection (primarily initiated by the woman). Not surprisingly, this pattern of action resulted in a failure to reach agreement on many conversational topics.

*Couple 006.* This couple's interaction was characterized by balanced, mutual discussion. The couple tracked well with each other, and their dialogue appeared effortless, fluid, and playful. A variety of topics were raised, and then processed and explored, in a way that flowed well. Both partners actively and collaboratively engaged with topics raised and maintained candid, optimistic, demeanours.

Consideration of each other's desires was evident when the couple shared their goals and dreams. They dreamed together by brainstorming together, and building on each other's comments in a positive manner. When making decisions about how to achieve their goals, there was a willingness to elaborate and truly engage with each other at all levels (cognitive, emotional, and physical) during the discussions. For example, when they explored the realities of the woman working as an on-call teacher, the man sought clarification through further questioning, and the woman responded with relevant elaborations.

The woman seemed to be the primary instigator of new conversational topics, but once a topic was initiated both partners actively engaged in the discussion. The man sometimes interjected with tangential and humorous statements (e.g., critiquing a

possible city to live in because of its hockey team). However, these interjections were incorporated into the flow of the conversation, which brought the discussion back to more serious topics. This couple appeared to be very “in the moment,” as they mutually engaged in conversations around what their lives together would be like once they graduated. As the conversation progressed, they were able to condense and refine their options, to achieve high levels of agreement on many topics.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis of Action*

The cross-case analysis revealed few commonalities across participants in the sample. Instead, each couple appeared to have their own unique style of interaction as the partners engaged in conversations about their transitions to work. Thus, the short answer to the second part of the third research question is that there were no common patterns of action. One pattern of action that consistently occurred, however, was the use of non-verbal communication as part of their conversations. The nature and meaning of non-verbal gestures differed from couple to couple, but all six couples used them. In particular, two kinds of nonverbal action emerged repeatedly (though not universally) in the sample: (a) the use of laughter as catharsis for emotional intensity, and (b) intentional physical contact during conversation (primarily initiated by females).

*Cathartic laughter.* Most individuals seemed to engage in cathartic laughter to some degree. This form of laughter was recognized as incongruence between verbal content and paraverbal and/or non-verbal expression. Typically, one partner would describe something that was distressing, and the other would respond with weak laughter, as in the following interaction:

Female 002: (smiles) Please don't say [City]. Seriously.

Male 002: It's possible.

Female: (laughs) (whispers) I don't wanna go to [City].

Male: (laughs)

Female: (whispering) [City] scares me.

Male: (laughs) Yeah, it's possible, we, something could happen.

This form of incongruent laughter appeared to have a cathartic effect, a way of dealing with certain unstated elements (e.g., emotional intensity, ambivalence, disdain) within the joint conversations. It seemed that incongruent laughter coincided with stressful personal experiences, and was used as a “substitute emotional expression.”

*Physical contact.* Most couples had at least one member who intentionally engaged in physical touch as a conversational tool, usually to establish contact and draw the other person into the conversation. This physical contact took many forms, but seemed to have a similar affect of establishing some level of connection. For example, couple 003 sat facing each other on a couch while the male explained that his life plan had not transpired in the manner in which he had envisioned. He made a comment about not being married when he had originally planned, to which his partner responded with a reassuring comment and, while she spoke, she reached out and touched his hand. He responded by touching her hand as they sat paused, before moving on to a new topic. Another example was provided by couple 004, where the woman playfully hit her partner to draw him back to the substance of their discussion, after he drifted off on a tangent. This physical response returned the conversation to the topic that the woman wanted to explore, the issue of when to have children. Across the couples, intentional physical

contact appeared to be used to establish more of a connection between partners, and to draw attention to specific aspects or topics in conversations.

#### *Additional Action-Related Findings*

Another finding that emerged was information about how different kinds of action affected the progress that couples were able to achieve, in terms of negotiating mutually acceptable decisions. Participants' actions could be classified into two distinct types: (a) actions/characteristics that promoted the attainment of mutually agreeable solutions, and (b) actions/characteristics that impeded this process. Many of these characteristics became evident through the self-confrontation interviews, and observations of nonverbal indicators. As a group, these couples tended to engage in more agreement-promoting actions than agreement-impeding actions.

The actions and characteristics that *promoted* progress toward agreement were:

1. Active, interactive, confident, and responsive
2. Explorative, inquisitive, and elaborative
3. Considerate, validating, and empathic
4. Respectful and committed
5. Aware of, in control of, and tolerant of, emotions
6. Humorous, intimate, and playful
7. Relevant, authentic, congruent, and consistent
8. Adaptable, flexible, and present "in the moment"

These actions appeared to lead to fluid, collaborative, balanced, well-paced, and relevant conversations which promoted mutual negotiation and decision-making.

In contrast, the actions and characteristics that *impeded* progress toward mutual negotiation and decision-making in the couples were:

1. Passive, unresponsive, and avoidant
2. Intrusive, abrupt, and demanding
3. Self-absorbed, close-minded, fearful, and restricted
4. Disrespectful and uncommitted
5. Unregulated, ignorant of, and intolerant of, emotions
6. Provocative and interruptive
7. Irrelevant, incongruent, and inconsistent
8. Rigid, distracted, disconnected, and distant

These patterns of action led to fragmented, incongruent, imbalanced, or irrelevant conversations that interfered with the process of reaching agreement concerning the partners' future goals and plans.

### The Timing of the Transition into the World of Work

#### *Projects and the Timing of the Transition*

One unanticipated but important aspect of couples' experiences that emerged in this study was the distinction that became evident between projects of individuals who were at the beginning stages of transitioning from school to work, and the projects of individuals who were already primarily in the world of work. Differences emerged in the amount of detail and scope of topics discussed, as well as in participants' perspectives and levels of commitment to engaging in their projects.

Couples who were at the beginning stages of transitioning from school to work (e.g., students and recent graduates) had projects that were vague and diffuse, rather than being focused on specific details related to work and career.

Male 004: Um....it's something that I, that I think about, yeah... if I were to become a priest, that the training on its own is something that interests me. But I'm not sure. Not really...

In contrast, couples who had already transitioned into the world of work seemed to be dealing with more concrete issues and projects that affected their present situations. Their discussions tended to be about more specific components of their work.

Female 001: ...But I'm still f-, fighting with myself. Should I ask my boss for a raise now, because the three month period is over?...

Male 001: Yeah.

Female: I'm wondering what he thinks if I don't.

Male: Yeah.

Female: But if I do ask for a raise, and then a month later I'm like "bye-bye," I feel (laughing) kinda bad too, you know. (laughing) [unclear] I've been thinking about that lately, like...

Male: [unclear]

Female: Because he might expect me to ask. I don't know what he'll say anyway, because from, from what I hear, there hasn't been many raises in that company for a while.

Another difference was the level of commitment and outlook (theoretical versus realistic) that was evident in the two kinds of couples. Those at the beginning stages of

the transition from school to work had a more idealistic, theoretical outlook on their future careers, and appeared less committed to the goals and plans that they made. If they did arrive at joint decisions, those decisions remained 'contemplative', rather than grounded in any concrete plans of action to achieve them.

On the other hand, couples who were already in the world of work maintained a more realistic outlook on their career futures, and were relatively committed to following through on their plans. If a concrete conclusion or decision was made, it seemed to be rooted in a course of action that would actually move them toward their desired outcomes.

Female 001: Just do one thing...this week.

Male 001: One thing.

Female: Yeah

Male: Or two things, and that's it.

Female: Yeah.

Male: But do it this weekend, next weekend.

Female: Yeah.

Male: You have, you've done actually...

Female: Yeah.

Male: Two things, in that direction. You never know how, how it.

Female: Yeah.

Male: Where it leads to, right?

Female: And then, I think, as I-, as soon as I make some progress, you know, as soon as I start meeting people, as soon as I really...like, the idea in my head right



now is like, ah, exhausting. But once I go there, once I'm there and meet people and talk to people, I'm gonna be motivated anyway, because that's stuff that I like, I do like talking to people. But....the idea is exhausting...doing it...

Male: Yeah.

Female: ...is much less exhausting than the idea in my head.

#### *Action and the Timing of the Transition*

Given the finding of a systematic difference in projects of couples at the beginning stages of transitioning from school to work, and those who had already made those transitions, I decided to explore whether there was a similar distinction in terms of how couples engaged around their projects (i.e., their patterns of action). This final exploration involved closely scrutinizing the actions of the two kinds of participants to identify systematic differences. This analysis revealed very few distinctions between the two sets of participants, possibly because every couple's patterns of action was unique. Although the timing of transitions appeared to be important in understanding the kinds of projects that couples worked on, couples' patterns of action appeared to be idiosyncratic, regardless of whether they were at the beginning or toward the end of their transitions into the world of work.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Schultheiss et al. (2001), who explored relational influences in career development, have called for more qualitative research like their own, which explores the relational contexts in which career development unfolds. Responding in part to that call, this thesis was an examination of romantic couples' processes of transitioning from school to work, by examining how couples negotiated decisions related to their transitions. The action-project method was used to identify the joint actions and projects of six transitioning couples, in a series of interviews and video-assisted observations of conversations. Two projects were found to be part of the core experiences of these couples' interactions about the partners' transitions into the world of work. The analysis also revealed that the actions that participants engaged in tended to be unique to each couple, rather than common across the group. Some clear links between actions and progress emerged, however. It was found that certain relational characteristics and actions *promoted* the progression of joint negotiation and decision-making while others *impeded* it. Finally, the timing of transitions appeared to be important to consider in understanding the nature of projects that couples tended to engage in together. It is important to understand these findings in light of the existing literatures on couples and career development.

The findings of this study indicate that romantic partners engage together in school-to-work transitions and career development. These are joint rather than individual processes. This is consistent with the finding reported in the literature, that career decisions in couples entail joint processes (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005; Gagne, Lydon, & Bartz, 2003; Godwin & Scanzoni, 1989; Krueger, 1982; Zimmerman et al., 2003).

Current knowledge has been extended in this study, in which the processes involved in making the transitions are described. Couples tend to negotiate and discuss future work (and other) plans in a wide variety of ways, some of which facilitated arriving at a mutually agreeable positions and working through the issues involved, while others impeded such processes.

### *Couples' Transition Projects*

Although the projects that emerged in this sample tended to reflect the specific circumstances of each couple, there were aspects of those projects that were common across the sample of couples: (a) obtaining and/or maintaining occupations that were appropriate and/or satisfying, and (b) negotiating and achieving greater harmony and resolving differences pertaining to their future lives together. These underlying aspects of couples' joint projects resonated with the existing literature on individuals' career choices and levels of work satisfaction, and research on conflict in couples.

Individual career choice and work satisfaction are well explored in the existing literature, especially in the area of person-environment fit (e.g., Arnold, 2004; Furnham, 2001; Meir, Melamed, & Dinur, 1995; Srsic & Walsh, 2001; Tinsley, 2000), including school-to-work transitions (e.g., Blustein, 1999; Swanson & Fouad, 1999). For the most part, Holland's (1959) theory of vocational choice has motivated research regarding person-environment fit, congruence, and satisfaction. Researchers in this area assume that congruence between personal traits (e.g., interests, skills, abilities) and occupational factors/characteristics (e.g., environment, duties, wages) will increase satisfaction with work. However, there are conflicting findings regarding how this congruence is associated with satisfactory occupational and life experiences, and challenges to these

perspectives' assumption that personal traits and occupational factors as static rather than dynamic entities (e.g., Bright & Pryor, 2005; Chartrand & Walsh, 1999; McKay, Bright, & Pryor, 2005; Pryor & Bright, 2003; Spokane, Meir, & Catalano, 2000). Additional challenges to the underlying assumptions of person-environment fit include some research findings that occupational satisfaction has only a weak relationship to overall happiness in life (e.g., Judge & Watanabe, 1993; Ton & Hansen, 2001). Despite these results, an underlying theme in the literature is that there is an important connection between personal satisfaction and the career choices that people make. The finding from the present research that couples strove to achieve high levels of satisfaction in the occupations they pursued and obtained is consistent with this literature. The question of how objectively important a satisfying career *is* to one's life remains open, but results of this study have revealed that it is subjectively important to people making transitions to work, at least in this sample of six young adult North American couples.

In the sample, some of the couples aspired to achieve a goal of equal occupational satisfaction, where both partners would experience the same level of satisfaction with their occupations. However, the question arises as to whether this aspiration is realistic or reflective of people's experiences in the modern day work-force. Specifically, existing literature indicates that partners may compromise their occupational satisfaction according to the demands of multiple life roles, including the needs of the relationship itself (e.g., Neault & Pickerell, 2005). Longitudinal methods, or conducting follow-up research with participants once they are in their 30s or 40s may be necessary to fully address the question of whether this particular is one that young adults can meet, or

something they give up as they realise that it is not realist to assume that both member can simultaneously pursue their career goals to an equal degree.

The couples in this study who contemplated having children also took into consideration the impact that the timing of becoming parents would have on their current career paths and finances. This need to consider the timing of having children in their transitions from school to work is consistent with the results of a study by Barnett, Gareis, James, and Steele (2002), who explored the concerns of final year university students (N = 201 females and 123 males) regarding “career-marriage conflicts.” They examined the conflicting demands of launching careers and building romantic relationships, which often included coordinating dual-career relationships. They found that concerns about career-marriage conflicts were influenced by students’ expectations about the timing of their marriages and childbearing: Students who planned to delay family formation had fewer concerns regarding potential career-marriage conflicts, while those who were planning to have children earlier expressed more concern. Similarly, in this study the couples who were about to enter different relational states (i.e., getting married) or who were contemplating having children tended to have projects that were focused on these issues.

Risch, Riley, and Lawler (2003) explored the issues that people commonly experienced as problematic during the early years of marriage, for a large sample of respondents from the United States (N = 793, aged 20 to 57 years). Data were collected using a premarital inventory questionnaire (FOCCUS – Facilitating Open Couple Communication, Understanding, and Study). Respondents rated 42 issues in “problematic” terms, ranging from “not applicable” to “very problematic.” The concerns

these participants endorsed as most problematic were: balancing job and family, frequency of sexual relations, financial issues, expectations about household tasks, communication and conflict resolution, parents/in-laws, and time spent with spouse. The focus of the projects for couples in the present thesis bear a striking resemblance to the list of issues found by Risch and colleagues (2003). It would appear, then, that the concerns that couples seek to address together (in their joint projects) are similar to those that they worry about as individuals.

Two intriguing themes emerged about factors that seem to shape couples' transition projects: (a) economic/financial influence, and (b) learning to relate to others as a couple. Research on populations other than romantic couples within school-to-work transitions has consistently highlighted the importance of these factors. In the present study, the issue of economic and financial concerns seemed to shape participants' goals and projects, imposing boundaries around future possibilities and determining the extent to which certain decisions could be made. Similarly, Barnett and Lundgren's (1998) research on the impact of relational structures and contexts on decision-making in dual-earner couples highlighted the importance of social contexts, including economic factors. Other research has revealed that broader economic, political, and cultural shifts were fundamentally changing the nature of intimate relationships, and that finances are a crucial aspect of negotiating plans for the future (e.g., Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Halpern, 2005; Vogler, 2005).

Although the research on romantic partners' processes during school-to-work transitions is limited, there have been several relevant studies in which the researchers addressed the influence of other relationships on career development. Relationship

components that have been explored include families of origin (parents and siblings), and other significant people in individuals' lives, such as teachers, counsellors, and friends (e.g., Bardick, Bernes, Magnusson, & Witko, 2004; Domene, Shapka, & Keating, 2006; Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989; Mau, 1995; Phillips et al., 2001; Schultheiss et al., 2001, 2002; Stratton, 2001; Whiston & Keller, 2004; Young et al., 1999; Young, Valach, et al., 2001). The findings of the present study extend this body of work by revealing that relational factors are also important considerations for career development in romantic couples. Members of the six couples in this sample all felt the need to consider other people in their lives (especially parents) in their decision-making. Clearly, results of this study also revealed that romantic partners are an important relational influence on career development during school-to-work transitions: Partners in these couples worked and negotiated with each other to plan for their future careers and lives together.

#### *Emergent Patterns of Action*

Couples in this study engaged in a wide range of actions as they discussed their transitions to work together, including behaviours that promoted progress (e.g., interactive, explorative, validating, empathic, respectful, tolerant, humorous, and flexible communication), and behaviours that impeded progress (e.g., unresponsive, avoidant, abrupt, demanding, restricted, intolerant, provocative, interruptive, rigid, or distracted interactional patterns). These emergent patterns of action provide new insights regarding how couples develop and work on their joint transition projects, but should also be understood in terms of the existing literature on career-related actions.

In a longitudinal study of the predictive validity of relationship appraisals of emerging adults, Gagne et al. (2003) indicated that the process of career pursuit within

romantic relationships requires some degree of decision-making and goal pursuit, as well as impartial consideration of all factors related to those decisions. For example, there is a potential conflict of pursued goals when career goals and relationship goals overlap.

Thus, adequate appraisal of romantic relationship goals and the future of the relationship itself are essential when seeking simultaneous goals in the domains of career and romantic pursuits. Most couples in the present study engaged in joint action in pursuit of their projects. Additionally, in those couples where one person was minimally engaged, the other member expressed frustration when attempts to engage their partners were unsuccessful. Self-confrontation interviews revealed that this process was far from impartial: Participants' actions were sometimes strongly motivated by their fears, worries, and their own desires. Even then, this did not prevent couples from exploring plans for their futures together.

Other research has revealed how couples can address differences of opinion and desires. Previous studies suggest that, during joint career transitions, a couple's decision-making process is a search for compromise and equality (Challiol & Mignonac, 2005; Zimmerman et al., 2003). Challiol and Mignonac noted that partners required solutions that satisfied the priorities of both individuals and, when there was substantial disagreement, it was necessary to arrive at compromises that best satisfied the couple's combined priorities. Berg et al. (2003) found that collaborative, high-affiliation actions (e.g., warm, friendly speech acts) led to constructive elaborations and explorations of the partners' situations. In contrast, progress was found to be hindered by low-affiliation actions (such as cold or hostile speech acts) evidenced by commanding, rejecting, countering, and resisting actions. These results correspond to the kinds of promoting and



impeding actions that emerged in the present study. Thus, results of the present study confirm that findings from the existing literature about processes for arriving at mutually agreeable compromises also holds true for couples' career-related decision-making. Similarly, the kinds of actions that promote or impede the process of developing and achieving joint school-to-work transition projects are those that tend to emerge in other areas of couples' decision-making.

### *Timing of the Transition*

An unanticipated divergence emerged between couples, relative to the timing of their transitions. Projects of couples who were just beginning their school-to-work transitions tended to more vague, intangible, and contemplative in nature. In contrast, couples who were in the final stages of their school-to-work transitions had projects that were more concrete, tangible, and action-oriented. The timing of transitions has been examined in previous research, although not in terms of couples' career development.

Kralik, Visentin and Van Loon (2006) conducted a comprehensive literature review on the concept of transitions. They found diverse perspectives and a lack of consensus among researchers regarding the duration (e.g., whether or not transition has a definite beginning and end), the steps or phases of transitions, and whether transitions were considered linear or cyclical in nature. Similarly, Meleis, Sawyer, Im, Messias, and Schumacher's (2000) work indicates that transitions are complex, multidimensional phenomena which usually consist of a number of simultaneously occurring changes. This complexity was evidenced in the projects of the participants in this study (e.g., school to work, relocation, marriage, timing of children).

Meleis et al. (2000) identified several essential interrelated properties of transitions: (a) awareness, (b) engagement, (c) change and difference, (d) time span, and (e) critical points and events. They found that a degree of *awareness* was needed to initiate the process of transition. They also asserted that the process required a level of *engagement* evidenced by a degree of active involvement (e.g., information seeking, actively preparing, proactively modifying activities). The authors further noted that *change* and *difference* are essential during transitions and that all transitions involve change but not all changes are related to transitions. Transitions only occur when individuals *adapt* to changes and differences. Of particular relevance to the findings in the present study is the concept of *time span*, which is characterized by flow and movement over time. The transition process is often assumed to move linearly from initial awareness and engagement, through instability, to stability. However, these authors reported that the transition process was rarely that predictable in its progression. That was in part because transitions occurred within contexts and, for the most part, were determined by a variety of developmental and environmental factors. Meleis et al. reported that transitions progressed through what they called *critical points* and *events*. They indicated that most transitions were associated with identifiable marker events, and/or critical turning points, which often initiated and/or increased awareness and active engagement during the transitional process.

Mortimer, Gembeck, Holmes, and Shanahan (2002) conducted research on prominent themes and patterns that characterized the vocational decision-making process during transitions to adulthood. Results of their study revealed a more clear picture of the patterns of thought and behaviour that young adults engage in during the career decision-

making process. Their findings conveyed experiences of uncertainty. They reported that emerging adults responded to such unpredictability in one of two ways. When these young adults lack career commitment or crystallized directions they tend to live on a “day-to-day” basis, hoping for clarity to “happen.” They found, like other researchers (e.g., Meleis et al., 2000), that discrete events or turning points occurred that induced different qualitative states. Former lack of commitment and indecision were shifted toward greater achievement of vocational identity. For others, it was a slow process of growing awareness that led them to occupational preferences following a series of decisions.

In the present study, one critical turning point in the process of transitioning from school to work for couples appeared to be, not surprisingly, completion of schooling. Projects of couples that were still in school were noticeably different from those who had completed schooling and were either seeking long term employment or had already entered such work. What was particularly intriguing was that the critical point appeared to be present, even in couples where only one person had completed his or her education. Perhaps shifts in status force couples to become more concrete in their future planning for a time. If so, couples may eventually reach plateaus, at which time transition projects become more diffuse until other partners complete their education. Assessment of this possibility will require longitudinal research to study thoroughly, especially given Kralik et al.'s (2006) findings regarding the complexity of transitional processes.

Although the research literature offers many perspectives and illuminates transitional and career decision making processes, it appears that couples' career decisions and actions remain unique to their contexts and circumstances. Findings from

the present study reflect those from the existing body of literature on emerging adults facing career decision-making and transitional processes, and extend them to these processes as they occur in romantic couples. Timing of transitions (e.g., full-time student versus full-time in the world of work) shapes the nature of couples' projects. There were obvious differences in levels of awareness and engagement across couples in the present study. Couples who had graduated were working on projects that were more crystallized, committed, and action-oriented than their pre-graduate counterparts.

#### Contributions to Counselling Practice

Results of this study revealed that transitions from school to work in couples are joint processes. For this reason, career counsellors working with emerging adults who are in committed romantic relationships may benefit from incorporating couples therapy interventions into their practices. Considering the relational components of clients' lives may better address the dynamics of this population, and provide more comprehensive approaches and understandings than counselling interventions and strategies solely targeting individuals. Perhaps it would be most effective to use strategies at *both* levels (individual and couple) for career exploration and development with young adult clients who are in committed romantic relationships.

It is important to recognize factors that promote and impede progression of the joint career development process. Results of this study revealed a number of patterns of action that facilitated and impeded couples' negotiations around transitions from school to work. Counsellors could provide psychoeducation regarding these elements and their potential effects on progression through career-related decisions and transitions.

In this study, partners in the couples tended to have their own patterns of action, as they discussed their futures together. This finding reinforces the need for counsellors to recognize idiosyncratic characteristics and background experiences of couples presenting with transitions from school to work. The actions that couples demonstrate during their career negotiations should be assessed from holistic, multidimensional frameworks in order for idiosyncratic and contextual components to be adequately addressed.

Results of this study also revealed that couples' career development was influenced by other significant relationships. As such, it is important for career counsellors working with emerging adult couples to consider the influences of other significant relationships (primarily with parents) while assisting their clients. Learning to relate to others "as a couple" was an important part of negotiation because some partners and/or couples put the desires of others above the needs of their own relationships. Counsellors should consider these influences because couples' negotiations and decisions may be shaped by such dynamics.

In the same way, counsellors must not underestimate the influence of financial and economic pressures on emerging adults as together they negotiate their transitions from school to work. Findings of this study confirm that financial and economic limitations constrain people's options and, in some cases, can hinder couples' negotiations about their futures. Financial insecurities surfaced, and created conflict between partners. Counsellors should address the origins of individuals' insecurities, and recognize the financial and economic boundaries of each member of their client couples. Feelings of financial insecurity, for example, may be induced by a number of factors,

including financial history (e.g., family of origin issues), current financial limitations (e.g., student loans, entry-level income), and anticipated future needs (e.g., reduced hours, further schooling, having children).

Results of this study also provide confirmation that attending to nonverbal and paraverbal communication is a crucial component for understanding clients' interactions. The self-confrontation interviews and video records offered a much more elaborate understanding of couples' interactions than the transcripts of participants' words alone. They also revealed a connection between withheld verbal information and non-verbal/paraverbal indicators, such as cathartic laughter and physical contact. It may go without saying that observation of nonverbal communications are of great importance to counsellors, because they assist in exploring the experiences of individuals and couples during joint transitions from school to work. Training for career practitioners must not neglect the development of general counselling and communication skills.

### Limitations

#### *Sample Size*

One of the limitations of this study was the relatively low number of participating dyads. Although the sample size of six couples is greater than that found in some previous action-project method studies (e.g., Turkel, 2003; Young et al., 2003), most published research that has used this method has included larger samples. The largest sample reported in the existing literature consisted of 32 dyads (Young, Lynam, et al., 2001), with the majority of studies having sample sizes within the 10-20 dyad range (e.g., Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 1999; 1997; Young, Valach et al., 2001). It is possible

that the relatively low sample size prevented the identification of commonalities among the couples, especially in terms of actions.

#### *Size of Team*

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the analysis team consisted of two primary researchers and one auditor. Again, this is within the range of established action-project method practice (e.g., Domene, Arim, & Young, 2007; Young, Logan, Lovato, Moffat, & Shoveller, 2005), but there are some potential problems associated with having only two people identify and discuss possible interpretations. Specifically, a larger analysis team may have produced a greater range of interpretations and perspectives during the team meetings, and generated a more dynamic platform for data analysis. Although a larger team would not *guarantee* better analysis, it is possible that having more analysts review the findings would have provided more in-depth descriptions of couples' actions and projects.

#### *Action-Project Protocol*

The complete action-project protocol was not used in this study. The protocol typically consists of three interviews and a monitoring period, conducted over a six- to eight-month period. The limited protocol used in this thesis foregoes additional descriptive data and analysis that may have offered richer consensual constructs of the phenomena under investigation. The monitoring period and final interview, particularly, might have provided longitudinal data to capture the progression and outcomes of projects. However, the use of the partial action-project protocol was adequate for exploring the research questions in this study, and follows the practice of Young, Lynam,

et al. (2001), and Young et al. (1999, 1997), in which those researchers used the same partial action-project protocol composed of two interviews.

#### *Timing of the Transition*

Another issue that surfaced was the influence of timing within school-to-work transitions. Couples in the present study were in a range of different phases in terms of their transitions from school to work. Such diversity of experiences may have reduced the number of common patterns of action and projects identified in the cross-case analyses. It may have been more beneficial to obtain a sample of couples who were more homogeneous, in terms of the timing of their transitions (e.g., couples who were all still in their final years of schooling). On the other hand, a more homogenous sample would not have revealed the links between timing of transitions and the nature of projects that couples engage in.

#### *Financial Compensation*

Another possible limitation is that the recruitment procedures (which announced the \$100 compensation for participation) may have attracted participant couples who consider money to be of particular importance. It is possible that, had the study contained no monetary incentive, the sample may have been composed of different kinds of participants who may not have emphasized the importance of financial and economic factors in their transition. However, it must be recognized that \$100 is only a miniscule portion of the reported annual income for most of the couples, so it is equally possible that the incentive to participate had no effect on the findings. This possibility is bolstered by the fact that the influence of financial/economical factors revealed in this study is consistent with the broader body of research on this topic, which indicates economic



forces as important determining factors during the school-to-work transition (e.g., Blustein, 1999).

#### Future Directions

Many opportunities remain for additional study of joint school-to-work transitions in romantic couples. One immediate direction would be to conduct a similar study minimizing some of the limitations of the present study. Specifically, researchers could have larger teams of analysts, increase sample sizes, and use more homogenous groups of couples in terms of their phases in school-to-work transitions. Researchers could also use the complete action-project protocol to further track actions and projects in terms of progress and potential outcomes.

Another future research direction would be to systematically explore the issue of timing within transitions and how couples' placements along those transitional continua are related to what partners experience, in terms of projects and actions. Rather than limit samples to homogenous groups, as suggested above, future action-project research could commence with three pre-selected groups that corresponded to the phases that emerged in this study: (a) pre-transition (e.g., in final year of education); (b) mid-transition (e.g., out of school, but still looking for long-term work); (c) post-transition (e.g., have recently begun working in positions that they consider to be their "long-term" careers). Findings from the three categorical groups could be compared, either using qualitative comparison procedures designed for the action project method (Domene, 2005) or redesigning the study entirely, to examine this phenomenon from a quantitative perspective.

Alternatively, other approaches to qualitative research that are more suited to exploring

patterns over time (such as narrative methods) could be used to explore developmental courses of couples' engaging in transitions from school to work.

A number of additional research questions were generated from the findings of this study: Is it possible that certain occupational and career aspirations have relationships with, or influences on, the interactional patterns and styles of couples? Is it possible, for example, that individuals pursuing manual labour or trade careers interact with their partners differently than individuals pursuing more academically-based careers? Another issue is the question of what other environmental or contextual factors (besides financial/economic influences and relating to others as a couple) may be influencing couples' actions and projects. It may be important to more closely examine nonverbal and paraverbal actions related to couples' school-to-work transitions, to determine whether there are common nonverbal or paraverbal indications of actions that promote or impede progression of negotiation and decision-making.

Additionally, contextual influences such as relationships to others, and learning as couples to jointly manage the impact of these factors, may also prove to be rich platforms for future investigations. The findings of this study suggest that issues such as marriage and deciding where to live are intertwined with occupational aspects of school-to-work transitions. Research that could systematically uncover how these factors are related could prove fruitful, and inform counselling practice.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, the findings of this study provided a number of potential implications for counselling practice. Researchers could use quantitative methodologies to explore the efficacy and effectiveness of the suggestions made in the "Contributions to Counselling Practice" section of this thesis. Specifically, it

might be beneficial to explore whether or not couples interventions would, in fact, be more effective than individual counselling alone, for facilitating the career development of young adults in romantic relationships. It may also be beneficial to investigate which specific couple interventions would best be suited to assist members through these transitions. Furthermore, more extensive empirical exploration of the factors that promote and impede negotiation and joint decision-making would not only help counsellors identify these dynamics, but facilitate the development of best-practice procedures for career counselling with this population. Comprehensive behavioural descriptions of these elements, and causal confirmation of their common outcomes, could guide counsellors in their approaches.

In conclusion, this thesis was an investigation of how committed romantic couples jointly engaged in school-to-work transitions. Results of this investigation have contributed to the existing research literature by providing in-depth descriptions of couples' projects and actions, and illuminating the importance of exploring transitions from school-to-work as *joint* processes, rather than solely individual endeavours. Transitions from school-to-work and involvement in romantic relationships reciprocally influence each other. For that reason, the complexities of each of these involvements must be weighed in light of the presence of each other.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT ADVERTISEMENTS

Example 1.

**Are You Graduating This Year And Looking For Work?**

**Are You Currently Discussing Your Career Plans With Your Romantic Partner?**

If you can answer yes to both of these questions you may be a candidate for a groundbreaking study.

We are currently looking for individuals who are willing to participate in a study on how romantic partners negotiate career decisions.

For More Information:

Please call XXXXX at: XXX-XXX-XXX

Or Email: [XXXXXXXX@XXXXXXXX.com](mailto:XXXXXXXX@XXXXXXXX.com)

Example 2.

Craigslist - Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology student is recruiting romantic committed couples who are in the transition from university-to-work to volunteer as a participant in a thesis research study. One member of the couple must have recently graduated (or is going to graduate soon) from a university degree program and be entering the world of professional work.

[xxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@xxxxxxx.com)

Example 3.

Married and unmarried couples needed for a research study being conducted at Trinity Western University, on how young couples plan their future careers together.

Involvement will consist of 3 interviews, for approximately 8 hours over a 6-month period. Each couple will receive \$100 for their participation.

For more info, see <http://www.XXXXXXXXXX.html> or leave your name

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Telephone Screening Interview Protocol

**Career Development as a Couple's Project Study: Telephone Screening**

**Date of screening call:**

**Name/contact info:**

Introduce yourself & explain that you are returning their call re: *couples' career planning study*

Thank-you for your interest in our study. Where did you hear about us?

---

As you may know, we are studying how people in committed romantic relationships negotiate and figure out what to do for their future careers. We are looking for volunteers who are willing to talk to us, and each other, about the career plans and decisions that they are making together, (things like deciding on a job; what to do after finishing their education; where to live and work; and how to balance career plans with relationship plans).

Do you have anything specific that you would like to know about this study, and what would be involved if you decide to participate?

We are looking for married and unmarried couples who can commit to doing 3 interviews over a period of six months or so. Both members of the couple would need to be involved. We can arrange to do the interviews in one of your homes, or you can use our facilities at Trinity Western University.

Are you interested in becoming involved?



A couple of things that I should let you know about: The first is that all the information will be kept strictly confidential, to ensure your privacy. Also, we may not be able to accept everyone who wants to take part in the study, so I have some questions that I need to ask to determine your eligibility to participate:

Have you and your romantic partner both discussed and agreed to being involved in the study?

**IF no:** Can you please discuss this study with him / her, because we really need both people to be willing to participate. I will call back in a couple of days to finish the screening.

(NB: get the callers name if not known; get a specific follow-up time):

Names:

a) \_\_\_\_\_ male / female age: \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_ male / female age: \_\_\_\_\_

What language do you normally speak to each other in: \_\_\_\_\_

If not English, would you be comfortable having a conversation with her/him in English, during the research interviews? Y / N

Do either of you have children or are currently expecting? Y / N [if Y, inform them of ineligibility]

Are you currently living in the same household? Y / N

Who else, if anyone, lives with you? (relationship to participant & age for each other household member):

[If necessary]

And who else lives with [partner's name] (relationship to participant & age for each other household member):

How would you categorize your relationship with [name]: dating, engaged, married, or something else: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you describe your relationship as committed, casual, or somewhere in between? \_\_\_\_\_ Would [name] agree? Y / N

Are you in school, working, or something else: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in all that apply:

[if school]: What are you taking? \_\_\_\_\_

[if work]: What is your job? \_\_\_\_\_

Is that a long-term career, or just something for now? \_\_\_\_\_

[if something else, seek clarification as to what] \_\_\_\_\_

And how about for [partner's name], is he / she school, working, or something else: \_\_\_\_\_

Fill in all that apply:

[if school]: What is he / she taking? \_\_\_\_\_

[if work]: What is his / her job? \_\_\_\_\_

Is that a long-term career, or just something for now? \_\_\_\_\_

[if something else, seek clarification as to what] \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any questions at this point?

What happens next is I will present this information to the research team, and call you back in 2 weeks or so, to let you know whether we will be able to include you in the study.

Assuming you can participate, what would be the best days and times of the week for both of you to do the interview? \_\_\_\_\_

Also, we can do the interviews either in your home or here at the university. If you want to do it at home, we would need space for two separate rooms with closable doors.

If you are selected, where would you prefer to do the interviews? \_\_\_\_\_

(if "home," ask them where do they live: \_\_\_\_\_)

Is this the best way to contact you, or would a different phone number be better?

We appreciate your time and interest. Expect a call from us in the next couple of weeks.

Interview 1 Protocol

**Career Development as a Couple's Project Study: Interview 1 guidelines**

**PRELIMINARY**

- \*Explain what will be doing in all 3 parts of today's interview\*
- \*Figure out what the two locations will be; where you will wait during the conversation\*
- \*1 person sets up the equipment: both audio-recorders; both cameras\*
- \*1 person explains consent & gets sigs from both people first; administers demographic questionnaire\*

**WARM UP**

As we mentioned in the consent forms, we will be video- and audio-taping everything, to make sure we have accurate records of what is going on. I'll just turn on the equipment now.

**\* remember to turn on video-camera, and the audio-tape \***

**Rapport-building:**

Ease into the process with questions / comments related to weather, where did find out about the study, positive comments about the home, etc.

Ask about the school / work that they said they were doing in demographics: what it is like, permanent or for now, what thinking about in future etc.

**Priming for topic** (\*remember to do this in conversational style, don't just follow the script\*):

So our study is about the career plans and decisions that they are making together, (things like deciding on a career path; what to do after finishing their education; where to live and work; how to balance career plans with relationship plans).

From your perspective [pick one], what kinds of issues might come up, when a couple is planning what to do around their future careers?

[to other] and, what about from YOUR perspective?

How about for the two of you specifically, are those the kinds of things that you are still in the middle of discussing and deciding upon?

[If no]

Then what things ARE you talking about, in terms of planning for the future?

[If yes]

So, if you had to pick only one or two things that you feel will be the most urgent to deal with in the next few months, what would they be [get BOTH people's opinions]?

\* follow-up questions / comments about the issues they raise\*

**When the couple appears ready to engage with each other, or if they spontaneously start react to each other's comments:**

So, do you think the two of you are up to having a conversation with just each other about this stuff?

OR

So, it looks like the two of you are up to having a conversation with just each other about this stuff; are you?

[If no] What part is confusing? What needs to happen first?

OK, well we will leave the room now, so that you can do that. Take the next 20 or so minutes or so to have your conversation, and come and get us when you are done.

### **JOINT CONVERSATION**

**\*remember to insert a new tape & start recording\***

Do any preliminary preparations for self-conf.

[If still discussing after ½ hour, go in and ask them how it is going, and if they are about ready to wrap up]

### **SELF-CONFRONTATION (each participant separately)**

**\*remember to insert a new tape & start recording\***

So now we are going to review the conversation that you just had, to help me get a better understanding of your perspective- what you were thinking and what you were feeling in each segment of the conversation.

Whenever something important comes up, I want you to stop the recording and tell me about it. I'll do the same if I notice something that seems important, or if it looks like there is a shift in the focus of what you are talking about.

Do you understand what we will be doing? Are you ready to begin?

[section by section, playing tape]

What were you thinking and feeling in that section?

What was your goal (trying to do) in that part of the conversation?

What do you think [partner's name] was trying to do in that part of the conversation?

\*Make sure you get their EMOTIONAL reaction, not just their cognitions\*

**At end of tape:**

So overall, what were your thoughts about the conversation you just had?

- *Typical vs. not typical*

- *Feelings about conversation*

- *Overall, what were your goals; what were you trying to accomplish in this conversation?*

Is there anything else that I should know, about that conversation?

Let's see if \_\_\_ and \_\_\_ are done.

Interview 2 Protocol: Member-Checking Interview

**Career Development as a Couple's Project Study: Interview 2 guidelines**

**INTRO**

Hellos.

Remind them of taping.

Today's interview will be much shorter than last time, and mainly to confirm our understanding of what was going on in the first interview. There will be some individual time, and some time with everybody together.

\* Set up recording equipment in 2 rooms \*

**FEEDBACK (separately)**

So, in the last few weeks, had a look at the conversation and self-confrontation that you guys did last time, and wrote up a summary of it. What we want to do today is to check with you to make sure we were on the right track... does what we say make sense from your own perspective.

I'm going to read out the narrative that we came up with to you, and I want you to stop me at any time if you have questions, or we got something wrong, I want you to tell me what it should say instead.

[read narrative, slowly, pausing at each paragraph and asking some variation of "does that fit with you?"]

Is there anything important that we missed?

In the next part, we are going to share this with [name]. Knowing that, is there anything that you would like me to change or omit, before we do that? Are you comfortable with sharing this with him/her?

## IDENTIFYING PROJECTS

[have each participant share their narrative with their partner, to read.]

[elicit reactions to the other person's narrative: are there any surprises or things you didn't know?]

As you probably remember, the point of this study is to figure out how couples are working together on their future careers. For the next three months, we are going to ask you to keep track what you are doing ...

But, first, we need to figure out what career-related goals, or decisions, or tasks you want to be focusing on, in the next few months. We call these things "projects"

Remembering that we define "career" very broadly... not just work, but education, choosing to focus on a family, figuring out where to live or move to; stuff like that.

Anyway, the couples career projects that we came up with, from our last interview with you include: [read summary of projects]

Is this off the mark in any way, or no longer an issue?

<if the written project is fine, proceed to explanation of monitoring>

<if we need to find an alternative project>

So what kinds of things DO you need to be focusing on together in the next few months, in terms of your future career and life? [explore more fully what that means]

So among these different projects, what are the priorities for the two of you in the next 3 months; what would you like to focus on in the next stage of the study?

[come to an agreement about the project to focus on]



## **EXPLANATION OF MONITORING PERIOD**

OK. So in the next few months, one of the things that the two of you will be working on, in terms of your future careers, is [describe project].

What we would like you to do is to keep track of the things that you do together to work on that... your joint actions and activities.

For example, if you have a conversation at home about [project], or [insert some relevant examples].

Specifically, we would like you to keep a written record, jotting down what you did, what you were hoping to accomplish, and how it turned out.

This is something that is important for each of you to do individually, because we want to be able to get at, and compare, each of your different perspectives.

There are two ways for us to do this. The easiest one (for us), is to send you the template electronically, and for you to type up the activities, and e-mail the logs back every 2 weeks.

The other option is to use these log-books [demo]; you will write up the activities as they happen. Every 2 weeks, we'll give you a phone call, so you can update us.

[get their preference for how to do the monitoring]

Do you have any questions about the monitoring period, or what we are asking you to do?

[give hard-copy logs, if needed]

[get contact info- phone AND e-mail... just to make sure we can contact you if we need to]

[give them your contact info: e-mail and phone]

## APPENDIX C: THESIS RELATED ANALYSIS

### **First Impressions of Couples: Observations/Interpretations**

#### **Underlying characteristics evident in data for 001 Couple**

##### **Impressions –**

##### **Actions -**

- Contribution to the conversation is mutual, they respond to what the other is communicating and they seem to be equally engaged in the discussed material
- It seemed to have a respectful, supportive and empathetic tone
- H. indicated that they were mainly focused on her looking for work but if D. has an issue to discuss the brainstorming would be directed towards his issues – it was indicated that this type of supportive, mutual, brainstorming (exploring options) conversation can go either way in their relationship
- They both initiate topics and carry them through – dialogue seems quite seamless/fluid
- This conversation seemed like a delicate dance as she pushed for answers and he engaged her in finding one herself rather than directly offering her one – he seems quite aware that it would be more meaningful for her if she arrived at a satisfactory answer on her own even though she pushed for him to give her one
- It was like she was presenting bait but he wasn't taking it
- He seemed to temper his emotional experience more than her
- They are comfortable challenging each other

##### **Projects –**

- Negotiating options for the female partner's occupational direction and her educational training may be utilized with her occupational interests and dreams

- Working on networking to connect with contacts that may enable her to arrive at her ideal job
- The couple is committed to help each other achieve their occupational desires through encouragement and support
- They seem to want to choose career paths that will enable them to maintain a healthy relationship
- It seems they are seeking balance in their relationship by both achieving fulfilling job positions

*“We are working together to explore options, and maintain happiness and satisfaction in our professional lives”.*

#### **Underlying characteristics evident in data for 002 Couple**

##### **Impressions –**

##### **Actions -**

- It seems that his decisions become her decisions as he appears to be the primary decision maker and she'll express her own opinion but will defer to him - she seems to abide by his non-committal, ambivalent ideas
  - She seems to be the primary energizer of the conversation and initiate topics and he seems to respond to them with contemplation rather than commitment
  - She seems to take a more subordinate role in the decision-making process – she may make suggestions and convey her desires but not with enough conviction to immediately influence the decision-making process
  - Her desires are stated tentatively as his ungrounded desires seem to take prevalence
  - He seems to withhold information and emotion while conversing (I don't want to

go to NY) – doesn't explicitly verbalize her emotions other than non-verbals

- She attempts to get him to elaborate on his comments and he does not entertain her attempts or offer her any sign of commitment regarding issues that contain emotional charge for her, other than provocation
- He seems to minimize or deflect her attempts at sharing at a more emotionally vulnerable level
- *It seems that he does not want to allow her to develop any form of expectation that he cannot/will not fulfill*
- *Their non-verbal communication is dynamic, intense and revealing but their verbal communication seems quite reserved and restricted*
- It seems that they are each aware of their own emotions but reserved in expressing them
- Age has implications on how they interact
- He seems quite guarded in his conversation
- The video revealed more about the conversation than the transcripts allowed
- He comes across as avoidant

### **Projects –**

- Things related to the couple's future career and life together to be important to them at this time.
- The couple is figuring out what to do to earn money, both now and once they finish their degrees. They are also thinking generally about where to live and work in the long term

- Negotiating balance between wanting structure and clarity about the future, and wanting to be open to whatever new possibilities may come up
- Focus on both future directions
- Commitment in the relationship itself is a project
- She has a project of making sure he doesn't drop out of school – afraid relationship will dissipate if he leaves?
- *Discovering the appropriate direction for A's career, in order to make plans for our future together.*

PS . . . A123: Yeah, I think that we've come to um, as much as we can, our natures are not very structured. Both of us, like, as in detail-oriented into the future, like you know, exact financial plans and all that stuff, and like plans for our future bank accounts together or whatever. We're not like, that kind of, anal about details. Um. So I think that what we have right now is as far as, it's gonna go, like, you know what I mean, I don't know how, how far we can like, go in depth.

### **Underlying characteristics evident in data for 003 Couple**

#### **Impressions –**

#### **Actions -**

- Mutually initiate topics and collaboratively discuss – topics flow into each other
- Explore, plan and search for clarification at cognitive level - somewhat balanced dialogue back-and-forth
- She's willing to express her emotional experience
- He's quite direct maintains a firm tone – she's more soft spoken and agreeable

- He states - "Can't make stuff happen"
- She seems to respond emotionally to his direct indication that his current living situation wasn't in his ideal 5-year plan – seems unaware of the impact on her despite her rebuttal regarding giving up on men
- *He seems to minimize his emotional experience or refute her attempts at identifying his emotional experience attached to issues*
- *Discuss details of issues rather than emotions attached to them – she isn't able to pull him towards her attending to emotions when she brings it up explicitly he doesn't respond to the emotional prompting*
- Respect and reflect on each other's suggestions, comments
- Pauses are carried forward by female
- Subtle emotions expressed, but fairly reserved verbal and non-verbal communication
- They both discuss facts rationally - he's somewhat intense and does not expand on comments in a fluid way, *she seems to soften his intense demeanor with the use of humor and attempts to access his emotions*
- He's non-emotional in stature but is somewhat intense and hyperkinetic with his motions (eg. Chewing gum, looking up and down) – she seems more mellow but becomes more animated when she attempts to use humor
- More like they finish each others thoughts rather than interrupting
- Physical contact
- She'll talk about his plans/desires as well as her own, and he focuses primarily on his own

**Projects -**

- Establishing finances - Getting rid of debt – finances - housing/equity
- How are we going to manage housing while striving for other goals
- Travel
- Maintain current direction - she's interested in government job – he wants to stay with this company
- Kids are inevitable but not a focus but must be considered in current projects
- Their on an occupational path of interest and don't intend to deviate
- How can they maintain current career plans in the case of having children
- *Actively pursuing long term goals for balancing work and life together by coming to an agreement about the specifics and timing of those goals (what do those goals mean).*

**Underlying characteristics evident in data for 004 Couple**

**Impressions –**

**Actions -**

- He doesn't seem to fully attend to her comments – he seems to be occupied in his own thoughts and experience
- Close physical contact during conversation – hits him twice
- He seems to minimize her experience by stating that it is “all right”
- She elaborates on her ideas and desires, and attempts to get him to but he doesn't and he minimizes (no big deal)
- She instigates meaningful topics and he instigates tangents - less relevant topics
- He indicates his emotional experience in a brief, abrupt manner

- Their pace of dialogue seems to be at different levels as he shifts topics tangentially and she talks constantly
- He seems to tune her out and responds to elements of her comments not her comments as a whole
- She seems oblivious to his shifty demeanor – as if she's talking to someone who is fully attending to her
- *They briefly express emotion but don't process it fully – their pace is so rapid that they seem to bypass emotional experience*
- They have an overall quick paced conversation
- They sometimes miss what each other are saying
- Wedding –“the issue should be – what do we want - it's our day” – his parents are more dominant in the process
- They don't seem to slow down enough to fully explore options/factors related to decision-making
- We're just chatting . . .
- *They don't seem to fully process raised issues, they touch on them but don't seem to elaborate on them*
- They both bring energy to the conversation, and are both hyperkinetic in different ways as they are constantly shifting posture
- *There's a flavor of incongruence to their conversation and interaction – it's like their shooting dialogue arrows at each other but completely missing they notice it fly by their head but aren't sure what it really is about – not connecting*



**Projects -**

- Practical issues of preparing for life together – preparing for marriage
- How to relate to each other's parents
- All about blending life together (eg. Friends)
- Career seems to take a secondary place to the transition into married life
- Talk about career as it is influenced by other primary projects & goals
- Their career projects did not emerge as a major focus in the conversation. Instead career was only discussed as part of other projects.
- Travel
- Timing of children
- Religion
- They didn't seem to indulge any particular project

**Underlying characteristics evident in data for 005 Couple**

- **Impressions –**

**Actions -**

- The interaction does not seem congruent as it is fragmented and broken
- Male minimally responsive, he's attending but does very little else
- Male non-verbals very closed and disengaged
- He was open to expressing opinion (HOUSE) but didn't really consider hers
- Didn't reach consensus – stated own opinions and clung to them
- The interaction dips into processing topics but is quickly averted when emotion is experienced

- Female leading conversation, interjecting demands/expectations, she's doing all the work
- He maintains a rational level of interaction while she is attempting to communicate her emotions attached to her concerns
- She is trying to convey her feelings of financial insecurity and he attempts to clarify with reason – her conveyances are not validated (find evidence for this brad)
- He maintains a candid/casual demeanor overall
- His passivity adds impact to statements – he does seem to be listening he's just not responding – by not responding seems to be a form of communication
  - Drawing back from the intensity or impasse of a topic – she attempts at times to get to the emotional level
- male gives her glimpses of what he wants but does not commit to follow through on the interaction about it especially when strong emotions are evoked
- She conveys lots of self-revelation and “I” statements

**Projects -**

- Finances/security (houses, finding work, potential schooling – last resort?)
- Focus? - work was her stuff, housing was mutual
  - He's content in career direction, negotiation of home

**Underlying characteristics evident in data for 006 Couple**

**Impressions –**

**Actions -**

- Comfortable interaction, relaxed pace, mutually discuss issues - balanced

- Seem comfortable expressing emotion, willing to elaborate and communicate
- Attend to content of each others comments
- Explore realities of work mutually (eg. On-call teacher)
- Even for tangents both engage with each other – (eg. Hockey) – neither steer away from tangent or get annoyed with it – bounced back onto deeper topics
- Candid interaction
- Track well with each other, seem like their constantly on the same page
- Effortless, seamless, fluid conversation – topics flow well and are explored when raised
- She seems to instigate novel topics, but once the topic was initiated both of them engaged in discussion about it
- They both engage topics
- Funnel discussed living locations collaboratively – and reaching consensus – engage in similar passions or dreams
- Consideration of each others desires
- Decision-making seems mutual
- They seem to share mutual dreams
- Develop and brainstorm living ideals together, dream together
- She states, “we could talk forever”
- Fed off each other in a positive way when exploring goals
- Both actively engaged
- Lots of tangents but not to shift the topic but because they were engaged – didn't distract from topic of discussion

- They were very in the “moment”

**Projects -**

- They know their professional directions but aren't clear around jobs
- Where are we going to live, how are we going to afford housing, connections between living area and work (missions),
  - Relationship with family and how will they maintain family connections
  - Worry of finances is absent in their conversation
  - *Structuring and refining a vision for the future that is mutually acceptable for both parties and trying to appease both sides of the family as much as possible – this project may include topics such as where to live, immigration, marriage and timing of, life after school*