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Date April 27, 96
ABSTRACT

This study explored the pattern of how students at the University of British Columbia became philosophy majors. A narrative approach was utilized to develop a meaningful understanding of each participant's story. The stories were then analyzed for common themes and patterns. From this analysis, seven themes emerged which encompass the experience of becoming a philosophy major. The interconnections among themes outline an abstract narrative. Theoretical and practical implications for career development and career counselling are discussed.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................ iii

Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................ iv

Chapter I: Introduction ....................................................................................................... 1

Chapter II: Literature Review ............................................................................................ 4

Chapter III: Methodology ................................................................................................... 13

Chapter IV: Individual Narratives ...................................................................................... 17

Chapter V: Analysis of Narratives ...................................................................................... 43

Chapter VI: Discussion ....................................................................................................... 53

References ........................................................................................................................... 61

Appendices ........................................................................................................................... 66

Appendix A: Initial Letter of Contact .................................................................................. 66

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form ............................................................................... 67
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Chapter I

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

This study examined how participants became philosophy majors at the University of British Columbia. The purpose of the study was to explore the experience of becoming a philosophy major through individual narratives in order to identify themes and patterns of meaning in determining a major field of study. This exploration could enable university advisors, professors, and career counsellors to help students discover what is meaningful to them and thus, aid them in selecting a field of study and ultimately a career.

Research Problem

This study is concerned with developing an understanding of story plots of how students became philosophy majors. Although there has been extensive research in the area of career development, this study seeks to explore themes of people who are currently engaged in career development through the pursuit of a university degree in philosophy. The concept of career has expanded to encompass patterns of meaning in a life or a life theme. As the definition of career has expanded, the construct of agency has emerged to be a significant factor in successful career development. It is hoped that the study will reveal critical features of constructive story plots containing the exercise of agency. This knowledge could add to our present understanding of agentic/self-determined
behaviours. Such an understanding could suggest ways to enhance or promote agency or self-determination toward meaningful career development.

**Rationale for the Study**

In today's society, there are many external factors that magnify the importance of a person's ability to define, develop, and pursue meaningful career directions.

The world of work is growing more and more complex and rapidly changing with developing technology (Bishop, 1990). In the 1990's, students are confronted with a future that is not as promising as those in the past couple of decades because of our uncertain economic climate. In 1986, Koplik and Devito reported a significantly higher level of distress among university freshman than a decade earlier.

Research has consistently shown that career planning is the primary concern of students in college or university (Carney & Savitz, 1980; Carney, Savitz, Weiskoff, 1979; Friedlander, 1978; Carney & Barak, 1976; Hitchcock, 1973). Today, there is an ever increasing need for career counselling as making career decisions becomes more difficult.

Furthermore, it is not only students in higher education who will experience difficulties in deciding upon and entering a desired occupation. There is a greater likelihood that people in general will experience one or more period(s) of unemployment, involuntary job loss, career changes, and/or retraining. Although
this study is limited to university students and how they determined their majors, the findings may be applicable to career development in various life phases.

Since the 1950's there has been an increasing trend toward self-determination and personal planning, with individuals taking control of their lives and accepting more responsibility for personal choices and life development (Forster, 1985). Successful pursuit of a career requires a greater sense of agency, where agency is (in simple terms) defined as the capacity of the individual to make things happen in contrast to simply enduring what happens to him or her. Therefore, it is important for students to discover what is meaningful in their lives. Meaning is significant to understanding who a person is and how a person wants to live his/her life. Yet this area has not been widely researched in education or career counselling. Therefore, this study attempts to explore the impact of meaning in a chosen field of study.
Chapter II

Literature Review

This chapter begins with a brief background on university student characteristics followed by a review of four theories of career development that might explain how a student becomes a philosophy major in university. The four theories are Holland's Theory of Types (Holland, 1962, 1975, 1985), Super's Life-Span Theory (Super, 1957, 1990), Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory (Krumboltz, 1979; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), and Accident Theory (Caplow, 1954; Miller & Form, 1951).

Student development theories are primarily psychologically based and focus on how an individual changes during the post-secondary years. Major developmental tasks for university students include achieving competence, clarifying purpose, and developing autonomy (Chickering, 1969). The task of achieving competence encompasses growth in a student's "sense of competence, the confidence one has in one's ability to cope with what comes and to achieve successfully what [one] sets out to do" (Chickering, 1969, p.9) in intellectual areas, physical skills, and in social and interpersonal relations. Students clarify purpose by setting goals for their future that integrate "avocational and recreational interests, pursuit of vocation, and life-style issues including concerns for marriage and family" (Chickering, 1969, p. 108). The outcomes of achieving the task of clarifying purpose include the student being a self-directed learner with knowledge
of self and the world of work and having educational goals that are well-defined (Chickering, 1969, Chickering & Reissen, 1993). The task of developing autonomy is a focus of many developmental theories and it refers to the attempt to achieve balance between dependence and autonomy (Chickering, 1969; Gilligan, 1982; Kohlberg, 1981). During the first year of university, many students assert complete autonomy as a response to dependence in high school and separation from family. As development progresses through the university years, students move back toward interdependence. This interdependence may involve responsibility to self and others (Gilligan, 1982) or perceiving self as a responsible part of humanity and within the world as a whole (Kohlberg, 1981).

During university, students are at a stage of career development in which they explore various life and career options. According to Super (1963), students are in a stage of exploration in which they experience increased self-awareness along with a greater understanding of interests, abilities, and aptitudes. Students are developmentally ready to crystallize realistic vocational options and specify tentative vocational preferences.

Many researchers have shown that career planning (which includes choosing a major) is the primary concern of students in college or university (Valerio, 1980; Carney & Savitz, 1980; Carney, Savitz, Weiskoff, 1979; Friedlander, 1978; Carney & Barak, 1976; Hitchcock, 1973). The selection of a major is an important issue for university students because it is a form of
commitment to a vocation (Apostal & Harper, 1972, Holland, 1973, 1985) and it is the best predictor of the actual career entered after graduation (Eccles, 1987; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

The Canadian university student population is becoming more multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural (McCormick & Paterson, 1996). Career theories and assessment tests have been, for the most part, based on white, middle class, heterosexual males (Heppner & Duan; 1995). Thus, there is a need for career counselling approaches that embrace the needs of individuals in their own cultural context.

Career guidance originated with the pursuit of living a good life. One of the earliest records of 'career guidance' can be traced back to ancient Greece:

Like the sages and sophists who preceded them, the earliest moral philosophers were primarily devoted to two sorts of tasks: recommending life goals and specifying ideals of personal excellence. Men of affairs, in their reflective moments, turned to men called wise to learn the secret of the good life -- of ultimate purposes and the goods most worth having; and sometimes, though probably much less often, they inquired about the traits of character most worth cultivating -- the sorts of persons most worth being (Feinberg 1970, p. 1).
The following review of career development theories exemplify four different approaches to career counselling - Trait-Factor (Holland's Theory of Types), Developmental/Self-Conceptions (Super's Life Span Theory), Behavioural (Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory), and Society and Career Choice (Accident Theory).

Holland's Theory of Types

Holland's theory (1962, 1975, 1984) focuses upon finding a "match between an individual's values, interests, and abilities and the characteristics of occupations" (Herr & Cramer, 1992). The rationale behind matching persons to work environments is that people who pursue occupations that are harmonious with their personalities will be more fulfilled, productive, and stable than those who enter less compatible occupations (Holland, 1985). To clarify the nature of a match, Holland developed six personality types and six corresponding work environments. A good match is exemplified by a personality type and a work environment being of the same type (e.g., a person with a social personality working in a social work environment).

Hypothetically, a student becomes a philosophy major because there is a match between self and the environment of philosophical study. The personality type that most closely resembles that of a philosophy major is Investigative. The main characteristics of an Investigative personality type are defined as "thinking rather than acting, organizing and understanding rather than dominating or
persuading, and asociability rather than sociability" (Osipow & Fitzgerald, 1998, p.76). An Investigative personality type develops from rewards (e.g., praise for analytical thinking), opportunities to engage in situations that require a search for solutions to problems and creative problem solving through complex and abstract thinking, and role models (such as a teacher). A student who has personality characteristics that are valued by the philosophy department, intellectual ability, and interests that are consistent with philosophy professors and other philosophy majors would be satisfied with a philosophy major.

Super's Life-Span Theory of Career Development

According to Super, "people strive to implement their self-concept by choosing to enter the occupation seen as most likely to permit self-expression" (Osipow and Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 111). A self-concept becomes crystallized as an individual realizes differences and similarities (through identification) between self and others. These realizations influence decisions about education and work. The development of an individual's self-concept is also influenced by inherited aptitudes, personality factors (e.g., needs, values, interests), and environmental factors such as community, school, family, peers, economy, and the labour market (Super, 1985).

Hypothetically, a student becomes a philosophy major because it allows him/her to implement his/her self-concept. In the case of a philosophy major, the formulation of the self-concept would have been influenced by the inheritance of
intellectual ability to analyze concepts and thoughts in a structured and rigorous manner as well as enjoying doing so. To become a philosophy major, a student would have had to have been exposed to opportunities that allowed him/her to play the role of a philosophy student (e.g., take a philosophy class, read philosophy books, discuss philosophy, or fantasize about being a philosophy student) and then he/she would have perceived a positive evaluation of him/herself in that role from others (e.g., professors, classmates). There is a translation between a student's conception of self and conception of being a philosophy major because valued aspects of the self-concept are allowed expression.

**Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory**

This theory primarily focuses on how learning experiences influence career decision-making processes. According to Krumboltz (1979; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996), the four factors that influence career development are genetic endowment, environmental conditions, learning experiences, and task approach skills. The four factors are outlined below in terms of how a student would hypothetically become a philosophy major according to Social Learning Theory.

Genetic endowment and special abilities are an individual's inherited or innate qualities and affect how an individual responds to learning and teaching. "Certain individuals are born with greater or lesser ability to profit from environmental learning experiences or are offered different experiences altogether because of their inherited qualities" (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1984, p. 238). In other
words, the greater the genetic endowment, the more likely the individual is to respond to learning and teaching. For example, an individual that has innate athletic ability would more likely profit from coaching and training, whereas, an individual who lacks coordination may improve from coaching and training, but is not likely to become a world class athlete. A student who decides to major in philosophy would have genetic endowment of sufficient intelligence. The assumption is that an individual who has an innate ability to think in a logical, structured, and critical manner would excel studying philosophy. Secondly, the student would have encountered environmental conditions that promote philosophical study. These environmental conditions may have included values expressed by parents and peers or the interests and personalities of teachers. The student would have also experienced models of philosophy students or professors and he/she would have had the opportunity to engage in learning experiences that would have enabled him/her to make generalizations to pursue studying philosophy. Other learning experiences might have involved the student being positively reinforced for studying philosophy by receiving good grades or intrinsic motivation. The fourth factor is task approach skills and these skills refer to how an individual approaches a task and include performance standards and values, work habits, and emotional responses. These task approach skills are formulated by interactions among an individual's genetic endowment, environmental conditions,
and learning experiences. Philosophy as a major is chosen as a function of decision making skills based on previous learning experiences.

**Accident Theory**

According to Accident Theory, career choice or university major cannot be predicted because of random factors (Caplow, 1954; Miller & Form, 1951). Random factors or chance encounters that may influence students to become philosophy majors include taking a philosophy course because it is the only course that fits into a class schedule, an inspiring philosophy instructor, and a friend's suggestion to take a philosophy course.

**Summary**

The concept of career has evolved over time. The origins of a "career" construct emerged to address problems of guidance in life. Early in this century, "vocational guidance took a professional form" (Cochran, 1990, p. 9) with the emphasis on matching an individual's personal characteristics with an occupation. The "matching" model of career counselling has continued to dominate, resulting in a rational and scientific procedure for research. The next development involved the inclusion of the self-concept that a person maintains through life stages. This initiated a movement toward examining career in terms of meaning in a person's life, accentuating the role of agency. Methods for researching career theory and counselling practice have expanded to include examining the stories people live and reconstructing a coherent life story through narrative (Peavy, 1992; Mair,
1988). Over time, theories of career counselling have fundamentally changed to conceptualize the individual, not as a fixed collection of abilities and attributes, but as a self-determining force capable of and motivated for purposive change and self re-direction. While even the earliest theories include an evaluation of the person and his/her characteristics, present views have incorporated a more dynamic process involving self-determined recursive patterns of feedback and behaviour. There has been a de-emphasis on reducing people into "types" or variables and movement toward viewing life as career and career as life.
Chapter III

Methodology

This study was conducted using a multiple case study design (Yin, 1989). A multiple case study design consists of developing narratives and then analyzing the narratives for themes and patterns. The benefit of using this design is that it captures the complexity and uniqueness of a research problem. This study examines the stories of how participants became philosophy majors.

Procedure

Participants

The researcher recruited participants from third and fourth year philosophy classes at the University of British Columbia. The researcher provided a brief description of the study and then distributed initial letters of contact and copies of the consent form. In addition, an initial letter of contact was posted in the student lounge of the philosophy department. A copy of the initial letter of contact can be found in Appendix A and a copy of the consent form appears in Appendix B.

Eight students were selected to participate in the study following confirmation of being a declared philosophy major or having a definite intention to declare a major in philosophy this year. One of the participants is completing a double major in philosophy and political science. The participants included four females and four males.
Interviews

The participants were encouraged to ask questions before signing the consent form and beginning the interview. Each interview began with the following opening statement:

The purpose of the interview is to develop a meaningful understanding of the story of how you became a philosophy major.

Your story might involve:

1) background experiences from an early age to high school
2) when you first started thinking about a major
3) what happened that led you to decide on philosophy as a major.

Participants were told that the opening statement was provided as a potential guide rather than a required outline for telling their stories. This statement was formulated to encourage and allow participants to tell their story and “provide a facilitating context in the research interview” (Riessman, 1993, p. 54). The main role of the researcher was to empower the participants to tell their stories using active listening skills (i.e., clarification) and creating a comfortable, collaborative environment. The interviews were conducted in the researcher's home or a private office in the philosophy department. The interviews were audio-taped and they ranged from forty to one hundred minutes in length.
Narrative Accounts

The narrative accounts were constructed using detailed notes taken from listening to the audio-tapes of the interviews three or four times. Each “story” was written from the participant’s perspective and incorporated the participant’s own words to accurately reflect the tone and feeling of the story as told.

The credibility or plausibility of narrative accounts is an important research concern (Mischler, 1986). To address this concern, each participant was given a copy of his or her narrative to review. Participants were asked to read their narratives for accuracy considering possible errors of omission, commission or distortion. They were also asked about the accuracy of the tone of the story and whether any sections required further explanation or refinement. All revisions were discussed with participants during the follow-up interview. There were no major errors or revisions in any of the eight narrative accounts.

In order to verify that the interviewer did not ask leading questions or impose an agenda on the interviews or narrative accounts, another researcher was asked to review both interview tapes and written narrative accounts.

Data Analysis

To begin data analysis, the researcher became familiar with the data by listening to the audio-tape recordings. Then the audio-tapes were listened to again in order to take detailed notes, replaying some sections several times. Once the notes for each interview were completed, the researcher listened to the audio-tapes
from start to finish one more time. The remainder of the analysis involved five steps adapted from Cochran (1988). They are outlined below:

1) Phrases of significant experiences or events were extracted from the individual narratives.

2) These phrases were translated into more general statements.

3) A clear description or meaning of each of the general statements was formulated in order to allow for comparison of meaning between narrative accounts.

4) The formulated meanings were arranged into themes or common patterns and compared to original transcripts to look for misrepresentations or distortions.

5) A complete descriptive account or abstract narrative was constructed from the themes.
Chapter IV

Individual Narratives

This chapter includes stories of how participants became philosophy majors. Each story is followed by a commentary.

Andrew

When Andrew was in high school, he had a deep love for the sciences and a strong interest in theology and philosophy. He was introduced to philosophy by one of his teachers and a youth group leader who was taking philosophy courses at university. He started collecting philosophy books and after school he would often spend hours reading about philosophy in the library. The main reason Andrew chose studying science over philosophy was that philosophy courses were not offered in high school.

Initially Andrew was brought up Anglican, and then when he was in high school, he went to a neo-Pentecostal church. The neo-Pentecostal church was contemporary in that the church members sang and danced during the service. The pastor facilitated spirit moving in which God spoke through various church members. Many of Andrew's friends had these experiences, but Andrew was skeptical. He felt excluded and he wondered why God did not choose to give words of prophecy through him. He decided that if God had gifted him in any way, it was with his mind and from this belief Andrew gained a lot of security.
While he was still in high school, Andrew took university level accelerated courses to prepare for university. He earned a full scholarship to SFU and he planned to study astrophysics. In his first year, he did “horribly”. He describes this time in his life as “emotionally difficult”. All of his friends had gone to UBC and he felt lonely and isolated at SFU. Andrew had always excelled at school and for the first time he was struggling to pass his courses. Andrew’s self-confidence was so closely tied to being smart and succeeding in school that he was devastated when he failed at SFU. He became depressed and dropped out of university. For the next couple of years, Andrew “did nothing.” He attempted working at various jobs, but he didn’t stay with any of the jobs for very long. The one thing he was sure of was that he didn’t want anything to do with sciences. He focused on his other interests in philosophy and theology.

During Andrew’s depression, his pastor asked him to research the “problem of evil.” Andrew spent weeks working on this project, but when his pastor asked him about the assignment, Andrew told him that he hadn’t worked on it. He wasn’t even sure why he had lied to his pastor; he only knew that he didn’t want to share the research that he had done. When Andrew started questioning his faith in his religion, he stopped going to church on a regular basis. For the most part, Andrew had spent two years alone - thinking, reading, and taking long walks.

Then Andrew was invited to go on a missionary trip to Mexico. During the three week trip, he was surrounded by a group of close friends and he reclaimed
his identity as being "the smart one." Andrew was sought out whenever someone wanted to discuss intellectual questions. He decided that he wanted to go back to school to study Arts. When he returned home, Andrew went back to his high school to visit his English teacher. When he told her about his plans, she said, "you tried sciences and it didn't work for you and now you're going to try Arts and you can be Andrew again." He realized that his decision to study science had been "easy" in that he had earned a scholarship to do so and everyone had expected him to go into sciences. For the first time, he could be who he really was and he released himself from the expectations of others.

Andrew enrolled in UBC and after his first year, he decided to major in psychology. He choose psychology because he wanted to help people. In his second year, Andrew took a Knowledge and Reality course to help with his psychology courses. After this course, which explored the philosophical perspective of what the mind is, he felt torn between studying philosophy and psychology. One day he heard Dr. William Craig, a philosophical theologian, on the radio discussing a Christian response to the problem of evil. It was a revelation to Andrew that one could be smart and respected as a smart person and Christian. He "found a piece of himself there" and he decided that he wanted to be a philosophical theologian. He had found something in philosophy that had brought everything together for him. He could be a Christian, and he could be respected for using his mind as a Christian.
Andrew took the following year off school to get married and to earn money to pay for school. Even though Andrew had reaffirmed his love of philosophy, he decided that pursuing a career in philosophy would be financially impractical. Therefore, when he returned to university, he decided to do a double major in philosophy and computer science. But, it didn’t take long for Andrew to realize that computer science was not for him. Now he feels even more motivated to study philosophy because he plans to go to graduate school in philosophy and theology. His future plans include teaching and writing books on philosophy and theology.

**Commentary on Andrew’s Story**

For Andrew there is a connection between philosophy and his sense of self. This connection began in high school, but he chose to pursue studying science for two main reasons. First, philosophy was not offered in high school and second, after excelling in science and receiving a scholarship, science seemed to be an obvious choice. When he wasn’t successful in his astrophysics studies, he went into a period of deep contemplation about his life. He came to realize that he wanted to return to university to study in Arts. Studying philosophy is a reflection of who he is rather than what he could be or what others expect him to be. Although he enjoyed studying philosophy from the first course he took, it wasn’t until he heard a philosophical theologian on the radio, that he envisioned a career involving philosophy. Dr. Craig became a role model that enabled Andrew to link his faith, his mind, and philosophy together into a career goal.
Many early experiences influenced Shana's decision to major in philosophy. Ever since Shana was a child, her dad encouraged her to think about questions such as "how do you know someone's telling the truth?" It wasn't very long before she had many "why" questions in her head. In particular, she remembers having many questions about religion. Her dad is Jewish and her mom is Catholic, but she was not brought up with any religious education at home. Although the Catholic religion was taught at her elementary school, she still didn't get any satisfactory answers to her questions. And then when she was a teenager, she noticed that some of her classmates became involved with drugs and stealing. She even asked one of her classmates why she lies and steals. She was amazed by the response she got, "Why is it wrong to lie?" She started thinking about the usual answers to this question such as because God said it is wrong to lie or because it is against the law, but once again, she couldn't come up with an answer that satisfied her.

At college, Shana focused on health sciences, but she was required to take four philosophy courses. She really enjoyed the philosophy courses that she took, but she didn't even consider taking any further philosophy courses because she didn't have any electives in her program. After completing her two years at college she applied to a few universities to study philosophy or zoology. The first acceptance letter she received was from the zoology department of a prestigious university. Her family was extremely excited about her acceptance to this particular
university and her friends urged her not to go into philosophy because it would be a "dead-end" - careerwise. She chose zoology over philosophy because she thought that she could always read philosophy books on her own and she believed that a formal education was required to study zoology. Half way through her zoology degree, she realized that she was not interested in finishing her degree. But since Shana didn't believe in quitting, she continued with her program. She found herself asking philosophical questions about her studies such as, "Is it right to do experiments on animals?" She even tried to work in a zoology lab, but she couldn't see herself doing that kind of meticulous, task-oriented work. She had just graduated and she didn't know what she wanted to do with her life.

Shana had been a swim teacher for many years. She really enjoyed teaching, especially when she "connected" with the children. She felt a sense of accomplishment when a reluctant beginner began appreciating his/her ability to learn and then began having fun learning. She could see herself as a teacher, but she wanted a higher level of intellectual interaction. She wanted to know what students were thinking and why. Next, she started thinking about what she would like to teach. This time her first choice was philosophy, but in order to do so, she knew that she needed at least an MA degree. She wasn't sure that she wanted to spend another four years in school completing another bachelor degree and then an MA. Shana needed a change in her life, but she didn't know what kind of change to make.
A friend of hers had just returned from a missionary trip to Africa and Shana thought a similar experience was just what she wanted for herself. She applied, but she was not accepted into the program. Then Shana took the following advice from a close friend: combine travel with returning to school by attending a university in a different province; “take hold your life”; and if you want to do something, do it now.

There was one other experience that greatly influenced Shana's decision to study philosophy. Someone that Shana had considered a friend betrayed her trust and left Shana feeling devastated. The actual details of this negative experience are not important here, but the experience caused Shana to ponder philosophical questions such as, “What is justice?”

Shana had wanted to see Vancouver for a long time so she decided to move to the West Coast. From the first week of classes Shana knew she had made the right choice. This was exactly what she had wanted. She enjoys studying philosophy because it is teaching her a focused and structured way of looking for answers to her questions. She is still planning to teach philosophy at the college level.

Commentary on Shana's Story

Where Shana grew up, college was a prerequisite to entering university. In college, she chose a program of study that would not limit her future career possibilities. After graduating from college, Shana was undecided between studying zoology or philosophy in university. Her decision was influenced by her
family and friends who had negative views of philosophy. She told herself that she could continue to read philosophy books on her own, but that zoology could only be studied at university. It wasn't long before Shana became disillusioned with zoology. She was devastated by what her studies were teaching her about how science works and she didn't see importance in what she was learning. After thinking about what she liked to do and what she could see herself doing with her life, she decided that she would like to teach. Even though she wanted to teach philosophy, she wasn't sure whether she wanted to return to university for another four years. Shana was wavering about what to do when a friend advised her to take hold of her life. Her friend said that if she wanted to do something, she should do it now. There was one other major influence that affected Shana's decision to study philosophy at that time in her life. She was betrayed by someone she had considered to be a friend. This experience left Shana with many questions such as, "What is justice" and "Why are some people dishonest?" In fact, Shana had been searching for answers to similar questions since she was a child. Although she had attempted to find answers through asking others and herself, she still had a feeling of dissatisfaction. Through studying philosophy, she has realized that she was not looking for specific answers, but for a process or method to explore different answers. For Shana, studying philosophy fulfills a void about how to interpret the world around her.
The summer after high school graduation, Tara worked at a golf course that was under construction. Through her job, she became interested in landscape architecture and decided to pursue a degree in horticulture. She had always loved the outdoors and envisioned herself working in horticulture during the summer months and teaching skiing in the winter. However, toward the end of her horticulture degree she realized that this was not the career for her. She didn't find the material stimulating and felt a stronger interest in Arts courses such as history. She only had one more year to complete her degree so she decided to finish what she had started.

During the last year of her horticulture degree, Tara's mother died. Her mother's death had a profound effect on her. Tara had not been happy throughout her childhood or even in recent years, but through the loss of her mother, she realized how much she had to be grateful for in her life. She found herself looking at the world differently and felt more appreciative about everything in her life as well as about the world around her. The mountains became more beautiful; it was as if she was seeing everything for the first time. After graduation, Tara drove to Vancouver to visit her brother. She felt a strong need to be by herself, to get away from what was familiar in her life, and to think. It was at this point that she decided to travel to other countries. She felt like she had to get away or she would self-destruct. Although she thoroughly enjoyed the countries she visited, and formed
friendships with people she met, she described her time travelling as being in her own world. She was surprised that people often commented on her bravery for travelling alone. Her self-confidence grew and she reflects upon her travels as a positive experience.

Even though she didn't know what she wanted to study, she knew she wanted to continue her education and, therefore, she applied to UBC while she was away. However, she ended up going to Langara because her application for UBC was late. She described this period in her life as “soul-searching”. She enrolled in a history course and a religious studies course - history because she had enjoyed history in high school and in her first degree, and religious studies because she had been brought up in a non religious home. The common link in these two areas for Tara was a “search for truth.” A friend then suggested that she take an introductory philosophy course. She immediately “fell in love” with the course material and for the first time really enjoyed school. Tara attributes her own connection to philosophy to her instructor's encouraging attitude and passion for philosophy. This instructor had such a powerful influence on her that they are still in contact with each other. She found the course readings more like pleasure reading than reading textbooks. Philosophy became her vehicle to search for “the truth”. She recalled asking many “why” questions in her childhood and speculates that this may have predisposed her to being interested in philosophy. She found that philosophical thought challenged her and was training her to think in a different
way. Her search for truth is no longer a search for one answer, but a series of evolving thoughts where one thought always leads to another. She views her philosophy major as applicable to everything she does in the future because it has altered how she thinks and who she is.

After graduating this year, Tara's immediate goal is to pursue graduate training in philosophy. Eventually she hopes to teach philosophy. Specifically, she would like to teach at an introductory level because she believes that there would be more room for creativity and students would likely be more open to many different philosophical ideologies. Her ultimate goal is to increase interest in philosophy in others.

Commentary on Tara's Story

Tara was dissatisfied with her first career choice because she didn't feel stimulated or challenged, but she was determined to complete her degree in horticulture. In the final year of her degree, her mother died. The loss of her mother made her reevaluate her own life and how she viewed the world around her. She came to realize that she had many things to be thankful for in her life. After graduation, she travelled for nine months because she wanted time to think and be alone. She knew that she wanted to continue her education when she returned to Canada, even though she didn't know what she wanted to study. From the start of her first philosophy course, Tara immediately recognized that she had found what she was looking for - a way to search for the truth. In addition, Tara attributes her
love of philosophy to her first instructor who was encouraging, enthusiastic and passionate about philosophy. For the first time Tara enjoys being in school and she describes studying philosophy as a pleasure rather than as work.

Linda

As a child Linda was very close to her dad. He had an adventurous spirit and her family often vacationed in other countries. Her dad came from a poor family and overcame many setbacks before becoming a successful businessman. He often fondly talked about his years at Cambridge University as the best years of his life. Although he made it clear to Linda and her siblings that they did not have to be concerned about financing a university education, he also made it clear that it was for them to decide whether they wanted to go to university. When Linda was young, she used to ask her dad “weird” questions such as “how do you know the t.v. really exists?” Once, he responded to her questions by saying, “you talk such poppycock.” Since Linda really “looked up to” her dad, this response had a great impact on her. She didn’t want her dad to think she was stupid, so she “shut up” and thought carefully before she asked any questions.

Linda was a good student in high school. By the time she graduated (half a year earlier than most students), she was “fed up” with school and therefore she didn’t even consider going to university.

After Linda graduated from high school, her family went on vacation to Mexico. She fell in love with a Mexican and they maintained contact when she
returned home. She worked until she had enough money to return to Mexico. She spent the next couple of years going back and forth between Vancouver and Mexico to be with John, her first love. After two years, Linda applied to UBC. She felt like she was “going through the motions” to go to university, but she never really planned to go. Up to this point, Linda lived by the principle “go wherever life takes me.” She found out she was pregnant and although her parents asked her to consider having an abortion, she loved John and wanted to have their baby. She moved to Mexico to marry John. She embraced the Mexican lifestyle. They were poor and they lived in a lower class neighborhood, but Linda knew she could always call her dad if they needed money. She was “cut off” from the world, yet she didn’t care. She and her daughter spent the summer months with her parents in Vancouver because the weather was unbearably hot in Mexico. She experienced “culture shock” readjusting between her time in Vancouver and Mexico. After she gave birth to their second child, they moved to a middle class neighborhood. She socialized with other moms in the neighborhood who were more educated than her previous neighbors. A few years later she started becoming bored with being a stay-at-home mom. Her friend had many parties and Linda often baked cakes and pies to take to them. While at one of these parties, a local restaurant owner asked her to make desserts for his restaurant. She started a business without ever planning to do so. Her business grew quickly. Then one day, she was offered a teaching job at a private school. One of the teachers had
suddenly quit and they had heard that a Canadian was living close by. Linda went from being bored to being too busy. After living in Mexico for eight years, she started to miss Canadian culture and she wanted her children to know her side of the family. She decided to move back to Canada after she taught her sister-in-law everything about her baking business.

Linda and her children moved to Canada first and then John joined them a year later when his immigration papers were approved. At first it was difficult for Linda and her family to adjust. Even though Linda had grown up in Vancouver, she felt like a Mexican moving to Canada for the first time. She got a job at the Greater Vancouver Housing Corporation showing apartments for rent, but it wasn’t long before she started feeling unfulfilled. Linda knew that there was no place for advancement at her work and she was “stagnating” so she decided to work summers in her sister’s lodge in northern B.C.

Working at the lodge opened up a whole new world for Linda. For the first time she was surrounded by university students. The students were also there to work during the summer and many of them were philosophy majors. The students often had philosophical discussions which Linda did not understand. It bothered her that there were so many things she didn’t know and she remembers thinking “I should know this.” She was fascinated by the students and their level of knowledge. Linda and many of the same students kept returning to work at the lodge every year. Linda was becoming increasingly bored with her life at home.
She was tired of her husband's jealousy and possessiveness and she decided to separate from him. After being exposed to university students, she decided that she did not want to feel uneducated anymore.

Linda did not feel ready to go straight to university because she had been out of school for almost twenty years. She enrolled at Capilano College to ease back into being a student. She took many psychology courses because she had wanted to be a child psychologist when she was young. At first she enjoyed psychology. Then she became "disillusioned by the DSM IV" because it seemed as though psychology had a label for everyone and everything. She thought about what subject would be "like psychology" and then she remembered listening her co-workers at the lodge talk about philosophy. She took two philosophy courses and she "knew immediately" that she was interested in philosophy. She liked the fact that there were "no answers in philosophy" in comparison to psychology, a field of study that had "too many answers." She enjoyed talking to her philosophy instructors and she felt an intellectual connection to them. After completing two years at Capilano College, she transferred to UBC to major in philosophy. She views the field of philosophy as male dominated and "too linear." She would like to uncover new ground in philosophy from the female perspective. She loves studying philosophy and she says that it "means everything and it is what my life is about." Although many others have told Linda that a philosophy degree is useless, she thinks studying philosophy is a "luxury." Linda does not have definite plans for
the future. After graduation, she is considering teaching English as a second language or pursuing a graduate degree in philosophy. Her dream is to finish a Ph.D. in philosophy and then contribute to making philosophy more “woman friendly.”

Commentary on Linda’s Story

After Linda graduated from high school, she went on a vacation to Mexico that altered the course of her life. She fell in love with a Mexican and even though his background was different from hers in every way (e.g., educational background, social class), she adopted his way of life. Eventually Linda and her husband and children moved to Canada. She began to feel unfulfilled and longed to continue her education. At first she took psychology courses in college, but after completing a few courses she realized that psychology was not for her. Linda had been exposed to philosophy by students with whom she had worked and she remembered how she had enjoyed listening to their philosophical discussions. She enrolled in two philosophy courses and immediately knew philosophy was what she wanted to study. Philosophy challenges her intellectually and her studies reflect what her life is about. Linda describes philosophy as a balance of knowledge and wisdom which is what she is striving for in her life.

Sarah

After graduating from high school, Sarah worked for a couple of years at various jobs. First, she worked at a bottling plant and then she worked as a clerk in
a stationery store. She was bored at each of her jobs so she decided that she had to try to find something more interesting to do with her life. She enrolled at Langara College in order to explore her interests. She was considering majoring in English because that was the subject that she excelled in at high school. She ended up taking a philosophy course in ethics as an elective. She immediately loved the course material which she described as "thinking about the kinds of things she had always wondered about when she was alone" and to Sarah that was exactly what higher education was meant to be. The instructor was female and Sarah admired her for being in a male dominated field. Sarah thought her instructor was amazing because she was knowledgeable and passionate about the material. She encouraged students to think on their own by constantly asking them, "What do you believe/think?" Sarah loved studying ethics so much that she participated in class discussions for the first time. She received her highest grade in this course which gave her confidence in her ability to succeed in philosophy. She found that she was concentrating on learning and she was having fun. She enjoyed the course so much that she enrolled in two more philosophy courses. The next two courses she took were in epistemology and metaphysics, and although she didn't enjoy the material as much, she knew that if she continued with philosophy, she could eventually focus on ethics.

Sarah wonders if some of her childhood memories are linked to her interest in philosophy. She recalls being an introspective child and remembers often
thinking about questions such as, "How should I be?" And she remembers looking at situations as if she were on the "outside looking in." One memory that stands out in her mind occurred when she was approximately eight years old. She was walking home from school when she suddenly saw herself on her block, in her neighborhood, in her city, in her country, and in the world; she was a tiny speck. She realized how insignificant she was in the world. She also thinks her argumentative personality predisposes her pursuing an education in philosophy.

Sarah is often asked why she is majoring in philosophy. Others have even tried to tell Sarah that an undergraduate degree in philosophy will not open doors to future employment, but Sarah believes philosophy gets her everything. She thoroughly enjoys exploring and questioning her own ideas as well as other people's ideas. Although Sarah dreams about completing a Ph.D. in philosophy, she is uncertain of her ability to compete in graduate school. She would like to teach philosophy at the college level in order to "open people's eyes to different ways of thinking."

Commentary on Sarah's Story

After working at a few different jobs, Sarah began to yearn for something more meaningful to do with her life. She decided to enroll in college to explore different areas of study. As soon as she began an ethics course, she knew she had found what she was looking for. Her instructor was passionate about the course material and she encouraged students to question their beliefs and
thoughts. Much to her own surprise, Sarah began participating in class
discussions for the first time. Eventually, she would like to share her love of
philosophy though teaching.

Ryan

Following high school graduation, Ryan decided to take a couple of years off from school to work. There was no doubt in his mind that he would eventually return to school because he felt there was intrinsic value in obtaining a university degree. Ryan attributes his feelings regarding the importance of a university education to two major influences. The first influence was that of his parents who place a high value on a university education. His parents did not have the opportunity to go to university and they chose to immigrate to Canada in order to give their children that opportunity. Although both Ryan and his parents place value on a university education, they differ in defining that value. His parents have a more utilitarian view of degree and believe the degree will bring about an improved financial situation. Like his parents, Ryan believes that there are financial rewards to having a university education, but he also sees intrinsic value in completing a degree. Ryan enjoys learning for the sake of learning. The second influence was the affluent neighborhood in which he was raised. Almost everyone he went to high school with went on to university. Graduating from university was a goal he wanted to and knew he could achieve.
Ryan worked in a bicycle shop for a few years and then enrolled in Capilano College for part-time studies to explore his academic interests. Capilano College seemed like the perfect setting to make the transition from high school to university since he had been out of school for a while and didn't know what field of study he wanted to pursue. In high school, he enjoyed English and he was also interested in business. While browsing through Capilano's course calendar, he came across a course on existentialism in literature. He had a curiosity about existentialism, but what really caught his attention was the literature aspect of the course. He described this course as fantastic. In particular, the instructor made a very strong positive impression on him. Her brilliance, talent as a teacher, and dedication cultivated a powerful interest in philosophy for Ryan. She taught Ryan that studying philosophy (e.g., critical thinking) involved acquiring skills that were as valuable, if not more valuable than learning any other practical skill. She became like a mentor to Ryan - lending him her own philosophy books, having discussions beyond class hours, and advising him about other philosophy courses. When many of the philosophy courses Ryan was interested in taking were not offered due to financial cutbacks to the department, this instructor lent him the relevant text books and discussed what he might have expected to learn. After taking a few more courses with the same instructor, he transferred to UBC. Upon reflection, Ryan feels the critical thinking course he took in his second semester of Capilano College was the single most valuable course in his whole degree because it helped
him take so much out of every other course. He recently returned to Capilano College to tell his philosophy instructor how much he enjoyed her classes and the impact her critical thinking course had on his other courses.

By the time he had completed three terms at Capilano College, he decided to major in political science. He realized he had such a strong interest in philosophy that he then decided to do a double major. Although Ryan first decided upon political science as a major, he now finds himself more interested in his philosophy courses.

Ryan values his studies in philosophy because he feels he has been a part of a tradition in the oldest field of study. He relishes thinking about the same questions that have been pondered by philosophers such as Plato thousands of years ago. As Ryan approaches graduation, he finds his attitude toward university shifting even closer to that of his parents. Rather than viewing university as an opportunity to partake in a tradition of scholarship, he is already thinking about what he could pursue for his next degree in order to obtain practical skills in the workforce. He future plans include completing a MBA program.

Commentary on Ryan's Story

Ryan knew that he would eventually go to university, but he wanted to take a few years off from school and work. When Ryan was ready to resume his education, he didn't know exactly what he wanted to study. He enrolled in a philosophy course and he was surprised by the impact the course had on him.
More specifically, Ryan credits his interest and enjoyment of philosophy to his first instructor's passion for the material and dedication as a teacher.

Steve

There were many reasons why Steve didn't make a lot of effort to excel in high school. Although he was confident that he had the ability to do well, he thought of grades as a competition among students and he had no desire to compete with his classmates. Furthermore, he didn't believe that grades accurately reflected one's level of knowledge. However, the main reason for his lack of effort was that he had no plans to pursue a post secondary education.

After graduating from high school, Steve became involved in community theater. And through this involvement he earned a one year scholarship to Capilano College. He planned to study psychology and enrolled in a philosophy course because it was the only one that fit into his course schedule. He immediately "fell in love with philosophy." The instructor was amazing. She was passionate about the course material and she urged students to question everything they were learning. And unlike Steve's high school teachers, she encouraged students to speak out in class. In this course, Steve learned to think and argue in a logical and rigorous manner. For the first time, Steve felt like his intelligence was recognized. He realized that he had an aptitude for philosophy and he wanted to continue studying philosophy. To Steve, philosophy "has to do with everything." He finds that the more he learns about philosophy, the more he
understands himself and the world around him. He enjoys being surrounded by other philosophers and he is now convinced that for him, philosophy is the only subject worth studying.

Upon reflection, Steve believes that there were childhood experiences that may have influenced his interest in philosophy. Most significantly, when Steve was seven years old, his father was killed. Steve spent a lot of time wondering, "Why him?", "Why me?, "If there is a God, why would he let this happen?", and "What does this mean?" He also recalls pondering philosophical questions with his friends during high school and fantasizing about whether there was life in other galaxies.

Although Steve believes that a career in philosophy would be the only career for him, he thinks that it would be "difficult for him to make a living as a philosopher". He has been told by a few professors that the only thing you can do with a philosophy education is become a professor and that there are not many jobs available. So, in order to fulfill his responsibilities, such as taking care of his family, Steve is considering becoming a lawyer. He believes that he would be able to apply what he has learned from his philosophy degree to succeed in law.

Commentary on Steve’s Story

Steve did not have a positive view of education during high school and therefore he did not make much of an effort to excel. He would not have pursued a post secondary education if he had not been given a scholarship through his
community involvement. He describes taking his first philosophy course as an “accident” because it was the only course that fit into his schedule. He was influenced by his first instructor who was extremely passionate and encouraged him to share his thoughts in class. Steve’s love for philosophy was almost instantaneous because he identified with the material and he was able to relate it to his life and how he views of the world. He sees “lessons in life” in philosophy and for Steve being a philosopher is who he is rather than something he does.

Justin

Justin first thought about majoring in philosophy in the summer between his second and third year at university when he was deciding between majoring in English and philosophy. He had enjoyed most of his English classes in high school for the most part because he enjoys reading. After taking a few English courses in university, Justin realized that he did not like the style of writing that was required to get good grades. He wanted to voice his own opinions, but he felt like he couldn’t disagree with his professor’s opinions without being penalized with a lower grade. He was also not interested in many of the English courses that were required for a major.

Justin had taken philosophy in first year. He found the course interesting, but it didn’t make a strong impression on him one way or the other. He even considered dropping out of university after his second year. Although he felt disillusioned about university, he decided that he was willing to continue for one
more term. In order to help with choosing a major, he read many books and then he decided to major in philosophy. He also found that as he read through the course calendar, the courses he found most interesting were philosophy courses. After the first day of classes, Justin felt like he was “walking on air.” He knew immediately that he would really enjoy the courses he had chosen. He was finally happy being in school.

Justin describes himself as a “dabbler”, someone with broad interests who likes to know a little bit about everything. Justin likes that philosophy encompasses broad areas of study, and therefore, allows him to continue dabbling in his other areas of interest. He describes philosophy as “encompassing all of human learning” and uses the example that new discoveries in science influence philosophical thought and vice versa. He compares studying philosophy to intellectual exercise, and for him, the bottom line is that he finds philosophy interesting.

At this point grades are not important to Justin because he believes he is learning something. His primary goal is to be able to say that he is well educated after completing his degree in philosophy. As for the future, Justin plans to continue with his education as long as he keeps learning. After graduating with a B.A., he is considering pursuing either a law degree or a Ph.D. in philosophy.
Commentary on Justin's Story

After Justin finished his second year of university, he wasn't sure whether he wanted to continue his studies. He had planned to major in English, but he changed his mind when his English professors appeared to reward regurgitation of their thoughts and furthermore, they penalized him for expressing his opinion. He spent the summer reading and thinking about what he would study if he returned to UBC. He decided to focus on philosophy because it covers broad areas of study, and therefore, it would allow him to continue exploring many different interests. Justin knew immediately that he had made the right choice because he found the courses interesting and he enjoyed being in school. As a philosophy student, he is encouraged to voice his opinions and he enjoys being challenged to formulate and defend an argument to a logical conclusion. Most importantly, Justin continues to find philosophy interesting.
Chapter V
Commonalities Among Narratives

This chapter outlines the findings of the study. Seven major themes emerged from the stories of how participants became philosophy majors. The seven themes are Soul Searching, Inspiration, Challenge/Learning, Belonging, Sharing, Reflective Appreciation of Philosophy, and Self-Fulfillment. A description of each theme is provided along with examples that illustrate the variations within a theme. This chapter concludes with a description of how the themes formulate an abstract narrative with a coherent beginning, middle, and end.

Themes

Soul Searching

The first theme of soul searching signifies looking for meaning. There is a longing for understanding or a search for meaning that may involve a specific event or a broader state of mind. Soul searching involves questions such as, “Who am I?”, “What do I want to do with my life?”, “What does this event mean?”, or “What are my interests?” There is a sense of yearning to find answers, explore interests, or overcome disillusionment through spending time alone, thinking, reading, removing oneself from a familiar environment or exploring new challenges. For two of the participants, the death of a parent initiated many questions. Steve was only a young child when his father was killed, but he vividly remembers wondering,
"Why him?”, “Why me?”, and “What does this mean?” Tara was in her early twenties when her mother died. Her mother’s death made Tara reevaluate her own life. And she had just completed a degree in a field that she didn’t want to pursue. She felt that she had to physically and emotionally remove herself from everything and everyone in her life. Although Andrew and Justin both began soul searching after becoming disillusioned about university, their experiences were very different. Andrew’s self-identity was so closely connected to academic success that when he didn’t succeed in his studies, he didn’t know who he was anymore. For two years, he spent most of his time alone, thinking and reading in order to try and find meaning in his life and redefine his self-identity. On the other hand, Justin felt disillusioned because he didn’t feel able to express his opinions and he wasn’t interested in the courses he was taking. For some students, soul searching is a process of exploration to discover interests. Sarah was bored with all of her jobs. She kept thinking “there must be more to life then this” so she decided to enroll in college to explore her interests.

Inspiration

Inspiration provides a solution for what was missing or longed for during soul searching. Inspiration often appears in the concrete form of a model. This model offers a way of being, a representation of what is possible. Many students noted the impact of their first philosophy instructor. These instructors were described as passionate about philosophy, brilliant, dedicated, and encouraging. Students were
able to form significant relationships with their instructors beyond the classroom. Linda was inspired by her co-workers who were philosophy majors in university. She was fascinated by their discussions about philosophy and the extent of their knowledge in so many areas. The discrepancy between their level of knowledge and her own, motivated her to pursue higher education. To some extent, Ryan was inspired by his parents who place a high value on a university education. And Shana was debating whether or not to return to university to study philosophy when a friend encouraged her to take hold of her life and pursue what she wanted rather than wait and do nothing.

**Challenge/Learning**

For many of these students, studying philosophy is a way to search for answers and to become immersed in significant questions. This theme often involves students being asked and then asking themselves, “What do I think?” In their previous studies the emphasis was learning through memorization and regurgitation of information that was not of great significance to them. In contrast, studying philosophy provides a meaningful and intellectual challenge and also teaches a “new way of thinking” that is rigorous, structured and critical. Instead of being given answers, students are taught to look for their own answers. For Tara, learning to think using a “philosophical framework” enables her to look for the truth. Students are encouraged to contribute their thoughts and beliefs and also challenged to defend them using logical arguments. Ryan stated that the critical
thinking course he took was the most important course of his degree because it changed the way he thinks and learns.

Belonging

Many participants referred to the fact that studying philosophy has given them the feeling that they belong to a group. Prior to meeting philosophy classmates and professors, these students felt alone - not alone in the traditional sense, but alone in the kinds of things they thought about and questions that they had. For the first time, many of these participants met others who shared a similar orientation, interests, and ways of thinking. The "group" also involves being part of a discipline and a link to past philosophers. For example, a few of the students interviewed commented that they took pleasure from thinking about the same questions philosophers long ago thought about.

Sharing

This theme involves a desire to share their knowledge of philosophy with others. The students interviewed believe that increasing awareness and understanding of philosophy would be valuable to everyone. Many of these students aspire to make an impact on others' lives through teaching philosophy. Shana spoke of wanting to teach philosophy because there would be a high level of intellectual interaction with students. She believes everyone and society as a whole would benefit from learning to think in a more structured, critical, and analytical manner. She gave the example that if people learned to think in this
manner, politics would be improved because votes would be cast after the issues were given appropriate consideration. Sarah also said that she would like to teach a "philosophical way" of thinking. And Tara stated that one of her main goals is to increase interest in philosophy in others. Many of the participants were so enthusiastic about philosophy that they gave me brief lessons about different branches of philosophy.

Reflective Appreciation of Philosophy

This theme is the most diverse and open to interpretation. It involves reflecting upon philosophy and coming to an understanding about what studying philosophy means to each individual. The appreciation stems out of a realization that studying philosophy is personally meaningful and it is a valuable goal worth striving for. This was expressed in two forms. The first is the conviction that studying philosophy is "a calling" or vocation. The second is the belief that studying philosophy has vast applications for pursuing a career. Reflective appreciation is best illustrated through the following examples. Many of the participants had to overcome the negative views of others regarding a philosophy major. Family members, friends, and acquaintances have felt free to tell these students that a degree in philosophy is useless and a dead-end. And in one case, even philosophy professors made discouraging comments about the viability of a career in philosophy. Despite these negative views, these students see the value of studying philosophy, and they are passionate about continuing to do so. Andrew
developed an interest in philosophy when he was in high school. He often spent
hours in the library after school reading the works of various philosophers for
pleasure as well as seeking out others to discuss philosophical thoughts and
issues. As previously explained, he chose to study sciences rather than
philosophy, but after two years of contemplation, he returned to philosophy. It
wasn’t until Andrew released himself from the expectations of others and
discovered a way to integrate philosophy into a career with his religious beliefs that
he made a commitment to philosophy. Two participants commented that
philosophy is a male-dominated field and it is as if they feel compelled to make a
contribution from a female perspective. There were fewer examples of participants
viewing their studies in philosophy as a foundation for pursuing a career in a
different field. Ryan greatly values studying philosophy, but he plans to pursue a
career in business. For Ryan, his undergraduate degree in philosophy is an
important “stepping stone” that has taught him valuable skills. Justin choose to
major in philosophy because he believes it encompasses many other subjects, and
therefore, allows him to continue exploring other areas of interest simultaneously.
For Justin, studying philosophy is a means to getting a “well-rounded” education.

Self-Fulfillment

The final theme is labelled self-fulfillment. It involves an emotional and/or
intellectual connection between philosophy and a person’s view of the self. Here
participants express how philosophy contributes meaning or purpose to their lives;
self views have an impact on philosophical views and vice versa. Also there is a realization that philosophy is integral to who they are and therefore, studying philosophy is fulfilling. A “love” and passion for philosophy is evident, not only in words, but also by animated speech and body language, such as “eyes lighting up.” All of the participants in this study expressed statements that exemplify this theme. An example from each participant follows:

Andrew - “I found a piece of myself there (in philosophy).”

Shana - “I knew I had made the right choice (to study philosophy). This was exactly what I had wanted.”

Tara - “Philosophy is applicable to everything I do in the future because it alters how I think and who I am.”

Linda - “I love studying philosophy, it means everything and it is what my life is about.”

Sarah - “Philosophy gets me everything. I don’t feel like I’m on the outside looking in anymore. I look for answers within myself.”

Ryan - “Philosophy training helps me get more from every other course I take because it has altered how I think.”

Steve - “I fell in love with philosophy. Philosophy has to do with everything. The more I learn about philosophy, the more I understand myself and the world around me.”

Justin - “After the first day of classes in philosophy, I felt like I was walking on air.”
Abstract Narrative

The seven themes fall in a narrative pattern of beginning, middle, and end that describe how participants became philosophy majors. The interrelationships among the themes are discussed in relation to the narrative pattern.

Table of Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>End</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soul Searching</td>
<td>Challenge/Learning</td>
<td>Self-Fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflective Appreciation of Philosophy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As stated previously the abstract narrative consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning consists of Soul Searching and Inspiration. The middle involves Challenge/Learning, Belonging, Sharing, and Reflective Appreciation of Philosophy. And at the end of the abstract narrative is Self-Fulfillment. Although the themes have been grouped to represent an abstract narrative with a beginning, middle, and end, it is important to note that themes may overlap from one part of the narrative into another.

The abstract narrative begins with a gap or discrepancy between the way things were and the way participants wished their life could be. In other words,
each narrative began with participants being in varying states of uncertainty in which they wanted something to be different in their lives or they wanted to be doing something different with their lives. This state of uncertainty varied from being bored with a job and wondering if there was more to life, to a crisis of self-identity. This theme was labelled soul searching to signify a search for meaning. Following soul searching participants began describing the next theme, inspiration, when a solution was found for their search. Inspiration provides a possible answer to what was being searched for or an example of what is possible. Many participants found inspiration in the form of a model, their first college philosophy instructor. The significance of these instructors as models was not so much about finding a specific person or career to emulate, as it was about finding someone who depicted a life full of passion, knowledge, encouragement, challenge, and meaning.

The middle of a story “explains how participants changed from the beginning state to the end state” (Cochran, 1990, p. 23). In this abstract narrative the middle is an extension of the beginning and explains how participants found what they were searching for and why they pursued their chosen solution (majoring in philosophy). Studying philosophy provides a structured method of searching for answers that is both challenging and meaningful. Participants welcomed being intellectually challenged and asked to explore and share their thoughts and beliefs. The idea of sharing expands into a separate theme that involves the desire to share their knowledge with others who have not studied philosophy. This desire
stems from the belief that others would benefit from learning about philosophy. Almost all of the participants stated that they would like to eventually teach philosophy in a college or university setting. Studying philosophy also provides participants with a sense of belonging to a group. Prior to studying philosophy, many students thought they were unique in the way that they thought and questioned things, until they discovered a group of people with a similar orientation and way of thinking and questioning. The last theme involves participants reflecting on philosophy and appreciating what studying philosophy means to them. Reflections often involved overcoming obstacles, such as uncertainty over what to major in, others' negative views on majoring in philosophy or limited job potential after completing a degree in philosophy.

The end of the abstract narrative is characterized by self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment is the end result of discovering what was searched for in the beginning. Through the themes in the middle of the narrative, participants discovered that philosophy is integral (on differing levels) to who they are and fulfills some aspect of who they would like to become.
Chapter VI

Discussion

In this study, students were asked to tell the story of how they became philosophy students. Individual narratives were written for each participant and from these narratives seven themes and an abstract narrative emerged.

Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of this study is that there were only eight participants. This number of participants does not provide an adequate sample to generalize the findings to all philosophy students. Also, since only philosophy students were interviewed, this study does not allow for generalization to students of other majors. In addition, there was a lack of uniformity regarding where participants were in relation to completing their degree. Half of the participants were in their third year and the other half were in their fourth. Although the interview specified the time period leading up to deciding on philosophy as a major, experiences (and ultimately the narratives) may have been affected by time differences in when the major was declared.

Another limitation is that an interview was the only method of gathering data. Furthermore, the data was reviewed only by participants for inaccuracies and distortions. This limits the finding to what participants say rather than other sources of inquiry (e.g., Q-sort). Related to this issue is the fact that the data was analyzed only from the researcher's perspective. The themes were then formulated
by the researcher from reviewing interview audio-tapes and the written individual narratives.

Implications for Future Research

One direction for future research is a replication of this study with a larger sample size in order to investigate whether the themes that emerged in this study are representative of all philosophy majors. And another study could examine how students in other departments selected their majors in order to explore similarities and differences among themes for majors. In order to address limitations of this study, future studies could incorporate more than one method of gathering data and also include an independent review of the data by another researcher.

Another direction might involve a follow-up study of these participants to explore their continuing narratives. Such a study could reveal links between university majors and career development and ultimately provide a counsellor with insight for collaborating with students on their career goals.

Implications for Theory

This section compares how theories of career development explain the selection of a philosophy major in university to the findings of this study.

Holland’s Theory of Types

The possibility of a match between these students and philosophy seems to be plausible from the narrative accounts collected in this study. Of Holland’s six types, all of the participants would likely be an Investigative personality type.
(analytical, abstract thinker, enjoys using intellect/learning, and independent) and philosophy would likely be characterized as an Investigative environment. These students also have the intellectual ability and they share common interests with philosophy professors and other philosophy majors. However, none of the participants spoke of making a match between their personality type and educational environment. When participants were asked how they became philosophy members, they shared narratives that were rich in meaning. All of the participants began their narratives with some form of soul searching in which they felt as though they were off path or wandering and searching for answers to questions such as, “Who am I?”, “What do I want to do with my life?” or “What are my interests?” It was as if they felt compelled to find a meaningful direction for their lives. The narratives capture the complexity of motivation and meaning underlying the selection of the philosophy major as well as providing context to events and experiences.

Super’s Life-Span Theory

There are many aspects of Super’s theory that correspond to how students became philosophy majors. Theoretically, genetics, personality factors, and environmental factors influence the development of the participants’ self-concepts. Many of the individual narratives included events and experiences that were exploratory in nature such as enrolling in a variety of courses and reading to discover interests. According to Super’s theory, students choose majors that are
consistent with their self-views. This idea is exemplified by the Self-Fulfillment theme which involves an emotional and/or intellectual connection between philosophy and a person's view of the self. However, the narratives included much more than the implementation of a self-concept. The selection of a major appeared to be more like a dialectic process. As with Holland's theory, Super's theory still adheres to a matching principle - matching a self-concept with a major, and therefore, it does not capture the complex nature of how a major is selected.

Krumboltz's Social Learning Theory

The main premise of this theory is that career development (and hypothetically the selection of a university major) is a function of learning experiences. These learning experiences are shaped by three other factors (genetic endowment, environmental conditions, and task approach skills). Evidence of each of the four factors in Krumboltz's theory was found in the stories of how participants became philosophy majors. It is possible that the skills required to study philosophy are innate to participants. And there are potential environmental conditions such as living in a culture that values higher education that influenced participants to pursue a university degree. The narrative included many examples of learning experiences that influenced participants to major in philosophy. Many of the participants included the impact of observing a model in their narratives and the reinforcement of good grades. However, some of the findings in this study are not explained by Krumboltz's theory. For example, many
participants became philosophy majors despite negative reinforcement such as their friends' and family members' negative views of philosophy. Another proposition presumes that an individual would be less likely to major in a field if the "cost" (time and effort) exceeds perception of future gains (viable employment). Although there are many aspects of this theory that correspond to participants' narratives, this theory does not capture many of the themes that participants discussed in how they selected their major.

Accident Theory

Many of the participants' narratives included accidents or random factors. Participants did not plan many of the events that led to the selection of their major. For example, many of the participants came across a philosophy instructor who became an inspiring model. One participant, Steve, didn't even consider continuing his education beyond high school until he earned a scholarship through his involvement in community theatre. He had no plans to study philosophy and said that he took his first philosophy course by accident because it was the only course that fit into his timetable. Steve had to encounter philosophy in some manner in order to select it as his major. It is not the means by which Steve first learned about philosophy that is important. What is important is that for him, studying philosophy is meaningful for many different and significant reasons.

Random factors alone do not fully explain how participants chose their majors, but
within a narrative account the meaning, context, and interpretation of accidents contribute to an understanding of how students selected their majors.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study uncovered themes of meaning in the narratives of how participants became philosophy majors. Each narrative included events and experiences of a student crystallized in a search for meaningful activity. In telling how a major was selected through narrative, participants made meaning of events, experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Cochran (1990, 1992, 1997) posits a theory of career development that focuses on the conception of four phases and emplotment - enabling a person to cast him/herself as the main character in a meaningful career plot or narrative. This study provides practical examples of Cochran's theory. Participants used a dialectic process, "a mutual fitting of ideal to actual and actual to ideal" (Cochran, 1997, p. 11). In the first phase, an individual is in a state of incompletion, "something is off, lacking or needed, generating a gap between what is and what ought to be" (Cochran, 1992, p. 194). This first phase corresponds to 'soul searching' when participants were undecided about what subject to major in, or they were employed and not even enrolled in post-secondary education. In the second phase, positioning, the student prepared to get in "position" through preparing, planning and refining meaningful goals such as enrolling in university or considering different fields of study. In the next phase, positing, the focus is to
make something actual. "Positing is the phase for immersement in vigorous action, enacting position to bring something about" (Cochran, 1992, p. 4). Here students took action, such as reading about philosophy or enrolling in a philosophy class. During the final phase, completion, an end may be realized "offering closure to what was aroused in the beginning and elaborated over the middle" (Cochran, 1992, p. 4). Completion for these participants is similar to the theme of self-fulfillment and also includes reflective appreciation of philosophy. In this final phase, a person becomes a spectator, stepping back to gain perspective on the completed action. Counsellors and university departmental advisors could use a narrative approach in career counselling to discover how an individual searches for meaning and then help him/her find direction and form connections between his/her past, present, and future. The findings of this study could provide students with a guide to explore meaning and emplot what would make life meaningful.

This study also has practical implications for cross-cultural career counselling. In order for cross-cultural counselling to be effective, it is essential that the counsellor understand an individual's world view (Ibrahim, 1984, 1985). Using a narrative approach in career counselling would allow counsellors and advisors to immerse themselves in the world view of an individual and discover the meaning of career in a cultural context. More importantly, a narrative approach considers the unique perspective and individual differences of an individual rather than trying to apply or adapt a career development model based on a homogenous
population. A narrative approach would also be appropriate for cross-cultural counselling because “telling stories about past events seems to be a universal human activity” (Reissman, 1993, p. 3). Through narrative, counsellors would be able to enter into a client’s world - who he/she is, where he/she is in their life, and what is meaningful.

Summary

A narrative approach was used to explore how participants selected their university major. Eight participants were interviewed and asked to tell the story of how they became philosophy majors. Individual narratives were written from the perspective of each of the eight participants and then reviewed by participants for accuracy. The eight stories were analyzed for common themes and from this analysis, seven themes and an abstract narrative emerged. The findings of this study illustrate how students search for meaning and how they ultimately found self-fulfillment in the selection of a philosophy major.
References


Appendix A

Initial Letter of Contact to Philosophy Students

I am conducting a study on the experience of becoming a university Philosophy major. This study is for my Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Larry Cochran (822-5259) in the Department of Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia.

Your participation would involve being interviewed by me and would require approximately one to three hours of your time in total. Your responses would remain confidential. Your name would not be identified and your responses would not be associated with your name in the results portion of my thesis. Your involvement is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time.

I believe that being involved in this study would be an interesting and enjoyable experience that would give you the opportunity to reflect upon your experiences.

I have attached a letter of consent for you to review. If you are interested in participating, please call me to arrange a convenient time for the interview. Or if you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call me at any time. Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Ruth Hahn (228 xxxx)
Appendix B

Consent Form

Title: Agency and Career

Principal Investigator: Dr. Larry Cochran (822-5259)
Department of Counselling Psychology

Co-Investigator: Ruth Hahn (228-xxxx)

I freely and voluntarily agree to be a participant in the research project entitled “Agency and Career” being conducted as a Master’s thesis by Ruth Hahn in the Department of Counselling Psychology. Participation will involve an interview about my experience of becoming Philosophy major at the University of British Columbia. In total my participation will take approximately one to three hours.

I understand that all information is confidential and that no identifying information will be retained by the investigators. I also understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. All interviews will be audio-taped and the tapes will be erased at the end of the project. Interview material will be transcribed without any identifying information to ensure confidentiality.

If I have any concerns about my rights or treatment as a research participant, I can contact Dr. Richard Spratley, Director of the UBC Office of Research Services and Administration at 822-8598.

By signing this document, I agree to participate in this study and have received a copy of this consent form.

Name (please print): ____________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________