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**About Presenters:**

Dr Mary McMahon is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at The University of Queensland, Brisbane Australia. She teaches in the career development and guidance and counselling specialisations of the Master of Educational Studies.

Mark Watson is a Professor in the Psychology Department of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa. He has published extensively in international journals and contributed chapters to international career texts.

Jenny Bimrose is a Professorial Fellow at the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, England. She has published extensively and taught, managed and researched in higher education for over thirty years.

Mary, Mark and Jenny are all experienced career counsellors. Drawing on their collaborative research in Australia, South Africa, and England respectively, they have identified a range of practical suggestions that may be used in career counselling with older women which they will describe in this symposium.

**Title of Paper:**                    **Older Women's Career Stories: Possibilities for Career Guidance and Counselling Support**

**Abstract:**

In labour markets around the world, women remain marginalised despite the adoption of equal opportunity legislation in many countries. This particular social equity issue is not country specific and gender equity is yet to be achieved. Ageism, as well as sexism, is also a persistent feature of labour market disadvantage. Older workers, women in particular, may face particular challenges related to employment and to retirement. For example, people are expected to constantly up-skill and work for longer so they can self-fund their old age. Self-funding retirement is largely dependent on levels of earnings and duration of employment. Thus, career trajectories that include late entry to the workforce, interrupted workforce participation or substantial part-time employment will seriously compromise an individual's capacity to support themselves or to achieve the lifestyle they desire. Women in particular are affected by such career trajectories.

Career guidance and counselling has a role to play in addressing the work concerns of older women. However, the provision of career guidance and counselling services has traditionally focused on the needs of young people and the unemployed. To date, the provision of such services for adults has been neglected despite general awareness of its potential benefits. Career guidance and counselling practitioners traditionally value social justice and could play a potentially important role in advancing equality of opportunity.

There is a pressing need to consider innovative responses to career guidance and counselling for adults, in particular older women. Yet traditional guidance theories, commonly underpinning current practice, have been criticised for being Eurocentric and gender biased. To effectively address the career development disadvantages of older women, multi-levelled responses related to career guidance and counselling theory, research, practice and policy are called for.

This thematic symposium will present findings from studies which explored stories of the careers of older women from developed and developing countries. Based on the findings, possibilities related to the nature of career guidance and counselling support for older women are considered.