

**A Narrative and Hermeneutic Approach to Understanding
the Career Development of Ten Professional Black South
African Women**

Kerry Lyn Frizelle

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Supervisor: Nhlanhla Mkhize

DECLARATION

Unless specifically indicated to the contrary this study is a result of my own work.

Kerry Lyn Frizelle

**As the candidate's supervisor I have/have not approved this thesis/dissertation for
submission.**

Signed _____, Name _____, Date _____

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- The ten women who availed themselves for interviews. You have taught me so much about personal perseverance and strength!

We must never forget that we may also find meaning in life even when confronted with a hopeless situation, when facing a fate that cannot be changed. For what then matters is to bear witness to the uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph, to turn one's predicament into a human achievement (Viktor E Frankl)

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ABSTRACT

This study uses a narrative and hermeneutic approach to explore the career development of ten professional Black South African women. Using an interview guide developed by Brown and Gilligan (1991) and adapted by Mautner and Doucet (1996) career narratives were collected from the ten women. The narratives were analysed using a Reading Guide (Tappan and Brown, 1992). This method involved reading each narrative a number of times, focusing on a particular aspect of the respondent's narrative with each reading. Four major themes emerged through the process of interpretation; 1) contextualised career narratives, 2) positive non-directional career narratives, 3) the social embeddedness of the career narratives and 4) gendered career development. A number of recommendations for research, practice and theory building were made on the basis of the interpretation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This chapter gives a brief overview of the development of career theory over the last decade with the aim of highlighting the need for a more *context sensitive approach* to career research in South Africa. This argument is further situated in a wider intellectual debate in the social science between modernism and post-modernism. The discussion highlights the way in which the post-modern turn provides a new, and more appropriate, framework and methodology for understanding and researching career development in the South African context. The discussion then moves to a critical engagement with the call for a more context sensitive (or indigenous) career theory; suggesting possible dangers associated with the search for a theory that is sensitive to factors that include gender and culture. The chapter concludes with an outline of the key research questions and methodology of the current study.

1.1 A brief overview of the development of career theory over the last decade.

In 1986 Collin and Young proposed the need for an “ecological, biographical, and hermeneutical” (Collin & Young, 1992, p.1) career theory. This theory argued that in addition to the intra individual factors (personality traits, abilities), given so much emphasis by traditional career theorists, it was necessary to take into account the context (socio-economic, political, cultural) of career development and an individual’s subjective experience of that context when trying to make sense of a person’s career. In 1986 Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg published a paper in which they noted the relatively sporadic consideration of context in career development theory. The development-contextual model developed by these authors (based on Bronfenbrenner’s 1979 ecological model) outlines the need for a career theory that is sensitive to the impact that the dynamic interaction of social, cultural, economic and physical contextual factors have on career development.

The above concerns about the infrequent acknowledgement of contextual factors in career theory have been echoed in South Africa. In the early 1990’s there was an emergence of literature that

recognised the need for a new approach to career theory. Naicker (1994) argued for the development of a career counselling model that is more relevant to the specific social needs of the majority of South African learners. Stead (1996) used Vondracek *et al.*'s (1986) developmental-contextual framework of career development to explore the way in which contextual and individual factors dynamically interact in the career development of Black South African adolescents. Stead (1996) proposed that an understanding of the interplay between environmental and individual factors is essential for the development of appropriate career interventions. In 1998(a) Stead and Watson reviewed South African career research that was published from 1980 to 1997. They found that, on the whole, South African research tended to mirror international trends. Underlying South African research were Western values and beliefs such as individualism, rational and independent career decision-making, and the nuclear family structure. In addition they found that international career assessment measures were being used in South Africa, with little effort being devoted to examining the appropriateness of these measures. In conclusion, an appeal was made for researchers to focus on career factors pertinent to the South African context such as economic factors, unemployment and the role of culture. The research of Mkhize, Sithole, Xaba and Mngadi (1998) highlighted the need to take into consideration contextual factors including socio-contextual and economic conditions when offering career counselling in South Africa.

The preceding overview of career theory and research over the last decade highlights the importance of considering *context* in career research in South Africa.

1.2 The debate between modernism and post-modernism

Collin and Young (1992) comment on developments in the social science that were taking place within a wider intellectual debate between modernism and post-modernism. The modernist world-view, expressed in neo-positivist essentialist psychology, engages in a search for universals. It assumes that the regulating systems of the mind are universal for *all* individuals (Dawes, 1998). From such a world-view, career *choice* becomes a “hard, external, objective kind of reality which is similar for most individuals” (Naicker, 1994, p. 31). A consequence of this worldview is the notion of a unilinear career, that is, a career that unfolds in one direction

and is similar for all individuals and provides little opportunity for change. In sum, career development has historically been conceptualised within a modernist framework. It has been regarded as a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy, through which a person moves in a predictable succession (Collin, 2000). Another consequence of the modernist world-view has been an over reliance on the positivist assumptions/methods of the social science. Stead and Watson (1999) contend that South African career psychologists have tended to operate within modernist epistemologies, relying too heavily on positivistic research methods and international quantitative psychometric instruments (Stead & Watson, 1998). The over reliance on positivistic research methods and international quantitative psychometric instruments is no longer adequate or appropriate. In sum, there is an urgent need for the development of more appropriate and relevant career research methods and theories in South Africa and the world in general.

Collin (2000) proposes that in an increasingly global economy the construction and experience of “post-modern time” (p. 84) will influence the future of career. By ‘post-modern time’ Collin (2000) is referring to a new experience of space and time. With the global economy traditional constructions of time and space are disrupted. Experiences of time are becoming increasingly instantaneous: “it disorders the sequence of events, making them simultaneous, and constituting ‘timeless time’, which now supersedes the clock time” (p. 84). Changes taking place in various domains are eroding the norms that have allowed individuals to take “longitudinal readings to locate themselves in time and space” (p, 91). The consequence for career theory is that the shape and nature of jobs are changing and the linkages between them are being broken. This change in the depth and direction of careers requires that individuals concern themselves not with the future or long-term (modernist time frame) but with “the short-term, the horizontal and lateral, the extended present” (p. 94) (a post-modernist time frame).

Now that a modernist world-view appears to be giving way to a post-modern world-view, alternative approaches like those grounded in hermeneutics, are being increasingly recognised in the social science. These approaches draw on social constructionism; a post-modern approach that is premised on the historically and socially constructed nature of social meaning. By using a post-modern approach like the hermeneutical approach career researchers will be able to

“achieve an understanding of career in context” (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 7). Mkhize *et al.* (1998) also argue for a more interpretive approach towards the study of career development in South African. Such an approach is more likely to lead to a richer understanding of how contextual factors like culture, economics, politics and changing relations between time and space, impact on the construction of career development. Mkhize *et al.* (1998), like Collin and Young (1992), suggest the use of narratives because of their socio-culturally constituted nature which gives insight into dimensions such as history, language and relationships, all considered to impact directly on career development. To date most of career theory is still ‘stuck’ within a modernist time frame resulting in the construction and use of outdated and inappropriate theory and research methodologies.

1.3 A cautious call for a more indigenous approach to career development.

In addition to the concern with the impact of the modernist world-view on career theory, career researchers have also identified the lack of information on the career development of Black South Africans. Stead (1996) comments on, how prior to the 1990’s, much of career research focused on White sample, with only 14% of career counselling research between 1980 and 1990 sampling Black youth in South Africa. These research findings, and those imported from Europe and America, have been unproblematically applied to individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Western values and beliefs, such as individualism, have primarily influenced most of the career theories adopted in South Africa. These theories place emphasis on modernist values such as independence, rational decision-making, self-actualisation and competitiveness. These values may be at odds with those individuals from more collectivist backgrounds and cultures. In South Africa many Black South Africans follow a traditional African lifestyle that emphasises cooperation. From this world-view, decision-making is community oriented and dependent on the wishes of significant others (Stead, 1996). South African career research has precluded the study of constructs of the self, prevalent in African cultures, such as the expression “umntu ngumntu ngabantu” (i.e., a person is a person through others) (Stead and Watson, 1998).

The preceding discussion highlights the need for an ‘indigenous career approach’. Such an approach incorporates an understanding of what it means to be a person, occupying a particular

position in society and thus takes into consideration the collectivist values of African cultures (Mkhize et al., 1989; Naicker, 1994; Stead, 1996, Stead & Watson, 1998a). It is necessary, however, to be cautious when framing individual values as either individualistic or collectivist. With the aim of being more sensitive to the experiences of individuals from various cultural, social, political and economic backgrounds career theorists run the risk of constructing a notion of culture in an over determined and essentialised manner (Dawes, 1998). Post-modernism argues that individualism and collectivism and their associated values cannot be seen as fixed identities to which any one individual 'belongs'. Within each of these constructs is a range of possible subjectivities. Such an approach acknowledges the differences in individuals' social and historical backgrounds. Where there are similarities or regularities observed these are *not* taken as inherent properties of a particular individual or group, but as "descriptions of local response patterns contingent on context, resources, instructional sets, authority relations, framing devices, and modes of construal" (Shweder, 1991, p. 87). What appear to be similarities amongst Black South Africans must not be considered a timeless unitary, collectivist/African identity. To revert to such an understanding would be to revert to a modernist world-view. The similarities, as Dawes (1989) puts it, reflect similarities in social parameters. From a post-modern world-view, culture is not a fixed entity but rather a construct that is constructed and reconstructed over time, making a range of subjectivities possible at any one point of time. Chinua Achebe puts this argument concisely in the following words:

It is, of course, true that the African identity is still in the making. There isn't a final identity that is African. But at the same time, there is an identity coming into existence. And it has a certain context and a certain meaning. (in Appiah, 1992, p. 117)

1. 4 An outline of the current study

Two main arguments relevant to South African career research have emerged from the above discussion. Firstly, there has been limited recognition of the impact of contextual factors on the individuals' career development. Historically, research in South Africa has focused primarily on the decontextualised individual. That is, it has taken the individual as the most convenient unit for study and in turn has largely ignored the social and institutional influences underlying the

individual's career decision process. As Naicker (1994) argues, a number of contextual factors such as external social influences (social, economic and political), and the cultural environment in which people reside as well as their struggle with the options available to them also account for the occupational choices that they make. Secondly, the above argument highlights that the post-modern turn in the social science has radical implications for the way in which career is conceptualised and researched.

This study is a response to the above concerns. In sum, it is a study that explores the career narratives of ten Black South African women. Through the process of interpretation the study explores the impact of contextual factors like politics, economic and culture on the career development of the Black South African women. Gender is one particular contextual factor that Mkhize *et al.* (1998) argue needs to be explored by career researchers. Black women are currently a particularly marginalized group in South Africa. The *2001 Youth Report* suggests that Black African women are least likely to have achieved their educational goals with only 14% of those surveyed having studied as far as they would have liked. In comparison, 45% of Indian and White women felt that they had achieved their educational goals. The most common reason given by Black women for not continuing with their studies was lack of money (40%). This, however, cannot be seen as the only explanation. Women in general have tended to be marginalized and discriminated against in the working world. Black women, in particular, were further denied career advancement by various apartheid legislation. In addition, it is important to consider traditional African belief systems, which hold that it is unwise to educate a girl (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2001). It was therefore decided to select only women for this study so as to explore how they understood gender to have impacted on their career development. A more varied/comparative sample would be more appropriate for a further study of its own.

Collin and Young (1992) argue that people can only make sense of their experiences by storying them through metaphor and narrative. This study illustrates how the use of post-modern research approaches, like the narrative and hermeneutic approach help, to place career development within a larger context; a context that takes into consideration a number of factors rather than merely focusing on isolated individual preferences and choices. Narratives offer a window on

historical periods, cultural practices and psychic events (Peacock & Holland, 1993). The narratives of the ten women in this study have opened up contextual factors like *inter alia*, culture and gender for exploration. The narratives became a vehicle for understanding how, among other things; women construct their career development. In addition, the narratives captured the way in which contextual factors either facilitated, or constrained, the women's career development.

The key questions of this study were:

- What cultural constraints that emanate from being a Black South African women impact on career development?
- How do changing gender constructs influence Black South African women's career narratives?
- In what ways has South Africa's past social, political and economic context influenced the career development of Black South African women
- In what ways does a changing social, political and economic context influence the career development of Black South African women?
- What obstacles are Black South Africans faced with in their career development?
- How do Black South African women cope with these obstacles?
- What role does significant others and the broader community play in the career development process of Black South African women?
- Does an interpretivist research approach open up contextual factors for exploration?

In order to be able to study career development, however, researchers have to interpret the stories people use to construct their careers (Collin & Young, 1992). Gadamer (1975) argues, "all understanding is interpretation..." (p. 350). To understand the world of meaning one must therefore interpret it, "the inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what meanings are embodied in the language and action of social actors" (p. 118). A hermeneutical approach will therefore be used to interpret the meaning of the career narratives constructed during this study.

It is hoped that the interpretivist stance of this study has opened up, for ongoing understanding, the complex and embedded meanings attached to the process of career development. The narratives of Black South African women in this study will hopefully contribute to the building of more appropriate theories on career development; not only in the South African context, but also in other contexts where the impact of external factors has been underestimated. These ideas will be explored in more detail in the proceeding chapter where literature relevant to this study will be reviewed.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will review literature that is relevant to the current study. The review will start with an exploration of the influences of individualism on career research and theory. To illustrate the influences two mainstream career theories will be critically discussed, highlighting the problems with the adoption and application of such theories in the South African context. An indigenous career theory will then be discussed as an alternative to those theories currently drawn on in South Africa. The review then turns to a critical discussion of the research paradigm currently adopted by South African career researchers, namely the positivist research paradigm. This will be followed by a discussion of alternative approaches to career research: firstly hermeneutic and interpretivist approaches and secondly the narrative research paradigm. The review will then proceed with a discussion of career development as gendered. Following this, the role of other contextual factors, namely culture, family and community will be explored. In addition, the likely impact of political and economic factors on career development will be discussed. Through out the review links will be made to the current studies research questions. Finally, the review will conclude with a summary of the main ideas covered.

2.1 Influences of self-contained individualism on career theory and research

Foucault (1974) argues that the modernist *episteme*, generated in relation to the transforming material conditions of industrialisation from the end of the eighteenth century, constituted the individual as an empirical object of study for the human science. As a result the notion of the individual that emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century appeared 'dehistoricized'; a subject that was unaware of the ongoing process through which they had been, and continued to be, socially and historically constituted. From this perspective, human identity is formed and found *within*, free from an external order (Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994) or history. Human subjects are viewed in decontextualised, reductionist and modernist terms where the self-determined, self-contained individual is upheld (Stead & Watson, 1998a). It is assumed that human beings' ideas, experiences, opinions and beliefs, upon which they act, originate from

within. The individual of contemporary Western industrialised society is “inhabited by drives and motivations, possessed by traits and characteristics and whose freely chosen actions are monitored by conscience” (Burr, 1995, p. 65). In sum, human beings are separate and disconnected from each other *and* the world around them.

The ideology of the ‘individual’ has pervaded career research. Stead and Watson (1999) are critical of the fact that most career research in South Africa has been based on Western values like individualism. As a result, career research and practices have taken the individual as the most convenient unit of analysis and in turn have largely ignored the social and institutional factors influencing an individual’s career development. The underlying assumption is that the individual is a free, autonomous agent engaging with the world against few (if any) external constraints (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). Based on concepts like individualism, current career research serves to reinforce this modernist, Western version of self.

Foucault (1974) proposes that an individual’s destiny is embedded in her or his history and socio-cultural context. From this perspective our immediate and distant past and our present social context are intricately woven into, and influence, our future. In Foucault’s (1974) words “we see the destiny of man [sic] being spun before our very eyes, but being spun backwards; it is being led back, by these strange bobbins, to the forms of its birth, to the homeland that made it possible” (p. 381). Career researchers have failed to adequately recognise the historical and socio-cultural contexts in which individuals are embedded. Career research in South Africa has historically been too centred on the individual. The focus has been on concepts like ‘individual choice’ and abilities rather than examining the “situation of career development in South Africa in terms of historical, cultural, socio-political, and economic factors” (Stead, 1996, p. 74). Nicholas, Pretorius and Naidoo (1999) suggest that if the career paths of the majority of South African’s were to be traced, the emerging picture would reveal that concepts like ‘choice’ and ‘intrinsic motivation’ had little impact on their career development. As they put it, “the multifarious inequalities of apartheid have led to disparate realities, differential options of choice and exclusivity, and differential access to education and vocational opportunities” (p. 2). Sampson (1989) illustrates the effect of socio-economic forces on people’s work related choices.

He argues that people's choices are largely limited to choosing between alternatives already "pre-determined by socio-economic forces about which one is only vaguely aware or able to affect... And yet the ideology of autonomy and of individuality remain deeply carved in the subjective consciousness of the culture" (p. 5). This understanding is central to this study because it is increasingly recognised that individuals' career experiences are never entirely autonomous. As Collin and Young (1992) argue, "individuals are defined and specified by aspects of the social condition that are taken for granted" (p. 10). This study identifies and explores the influence of multiple 'aspects of the social condition' on the career development of Black South African women.

In sum, it is essential that career research, like this study, begin to take cognisance of the effect of the social condition on career development. Ignoring factors like the political climate and socio-economic conditions only serves to reinforce the idea of the individual of contemporary Western industrial society. A practical implication of this is that the knowledge, skills and perspectives of members of a minority, socially disadvantaged group, or individuals from different cultural backgrounds are overlooked (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The meaning of constructs like career need to be understood in a specific context (Stead & Watson, 1998a), taking into account cultural understandings of what it means to be a person occupying a particular position in one's society (Heelas, 1981). Reliance on Western values and beliefs such as individualism in South African career research have precluded the study of the impact of firstly contextual factors like socio-political, historical and economic factors on career development, and secondly of variables prevalent in collectivist African cultures. For example, research findings suggest that many Black South Africans tend to be community oriented with regards to their career decisions. The desire to be of service to their community influences the choices they make. It is the impact of contextual factors as these that the current study explores closely. Variables prevalent to African cultures will be explored in more detail further on in the literature review. However, before these variables can be discussed it is important to critically discuss two mainstream career theories that have informed career research and practice in South Africa.

2.2 A critical overview of two mainstream career theories

Of the theories that have been embraced in South Africa, those of Holland and Super have been most notably accepted as *a priori* by career researchers and counsellors in South Africa (Stead & Watson, 1998b). The review will now turn to a critical overview of the theories of Holland and Super. Each theory will be briefly outlined and then critically discussed.

2.2.1 *Holland's typology of persons and environments*

Holland's typology can be briefly summarised as characterising people according to their resemblance to six personality types (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, Conventional) and characterising environments according to six ideal environments. Each personality is said to flourish in an environment having the same label. For example, Realistic types are said to do well in a Realistic environment, because it provides opportunities and roles that are congruent with the Realistic type's personality (Holland, 1996). More explicitly Holland (1996) argues, "it is assumed – other things being equal – that congruence of person and job leads to job satisfaction, stability of career path, and achievement" (p. 397). Conversely if a personality type and environment are mismatched, the result will be dissatisfaction, instability of career path, and low performance.

Holland (1996) argues that multiple interest inventories that follow this typology have indicated that people tend to act on their dominant interests and seek occupations in which they can express these interests. He goes on to suggest that a person with a clear sense of identity will have an explicit and relatively stable picture of their interests and suitable occupations. It follows that person with a clear sense of identity is more likely to seek out an occupation that is congruent with their personal characteristics. In contrast, a person who does not have a clear sense of identity is more likely to have a work history characterised by incompatible choices and frequent job changes.

Holland's theory has been described as a very effective 'person-environment fit' model that has provided career counsellors with very useful measuring instruments and indices. However, it has also been suggested that a number of questions must be kept in mind when applying Holland's

system. Nel (1999) questions Holland's description of a fixed, static environment and argues that environments are rather *constantly* changing and *never* homogeneous. Although South Africa has made a political transition from an apartheid state to a democratic society, it continues to undergo political, economic, and social changes as it attempts to move beyond its apartheid heritage (Stead, 1996). Holland's conceptualisation of 'environment' is clearly problematic when applied to the South African context. Considering socio-political changes in South Africa it becomes apparent that a number of variables, other than personality type, have to be taken into account in career development. Not only are individual characteristics important in career development, but so are economic, cultural, educational and socio-political factors. Although Holland recognises the interaction between person and environment, the *dynamic* (Stead, 1996) interaction between the career development of South Africans and the contextual factors surrounding it is underplayed.

Another criticism, related to the previous one, is that Holland's theory, like most of the international career theories, were founded on middle-class conditions and possibilities (Akhurst & Mkhize, 1999). Such theories fail to take into account the issues and limitations on career choices experienced by learners who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. When Holland's (1996) argument that people will seek out occupations based on their interests is applied to a South African context, this assumption becomes problematic. The reality is that many South Africans have been forced, by political and economic factors, into employment that is often not a preference, based on one's interests, but a necessity. Understanding the dynamic interplay between person and content is a central concern of this study.

Holland's (1996) discussion of 'identity' is also problematic when applied to the South African context. The way in which he discusses the concept of identity suggests that 'identity' is an *innate* attribute, which is manifested in individual's goals, interests and skills. Implicit in this theory is that one's identity develops independently of one's context. However, this notion of identity fails to take into account the impact of contextual factors like culture. This is particularly relevant to the South African context where culture should be recognised as contributing to the development of identity. For example, in African cultures it is argued that

individuals partially derive their sense of selfhood through the relationships they have with their extended families and then the community (Mkhize *et al.* 1998). In a South African context, the extent to which culture constructs one's identity needs to be recognised. If, as Holland argues, identity is central to one's career development, then the way in which culture impacts on the construction of one's career identity needs to be acknowledged and explored. This is one of the purposes of the current study.

Again it needs to be clarified that arguing for a career approach that takes into consideration African culture, does not imply that there is a single, fixed African identity to which all Black South Africans whole-heartedly aspire. In a chapter entitled 'The Myth of an African World', Appiah (1992) argues, "that we cannot accept a central presupposition... namely the presupposition that there is, even at quite a high level of abstraction, *an* African world-view" (p. 132). While acknowledging that culture, in its present and past form, has an impact on the construction of Black South African's identities, this acknowledgement does *not* fix *an* African identity nor individuals in terms of this identity. This would only serve to "create a rhetoric which binds the subjectivities of those inhabiting the African continent seamlessly together, denying that this is a constructive and historically informed exercise" (Dawes, 1998, p. 6).

Holland acknowledges the impact of external factors such as age, family, gender and social class on career development. He is criticised, however, by Wienrach and Strebals (1990) for describing these factors in a negative light as *limiting* career development. In the South African context it is problematic to view external factors as simply limiting one's career development. Although it is recognised that some factors do present challenges and obstacles, it would be inappropriate to label something like culture as a limitation to one's development. It is recognised that external factors may present conflicts or challenges to individuals, but to encase factors like family and gender in negative discourses is to overlook the importance of culture in an individual's development. In most, if not all, African cultures, cultural constructs like family and gender are considered to have a significant impact on career choices. From this perspective it becomes necessary to explore the way in which constructs like family or gender intricately

enters into the structure of an individual's career development, rather than simply being labelled as a *limiting* factor that needs to be *controlled*.

2.2.2 *Super's self concept theory*

Super and Crites (1962) argue that each person has certain abilities, interests, personality traits, and other characteristics which, if they know them and their potential value, will make them happier, more effective workers, and more useful citizens. Self-understanding becomes part of the individual's education, where they are assisted in getting a better understanding of their aptitudes for various skills. A well-adjusted person is described as being someone who has achieved education about both herself or himself and their world and goes on to put these two types of knowledge to good use and finds a place for herself or himself in society (Super & Crites, 1962). A person with a well-integrated personality will be driven in a particular direction, will make good decisions and will function effectively. However, a person with a poorly integrated personality may have trouble adjusting in work situations. From Super and Crites (1962) point of view, many instances of maladjustment in the work place often prove to be "deep rooted in the personality" (p. 518).

Central to Super's theory is the notion of 'self concept'. He argues that entering into an occupation involves implementing a concept of oneself and establishing oneself in an occupation where an individual can achieve self-actualisation (Super, 1963). Another concept that is central to Super's theory is that of 'development'. Super emerged as a major proponent of career *development* theory. From this perspective career choice was conceptualised as a developmental process. Instead of focusing on understanding an individual's present career behaviour, a more holistic approach was initiated in which past and future career behaviour was also taken into consideration (Watson & Stead, 1999). As a result a number of developmental life-stages emerged in Super's theory (Stead & Watson, 1998b). In addition to recognising the developmental process of career choice, Super is also recognised for his incorporation of cultural variables into his 1990 Life Career Rainbow, in which he argues that career development emerges from an interaction between individual factors and the environment, including the cultural context (Langley, 1999).

Although Super's theory is widely used, some criticisms need to be taken into consideration. Super's theory emphasises a holistic view of self-concept, highlighting the impact of cultural factors. However it is necessary to study the relevance of his postulations in the South African context (Langley, 1999). Super's theory has been influenced by Western individualistic values. It implicitly assumes that an individual is a free and autonomous agent. Stead and Watson (1998b) suggest that a discussion of the self- concept "without examining the impact of socio-political, socio-economic, and familial factors, would seriously erode the usefulness of the construct as applied to Black South Africans" (p. 41). African models of the person "see embeddedness in one's family and community to be a definition of personhood par excellence" (Akhurst & Mkhize, 1999, p. 172). However, Stead and Watson (1998b) highlight that although familial/community factors do play a role in constructing identity, individuals are not autonomous of the other contextual factors in which they are embedded. Applied to career development, a Black South African may be influenced towards some form of community work because of familial/community factors; however, the socio-political and socio-economic factors may force her or him into unrelated work like domestic work because it is all that is available. Even those individuals who are fortunate enough to gain access to higher education may make pragmatic rather than ideal choices, many 'choosing' technical or business training with their associated individualistic modes of work and associated reward systems. As Langley (1999) proposes, it is necessary to study Super's theory in the South African context before we can assume that it is relevant or appropriate for individuals living in a context like South African with its tenuous political and economic climate. This perspective challenges Super's notion of career development as a process of self-actualisation, as Mkhize *et al.* (1998) argue, "the assumption that an individual, granted adequate information about himself/herself and the world of work, will be equipped to make an informed career decision, may not hold in collectivist cultures" (p. 9). Adequate knowledge about one's self is not sufficient. This needs to be balanced with a number of responsibilities towards family and community (Akhurst & Mkhize, 1999) and other contextual factors like the socio-economic environment. The influence of responsibilities towards ones' family and broader community is a central theme of this study.

Super's notion of developmental stages is also problematic when applied to the South African context. Super devised a linear progression of major life-stages, starting with the Growth phase through to the Establishment phase, where the individual eventually enters and settles down into a job. Stead and Watson (1998b) suggest that these developmental stages were founded on a sample that was perhaps not as pervasive as they were in South Africa at the time. Langley (1999) argues that Super's theory was devised in a context where individuals were likely to have different options available to them when making a career decision. The widespread unemployment makes this difficult to apply to the South African context. As Akhurst and Mkhize (1999) suggest, Super's theory has limited understanding of the issues and limitations on choices experienced by those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This debate is not limited to the South African context; the world of work globally is not as stable and predictable as it was when Super first conceptualised this developmental process (Stead & Watson, 1998b). Several shifts in an individual's career path are becoming more the norm than the exception (as discussed under section 1.2).

Vondracek *et al.* (1986) acknowledges that Super's theory recognises the impact of social, cultural and physical features on the environment. They argue, however, that to simply acknowledge that various contextual factors impact on career development is not adequate. To overcome this limitation, they suggest the notion of '*dynamic interaction*'. This implies that the context and environment are inextricably embedded in each other and that the "context consists of multiple levels changing interdependently across time" (p. 37). The context of career development is more than one's immediate social environment. Although Super's model recognises the interaction between individual and context, *and* although Super does view the stages he identifies as being flexible, his theory *does not fully* acknowledge the *dynamic* nature of this relationship, conceiving contextual factors as only sporadically impacting on career development (Stead & Watson, 1998b). The developmental-contextual model becomes a useful tool that can foster an understanding of the changes that need to occur in career theory and research in a post-apartheid South Africa (Stead, 1996). In this model South Africa's economic, cultural, educational and socio-political factors are considered in dynamic interaction with the individual's characteristics. Stead (1996) proposes that the developmental-contextual

perspective is an appropriate approach to understanding the development of people who have to cope with not only their own individual developmental changes, but also with dramatic environmental changes that make career exploration and planning a complicated activity. Contextual factors impact continuously on individuals who regularly need to learn new skills to compete in local *and* global economies (Stead & Watson, 1998b).

From Super's (1963) perspective a *stable* career path is an indication of an individual who has a good understanding of their self-concept. Such an individual will be driven in a *particular* career direction and will be an effective and happy worker. Implicit in this formulation is the contention that significant changes in a career path are symptoms of a maladjusted personality. Such a theory provides a normative perspective on career development, assuming that all people develop in the same manner, regardless of the context in which they reside (Brown & Brooks, 1990). Career stability is 'normalised' while career change is pathologised. South Africa continues to be affected by unstable and unpredictable contextual factors that make it difficult, and problematic, to employ developmental stages put forward by theorists like Super. Many South Africans will *not* be in a position to pursue a particular direction in their early phases of career development (Stead & Watson, 1998a). Collin (2000) takes this criticism one step further, suggesting that encouraging people to seek out a stable and predictive career path is neither appropriate nor to the individual's advantage. As discussed earlier, work organisations are changing globally; in addition previously accepted norms around careers indicated by age, social class and gender are changing radically. These changes "will dislodge some of the certainties and predictabilities individuals have hitherto experienced" (Collin, 2000, p. 92). Individuals need to be taught to concern themselves with the short-term and change needs to be normalised and internalised as inevitable.

Research by Bozalek (1997) confirms that change will characterise the career development of the majority of South Africans. This research shows that due to financial constraints many Black South African children are, from a young age, involved in maintaining the family through paid labour, either after school hours or by leaving school to seek full-time employment. A greater constraint on the career development of young South Africans is the crisis of HIV/AIDS. South

Africa has one of the highest prevalence levels in the world. A disease of this magnitude is having an impact on the career development of the youth, in particular the female youth. The main caregivers of the ill are women. HIV/AIDS is putting increasing pressure on this group: “not only is it an increased burden on the women, with many female children being removed from school to provide the care, but it also reduces female participation in sectors beyond the home” (Willans, 2000). Due to contextual constraints many youth will be forced to finish their schooling at a much later stage in their lives and *may* only have the opportunity to enter into a ‘preferred’ career direction beyond their adolescent years. The above South African realities challenge Super’s notion of a ‘normal’ and ‘smooth’ career development, further highlighting the need to normalise change and career instability. This study takes a close look at the way in which Black South African women cope with frequent changes in their career development.

Throughout this review the importance of recognising the impact of a changing environment on career development has been highlighted. This requires a reformulation of processes that are involved in an individual’s career development like the decision-making process.

2.3 A new decision-making framework

Integral to career development is the process of decision-making. Theories like that of Super have proposed a prescriptive decision-making model. This process of decision-making is based on “rational principles in which data are evaluated, alternative identified, the probability of outcomes materialising considered, alternatives weighed and so on” (Stead & Watson, 1998b, p. 42). At the heart of this process appears an individual who is involved in making a choice in a relatively stable environment.

If change is to be normalised in career development, a new strategy of decision-making needs to be integrated into career theory. Stead and Watson (1998b) suggest that Gelatt’s (1989) model of decision-making is a more appropriate and relevant model for changing contexts. In 1989 Gelatt published an article in which he states that he has changed his mind about the decision-making process. He relates how in 1962 he had described a rational approach to making decisions. This approach required that decision makers define their objectives clearly, analyse

information rationally, and predict consequences and that they remain consistent. Gelatt (1989) goes on to contextualise his 1962 model, explaining how this model was constructed in a context where “the past was known, the future was predictable, and the present was changing at a pace that was comprehensible” (p. 252). The world we face today is different: “the past is not always what it was thought to be, the future is no longer predictable, and the present is changing as never before” (p. 252). Though not a career theorist, Gelatt (1989) provides us with a new decision-making strategy that can be applied to career development. This strategy encourages an attitude of positive uncertainty that helps individuals deal with change and ambiguity, to be more positive in the face of uncertainty and inconsistency and to utilise the non-rational and intuitive side of thinking and choosing.

In addition to Gelatt (1989), Gadamer's (1975) notion of history can be used to understand career development as an *ongoing* development, rather than a once off, closed choice where change is equated with mistake. Gadamer (1975) argues for the historical movement of human life, which “consists in the fact that it is never utterly bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is rather, something into which we move and that moves with us” (p. 271). From this perspective career choices are part of a life-narrative, which is in constant movement. Changes, *rather than mistakes*, become openings in the human life, which make transformations and ‘progress’ possible. As Gadamer (1975) explains “horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion” (p. 271). Gadamer's (1975) notion of change dynamic. From his point of view complete change can be necessary for what has come to be termed development. In changing contexts like South Africa it becomes necessary to re-conceptualise notions like career change. This study explores the ways in which Black South African women have coped with notions like change, inconsistency and uncertainty. In addition, it makes recommendations on how these ‘coping skills’ can be adopted by individuals living in similar contexts to that of South Africa.

From the above discussion it is clear that the simple adoption and application of international career theories in changing contexts like South Africa is problematic. Many South African

researchers have responded to the appeal for relevancy in South Africa by increasing diversity in their samples. Stead and Watson (1998a) argue however that simply taking more Black samples does not necessarily address the cultural context and the economic realities within which the majority of Black South Africans live. In an attempt to overcome this limitation they propose that South African career researchers/psychologists consider employing an indigenous approach to understanding career psychology.

2.4 A call for an indigenous career theory

From an indigenous psychology perspective, psychological processes are generated from a particular culture, rather than being imposed from external factors (Kim & Berry, 1993). There needs to be some caution when using the *indigenous psychology*, as it differs vastly from *indigenisation*, which is an attempt to make theories, concepts and instruments developed in other cultures appropriate for the target cultures in which they are being utilised (Stead & Watson, 1998b). Indigenous psychologies, in contrast, take into account that psychological reality is generated within a culture (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). It is also important to note that the shaping of psychological reality does not only take place within cultural values, but *also* includes the related social, historical, economical and political factors. From this perspective “local cultural traditions or frames of references should be used in defining career psychology concepts” (Stead & Watson, 1999).

Central to an indigenous perspective are the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’. Stead and Watson (1999) argue that there is not widespread agreement on the meanings of these terms in South Africa: “In post-apartheid years, cultures and ethnic groups are redefining themselves, thus making it even more difficult for social scientists to express the meanings of these terms clearly” (p. 215). Racial segregation is no longer legal in South Africa. Increased contact between different cultures and ethnic groups will result in individuals reviewing and even changing attitudes, beliefs, behaviour, and values regarding career development (Stead, 1996). From a slightly different perspective, for Black South Africans there is sometimes a hiatus between the core ideas reflected in (primarily Western) educational institutions (independence, competition) and the core ideas of the communities and families of their origin (connections, attachments)

(Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000) and their early schooling. This suggests that in their call for an indigenous career perspective, career researchers and psychologists must be cautious of over-emphasising the Western/non-Western and individualism/collectivism dichotomy.

Dawes (1998) sheds some light on the above dilemma when he proposes that the tendency of writers to, for example, call for liberation from the Euro-American world view is based on a problematic assumption that there is in existence a unitary 'European' and 'African' world view. He argues that "African and Europe are first of all geographical entities which are home to a range of subjectivities (and world views)" (p. 9). Dawes (1998) offers a way of avoiding the above dilemma. He suggests that there may be profit in moving away from the African/European dichotomy. When psychology does this, the result will be that:

Locally developed psychological knowledge becomes not a feature of a specific culture, but an account of the dialectic between mentalities and social practices, which occur within particular cultural communities. Thus there may be great similarity in the cultural forms and mentalities across the language or ethnic groups in Africa, and between African and other societies. These similarities would be predicted on the basis of the eco-cultural system, which evolves as a function of the form of which the communities take as they make their existence (p. 12).

Sampson (1989) makes a similar argument when he suggests that the reality of personhood cannot be grasped either as the extreme pole of individuals (autonomous, independent) or at the pole of mechanical collectivism (individual determined by an underlying social order): "there is an essential dialectical interpenetration of subject and object which neither has full primacy" (p. 6).

Applied to career research and theory, the preceding discussion highlights the need for career researchers to be aware that the career behaviour of people *within* various cultural and ethnic groups can vary considerably. This implies that it is equally important to recognise that there may be considerable similarities *between* various cultural and ethnic groups. During the

apartheid area cultures were polarised and group differences were accentuated rather than their similarities. An outcome of this was a tendency to associate White people with Western lifestyles that emphasise independence and competitiveness. Black people, on the other hand, were considered to follow a traditional African lifestyle that emphasises cooperation (Stead, 1996). Stead and Watson (1999) call for career researchers to be aware of the transitions that are taking place in South African cultures as they adjust to a rapidly changing post-apartheid context and to acknowledge that these transitions “mitigate against cultures becoming homogenous” (p. 218). Mkhize et al. (1998) illustrate why it is necessary for career researchers not to homogenise the experiences of Black and White South Africans. They suggest that in a culture driven by the needs of a competitive Western market economy a Black individual may consider abandoning collectivist values and go it alone in her or his career development. This abandonment is likely to lead to a sense of guilt because of the value attached to family and the community. Homogenising cultures runs the risk of overlooking the impact cultures in transition may have on an individual as they negotiate their career development. The current study explores the way in which a changing socio-political context has on cultural values and how these changes impact on the career development of Black South African women.

The development of an indigenous career psychology in South Africa is both necessary and important. The preceding discussion however suggests that if career researchers/psychologists are not cautious they could unwittingly deny the variety of eco-cultural niches within which African subjectivity is made (Dawes, 1998). In addition they could revive segregationist ideas of the apartheid era. Being aware of these potential dangers and using appropriate research methods can involve South African career researchers in the essential process of developing a more appropriate, indigenous career approach for the people of South Africa. An indigenous approach that does not aim to radically discredit Western career perspectives, but rather generate interpretations and meanings of career development that stem from *South African data* (Stead & Watson, 1999) collected from *appropriate* research methods. A more appropriate approach would recognise the range of subjectivities (and tensions between these subjectivities) within and between particular cultural groups in South Africa. These subjectivities and tensions between them can only be negotiated successfully if career researchers and psychologists are prepared to

explore the various perspectives or horizons through which individuals make sense of themselves and the world (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

To be able to explore these various 'perspectives' or 'horizons' it is argued that career researchers need to reconsider the appropriateness of the positive research paradigm that has permeated career research.

2.5 The positivist research paradigm

An indigenous approach suggests the need for a variety of research methods. It has already been noted that much of career research has developed to fit the modern world-view. The aim of this research has been to access and analyse skills, strengths, interests and values (Collin & Young, 1992). The positivist research methods employed follows logically from the modern view of the self as autonomous and independent of environment, values, culture and gender constraints.

Reflecting on the work of Bernstein (1976), Richardson and Woolfolk (1994) comment on the ideal of mainstream American social science. Historically the social sciences have aimed at achieving law-like correlations that are "both theoretically derived and empirically confirmed" (p. 205), which, allows for precise prediction in the end. From this perspective human action becomes asocial and ahistorical. Human motives and goals (like those around career choice) develop independently of their social, historical and cultural contexts. Sampson (1989) refers to this as "self-contained individualism" which refers to a "firmly bounded, highly individuated conception of personhood" (p. 1). There have however been serious doubts voiced, within and without the social science, about "whether the ideal of empirical theory ever has or could be achieved in connection with human activities in their real-life social and historical setting" (Richardson & Woolfolk, 1994. p.1).

A consequence of the neo-positivist ideology that permeates much of mainstream social science research and practice has resulted in a technocratic approach to real everyday social problems (Peavy, 1997). That is, everyday lived human concerns are reduced to technical issues to be resolved in the same manner as we do with natural science phenomena; rational calculation,

prediction, and control (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The impact of social factors are often (if not always) ignored and as a result career research often fails to give an “adequate explanation of social processes and institutional forces underlying the individual’s career choices” (Naicker, 1994, p. 31).

The impact of social processes and institutional forces are often overlooked in an over reliance on psychological tests which aim to slot individuals into various categories in a rational, efficient and predictable manner. In advocating an image of individuals making career choices in a straightforward, systematic and objective way, independent of external and cultural factors, mainstream career theory (as does most of mainstream social science) often hides, or treats as unproblematic, the historical and cultural assumptions and philosophies that form the basis of Western scientific discourse (Much & Harre, 1994). Further, it serves to hide and ignore the fact that certain socio-cultural institutions have been a source of marginalisation and exclusion for many in certain contexts like South Africa. The predominance of Western ideas creates an illusion that there is an objective and universal theory of the ‘person’. The result is that career researchers/psychologists have failed to recognise the political, moral and ideological dimensions of career development and counselling (Collin & Young, 1992). In addition, what is further ignored is the fact that psychological tests are themselves social constructs. As a result, the test and its interpretations, serves to communicate societal expectations to the clients in an indirect way (Collin & Young, 1992). These ideas do not take note of the knowledge, skills, and perspectives on life that people share by virtue of being members of different cultures or socio-economic backgrounds.

The call for a more appropriate research method does not suggest a wholesale rejection of quantitative research methods. As Stead and Watson (1998a) argue, “indigenous psychologies do not favour a particular research method and recognise both quantitative and qualitative research methods” (p. 219). The aim is to make use of an *appropriate* research method that takes *adequate* cognisance of often ignored social, cultural and institutional influences that underlie an individual’s career development. It has been suggested that more attention needs to be paid to qualitative research methods in career theory (Stead & Watson, 1998a). There is an

increasing awareness of the potential benefits of employing more interpretivist approaches to career research. Interpretive approaches facilitate a contextualised understanding of career development. From this perspective the researcher is able to achieve an understanding of career in context (Collin & Young, 1992). Stead and Watson (1998a) similarly propose, “the development of theories that reflect a particular context is an important part of indigenous psychologies” (p. 219).

2.6 Hermeneutic/interpretivist approaches

The shift to a post-modern world-view has elicited a change in the research paradigm of the social science. There has been a similar shift in career research, where the emergence of approaches like constructionism, narrative and hermeneutics serve to call into question the positivist assumptions of the social science (Collin & Young, 1992).

Collin and Young (1992) have argued for a hermeneutic or interpretive approach toward career development. This approach, which shares many features with social constructionism, “holds that reality is constructed through interactions in relationships, institution, society, culture and history and is represented through language and action” (p. 2). In addition, for hermeneutics, an adequate understanding of human action should take cognisance of the meanings, purposes, and interaction of the actors and their contexts (Peavy, 1997). It is concerned with lived-human experience, rather than technical concerns. Furthermore, it takes into account the historical and psychological realities of the person whose life is being interpreted (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

What the hermeneutic researcher studies, then, “is what people actually do when they are engaged in the everyday practical tasks of life” (Packer, 1985). Packer (1985) describes these practical tasks, or everyday practical activities, as *perspectival* and *holistic* in character. Practical activity as *perspectival* suggests that human action can have a number of meanings, depending from which perspective it is interpreted. Packer (1985) is quick to note however that this openness to several interpretations does not lead to total subjectivism. The context in which any particular act occurs constrains the number of alternative ways of understanding that act. The *holistic character* of practical activity refers to the context within which human action

occurs and highlights the fact that understanding human action is not possible without understanding the context within which it occurred.

In addition to the cognisance of the context there is also the importance of acknowledging the psychological and historical realities of the interpreter him/herself. This is important because “an interpreter understands by constant reference to her own perspective, preconceptions, biases, and assumptions that rest, fundamentally, on her lifestyle, life experiences, culture, and tradition” (Tappan, 1997, p. 649). From the hermeneutic perspective, we understand in terms of what we already know, and more importantly, in terms of whom we are (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The aim is to find a way in which the interpreter can understand a subject’s action that is based, at least in part, on the subjects own experience. Tappan (1997) goes on to explain that interpretation involves an essential “circularity of understanding” (p. 651). This circularity builds onto the idea of the hermeneutic circle. It suggests that an initial interpretation of a human act is shaped by an interpreters perspective and understanding. As this interpretation interacts with the action in question it is open to revision and elaboration as “the perspective and understanding of the interpreter, including his biases and blind spots, are revealed and evaluated” (651). From this perspective “the interpreter and the text must share authority and responsibility for shaping the meaning of a given text” (Tappan & Brown, 1992, p. 121).

Cohen and Omery (1994), in their interpretation of Heidegger hermeneutics, define hermeneutics as:

the discovery of meaning that is not immediately manifest to out intuiting, analysing and describing. Interpreters have to go beyond what is given directly. Yet, in attempting this, they have to use the ordinary, everyday given as a clue for meanings that are not given, at least not explicitly”. (p. 146)

Using Heidegger concepts, Cohen and Omery (1994) further describe hermeneutics as an interpretive method that leads the investigator back from the naively conceived beings to the Being itself. This ‘Being’ has a “tendency to fall (or possibly be pushed by human beings in

their angst) into oblivion” (Cohen & Omery, 1994, p. 146). The role of the interpretation process is to take as its starting point everyday experiences and transcend back into, and make *apparent*, the ‘Being’. What is being suggested is that human action (the being) occurs within a background of practices, which are only partially known, to us and that interpretation is required to make these practices (Being) apparent. Foucault (1974) argues that “neither norm, nor rule, nor system is given in daily experience: they run through it, give rise to partial consciousness of themselves, but can never be wholly illumined except by a reflective form of knowledge” (p. 363). Foucault (1974) therefore defines hermeneutics as “the re-apprehension through the manifest meaning of the discourses of another meaning at once secondary and primary, that is, more hidden but also more fundamental” (p. 373). The hermeneutic approach sets out to elucidate and make explicit practical understandings of human action by providing an *interpretation* of them. Applied to career development, the hermeneutic approach makes it possible to a) understand human action in *context* and b) to identify those socio-political, socio-historical and socio-cultural factors that individuals are only partially aware of, but that have an impact on the construction of their identity.

Applied to career research, the above discussion suggests that the aim of hermeneutics would be to understand the complex process of career development in its *context*, and to grasp the definition of this process as given by the social actors involved (a central aim of this study). From such a perspective the complex meanings attached to career development will be opened up for exploration. The emphasis is on how people make sense/meaning of their career choices. The socio-culturally situated nature of hermeneutics makes it possible to explore the issues of power, gender, and other social and political factors that impact on the process of career development (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach highlights the need for career researchers to acknowledge that interpretation is a *relational activity*. The interpretation/understanding of peoples’ career experiences will be influenced by the interpreter’s own standpoint and perspective. She or he must therefore be aware of, and acknowledge, the way in which her or his assumptions, values and biases shape and inform an understanding of career experiences. Tappan and Brown (1992) refer to this process as an “ethic of interpretation based on care and responsiveness”(p. 125).

Collin and Young (1992) argue that it is only through interpreting career stories that researchers will be able to achieve an understanding of career in context. Career research needs to explore the “dialectic between individuals and their context in this constructive process, and it can only be achieved through interpretation”(p. 2). The current study demonstrates how an understanding and practice of interpretation are two key elements in understanding careers.

2.7 The narrative research paradigm

Collin and Young (1992) regard careers as having to do with human action and argue that our access to it for hermeneutical study is through its expression in narrative. Narrative is the primary vehicle through which persons make sense of their history. An understanding of careers therefore comes from an understanding/interpretation of the stories that people tell about their career experiences. They go on to describe the socially constructed nature of the narrative:

It is built from history, culture, society, relationships and language. It embodies context, although individuals are not likely fully aware of how context is manifest in their narratives or in the actions on which they are based. But we become aware of context through narrative. (p. 8)

A narrator’s story is embedded in her or his culture, language, gender, beliefs and life history. Peacock and Holland (1993) discuss the importance of life stories in self-formation and self-expression. Currie (1998) argues that culture not only contains narratives but is contained by narratives “in the sense that the idea of culture, either in general or in particular, is a narrative” (p. 69). Narratives are, in effect, social constructions (Gergen & Gergen, 1988).

Laubsecher and Klinger (1997) describe narratives of the self as being populated with images that are collected through one’s engagement with family and culture. They suggest that such images give insight into the circumstances and culture of particular groups. For example many Black South Africans share images of forced removals and migrant labour laws. A narrative allows insight into the circumstances and experiences that might otherwise have remained

foreign to those that have experienced differing circumstances. Events become socially visible through narrative (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). This suggests that career narratives can provide an opportunity to explore the complex and dynamic interaction of the individual and their context as suggested by a number of career researchers who recognise the impact of contextual factors on career development (Naicker, 1994; Stead, 1996; Vondracek *et al.* , 1986).

The narrative, as a post-modern research method, challenges the modern world-view of people acting as singular selves. Gergen and Gergen (1988) explain how people are often described as having motives, beliefs, understandings and plans as if these were properties of an autonomous, independent self. When people express these beliefs and motives in the form of a story, it is easy to make the mistake of viewing such a construction as a product of an independent self because the object of a self-narrative *is* the single self. Gergen and Gergen (1988) challenge this conception of narratives by arguing that in the reliance on a language system for relating or connecting events, people constructing narratives are engaging in an inherently *social* act. Narratives are “not isolated from daily affairs; they are immersed within processes of ongoing interchange” (p. 37). An actor’s ability to make her or himself intelligible through narratives is embedded within a socio-historical context. That is, in telling a story one has to rely on certain features of a pre-existing social order. Culture thus speaks through the actor. From this perspective, what we label as individualized characteristics are actually primarily products of joint configurations (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). Applied to career research, this understanding of narratives suggests that the narrative is an *appropriate* method in the development of a more indigenous approach, as it makes it possible to explore what it means to be a person, occupying a particular position in society, with particular motives and goals

In addition Gergen and Gergen’s (1988) notion of *multiplicity* in narrative is useful when applied to career research. It is common practice to see each individual as possessing *a single* life story, yet it appears that people are capable of adopting multiple perspectives: “Common experience in the culture will typically offer the individual exposure to a wide variety of narrative forms, from the rudimentary to the complex” (p. 33). Gergen and Gergen refer to these multiple perspectives as “*nested narratives*” (p. 34). There is no unitary, fixed narrative, but rather a negotiation

between existing narratives and the development of new narratives. Thus, a narrative is never fixed or static, nor is there a unidirectional and predictable relationship between individuals and cultural meanings. Rather, these are subject to continued negotiation and renegotiation over time (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

Gergen and Gergen (1988) propose that those people with an extensive background in the history of their culture are likely to possess a more coherent and continuous narrative. However, those people from a young culture or nation may have much less coherent or continuous narratives, “the former may experience a lesser degree of strain to behave in a way that is coherent with the past” (p. 35). It has already been noted that South Africa is undergoing rapid social and political changes, which is likely to impact on the career development of Black South Africans. The increased contact between different cultures and world-views, as well as the opening up of more possibilities and opportunities for Black South Africans, suggest the potential for using a wide variety of guiding narratives as they negotiate their career experiences. By recognising the potential for nested narratives, it becomes possible for career researchers to explore the impact of a range of social and political constants/changes on the career development of Black South Africans.

The work of Ricoeur (1979) is also relevant to career research. He demonstrates the possibility of researching expressed human phenomena, without resorting to positivist research methods. He accomplished this by drawing analogies between texts and human action. Human action becomes a text that can be interpreted. Conceptualising human action as a text makes it possible for us to study human phenomena in a meaningful way, provided they have been captured or recorded in some form. Narratives or the stories that people tell about their lives capture meaningful action, making it open for exploration and interpretation (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The above discussion suggests that if we want to study the process of career development, “we need to listen to people’s narratives and interpret them both in terms of what they know and understand of themselves, and their context, and what they may not necessarily know or understand, but can be brought into play by the researcher” (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 9). This study illustrates how narratives place career development within a larger context. It

demonstrates how narratives become a means of exploring the impact of a number of factors, such as culture, issues of power and gender on career development, which is necessary for the development of an indigenous careers approach.

It is suggested that a number of contextual factors impact significantly on individuals' career development. For the purposes of discussion these factors will be discussed separately in the literature review. However, it should be noted that the interpretation and discussion section of this study will demonstrate that these contextual factors are intertwined, for example gender and culture are two inextricable factors that can only be separated for the purposes of discussion.

2.8 Understanding career development as gendered

The work of Labouvie-Vief, Orwoll and Manion (1995) reflects on the informal ideas of gender that exist within many cultures. These ideas have led to a polarisation of human functioning, like the polarisation of concepts like 'masculine' and 'feminine'. This dualistic myth is integral to informal ideas of development in many cultures where women's biological role as bearer and nurturer of children is said to tie her to earth's activities, while men, as bearers of culture, are seen to be involved in the creation of symbols and artefacts. As a result "the core masculine experience is that of enhancing one's sense of being a causal agent in one's success, the core feminine experience is that of surrendering such claims" (p. 243-244). Despite changes in education and the labour market profound differences remain in how, for example, men and women subjectively experience their success. Labouvie-Vief *et al.*'s (1995) review of relevant research suggests that the gendering of intellectual activity has implications for how the individual is able to integrate intellectuality and creativity into their sense of developing self. For example, girls are said to renounce and subvert their agency and desire to *relational needs* quite early in life, while boys are encouraged to strive for and claim accomplishments as their own. Contemporary research findings showed that "by early adolescents, gifted girls had ambitious career aspirations, but by late adolescence, this ambition had given away to confusion and denial" (p. 245). The findings go so far as to suggest that for boys poor academic performance can be associated with emotional problems, while *higher* academic performance predicts emotional problems in girls. These findings seem to support the traditional view that

conformity to traditional gender-role standards is a prerequisite for healthy adjustment (Mokgathe & Schoeman, 1998). This implies that a secure identity requires that men and women acquire a range of traits typically associated with their sex. An individual who does not succeed in doing this develops confused identities and adjustment problems. Mokgathe and Schoeman (1998) reflect on the work of contemporary theorists who argue against this traditional view, suggesting, “freedom from conventional sex-typed standards and traditional gender-roles may actually be psychologically more adaptive” (p. 30). Mokgathe and Schoeman’s (1998) research findings support this contention. They found that similarly to androgyny, “unconventionality in gender-role attitudes leads to greater flexibility, more effective coping and environmental mastery thus contributing to psychological well-being” (p. 33). Applied to career development, this flexibility provides access to a greater variety of work possibilities and is therefore reconstructed as adaptive rather than maladaptive.

Labouvie-Vief *et al.* (1995) suggest that this reconstruction of gender narratives will lead to re-conceptualising concepts like ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’. This will involve the development of new images of the masculine and the feminine and conceptualising them not as polar opposites, but rather as interacting poles of a dynamic system. Referring to research data, Labouvie *et al.* (1995) comment on the transition that appears to occur in the lives of men and women as they get older, when both seem to be able to incorporate both masculine and feminine attributes into their self concept. However, Labouvie-Vief *et al.* (1995) are quick to caution us not to see these pictures of balance and integration in later life as ‘natural’ or ‘automatic’. The ability for balance and integration may involve ultimately “communal and cultural efforts at reconnecting the divided poles of the gendered mind (p. 252).

Applied to career development the preceding argument highlights two important points. Firstly, cultural understandings of gender will impact on the career development of individuals. The research findings of Mkhize *et al.* (1998) illustrate this point. They found that Black female students perceived more barriers to their occupational aspirations than the Black male students. Reflecting on the work of Ansah (1991), they argue that the finding could be partially explained by the traditional African belief that places less emphasis on the education of girls. They go on

to explain how boys are traditionally expected to be independent and to go out and explore, however, in contrast, girls are expected to stay around the house and be available to host visitors. There is a need for career researchers to pay attention to what gender means to different groups and cultures and to what extent these meanings impact on career development. Secondly, although closely related to the first, is that because gender is perceived as changing over time and being different from one culture to another, gender identity cannot be viewed as stable or fixed for life. Rather gender identity may shift and change over time and within different contexts (Shefer, 1997). In South Africa, the political and economic context may change the meaning of gender identity for a number of individuals. South Africa's history of apartheid has led to the oppression of people along racial lines forcing many individuals to renegotiate what employment is appropriate for their gender. This negotiation between changing gender narratives is a central theme of the current study.

Shefer (1997) writes about a Black South African male student whose parents were both employed. As a result this young man and his brother were forced to do chores around the home that are traditionally considered to be 'female' chores. Due to the stigma attached to these chores both men would lock themselves in the home so that no one could see them doing the chores. This illustrates the contradictions and complexities of gender identity in differing or changing contexts. For example, when in the rural areas a Black South African woman may take seriously the traditional African belief of being the one who caters for the needs of her visitors while economic factors may force her to work in the urban areas in a more independent manner. Shefer (1997) provides an example of a Black South African male with a rural background who gained a tertiary education and now resides in an urban area, but finds being in his rural home problematic. The following direct quote illustrates the conflict he experiences between his different gender identities in differing contexts:

Times of confusion arise when one comes into contact with other females (especially at home), some of whom have deeply internalised, accepted and taken as natural some of the situation that put not only me (but other males as well) in

the roles of oppressing them, even though I try to do the opposite. However, refusing to take on the 'male' role is problematic to them. (p. 94)

In career research, it is important to consider how these contradictory gender identities may impact on the career development of individuals. Being more 'gender aware' is important however it is not appropriate to simply view the South African context through gender-sensitive spectacles imported from Europe or America. These spectacles "should be designed for use in our own context, with all its specific interlinked and complex forms of inequality (Shefer, 1997, p. 92). In addition, it is not possible to separate gender meanings from other factors that include economic, political and social factors, as they are intricately interlinked. By encouraging people to tell stories about their career experiences, career researchers will have the opportunity to explore constructs like gender. In sum, in an attempt to be more sensitive to the impact of cultural constructs of gender on career development, career researchers must be cautious of reinforcing traditionally dichotomous conceptions of male and female roles.

2.9 The role of culture, family and community on career development

The Western heritage in South African has led to a 'familist ideology'. Bozalek (1997) argues that this 'familist ideology' is created by dominant group beliefs, which both idealise and globalise the nuclear family. With time these beliefs gain authority through formal systems of knowledge like developmental psychological theories and in turn become common beliefs. As a result the nuclear family has been constructed as unequivocally desirable, not through any comparison with alternative family structures, but through not mentioning these alternative structures at all. This serves to undermine other family structures like the extended family in the South African context. Bozalek's (1990) research showed that 72% of her social work students at The University of the Western Cape reported living in extended families. Drawing from the lived experiences of these students Bozalek (1997) illustrates the importance of the immediate and extended family to Black South Africans. 99% of these students reported that elders were greatly respected in their families and that "elders were regarded as being sources of wisdom and transmitters of cultural values, and in African families, as living ancestors, greatly revered" (p. 12).

The preceding discussion suggests the importance of plurality in the experience of African persons. Tema (cited in Paris, 1995) illustrates the importance of plurality in the following quote: “An African is never regarded as a loose entity to be dealt with strictly individually. His being is based on or coupled with that of others...The concept of plurality and belonging to is always present, e.g. a person is always viewed as: “Motho wa batho” (person of persons or belonging to persons) or “Motho weso (Our person or person that is ours)” (p. 101). ‘Other’ plays an important role in the self-understanding of African people. Paris (1995) states: “First and foremost, of course, the African person is defined as a member of a family, and so the African person is never alone either in self-concept or in the perception of others” (p. 101). Oduyoye (cited in Paris, 1995) writes that when born, children are a nonentity and that they only become a person when the naming ceremony has been performed. A child’s name is an expressive bearer of their place in their family and tells the story of a person’s birth and destiny. Ray (1976) describes how in the Dogon view, a newborn child is only potentially a human being and must be given his or her identity by the human community into which he or she is born. Paris (1995) reflects back on a conference he attended in Nigeria in 1984 where he heard the address of a prominent local chief. This chief argued “the greatest problems facing contemporary youth was that they had been improperly named by urban parents disconnected from their familial and tribal traditions”. He went on to argue that the “function of children is to live up to their names” (p. 103). In his judgment, correct naming not only acknowledged the child’s destiny but also empowered her or him to actualise it.

Paris (1995) also highlights the importance of the larger community, arguing that the individual is an essential part of the family *and* the extended community. As a result the individual’s life is “at one and the same time an important occasion in the life of the whole community” (p. 110). Paris (1995) goes on to explain that this communal view of personhood does not mean that individuality is devalued. He argues that it rather implies that the value Africans bestow on individuals is less than that bestowed on the community: “In the moral order of importance, the corporate community always assumes priority over individual members. Thus under certain conditions the person may be sacrificed for the well-being of the corporate body...” (p. 111).

This contention is supported by the research of Mkhize *et al.* (1998) who found that most Black South African pupils were attracted to the social and investigative types of careers. They argue that one reason for this attraction is the desire to be of some help to the community, which is the very centre of selfhood in collectivist cultures. The research of Cloete (1981) has also identified a strong attraction of Black South Africans for the social service occupations. However, Mkhize *et al.* (1998) provide another possible explanation for what appears to be an attraction to the social and investigative types of careers. They suggest that these findings could mean that Black learners are being realistic. Since many of them do not have high school maths or science, it is mainly the social and some of the investigative occupations that are open to them. In addition, financial obstacles may have forced them into these particular directions. For example, it is well known that historically a teaching or nursing qualification was a much more economically viable option for the majority of Black learners. From this perspective the option of nursing or teaching is not necessarily the outcome of a desire to be of some help to the community, but a result of the socio-economic context in which they found themselves. This again points to the idea that we cannot argue for *an* African world-view, which un-problematically directs an individual's career development. The current study confirms that career development is rather the outcome of an individual's embeddedness in a *particular* socio-cultural context.

As has already been indicated, South Africa has undergone a number of political and social transitions, which have, and continues to have, an impact on traditional African family structures. For example, forced removal under the Group Areas Act was a form of institutionalised racism that affected the constitution of many South African families (Bozalek, 1990). Bozalek (1997) notes that 41% of the students in her study had been forcibly removed from their homes, had lost their land and had their relationships with relatives and neighbours broken. In addition they were "dumped in areas far from employment without access to basic resources. In most cases only the male breadwinners migrated, sometimes staying in men hostels. Women were not permitted to stay in these hostels" (p. 16). In South Africa institutional racism in the past has forced families and communities apart. It therefore cannot be assumed that the same value will be placed on family by individuals with a collectivist background under these conditions. Black individuals may now be forced to make their own

choices in terms of major life decisions like which career path to follow. Further, it has been suggested by Stead (1996) that South Africa's apartheid past has served to politicise many young Black South Africans and as a result has minimized the influence many Black parents have over their children. Black adolescents gained increased power and control from organizing and participating in, for example, school boycotts, which heightened the level of conflict between parents and children. This conflict led adolescents to question many traditional values held by their parents. In addition, because of inadequate education, lack of employment and lack of other basic resources stemming from an apartheid legacy, it is likely that many Black South Africans have been forced to take whatever work is available in order to ensure their survival. Stead (1996) confirms this contention when he argues that although parental aspirations of Black South African parents may be high for their offspring "it seems that career issues are closely linked to maintaining adequate subsistence levels, particularly among disadvantaged families" (p. 271). This tension between world-views is explored closely in this study.

The preceding discussion has important implications for understanding the career development of individuals from African cultures. Firstly, it suggests that from a traditional perspective considerations of one's immediate and extended family are likely to have a significant impact on the career development of Black South Africans. Secondly, it suggests that understanding and exploring the meaning of an African's name may be important in understanding career development. Thirdly, it suggests that an African's individual preference for a certain career may be sacrificed for the well being of the community as a whole or for a family in need of financial assistance. Fourthly, it argues that it is not only culture that impacts on an individual's career development but a range of factors that include one's socio-political and socio-economic context.

2.10 The impact of political factors on career development

The career development of Black South African's cannot be understood without exploring the likely impact South African's apartheid legacy has had on their life decisions. Stevens (1998) argues that South Africa is the most prominent historical illustration of "a social formation that has been engineered and polarised through the use of racism as ideology" (p, 204). He goes on

to argue that despite significant transformation towards a more democratic society, racism as an ideology still remains part of the social fabric. Despite this ongoing ideology South Africa is undergoing significant social and political transformations. In the process of career development an individual must cope not only with his/her own developmental changes, but also with dramatic environmental changes that are likely to make career exploration a complicated activity. Stead (1996) suggests that in order to succeed an individual needs to make a career decision that is partly based on her or his predicted outcome of recent political developments. One of the results of a changing political society, such as South Africa, is that career development may in turn change for South Africans. Stead (1996) therefore argues for the use of the developmental-contextual framework by Vondracek *et al.* (1986), as it not only views the individual's characteristics as salient but also political factors. He argues that such an approach can "foster an understanding of career development under apartheid and the changes that may need to occur in a post-apartheid era for career development to become a meaningful activity" (p. 270).

Naicker (1994) illustrates the impact of political policies like apartheid on career development in his discussion of the status of career counselling in South African schools. He notes the serious shortage of psychological services, including guidance and counselling in African schools. While White, Coloured and Indian departments initiated some form of career guidance service in 1967, it was only in 1981 that guidance was included in the African departments. Naicker (1994) however argues that the installation of these services in African schools has been resisted because it was perceived to be a form of social control and therefore viewed with distrust by Black pupils. This study highlights how the lack of career guidance and the suspicion of existing services are likely to have complicated the career development of many Black South Africans.

The impact of contextual factors like politics has been largely excluded from career research. The above discussion illustrates the necessity of exploring the impact of such factors on the career development of Black South Africans.

2.11 The impact of economic factors on career development

South Africa is not only undergoing rapid political changes, but also economic changes. In White capitalised societies Black individuals have in the past been viewed as employees and seldom as managers. In addition, under the apartheid regime, Black individuals were only permitted to establish businesses near their residential areas (Davies, 1997, in Stead, 1996). As a result apartheid effectively prevented Black people from participating, at an equal footing, in enterprising-type occupations. Although these restrictions were removed by the eradication of apartheid, it is still likely to have an impact on those Black individuals who have lived through, and developed within, an apartheid period. This may be an additional reason for why there is a low interest, by Black individuals, in enterprising-type occupations as indicated by the research of Mkhize *et al.* (1998) and Cloete (1981). The current stagnant economy in South Africa and the shortage of people in occupations such as engineering and information technology has led to a call for people to consider such occupations (Stead, 1996). This suggests that Black youth might begin to broaden their career interests.

As Swartz (1987) argues, South Africa is to date characterised by class divisions, which primarily still follow difference in racial classification. She argues that White persons have historically had access to middle-class opportunities and lifestyles while Black families have been confined to the working class: “Extreme poverty, unemployment, inadequate or crowded housing, poor or non-existent health and welfare facilities, and grossly inadequate provision of educational resources” (p. 5) have all contributed to ongoing economic distress. As has been noted before, such distress may make it necessary for an individual to take any employment opportunity that comes their way rather than making an informed choice about a preferential or appropriate career. The history of inadequate provision of educational resources also makes it difficult for Black individuals to further their studies at a tertiary level, making career decisions problematic since most job opportunities are available to those individuals with extended education. The impact of financial constraints on individuals’ career development is explored in this study.

2.12 Summary

Self-contained individualism that informs much of career research and theory in South Africa is too narrow. By failing to recognise the contextual factors that impact on career development current research serves to further marginalize an already disadvantaged, large majority of South Africans. This review argues for a broadening of theoretical horizons to include interpretive, meaning-based approaches to career development. These approaches take into account the indigenous or local narratives of what it means to be a person developing within certain social and cultural contexts. The advantages of the narrative is that because they are socio-culturally situated, they open up for exploration the dynamic interaction of a number of contextual factors that impact on career development (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). Central to the current study is how cultural constructs like gender, family and community interact with other contextual factors like the economic and socio-political while impacting on career development. Relevant literature has been reviewed. The proceeding chapter will present the methodology of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study has already been discussed in detail in the preceding literature review. To avoid unnecessary repetition the researcher will guide the reader back to the literature when necessary. This chapter will provide an outline of the methodology for the current study.

3.1 Justification for a qualitative approach

Maxwell (1998) describes particular research purposes for which qualitative studies are especially useful. Three of these purposes centre around understanding: understanding the meaning of life experiences, understanding the particular context within which people act, and understanding the process by which events or actions take place. All three of these purposes are central to this study and it was partly for these reasons that a qualitative methodology was selected for this research. It is argued that a qualitative study is better suited to investigating the *meaning* that the women who participated in this study attributed to their career development. The relational nature of qualitative research (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998) enables the interviewer to probe the interviewees to *explore in detail* the broader social, structural and cultural influences on their narratives (see section 3.5 for more on the relational nature). In addition, it is argued that a qualitative approach picks up on *tensions and conflicts* between different ideas and experiences that a quantitative study may overlook.

The post-modern turn in the social science has already been discussed (see section 1.2). However, it is important to return to this debate at this point. With the post-modern turn has come a changing framework for understanding social realities like career. The hermeneutical approach, like social constructionism, holds that all reality is historically, and socially constituted. This approach “shifts the focus of the study of human phenomena from an explanation of them to the process of their construction” (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 2). As Collin and Young (1992) argue, this shift requires an *interpretation* of social realities like career. From this perspective the choice of a qualitative approach *is not simply methodological*, it is first

and foremost a *challenge* to the existing approaches to career research, which are situated within a modernist framework. As Schwant (1994) puts it “the activity of interpretation is not simply a methodological option open to the social scientist, but rather the very condition of human inquiry itself” (pg. 119). The argument for a hermeneutical and narrative approach to career has already been covered in detail in the literature and will therefore not be repeated here (see sections 2.6 & 2.7).

3.2 The interviewees

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants for this study. Maxwell (1998) argues that this is a strategy “in which particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). It has already been noted in the preceding literature review that much of the career research in South Africa has focused on White samples. A Black sample was therefore chosen for this study. A fundamental aim of this study is to explore the impact of a number of contextual factors on career development. Black, South African women were therefore chosen as the sample for this study as it was felt that their narratives would allow for an exploration of the way in which contextual factors like socio-political, economic and cultural factors impact on career development. In addition, the sample provided the opportunity to explore how factors like gender impact on a Black South African’s career development.

The researcher is currently employed at the University of Natal. This position allowed for the easy access of individuals who would be suitable for this study. It is recognised that this sample is to a large degree opportunistic and that individuals from more varied contexts might have led to richer results. *However*, many of the participants are either close friends of the researcher or family members of friends. Being friends, or referrals of friends, as opposed to complete strangers had the added advantage of ensuring certain levels of trust. Although interviewing people with whom you are familiar may have problems of its own, as a White South African, living in a country with an apartheid heritage, the researcher was aware that she might be met with distrust or scepticism. It is argued that the opportunity to interview women with whom she

has social contact “facilitated greater disclosure and reflexive commentary” (Burman, 1994, p 67).

Ten, Black professional women were interviewed for this study. For the purposes of this study, ‘professional’ refers to women who have obtained a degree and/or a diploma and are currently employed. The women in this study come from a variety of backgrounds and their experiences can therefore not be easily homogenised, however their stories share many commonalities. All ten women were born and raised in South Africa. All of the participants are over the age of thirty years and have therefore all lived through the apartheid era. All of the participants come from economically disadvantaged family backgrounds. All ten of the women in this study are currently employed in ‘social’ occupations. One of the women is a nurse, another a consultant for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that works with youth. Included in the list is a teacher, a sales representative, two social workers, two administrative officers that work closely with students at a local university and a community developer.

Where possible the interviewer contacted each of the women separately and set up a time to conduct the interview. This was the case with the women who work at the University where the interviewer is currently employed and registered; it was also the case with the women with which she had frequent personal contact through her work off campus. The remaining women were contacted by friends of the interviewer who set up times and venues for the interviews.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Each of the participants was informed about the purpose and the procedure of the interview. It was explained that the narratives were to be used for research purposes only and that they would be used in the write up of the study and in possible future publications. Each participant gave informed consent verbally at the time of the interview. Subsequently one of the participants asked to have her interview removed from the study, as she felt uncomfortable about having revealed so much about herself in her narrative. This request was respected.

Each participant was given the option of using a pseudo-name. All of them felt comfortable with

using their first names without their surnames attached.

3.4 Capturing the narratives

Career has to do with human action and our access to that action for hermeneutical study is through its expression in narrative (Collin & Young, 1992). People make sense of their experiences by storying experience through narrative. Therefore if we wish to study careers, we need to listen to people's narratives. A narrative contains elements of what people know and understand of themselves, and also elements of their context, which they may not necessarily be aware of or even understand. Based on the ideas of Collin and Young (1992), this study chose to make use of the narrative structure as a vehicle for capturing the meaningful life stories of the ten participants. The narrative thus provides the content for meaningful and hermeneutical study. Peacock and Holland (1993) suggest that narratives/life-stories, considered as content, "offers a window-though not a perfectly transparent one-on historical periods, cultural practices, and psychic events" (p. 374).

3.5 The interview Guide

An Interview Guide was developed to conduct the narrative research (see Appendix A). The design of the guide was guided by the voice-centred-relational method developed by Brown and Gilligan (1991) and adapted by Mautner and Doucet (1998). This method can be described as 'relational' because it explores interviewees' narratives in terms of their relationship with other people. In addition, it takes into account the socio-cultural influences in which the interviewee's exist. This method is also regarded as 'voice-centred' as it focuses on the speaking subject, that is, how the individuals speak about themselves (Gambu, 2000).

The interview guide opens with an invitation to the interviewees to tell a story about their career aspirations and development from their earliest recollection up until their present position. This initial question was followed by a number of probes to gain a deeper understanding of the social, historical, cultural, and other factors that might have influenced their career development. These probes included questions like: 'when do you think you first considered what career you would make?', 'was there anything significant happening around you at the time you started thinking

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about a career choice (politically, in your family)?’, and ‘who do you think influenced your career choice?’ (see Appendix A for the rest of the interview schedule).

3.6 Interpretation of the narratives

Before the official interpretation of the narratives began, each narrative was transcribed in full. It should be noted that the interpretation of the narratives began even while the participants were sharing their narratives. The narratives of the women were further analysed during the transcribing process, which was completed in full by the researcher. The involvement of the researcher highlights what Miles and Huberman (1984) refer to as the “interactive, cyclical nature of qualitative analysis” (p. 49). Analysis during the process of capturing the narratives led the researcher to cycle back and forth between thinking about the narratives that had already been collected and developing strategies for the next interview. This provided a healthy corrective for built-in-blind spots, and it made the analysis an ongoing, lively enterprise (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The methodology developed (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000) for interpreting the narratives of the ten participants was based on Brown and Gilligan’s (1991) and Tappan’s (1997) *hermeneutical* methodology for interpreting moral choice. This methodology provides a framework for the reading and interpretation of interview narratives. Tappan and Brown (1992) refer to this methodology as a Reading Guide (p. 121). This Reading Guide is:

a voice-method that attempts to record the complexity of narratives of conflict and choice, and attempts to capture the personal, relational, and cultural dimensions of psychic life. (p. 121)

The method questions not only the source of the story that is being told, but the social and cultural framework in which the story is embedded as well (Brown & Gilligan, 1991). By focusing on the speaking subject, it becomes possible to listen and highlight the various voices (and struggle between them) of others that have been appropriated into the self (Tappan, 1997).

The interpreter in this study engaged in four readings of the interviews (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). It is important to note that for the purposes of clarity each of these readings have been separated and discussed in isolation in this chapter. However, all four of these readings are interdependent and in the process of interpretation each reading fed into each other, rather than following an exact, sequential format. Thus, the discussion of the results will not fall under neat categories that reflect the separate readings, but will reflect the interdependent/cyclic nature of the reading/interpretation process.

3.6.1 *First reading*

In the first reading, the interpreter concentrated on understanding the career story as the narrator experienced it. In particular attention was paid to the recurrent images, metaphors, and inconsistencies and contradictions in the story. Part of this reading involved reflecting on the impact the story had on the researcher who was in a privileged and powerful position of reading other's stories. Tappan and Brown (1992) argue that interpretation is a relational activity. They argue that when interpretation is understood as entailing a relationship:

There is, *at one and the same time*, both an attempt to understand the 'true' meaning of another's text/experience, and a realization that such understanding will necessarily be influenced by the interpreter's standpoint and perspective, informed by his/her own values, biases, and assumptions (p. 120 & 121).

Viewing interpretation as a relational activity suggests that both the interpreter and text *share* authority and responsibility for shaping the meaning of a given text. Tappan and Brown (1992) highlight the need for self-reflection on the part of the interpreter during the analysis. The aim is to enter into a "genuine relationship with the person whose text he or she is interpreting" (p. 124). In addition they highlight the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of the powerful position she has in analysing the narratives and cautions the interpreter to be aware of the temptation to violate the symmetry of that relationship and to assume ultimate power to interpret another's story. As a result, during the interpretation process, the researcher had to be constantly

aware of how her position as a White, South African female Psychologist in training, could influence her interpretation of the narratives.

3.6.2 *Second reading*

In this reading the researcher paid attention to the sense of self that emerged from the career narratives. For example, an individualistic, collectivist or multi-narrated self. The researcher paid attention to the voice of the 'I', the speaking subject in relation to the 'we': (groups and important others in the individuals life), the tensions between the two, and how they were negotiated.

3.6.3 *Third reading*

During this reading the researcher paid close attention to how the self was/is experienced in relation to others (brought out in reading two), real or imagined, living or deceased. This involved exploring the feelings, actions and thoughts around ones career development in relation to these others.

3.6.4 *Fourth reading*

The last reading involved exploring the broader social, cultural and political context in which the individuals career development has taken place. Issues of power, oppression, gender, the role of the family and community were all explored in the career narratives.

3.6.5 *Reading matrix display*

In line with Mkhize's (1999) recommendation, a matrix display was created for each analysed interview. A matrix provided a summary of the major interpretations and enabled the interpreter to pull significant and reoccurring themes together across the interviews. An A4 landscape page was divided into four columns, the first column was used to record recurrent images, metaphors and tensions picked up through the reading process. Column two recording the sense of self that emerged from the narrative, column three recorded incidences where the interviewee described themselves in relation to others, and column four recorded the emergence of broader social, political, economic, cultural and gender factors through the reading process. This method is by

no means sequential, the matrices rather facilitated the identification of reoccurring themes and tensions across each interview.

3.7 Credibility

Durrheim and Wassenaar (1999) argue that qualitative researchers have a problem with terms such as 'validity'. Social constructionists, for example, reject the idea that research findings can be accurate reflections of reality. Qualitative researchers argue that it is more appropriate to argue that research can be evaluated according to its "credibility" (p. 62). They argue that the credibility of qualitative research is established while the research is being undertaken: "the researcher continually looks for discrepant evidence to the hypotheses she or he is developing as a means of producing a rich and credible account" (p. 63).

Richardson and Woolfolk (1994) argue that in order to understand we need to be open to the possible truth of other points of view. We need to be involved in a "genuine dialogue" (p. 220) that involves openness to challenges that may overturn our prejudices or partialities. During the research process, the researcher of this study was open to this genuine dialogue, which meant that she had to often re-think ideas and return to relevant literature to reconstitute the ideas she was working with. For example, it became clear during the capturing of the narratives that what she had regarded as an identifiable African identity was not emerging in the interviews. This led her back to relevant literature, which began to challenge the idea of a unitary African identity, and so this idea was transformed and reworked into a more plausible understanding. Packer (1985) argues that a unique characteristic of hermeneutic analysis is its openly dialogical nature: "the returning to the object of inquiry again and again, each time with an increased understanding and a more complete interpretivist account" (p. 1091).

Credibility was assured in two ways in this study. Firstly, during the interviews the researcher was conscious of having to constantly reflect back on what had been narrated, and asking for clarity and confirmation of meaning from the narrators. Secondly, the researcher returned to the transcribed narratives over and over again, asking new questions and thus constantly revising her interpretations (Packer, 1985). As Richardson and Woolfolk (1994) argue, "the work of

understanding is never finished and is permanently liable to honest doubt” (p. 221). They argue that all understanding is “historically conditioned, essentially prejudiced, in part relative to the perspectives and purposes of the interpreter, and therefore continually changing” (p. 218). The researcher therefore acknowledges that her interpretation of these narratives is partial and permanently liable to honest doubt. In sum, the researcher would argue that her findings are neither accurate nor final reflections of reality, but rather a tentative and plausible account of human agency in the world.

3.8 Transferability

As a post-modern study, this study did not seek generalisability. Rather, the researcher acknowledges that meanings are highly variable across contexts of human interaction (Durham & Massena, 1999). Through the process of interpretation this study provides a detailed and rich description of the contexts of the participants. Readers are thus able to achieve understandings of the structures of meaning, which develop in *specific contexts*. These understandings can then be “transferred to new contexts in other studies to provide a framework with which to reflect on the arrangements of meaning and action that occur in these new contexts” (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999, p. 63). In sum, the aim of this study is not ‘generalisability’ but rather ‘transferability’.

3.9 Dependability

Closely related to the notion of transferability is that of dependability. Interpretivist researchers do not assume that what they are studying is a stable or unchanging reality and therefore do not expect to find the same results repeatedly. Rather, they expect that individuals will behave differently in changing contexts (Durrheim & Wassenaar, 1999). The researcher has therefore not sought to show reliability, but rather dependability. By giving a rich and detailed description of the contexts in which the participants interact during the interpretation of the narratives, it is hoped that this study has shown how certain actions and opinions are rooted in and develop out of *contextual interaction* (Durrheim & Wassenaar, p. 64) and that reliability, as a positivist term, is not appropriate to interpretivist research.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents an interpretation and discussion of the narratives of the ten Black South African women who participated in this study. As a qualitative study it is argued that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the interpretation and discussion into two separate chapters, as they are so intertwined. This chapter therefore presents the major themes that emerged throughout the interpretation process, alongside a discussion of these themes. Chapter five expands on the discussion of the interpretations in the form of recommendations for practice, research and theory-building.

Interview extracts are presented to illustrate the main themes that emerged through the process of interpretation. The reading process has already been discussed in Chapter Three. However, it is important to reiterate that the findings will show that all four of the readings are interdependent. During the process of interpretation each reading fed into each other, rather than following an exact, sequential format. Thus the discussion of the interpretations will not fall under clearly distinctive categories that reflect the separate readings, but will reflect the interdependent/cyclic nature of the reading/interpretation process.

The writer acknowledges that the interpretation of the narratives reflects a 'relational activity' (Tappan & Brown, 1992). She acknowledges that her own standpoint and perspective would have influenced the interpretation process to a certain extent. At all times, however, she took responsibility to be aware of the way in which her own assumption and values may have been influencing the process of interpretation and thus feels that she engaged in an "ethic of interpretation based on care and responsiveness" (Tappan & Brown, 1992). In addition, it is argued that the context in which the individuals reside constrains the number of alternative ways of understanding their career development, which prevents the interpretation from leading to total subjectivism (Packer, 1985).

The overarching purpose of this study was to explore the way in which contextual factors (social, political, economic, cultural) may impact/influence the career development of Black South African women. In addition, it aimed to illustrate how research approaches like the narrative and hermeneutic approach open up these contextual factors for exploration. The interpretation shows that using narratives is a useful vehicle for understanding how women construct their career narratives. Through the interpretation process four main themes emerged and will be discussed as follows:

1. *Contextualised career narratives*: career development as situated in, conditional on and dependent on contextual factors
2. *Positive non-directional career narratives*: attitudes of 'positive uncertainty' in the face of extreme uncertainty and inconsistency
3. *The social embeddedness of the career narratives*: the importance of the 'other' in the construction of the career narratives of Black South African women
4. *Gendered career development*: negotiating multiple gender narratives

4.1 Contextualised career narratives

- Research question: in what way has South Africa's past social, political and economic context influenced the career development of Black South African women?

The following interpretation of a variety of extracts from the women's narratives in this study illustrates how career development is inextricably embedded in socio-historical contexts (Collin & Young, 1992; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Nicholas, Pretorius & Naidoo, 1999; Sampson, 1989; Stead, 1996). The interpretations show that these women understand their career development is situated in, conditional on and profoundly dependent on a number of contextual factors. Various factors, including economic factors, apartheid legislation and policy, cultural values and gender, were seen as instrumental in directing the career development of the women in this study. The importance of contextual issues in the career development of Black South African women cannot be underestimated. It is important not to assume, however, that individuals are passive 'victims' of contextual factors. It is more appropriate to speak of a 'dynamic interaction perspective' (Stead, 1996) that emphasises a dynamic inter-relationship between the self and context. This

perspective acknowledges, that in addition to contextual factors, personal preferences and abilities do play a role in career development. The following extracts, however, suggest that in a country like South Africa, that is undergoing considerable changes, there is not a *unidirectional* (Stead, 1996) relationship between self and context. That is, due to South Africa's apartheid heritage considerable class divisions continue to exist in this context. In such a context, political and economic factors rather than preferences or interests, will largely pre-determine the career development of individuals, especially individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The following interpretations illustrate how financial constraints and the policy of apartheid *significantly* influenced the career development of the women in this study. In addition these findings challenge the widely accepted view that career development is directed by internal motives or attributes like one's personality type.

4.1.1 *Financial constraints*

All of the women in this study faced immense financial constraints as they commenced their career development. As a result, they were forced into what can be termed 'opportunistic careers', for example study trajectories constrained by their school subjects and results or post-secondary training that included opportunities for paid work. The career decisions of the women in this study were largely determined by financial and political constraints rather than being choices based on rational decision-making processes or personality types (Holland, 1996; Super & Crites, 1962).

Makhosi, a registered nurse who currently works as a full time community developer, commenced her interview with the following explanation of why she had become a nurse:

Makhosi: Now the reason, uh, first I must tell you that I was a nurse, but, uh, I wasn't a nurse because of... I had no option.

Kerry: You had no option?

Makhosi: Yeah, it wasn't my choice, I had no option because I mean my parents couldn't take me further so, uh, with the nursing career, after matriculating just went

straight to the hospital... we didn't pay, they gave us allowance. That is why I...I...I went, um, I opted for nursing.

Contrary to the usual notion of 'vocational calling', associated with a career in nursing, Makhosi registered at the local training hospital as a nurse because it was a financially viable option. Dudu's narrative also illustrates the role financial constraints can have on an individual's career development. She describes her first year out of school as follows:

Dudu: Mm, that first year... after completing matric there was no ways... because I didn't have money I have (emphasis) to go and look for something, otherwise I was staying, I was at home at that time. And then my teacher who was teaching me maths at school, he was the one who came to me and said to me that there is this space, 'now my friend wants somebody to teach her children, children', and then I went to...

Kerry: Okay, and you worked for them privately?

Dudu: Yes, privately, it was...

Kerry: That wasn't your preference hey?

Dudu: It wasn't at all, at all, but because I was at home and I wanted something rather than to stay at home then I went.

Kerry: And to make some money...

Dudu: Yes that was it, to make money to provide myself, although that was not much money, but it helped me to just buy few things when I was... for the following years when I, I went to Technikon... but tuition, my sister was paying that for me, I was staying with my relatives in Johannesburg.

Dudu's decision to teach part-time was determined largely by her financial context and not a choice based on, for example, a fit between a particular personality type and environment (Holland, 1996). Dudu's family was struggling financially and so she was unable to start her studies straight after matriculating. Instead she was forced to take on part-time teaching out of necessity.

4.1.2 *Socio-political constraints*

Nompilo's narrative illustrates the extent to which the career development of many Black South Africans has been shaped by socio-historical circumstances. Apartheid was characterised by gross inequalities in educational rights. Millions of Black South Africans were educated in poorly resourced schools. Nompilo is currently employed by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) as a consultant. She has a Business Administration Diploma and has in the past worked for one of South Africa's leading banks. With these achievements it sounds impossible that Nompilo received very poor results in her final matriculation examinations. When probed about the quality of her education, Nompilo talked about the poor conditions under which she was educated. She was a maths and science student and the mastering the latter subject depended on practicals in the school laboratory. Nompilo's school laboratory, however, did not have the equipment or the chemicals needed for the science experiments that are essential for real engagement with the subject. The teachers at her school were mostly under-qualified, and as a result, struggled to give the learners the academic assistance they required in order to achieve above average marks in their examinations. Nompilo realised that repeating her matriculation to improve her marks was not going to be a possibility due to her family's financial difficulties. She gives the following account of her visit to a Technikon, where she was determined to find a department that would register her despite her poor matriculation results.

Nompilo: When I arrived there at the Technikon... uh, I went to science first because I wanted to do analytical chemistry. They said 'no, they cannot help me because of my... uh, results'. I went to accounting, I wanted to do a national diploma in accounting, and they said 'no'. The last one, and it was new, I think that is why they took all of us, they didn't mind our results and our subjects that we are doing... to do National Diploma in Public Administration. We wrote a test and I was admitted there, they didn't look at the results.

Historical circumstances and her family's financial constraints largely determined Nompilo's 'choice'. The direction of her career was opportunistic and concerned with the short term, rather

than a result of rational decision-making process driven by individual desires and/or abilities. Her acceptance into Public Administration can be most accurately conceptualised as a chance event.

Miriam was schooled during apartheid. During this period Black schools did not have access to school guidance counsellors. She recounts how this, and other political factors, had serious repercussions for her career development. Within a few weeks of starting high school (1982) Miriam was introduced to Saturday school. This was a programme aimed at extending the academic abilities of learners, but more specifically was intended to introduce young Black students to the Science. She describes how over the next two years she developed a strong interest in Science. In 1986 Miriam's schooling came to a sudden halt. Rioting began in her community and Miriam stopped attending school because her life was at serious risk. Fortunately, the same organisation that had provided Saturday school sponsored Miriam and a group of her peers to complete their schooling in the Eastrand, where things were politically more stable. After completing her matric certificate, Miriam received a scholarship to attend a private college, where she had the opportunity to upgrade her matric certificate to a matric exemption, allowing her the opportunity to attend University. During this time Miriam was given part-time work at a major chemical company that had initially sponsored her studies. It is therefore not surprising that Miriam developed an interest in engineering and laboratory work:

Miriam: You see at the time I wanted to go into engineering but I didn't want to go to Technikon, for some reason I just thought that it was going to limit me. Now, the other thing that I also discovered was that I think that I wanted to work in laboratory (pause). That was another thing that I discovered about myself...and that I think was initiated by the fact that during that time I used to work on Saturdays, for a major sponsor of my studies. A major (emphasis) industry of chemicals.

Miriam: Now I liked working in the laboratories, so I thought the other career that I can follow is working in a laboratory, whether as a chemical analyst or something else...

The above extract illustrates the extent to which Miriam's career narrative was shaped by political circumstances. This narrative is important in the historical context of South Africa where for a very long time Black South African students were denied psychological services such as career guidance (Naicker, 1994). What the above extracts illustrate is how contextual factors like politics may direct career narratives. Miriam's desire to become a laboratory technician was not based on careful consideration of her personality type, or the ideal environment in which she was likely to flourish (Holland, 1996). It was rather an outcome of the socio-political circumstances in which she was schooled. In retrospect Miriam is aware of the fact that at the time she was being schooled there were very few Black Engineers. As a promising Black student she had been selected to be guided towards the Science. At the time, her interests appeared 'natural' and an outcome of certain abilities, interests or personality traits. Through the process of reflection, however, Miriam begins to reconstruct her narrative as one directed primarily by contingent factors. Miriam's career experiences are not entirely autonomous, but rather largely defined and specified by the social conditions in which she grew up (Collin & Young, 1992).

It is interesting to note that after she had completed her matric certificate and had registered at a local college to upgrade her certificate to an exemption, Miriam was given an aptitude test. The results of the test are not surprising:

Miriam: (laughs) And I remember after that test I discovered that I think (emphasis), because I like working (pause), referring to material and uh working in a laboratory type of environment...see it is coming up again, the laboratory type of environment...uh, that I think I want to do, at that time I wanted to do medical technology...So then now the career changed, the direction changed, medical technology, anything that would make me work in a laboratory...

It is simplistic to assume, based on her test results, that Miriam had by chance ended up in a career that was suited to her personality type, strengths or interests. Miriam's narrative forces us to recognise that psychological testing is a social construction that is negotiated (Collin &

Young, 1992). That is, Miriam's results are not necessarily an outcome of an analysis of deep-seated, immutable skills or aptitudes, but rather reflect Miriam's negotiation with socio-political expectations for her to become a Black scientist. Prior to the test, Miriam had been carefully prepared and primed to enter the science. It is this socially constructed 'desire' that emerges in her responses to the test rather than innate interests or skills.

The above contention is confirmed when Miriam describes how once she began her studies at University her career direction changed dramatically. Miriam registered for a Bachelor of Science, but at the end of her first year she had failed her major. At this point her career path changed, she moved to the Social Science.

Kerry: Now that's a big difference.

Miriam: That's a big (emphasis) change!

Kerry: Now was that because you felt that was the only option of that you had found something else that had interested you?

Miriam: As I say that was the only option (laughs). At that stage it was a matter of do I get kicked out of residence or not, so I immediately took social science.

Kerry: To stay in the system?

Miriam: To stay in the system...

Miriam's decision to move to the Social Science, like her decision to go into the sciences, was not based entirely on some intrinsic motivation but rather on contextual factors. In this incident Miriam was forced by economic factors to redirect her career path. To avoid being evicted from residence Miriam makes a sudden change in her degree to avoid having to repeat first year. In addition to this, Miriam had been elected a residence officer during her first year at University. As entertainment manager she found that she enjoyed working with people. As a result Miriam was not disappointed in having to move to the Social Science, and today Miriam works closely with students in an administrative position at a local University. This is not to say that her current career is closer to any 'authentic' Miriam, but rather confirms again that career decisions

are, to a large extent, directed by political and economic factors, rather than being solely a preference based on one's interests.

Nonhlanhla's narrative, like Miriam's, highlights the way in which career narratives are directed by socio-political factors. It also illustrates how individuals are often only vaguely aware of the contextual factors that pre-determine their career direction (Sampson, 1989). It required returning to the topic a number of times (a hermeneutic technique) before she was able to make more direct links between her career development and her social and political conditions of existence.

Nonhlanhla articulated very clearly how the violence that was being played out in her township had a detrimental impact on her health. She had developed a tumour in her jaw but was unable to have it timeously removed because the violence in her area was of such an extreme nature that victims of political unrest permanently occupied the local hospital's intensive care unit. Her operation was delayed until almost the entire right side of her jaw had to be surgically removed. Despite being able to make direct links between her health and the prevailing political context, Nonhlanhla was not able to make such links between her career development and the political system. While talking about her career path, she recounted the following story:

Nonhlanhla: I remember when, aaa...when I was doing my matric, we didn't have economics teacher... so I was the one helping the matric pupils.

Kerry: In your own school, in your own year?

Nonhlanhla: Yes, because I was able to read it, and wow, big companies! Came to class and explained to them 'you know those things and this and this and this' and then I go back to the book... 'who does not understand? You see it is like this and this' and um, when the teacher came, it was May, and it was quite easy because he had to do revision of what we, I...I...

Kerry: Of what you had taught? So you helped him out there?

Nonhlanhla: Yes, so from there I got motivated.

Although aware of how this experience had influenced her motivation to teach, Nonhlanhla was unaware that this ‘motivation’ did not arise entirely from some innate desire to help other people, but was rather to a large extent the outcome of a deficient political and economic educational system under the apartheid regime. She was convinced that she had a ‘calling’ to be a teacher and when it was suggested that she consider studying something other than teaching when she had completed her degree, she was adamant that teaching was what was ‘within’ her:

Nonhlanhla: No (emphasis)! I just want to do H.D.E (Higher Diploma in Education) because that was just in my mind.

As the interviewer began to ‘tease’ out Nonhlanhla’s narrative she began to make more direct links between her career development and apartheid. Although she continued to maintain, that finances had been her only obstacle she eventually, but only after direct probing, began to identify characteristics of the inferior schooling system to which she had been subjected. For example, she explained how a lack of school guidance had resulted in her having to explore her career options for herself. When asked why she thought her school had no school guidance she finally identified apartheid as the reason:

Nonhlanhla: I just think it was because of apartheid... because now most of the schools have it...ja.

At this point Nonhlanhla made a number of connections. For example she recounted, with obvious embarrassment, how in standard nine she didn’t have one English lesson. Despite this she and her fellow learners were given a class mark at the end of the year.

The above extracts from the women’s narratives illustrate the way in which career narratives are embedded in one’s socio-political context. The extracts point to the importance of examining the situation of career development in terms of historical, socio-political and economic factors (Stead, 1996). In addition, the extracts suggest that many South African’s career paths cannot be seen as the outcome of ‘choices’ or ‘intrinsic motivation’ but are often the result of the social,

economic and political inequalities that exist as a legacy of apartheid (Nicholas, Pretorius & Naidoo, 1999). However, the extracts also suggest that individuals need to be assisted in recognising the way in which contextual factors have directed their career development, as they are often not fully aware of the factors, which pre-determine their career paths.

4.2 Positive non-directional career narratives

- Research questions: In what way does a changing social, political, economic context influence the career development of Black South African women? What obstacles are Black South African women faced with in their career development? How do Black South African women cope with these obstacles?

The following extracts from the narratives illustrate the way in which the women in this study have been affected by a changing context, identify the obstacles that they have encountered, and most importantly illustrate the positive way in which they have dealt with these changes and obstacles. The findings serve to challenge the notion of a smooth, linear career path that permeates most of career literature.

The extracts also illustrate the importance of indigenous psychologies in the development of a more appropriate career development theory in South Africa (Stead & Watson, 1998, 1999). The extracts suggest that indigenous career theories developed in South Africa can offer valuable lessons to contexts with similar social parameters. An indigenous career theory cannot be viewed as relevant to only a particular individual or group. This would be reductionist and would imply a unitary identity specific to a particular group of individuals (Dawes, 1998). Rather, relevant aspects of an indigenous career theory, developed in South Africa, can be applied in contexts with similar socio-political and/or cultural contexts.

In an increasingly global economy traditional constructs of time and space are being disrupted. All over the world the shape and nature of jobs are constantly changing. One outcome is that the world of careers is requiring the services of individuals who are able to adapt quickly to changes in the working environment (Collin, 2000). South Africa continues to undergo environmental

changes in its attempt to overcome its apartheid heritage in addition to being an emerging market in a global economy. As a result individuals will have to learn new skills to cope with changing contextual factors as they compete in local and global economies. International career theorists are beginning to recognise the need for individuals to concern themselves with the short-term and to internalise change as normal and inevitable (Collin, 2000). The following extracts suggest that Black South African women have for many years been forced to develop attitudes of flexibility and therefore have much to teach other contexts facing increasingly changing environments.

4.2.1 *Multiple and changing career narratives*

Most of the women in this study have multiple career narratives (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). That is, they have been forced due to a number of contextual factors into a *number* of seemingly unrelated areas of employment. Helen is a qualified social worker, but due to financial constraints was unable to commence her studies straight after completing her schooling:

Helen: Ja, ja...after matric, because I didn't have money I had to work for contract, three months for temporary jobs ah, like ah... like I worked in Wardkiss, ja, I worked in the hotel as a waitress, ja, packing in the supermarkets, Checkers, ja...

Kerry: So you did lots of jobs like that?

Helen: Ja.

Kerry: For how many years Helen?

Helen: Ah, it was in 1990, I passed matric in 1990. 1990 until 1994.

Kerry: For four years.

Helen explained that she had even tried to become a nurse despite not wanting to be one because she had heard that you could earn money while studying. She agreed that becoming a nurse had nothing to do with her personal preferences but was a result of financial necessity. Helen was able to pursue her dream to be a social worker only once she found out about a bridging course at the University and financial aid. Helen has since decided to continue her studies in community development and hopes to run a community-based project. Her narrative illustrates the non-

linear nature of many Black South Africans' career narratives. Change was a necessity for Helen rather than being an indication of some underlying personality deficit (Super & Crites, 1962). Change was an integral and *functional* part of Helen's career development. Her narrative highlights two related ideas 1) that the career narratives of many Black South African women are "nested narratives" (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). That is, their career development involves a constant negotiation between existing narratives and new narratives. 2) That career development is an ongoing process. Rather than being a once off, closed choice where change is equated with a mistake, career development is in constant movement. From this perspective change becomes an opportunity for progress or development (Gadamer, 1975) rather than being viewed as pathological or problematic.

4.2.2. *Positive uncertainty*

Nompilo's narrative is also filled with change. In addition to confirming the non-directional nature of career development, Nompilo's narrative illustrates the importance of a positive attitude towards change and obstacles. Despite her poor results in the matriculation examinations, Nompilo was determined to be registered at the local Technikon. Although part of this extract has been quoted before in section 4.1, the focus of the analysis is now primarily on the positive determination of Nompilo, rather than on the financial constraints that determined her 'choice':

Nompilo: ...after matriculation I went to a Technikon, although I wasn't sure about my...

Kerry: Career?

Nompilo: Career, which direction I take because I didn't have good results in matric, uh...I was doing science subjects, but I said to myself I will go there and I will check all the departments. I went there, I went to Science, they didn't take me because my maths and science was very poor, but I said, no I won't go back to matric to improve my results because of my situation at home... we didn't have, uh, money. I had, uh, five sisters and two brothers, although mom and dad were both working it was difficult for them to pay for all of us in tertiary and others were in high schools by

that time. I went there, I wasn't sure whether they will be able to pay me or not, I was just taking the chance. When I arrived there at the Technikon, uh, I want to science first because I wanted to do analytical chemistry. They said no, they cannot help me because of my uh, results, I went to accounting, I wanted to do a national diploma in accounting, they said no. The last one, and it was new, I think that is why they took all of us, they didn't mind our results and our subjects that we were doing, to national diploma in public administration, we wrote a test and I was admitted there, they didn't look at my results. English test, that was good, and then that is how I entered there, it was a three-year diploma, 18 months theory and 18 months practical.

The above extract indicates that many Black South Africans schooled under apartheid were not in a position to choose a career path in a tertiary institution based on personal preference or some inherent psychological characteristics. Due to a poor education Nompilo was forced to register with any department that was prepared to accept her poor matric results. In addition, the extract illustrates how the lack of school guidance, and more specifically information, was likely to have complicated the career development of many Black South Africans (Naicker, 1994). This is what Nompilo had to say when asked whether she had received any career guidance at school:

Nompilo: It is (career guidance) like an animal to me, it was a dream, I have never heard of that until I finished my matric, although I knew the word.

Despite a poor school education Nompilo was not deterred from furthering her education. Despite being turned away from a number of departments due to her poor results Nompilo did not turn away in despair but persevered until she was accepted. This positive and flexible attitude is prevalent throughout Nompilo's narrative. She describes her academic years as difficult and recounts how during one of her semesters she was forced to stay at home for a period of time because her parents were unable to pay her fees. Again, Nompilo did not give up; she was finally awarded a bursary and was able to return to her studies. After she had completed the theoretical component of her diploma Nompilo was unable to find a place of employment

that would take her on for the practical component of her course. Eventually Nompilo accepted a position at a company some distance from her home, and worked for them for 18 months without remuneration.

Nompilo was then faced with the difficulty of finding employment when she completed her diploma. She was eventually employed at a prominent bank and had the following to say about her time there:

Nompilo: ...they took me there, I worked there for three and a half years, and it was difficult, it was like I had worked there for thirty years because of, um, apartheid, discrimination by both customers and staff (pause), um, because I know where I came from I persevered, although it was really difficult. And my problem was my salary, it wasn't enough, because most of it I was using for the bus fare and the place was awkward, the place from Amanzimtoti and I was staying in Umlazi, I had to take maybe three taxi's for single trip.

Nompilo resigned from the bank when an Indian woman with no qualifications was employed by the bank in a position under Nompilo but was paid more than her. Prior to this incident, she had applied to be promoted to a consultant but her application was not successful. Nompilo was aware that this was a direct result of apartheid legislation but surprised the interviewer when she had the following to say about her experience:

Nompilo: But I think that helped me Kerry, because...

Kerry: It helped you? In what way?

Nompilo: Uh, I realised that I have got the ability, although I am Black I had the potential.

Kerry: Okay, and you did a good job and you had a high score on your aptitude test, you got good experience...

Nompilo: Yes, very good experience

The above extract illustrates the interviewer's absolute surprise at Nompilo's reconstruction of her experiences at the bank as 'helping' her. The interviewer's world-view and limited experience of discrimination made it difficult for her to believe that oppression could ever be viewed in a positive light. Before Nompilo was able to express herself the interviewer jumped in with a disbelieving query on how this could be possible. Even when Nompilo had explained herself the interviewer continued to probe her experience in the same disbelieving vein:

Kerry: Okay, two different things, if I can ask you to clarify two different things. On the one hand it gave you good experience, it taught you a lot about yourself?

Nompilo: Yes.

Kerry: On the other hand it was a very difficult experience, because of the discrimination, because of the way you were treated...

Nompilo: Yes, but I did prove them wrong.

Nompilo was able to acknowledge that her working experiences had been difficult, especially when she was employed as a Black South African woman during apartheid. However, Nompilo chose to reconstruct her multiple (Gergen & Gergen, 1988) work narratives into a story that acknowledged its tensions, but had an overarching positive tone. She was eventually employed by a University where she held an administrative position. She has since worked as a consultant for an NGO and has recently been re-employed by the University where she will be able to put into practice all the skills she had acquired over the last few years. Despite difficulties along the way Nompilo never chose to use any negative discourse in her narrative; rather her narrative is imbued with terms like "challenge" and "potential". Nompilo was on more than one occasion forced to make career decisions that were *not* based on rational decision-making processes. Due to a number of contextual factors she had no option but to take up any career related opportunity that came her way. In the process she developed a positive and flexible attitude towards her changing circumstances and, as a result, is better equipped to deal with change and ambiguity in the working world. Gelatt (1989) would argue that Nompilo has developed an attitude of 'positive uncertainty' that enables her to be positive in the face of uncertainty and inconsistency.

Makhosi's narrative also carries a positive tone, despite having had to start her career as nurse for financial reasons:

Makhosi: Now the reason, uh, first I must tell you that I was a nurse, but uh, I wasn't a nurse because of... I had no option!

Kerry: You had no option?

Makhosi: Yeah, it wasn't my choice, I had no option because I mean, my parents couldn't take me further so, uh, with the nursing career, after matriculating, just went straight to the hospital, we didn't pay... they gave us allowance. That is why I...I...I opted for nursing.

Despite not being able to see herself as a nurse, Makhosi went on to do three years training as a nurse in a local hospital. The interviewer jumped to conclusions about Makhosi's experience and suggested that it must have been difficult for Makhosi to study for three years towards a discipline she had no interest in. Like Nompilo, Makhosi surprised the interviewer with the following response:

Makhosi: It wasn't difficult, and I, I ended up enjoying it (laughs) while I was training.

Kerry: Right?

Makhosi: Ja, enjoyed it.

Kerry: What... why did you enjoy it? What did it teach you about yourself or...

Makhosi: Uh... in fact I, it was because I wanted to help people. I had people to help, sick people now...

Kerry: So it confirmed...

Makhosi: Ja...

Kerry: That, that is what you wanted to do, help people

Makhosi: Ja, ja... I had people to help there and uh, I think it did open my eyes because I could see some other...

Kerry: Options?

Makhosi: Options

Makhosi was forced into a career path she at first felt was incongruent with her interests. In retrospect, however, she sees that her training as a nurse opened up other opportunities for her. Makhosi is now a community worker, specialising in work around HIV/AIDS. When asked more directly by the interviewer whether she considered going into nursing a mistake she responded in the following way:

Kerry: So you wouldn't look back and say that nursing was a mistake?

Makhosi: No, ah, no I can't because with the nursing background there is... it has opened all my doors (laughs).

Kerry: Made many other...

Makhosi: Yes!

Kerry: Opportunities available for you?

Makhosi: Ja, yes it does, ja! I mean, I mean going for this HIV and AIDS counselling or training of caregivers, it couldn't be easy for me if I wasn't...

Kerry: If you weren't a nurse?

Makhosi: If I didn't have this nursing background.

Kerry: So that has opened up a whole lot of other possibilities?

Makhosi: No, I don't regret.

Makhosi's narrative suggests that during apartheid many Black South African women were faced with very few, if none at all, choices with regards to their early career development. Through the process of her career development, however, Makhosi, like Nompilo, developed a positive attitude toward her circumstances and as a result was able to embrace opportunities that came her way. When approached with a positive attitude this change becomes an opening in the human life, which makes transformation, or development, possible (Gadamer, 1975). The above extracts suggest that career change can be a sign of progress, rather than a symptom of pathology.

4.3 The social embeddedness of the career narrative

- Research questions: What roles do significant others and the broader community play in the career development process of Black South African women? In what way does a changing social, political and economic context influence the career development of Black South African women?

The following extracts in this section illustrate the importance of the ‘other’ in the construction of the career narratives of the Black South African women of this study. All ten of the women in this study are currently employed in ‘social’ occupations. Their occupations include a nurse, another a consultant for an NGO that works with the youth. Included in the list is a teacher, a sales representative, two social workers, two administrative officers that work closely with students at a local University and a community developer.

4.3.1 *The importance of community*

It has been suggested that a possible, and important, explanation for socially oriented career paths amongst Black South African’s in general (Cloete, 1981) is the desire to be of some help to others, in particular to one’s community (Mkhize *et al.*, 1998). The following extract from Nonhlanhla’s narrative supports the above contention:

Nonhlanhla: Yes, and my father always said if I would not become a social worker, I would become a... a nurse and I always want to help the people, from the age of seven, even now I like to help the people. Help the people... if someone comes at home, I, I was the one who stands up and make a cup of tea, ‘ok, my mom is not here if you want to wait, if you want’. Or if they say I want you dad, ‘oh, I don’t know what time will he come back, but you must wait, or maybe I will come and tell you if he is here’. I wouldn’t mind to even walk a kilometre to tell that particular person that my father is back ‘can you come and see him?’ Oh, I was just that person...

The following extract shows how Helen's decision to become a social worker was influenced by her desire to be of assistance to her community that was so affected by the political violence that permeated her township during the apartheid years:

Kerry: Ja, so what we are picking up on was the political climate during the time that you started to decide what you were going to do and there was lots of violence in your area, there was lots of sexual abuse going on and possibly physical abuse?

Helen: And... ja, and physical abuse and for that result, aah... that was where the social workers came to also, ja, to intervene.

Kerry: Okay...

Helen: Because of the traumatic incidences.

Kerry: Okay, so did you also feel you could also help your community if you took on a job like this?

Helen: Yes, yes I felt that so much, I even told my neighbours about AIDS.

The above extract suggests that a deep sense of commitment to one's community will often influence the career path of Black South African women. This finding is in contradiction to the dominant atomistic, autonomous and Western view of the self (Ikuenobe, 1998). Africans derive their sense of selfhood through the relationships they have with their extended families and their community. From this perspective the purpose of selfhood, "rather than being self-actualisation (or, in the case of career development, the fulfilment of unmet needs or an implementation of a self concept), is to realise oneself fully in the solidarity of others, thereby promoting the harmonious existence of all living beings" (Mkhize *et al.*, 1998).

Thabisile's narrative illustrates how, under certain conditions, personal 'preference' may be sacrificed for the well being of the community or family (Paris, 1995). Thabisile described how she had started out wanting to become a lawyer. When the interviewer asked if she had changed to social work because of financial constraints, she responded as follows:

Thabisile: No, it was not finances because it costs more or less the same doing social work and law or whatever degree, and my mother was struggling a little bit with my father. And you know when you are here in the townships or whatever, some other children, some other people's children that are saying 'my mother was helped by a social worker' and in the rural area where I stay there were really no social workers... nothing like a social worker so I had this idea that maybe I won't be able to help my mom, but I will be able to help others in the rural areas.

Kerry: So it sounds like what you are saying to me is that you help your community... or to help your family became more important...

Thabisile: Yes it did...

Kerry: Than becoming a lawyer...

Thabisile: Yes.

Kerry: So it isn't just based on what you maybe wanted to do, what you thought would be nice, it was rather based on how you could help your community?

Thabisile: Yes.

The following extract from Dudu's narrative further illustrates how a sense of self is derived from one's engagement with the community. Dudu describes how her political involvement and concern in and for her community led to her current interest and postgraduate studies in community development:

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Dudu: Exactly, exactly! And also things that were happening... and then as people we were involved in politics... we used to, we were supposed to look and see what was happening in our townships and try to solve a lot of the things. And then it started from there, for me to, ja... to have that thing to work... er, for the people... ja because there people. Crime! (Emphasis) Crime was there... we, we as a community have to sort that thing...

4.3.2 *The importance of family*

The following extracts illustrate the importance of the *family* in the career development of Black South African women. Career development theory has historically constructed the influence of family on career development in a negative light. Family has often been seen as *limiting* career development (Wienrach & Strebalus, 1990). The following extract shows how family was an *enabling* factor in Dudu's career development:

Dudu: ... Then I started, I was still struggling at the time. My sister, luckily my sister got job... get job soon after completed our matric and she was the one that was helping me with my studies, because my mother was not working, it was only my father who was working at that time. My sister helped me in my first year then my brother, my eldest brother he also helped me until I completed my... my... my diploma...

Many of the narratives in this study tell of parents, older brothers and sisters who sacrifice what they have to ensure that an academically able child or sibling can continue with their studies.

Simphiwe tells about the sacrifices of her father who is now deceased:

Simphiwe: ... It was difficult since my father was just a general worker raising eight children who were all willing to go to school, it was quite difficult but he tried any way because none (emphasis) of us has ever been sponsored or got a bursary or whatever, until I went to UNISA and got that loan. I was encouraged, my father wanted us to learn, my father wanted us to study, that is what he wanted and he tried.

Thabisile described how studying was not an easy option for young Black women, but when asked how she had been able to rise above this constraint she related the following:

Thabisile: I think it was more about my mother.

Kerry: Okay?

Thabisile: She really wanted it, because she used to say ‘look at me, I didn’t study’. She ended up in standard six or seven, I can’t remember. ‘If I had studied maybe it wouldn’t have been like this’, so I want to get the best of it, as long as I can afford... go to school, go to school. Sometimes we would starve at home that she can give us the money to take the bus to school because we are taking the bus to school because we have no schools around where I stay.

Thabisile went on to recount many stories of the personal sacrifices that her mother made to ensure that she received an education and was able to better her position. Thabisile’s narrative illustrates how the very nature of being family creates a special kind of relationship, characterised by caring for and responsibility towards one another (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The influence of the family is apparent in the following extract concerning her mother:

Thabisile: ... when I was about to write exams, she was supposed to buy something else, I can’t remember, but she was supposed to buy something else. I needed the money for the transport to go and write the exam so she said ‘take this money, we will sacrifice, take this money because you are hopefully going to pass’.

Kerry: Wow!

Thabisile: I had to wait for my results, heart beating...

Thabisile was extremely grateful for the sacrifices that her mother made to ensure she was able to complete her University studies. The above extract suggests that such sacrifices had an influence on their children’s career development. Thabisile’s description of her heart beating as she awaited her examination results suggests that she knew how important it was to pass her examinations because of the financial sacrifices her mother had had to make, to ensure her attendance at the examinations. Her mother’s personal sacrifices suggest that the family relationship plays a significant and enabling role in the development of Black South Africans’ careers. The above extracts suggest that the ‘self-other relationship’ or ‘sense of self in relation to others’ has a definite bearing on the career development of Black South African women and needs to be taken into account in career development theory and practice (Mkhize et al., 1998).

Although the above interpretations and discussions support the importance of acknowledging the desire to be of assistance to one's family and community when trying to understand the ten women's attraction to the social occupations (Mkhize *et al.*, 1998), it would be problematic to assume that this is the *only possible* interpretation of these extracts. Section 4. 1 of this chapter discusses in detail how career choices were significantly constrained and limited by social, economic and political factors stemming from South Africa's apartheid heritage. Instead of trying to explain the women's attraction to the social occupations as *either* an outcome of a desire to be of service to one's community *or* an outcome of certain contextual factors, the interpretations so far suggest that it is more appropriate to recognise that cultural (in this case, the importance of family and community) *and* contextual factors are intertwined and have a *combined* influence on the career development of Black South African women. The following extract highlights the way in which cultural factors like the desire to be of service to one's community is intertwined with other contextual factors like the political climate. Helen clearly stated that wanting to be a social worker was based on her 'desire' to be of assistance to others:

Kerry: And when you saw these people coming in you decided this would be a good job for you?

Helen: Yes, because we asked them 'what are they coming to do there?' our teachers told us 'these are the social workers, so they are coming... they are helping people to solve their problems even at home'. They told us even if we have problems we must tell them.

Kerry: Okay, and what was attractive to you about that job (pause) was it that they were helping people?

Helen: Ja, ja they were helping people and they were working with people at different levels, mm, mm...

Kerry: And you liked that idea?

Helen: Ja, I liked that idea.

Helen's attraction to social work, however, is not entirely an outcome of a culturally constructed desire to be of assistance to other people in her community. Helen's attraction to a socially useful career was also influenced significantly by the socio-political climate in which she was schooled. She responded in the following way when she was asked to construct her career narrative:

Helen: I think Kerry, I was in the high school, ah, level doing grade seven when I was thinking about becoming a social worker. Because I was brought up in a Black culture, uh, so because we had so many problems in the schools so the social workers used to come to the school to do some counselling sessions, so that's what made me think about becoming a social worker. Ja, so I think it inspired me, their work.

Helen went on to explain that in her school sexual abuse had become an increasing concern. In addition, political violence was at a peak in her community:

Helen: So they used to attack us in the township in the section because they know we are (...) so they killed many boys in our area because of that.

Kerry: Because of that friction?

Helen: Ja, so many parents and children were traumatised, even myself, I was traumatised because we, we used to see many people come with copper heads and collect every man and every boy in the road. And one incident they asked the boys to sleep on the road, they shot them... pow... they shot them.

Kerry: Okay... that must have been quite difficult, when was that happening, in your high school years?

Helen: No, ja it was in my high school years, in my high schools.

Kerry: In that time period, there was, there was lots of violence?

Helen: Ja.

Kerry: Ja, so what we are picking up on was the political climate during the time that you started to decide what you were going to be, and there was lots of violence in your area, there was lots of sexual abuse going on and possibly sexual abuse?

Helen: And... ja, and physical abuse and for that result, ahh... that was where the social worker came to also... ja, to intervene...

Kerry: Okay...

Helen: Because of the traumatic incidents.

Kerry: Okay, so do you also feel you could also help your community, if you took on a job like this?

Helen: Yes... yes I felt that so much, I even told my neighbours about AIDS.

In sum, the above extracts suggest that the career narratives of the women in this study are not the outcome of a Black South African culture, *neither* are they entirely the result of contextual factors. They are rather an account of the dialectic *between* mentalities and social practices that have occurred and are occurring within the women's particular cultural communities (Dawes, 1998).

4.3.3 *The pull between collectivism and individualism*

Although the narratives of the women in this study demonstrate the importance of the other, especially the family and community, in the construction of Black South African women's career narratives, the narratives also demonstrate that there can be, and often is, a tension as Black South African's negotiate themselves between collectivist and individualistic perspectives on life. Black South Africans sometimes find themselves torn between two worlds. On the one hand, they live in a world that values connections and attachments to family and community while on the other hand they have to spend their educational and work lives in a world that values independence and competition against others in order to succeed. The following extract suggests that the hiatus between the values of the community and the dominant institutions of public life, in which Black students further their education and work, can place them under enormous cognitive and emotional strain (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The following extract begins after the interviewer has spent some time exploring the influence Nompilo's father had, had on her career development:

Kerry: Okay, and your community, how have they responded to you... your education is held quite highly in your community, being educated or...

Nompilo: Ja... it is difficult, especially my family... they don't like us, they say that we are behaving like Whites.

Kerry: Like White people?

Nompilo: Mmm!

Kerry: Everyone in the community or just a...

Nompilo: Everybody.

Kerry: (pause) Because you are well educated?

Nompilo: They see us, they say 'here comes umlungu' or... ja, because of our education... and I think their problem, they don't know exactly what education means.

Kerry: Mmm.

Nompilo: Ja... because you don't have masters and...

Kerry: Ja, so that makes it quite difficult for you...

Nompilo: Mmm...

Kerry: To feel part of your community, does it?

Nompilo: It is, even if you can ask (...), she...

Kerry: She experiences the same thing?

Nompilo: No, that's what she said to me the other day.

Kerry: What?

Nompilo: She said to me 'I remember when you behaved like Whites', I said 'I have never done that'. She said 'I didn't even speak English, we only speak Zulu like any other kids', like my daughter, she is in a private school but...

Kerry: When she's at home?

Nompilo: She speaks Zulu, not even a single (emphasis) word in English.

Kerry: Ja? Wow...

Nompilo: Even now it is still difficult...

Kerry: That transition and...

Nompilo: Mmm.

Kerry: Wow, I didn't know that...

Nompilo: Ja, cause they also asked one of my new neighbours 'how did you connect with them because they think they are better and...

Kerry: And she says 'no'?

Nompilo: She says 'no, they are not like that'.

Kerry: Shoo...

Nompilo: All (emphasis) are asking her the same questions, 'they are not like that...'

Makhosi's describes a similar situation between herself, her husband and her extended family. Both Makhosi and her husband have chosen to register for postgraduate studies. When asked how other people and her family have responded to this Makhosi said the following:

Makhosi: Uh, quite negative at times because I, I can't attend most of the function so the weekends, I am busy... funeral, I can't... I mean, so they don't... they... they don't feel... to them it is not as important as it is to me.

Kerry: You know the outcome of what you are doing, but they just see it in the immediate terms.

Makhosi: Mmm.

Kerry: You are not available...

Makhosi: Yeah, and my family... ja they do have a problem. My husband, better with my husband because he is also studying, so he does understand it. To them that I am still studying and the he is still studying, it doesn't make any sense.

Kerry: Any sense...

Makhosi: No.

Kerry: You should just do one thing and that is it?

Makhosi: Yes, because we have got grown-up children why should we be studying now.

The above extracts illustrate how a community may have limited understanding of the culture and functioning of tertiary institutions and further illustrates how this limited understanding,

against a backdrop of political discrimination in the form of unequal education, can lead to social isolation or different levels of conflict for those who have been able to further their education. It is suggested that this is an emotionally strenuous experience, especially for those individuals who have grown up in communities where acceptance from one's community gives meaning to personhood (Mkhize et al., 1998, Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). The tensions described in the above extracts need to be taken into consideration in career theory and practice as they certainly have an impact on a person's career development.

4.4 Gendered career development

- Research question: how do changing gender constructs influence Black South African women's career narratives?

Gender emerges as a shifting cultural construct in the narratives of the ten women who participated in this study. One reading of the narratives reveals how the women's career development was influenced by changing constructs of what is an 'appropriate' or 'acceptable' occupation for a women. Another reading, against a backdrop of traditional African beliefs, illustrates that traditional constructs around gender continue to have an influence (to varying degrees) on Black South African women's career development. The following extracts suggest that increasingly Black South African women have to enter into a dialogue with *multiple* and *changing* gender constructs as they try and negotiate their own location within the working world (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

4.4.1 *Changing gender constructs*

The following extract from Dudu's narrative confirms that while traditional gender constructs still exist and have an influence on the career development of Black South African women, these constructs are not fixed but are changing:

Dudu: In our... in our... in our culture it is very common, you find that in some other families they... just that the women is not supposed to... to... to study. It is only men that have to go to school and study, women to stay at home and hello

children, look after the house, that's the thing in our culture, that's a bad thing, but now I think they are starting to see that 'no those are old'.

Kerry: Change is happening...

Dudu: Changing now, but in, in early age like in our, when we are still young, some other families use to have this thing not to encourage the women to go school. No, but now, they really are starting now to see on the other way, yes, ja... ja... ja.

Miriam recounted in her narrative how her mother encouraged her children to study irrespective of their gender. Her narrative suggests that many Black South African parents embrace any opportunity for their children, male or female, to be educated as this suggests a better future for their children. Miriam explained how her mother had been very happy when she had been invited to get involved in the Saturday School programme:

Miriam: ... it was an answer to, I think even to my mother, to every problem that you could think of, because it got me away from the streets and during vacations we went to camps. She couldn't afford to send me to camps... it introduced me to things she wouldn't even think of getting me to do, you know.

Nonhlanhle argued that education was also changing what parents considered to be 'appropriate' for their female children, although she also recognised that these changes were not prevalent through-out Black African families:

Nonhlanhle: I can say that I was the lucky one because I had educated parents. Most of our parents at my age were not educated, so what they believed in, they believed that if you are a lady you must go up to standard five or standard four, once you... you know how to write a letter you just leave school. They didn't mind about the girl's education, they know that you have to go and fetch wood from the forests, fetch water, be a domestic lady and then what they really wanted from you was labola, they wanted those cows *only*. And for... for the boys, they were ones who were highly motivated for schools. So I think as from... late 80's some parents have

got that little element of education, but very little, because I remember even, even during the 1990's some of the parents didn't talk about educating there...

4.4.2 *Negotiating multiple gender constructs*

The above extracts suggest that gender constructs are changing within more collectivist cultures. The narratives of the women, however, also suggest that there is a tension between traditional and more contemporary gender constructs. Although Miriam was aware that her family supported her studies as a female child, she was not so convinced about the broader community's reaction:

Miriam: ... So my family, I don't think they had any doubt and they didn't treat me differently but the community, I know that um... I mean there are other people who believe that you don't take a girl child far in education because they are going to get married and all your money would have gone down the drain because they have to work for their husbands. You know that sort of mentality, although it is subsiding, but what I mean is... it is not as prevalent any more like it used to be, because I think people are changing now... but there are others that still believe that.

It is important to read the above extract against the background of traditional African beliefs which held and, in certain contexts, still do hold that it is unwise to educate a female child who would later get married and leave the family (Ansah, 1991). Miriam's narrative suggests that there is an ongoing negotiation between multiple gender narratives. On the one hand Miriam talks about her family both endorsing and encouraging her education. On the other hand she talks about the sense of responsibility that she has first and foremost for her family and community as a woman:

Miriam: ... because in our culture even if I am married, or I am learned and I am at this age working, I must still not forget about my mother. Mmm, look after your elders.

Further on in her narrative Miriam explains that although her mother had always encouraged her decision to study, it was clear that her mother believed that her ultimate commitment should be to her family:

Kerry: And your mom, is she very please with where you have gone and supportive of that? And your extended family?

Miriam: Ja she has, I mean she is... she... she is happy, and... um... and she has never stopped us from studying. I remember when I phoned her when I was starting Honours and I said to her 'I am going back to study', and she said 'oh, okay, just make sure that you take care of your family (laughs).

The above extract suggests that Black South African women may often feel torn between two worlds. On the one hand they are embedded in a collectivist culture that values connections and attachments to family, whilst on the other hand they also exist in a world that values independence and personal sacrifice in order to succeed (Mkhize et al., 1998). The tensions between two worlds are a potential area of conflict and confusion (Burr, 1995) for Black South African women. Makhosi's narrative further supports the idea that Black South African women have to negotiate a multitude of gender constructs in the process of their career development. Makhosi clearly had to work with a variety of alternative perceptions of what was expected of her as a Black African woman. She had to negotiate her position as a workingwomen with herself, her husband, her extended family *and* her community. The following extract illustrates her struggle with her desire to be of assistance to her community while at the same time wanting to be a 'good' mother for her family:

Kerry: And how is, how is... as a woman working in a career world and now taking on contracts like you do, um, how has your family responded to you. Perhaps your husband... as a woman working, is he happy with this?

Makhosi: Uh, he is happy, I try to make a balance...

Kerry: okay...

Makhosi: The family and the work I do, but times I just feel that I am being unfair to my family.

Kerry: Okay, do you feel that you are unfair or, or does your husband seem to feel that you need to put more focus on the family?

Makhosi: Ja, he does.

Kerry: Okay.

Makhosi: He does, and I also feel at times he feels as if I have neglected the children because most of the times I had to attend the parents evening and I, I am not available. I am not even at home, I am away on business.

The above extract confirms that gender still has a significant impact on the career development of Black South African women. The following extract further confirms this contention. It also illustrates how Black South African women have to carefully negotiate their career positions with significant others. Makhosi's mother-in-law assists her by coming to stay with her children when she goes away on business. Makhosi is, however, clearly aware that her mother-in-law is not in favour of Makhosi's life-style because it takes her away from her family:

Makhosi: And I have my, I mean my mother-in-law. If I am away and she comes... she... she lives in Ladysmith, she comes here not very often. She does come and if I am away... to her... it doesn't sound good that I am leaving her son here (talks slower), grandchildren... that I am gone, I am busy.

Kerry: Ja, another gender perception.

Makhosi: Yes

Kerry: Of what you as a woman...

Makhosi: Ja, she can't understand why, how... how I can do that.

Kerry: And it is funny because it sounds like you and your husband negotiated that.

Makhosi: Yes.

Kerry: And yet still she can't understand it?

Makhosi: Mmm, yes but then he can explain to his mother.

Thabisile's narrative illustrates how changing political and economic contexts may change the meaning of gender identity for individuals (Shefer, 1997). Due to financial difficulties Thabisile took on what was considered to be a 'man's job' in a factory because this was all that was available to her at the time. The following extract illustrates how on the one hand gender norms were challenged by Thabisile's circumstances, whilst on the other hand her mother was uncomfortable with, and directly resisted, these changes:

Thabisile: Oh, in 1993 I stayed at home until June, then in June I did a job, we were making furniture, but I wasn't qualified for it so they were teaching. I was the only lady in the factory for the guys. We were making tables and using all the machines

Kerry: And how did that go?

Thabisile: Oo... it was so difficult, at least I was a girl alone... sometimes the guys would favour me and say 'no, please do this, try to do something else'. But it was a really hard job, my hands were (lifts and clenches hands)...

Kerry: Sore?

Thabisile: Yes, like a man's. I worked there for five months and then my mom felt pity for me. Usually when I come home with my dirty clothes when I'd been doing the mechanics or whatever and the hands, 'no I think I will manage you, please sit down (laughs) I cannot see you like this...'

The above extracts suggest that group and cultural values around gender play an important role in the career development of Black South African women, more importantly the extracts highlight that career theory and practice needs to pay more attention to the cultural values, especially in their work with individuals from collectivist cultures (Mkhize et al. 1998).

4.5 Summary

The interpretations of the study have been discussed under the main themes that emerged. It has been shown that a number of contextual factors may significantly influence the career development of Black South African women. Various factors, including economic conditions, apartheid legislation and policy, cultural values and gender identities were seen as instrumental

in directing the career development of the women in this study. In addition, it has been shown that the narrative and hermeneutic approach is able to open up these contextual factors for exploration and understanding. This approach also makes it possible to identify and explore the tensions and conflicts that exist within the narratives of the women in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE, RESEARCH AND THEORY BUILDING

Chapter one expressed hope that this study would open up, for ongoing understanding, the complex and embedded meanings attached to the process of career development in South Africa. One of the anticipated outcomes of this study was that the narratives of the Black South African women would contribute to the building of more appropriate theories on career development (see section 1.4). This chapter will expand on the discussion of the interpretations in chapter four, in the form of recommendations for practice, research and theory-building. It is difficult to separate research, practice and theory-building implications, as there is considerable overlap between these three areas. For the purposes of this discussion an attempt will be made to discuss them separately. It should, however, be noted that there will be overlaps in the following discussion.

The discussion begins with recommendations for research and theory-building and then moves to recommendations for counselling practice. A call for structural and organisation changes that need to take place to support and enhance the career development of individuals living in South Africa or other changing contexts will then be discussed.

5.1 Recommendations for research and theory-building

The use of existing, positivist career assessment instruments needs to be reconsidered. The findings of this study suggests that career assessment instruments, like psychological testing, do not necessarily identify *innate* or *immutable* skills, strengths, interests, values, but rather reflect an individual's negotiation with societal expectations for career (Collin & Young, 1992). This recommendation highlights that new career assessment instruments are an urgent necessity. In order to develop these instruments it is argued that qualitative interviews, like those conducted in this study, should be had with Black men and women at various stages of career development. In addition to interviewing professional women, interviews need to be run with scholars, students, skilled/semi-skilled individuals, unskilled individuals and retired individuals. As

Mkhize et al. (1998) argue that, “this process then feeds back into the design of relevant instruments and, in the long run, theory building” (p. 12).

This study has also illustrated that the narrative and hermeneutic approach, rather than quantitative research approaches, enables researchers to “achieve an understanding of career in context and to recognize the impact and control of social institutions and socialization on the individuals experience” (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 7). Through the process of interpretation comes a greater awareness of cultural, political, institutional and social pressure. With this understanding comes the possibility of emancipation:

Without naively promising hope or envisioning it where there is none, it is important to recognize the interpretive stance as emancipatory. Through narrative, one is able to come closer to the truth of one’s life. (Collin & Young, 1992, p.11)

In addition to the possibility of emancipation, the narrative’s holistic and context-dependent characteristics provide the basis from which information and understandings can be collected and fed into the development of an indigenous career development theory in South Africa (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Stead & Watson, 1998, 1999). This study suggests that an indigenous theory developed in South Africa may be useful in other contexts with similar social parameters.

5.2 Recommendations for counselling practice

A number of practical implications follow from the interpretations and discussion in chapter four. This study has illustrated that the paradigm of ‘self-contained individualism’ that premises much of career guidance is not adequate to address the needs of Black South Africans who come from a predominately collectivist culture (Mkhize *et al.*, 1998). This study highlighted how cultural definitions of personhood (the concept of self in relation to others) and traditional gender values have a bearing on the career development of Black South African women. It is suggested that these indigenous notions of personhood need to be taken into account if counsellors are to render culturally appropriate and sensitive services (Naicker, 1994; Mkhize *et al.*, 1998). For example, this study suggests that Black South African women are situated within a certain

cultural narrative of realising oneself within the context of others and will thus often be interested in social occupations. These understandings need to be taken into cognisance by career counsellors working with individuals from collectivist backgrounds. Exploration of cultural values with one's client enables the client to understand how cultural self-understandings impact on, and influence, their career development. This provides the opportunity for emancipation, not from one's cultural background but from a *limited* understanding of one's career development. Such emancipation opens up, for exploration and consideration, a number of occupational opportunities. As Naicker (1994) suggests, counselling should be "directed toward helping students understand the personal, social, economic, and other related factors that have a bearing on the making of educational, vocational, and other personal life-decisions" (p. 27-28). Individuals need to be shown how personal preferences *and* social forces impact on their career paths.

While this study highlighted the importance of recognising the influence of collectivist values on career development, it also highlighted the importance of recognising that a changing South African context will result in individuals, from various backgrounds, reviewing and altering their beliefs and values regarding career development (Stead, 1998). This study suggested that Black South African women might feel torn between two different world-views. On the one hand they are located within a culture that values relatedness to significant others like family and community. On the other hand they spend much of their working time within a world that values autonomy and independence (Mkhize *et al.* 1998) in order to succeed. The study also illustrates the way in which Black South African women are increasingly having to negotiate with multiple, and sometimes conflicting, gender values. Mkhize *et al.* (1998) argue that the hiatus between these different world-views and values may place Black South Africans under enormous cognitive and emotional strain. This study confirmed that this might be the case with many Black South African women who are increasingly torn between traditional gender values and changing gender values in the working world. This negotiation between two sets of values has a definite bearing on the career development of Black South African women, and possibly men too. Career counsellors need to enable individuals to recognise and work with these tensions to construct a new world-view that is cognitively and emotionally manageable. In practice,

counsellors need to concentrate on how people frame their experiences in light of the socio-cultural and economic conditions in which they find themselves (Mkhize *et al.*, 1998). Career counsellors need to enable people “to come to grips with, understand, and cope with crucial personal and societal issues that are part of their daily experience” (Naicker, 1994, p. 28). In addition, Naicker (1994) recommends that career counsellors should be trained to establish a proper balance between perspectives, which emphasise individual values, and those that stress collective societal values.

This study has shown that many Black South African women have had to face many obstacles and changes in their career development. A remarkable finding of the study is that in the process of their development the women developed a positive and flexible attitude towards their changing environments and the difficulties they encountered. This attitude equipped these women to deal with change and ambiguity in their working environments. A positive attitude toward change meant that change became an opportunity in their lives, enabling personal career development (Gadamer, 1975). Stead (1996) proposed that Gelatt’s (1989) decision-making strategy of ‘positive uncertainty’ has promised in a rapidly changing contest such as South Africa. He suggests that adolescents be encouraged to develop this strategy of positive uncertainty so that they can creatively respond to changes in their environments in ways that enhance their career development. The findings of this study suggest that many Black South African women have developed such a strategy and that it has enhanced their career development. This study suggests that it is necessary for career counsellors to turn to new and appropriate decision-making frameworks. The findings in this study highlight how important it is to equip young people with appropriate decision-making skills. It is no longer appropriate for career counsellors to rely on rational, prescriptive decision-making frameworks that are only appropriate for individuals living in a context where the future is predictable and the present is changing in a comprehensible way (Gelatt, 1989). Individuals need to be taught to embrace career opportunities that may unexpectedly present themselves. In addition, they need to be taught how to make decisions in a changing and ambiguous environment (Stead, 1996).

It is suggested that narratives, like those in this study, can be used as case studies to prove to young people from disadvantaged backgrounds that the future need not always echo the past (Stead, 1996). Despite difficulties in their pasts, the women in these studies moved into more positive career paths. It is suggested that their stories can help individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to envision a future “and link current behaviours with anticipated future outcomes” (Stead, 1996).

5.3 The need for systemic and organisational changes

In addition to the above recommendations, this study has illustrated that there is a need for more systemic and structural changes to take place to support and enhance the career development of South Africans, in particular those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds. For example, this study illustrated the need for school counselling services at secondary institutions. None of the women in this study had access to career counselling while at school. Many of the women indicated that career counselling early in their career development would have made a huge difference to their career paths.

Historically career services and resources in South Africa have primarily addressed the needs of the privileged; it is therefore necessary to question this imbalance between the privileged and disadvantaged sections of the populations. It is not, however, as simple as offering *equal* career counselling and services across schools. In addition to motivating for the provision of career counselling services in all South African schools, it is argued that there has to be a critical examination of the current practices and assumptions on which career counselling in schools are based (Naicker, 1993). This points to the importance of developing and employing an indigenous approach as a way of understanding career psychology within the South African context (Stead & Watson, 1998a). The changing social and economic environments in South Africa demands that practical solutions to issues surrounding work are rooted in research that is culturally and contextually sensitive. In sum, it is argued that there is a need for relevant and appropriate career counselling services to be offered to learners in all schools in the South African context (Stead, 1996).

This study also highlights the way in which financial constraints have a direct impact on career development. It is argued that there needs to be an attempt at government level to eliminate poverty and to create more employment opportunities for South Africans. Stead (1996) argues that an economic policy is needed to address career development by improving the quality of primary and secondary education. In turn, these institutions will have to adjust to systems of learning that encourage curiosity, scepticism, and creativity rather than learning by rote.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has made certain recommendations based on the themes that emerged from the interpretation process. These recommendations can be summarised as follows:

- New and appropriate career research instruments need to be developed for use in the South African context.
- Narrative and hermeneutical research approaches need to be adopted to explore the influence of contextual factors (culture, gender, politics, economics) on the career development of Black South Africans.
- An indigenous career development theory needs to be developed and applied to South Africa.
- Cultural values need to be explored during career counselling.
- Career counsellors need to be trained to recognise and deal with the tension Black South African individuals may experience between collectivist and individualistic values.
- Gelatt's (1989) decision-making strategy of 'positive uncertainty' should be employed to enable young South Africans to cope with a changing context and working world.
- Narratives, like those collected in this study, should be used as informative case studies to help young South Africans to envision a future working world.
- Relevant and appropriate career counselling services and resources need to be offered to learners in all schools in South Africa.
- The quality of primary and secondary education needs to be improved.
- The government needs to put policies in place that will reduce poverty and increase employment opportunities.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The overarching purpose of this study was to demonstrate how a narrative and hermeneutic approach could open up for exploration a number of contextual factors that impact on career development. The study was a response to 1) the limited recognition of the impact of contextual factors (culture, gender, politics, economics) on career development and 2) an over-reliance on positivist research paradigms in career research. An objective of the study was that the interpretations of the narratives would provide valuable understanding that could be used to formulate recommendations for career practice, research and theory-building.

This study has illustrated that the individualistic paradigm that has informed much of career counselling research and practice in South Africa is too narrow. It has demonstrated that interpretivist research approaches can enable career researchers to develop indigenous career theories that take into account local narratives of what it means to be a person developing within a certain social and cultural context (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). It is argued that this study has contributed to the development of an indigenous approach by generating interpretations and meanings of career development from *South African data* that has been collected through an *appropriate* research method (Stead & Watson, 1999). Career research and counselling can no longer rely so heavily on Western models, which over-emphasises the importance of individualistic values (Naicker, 1994). This study has highlighted the need to develop research and counselling models that explore and take into account the values of individuals from more collectivist backgrounds.

An important finding during the process of interpretation was that most Black South African women might have to negotiate various possible identities. The interpretations suggest that during their career development may Black South African women have to take into account and negotiate multiple and often shifting meaning systems afforded to them by their cultural and social contexts (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). This study explored this process of negotiation and

argued that it is essential that career researchers and counsellors take cognisance of this in their practice.

In addition, this study has explored how a changing context impacts on career development. Economic, political and organisational changes that are taking place in South Africa are eroding norms that once allowed for longitudinal career readings. The women in this study have adjusted to such changes by developing a positive attitude towards change. Their narratives point to the importance of having a flexible career attitude and being able to concern oneself with the short term. These narratives challenge Holland's (1996) assumption that only career stability equals job satisfaction and happiness. They also challenge Super's (1963) theory that envisions a smooth, linear progression through several life stages. These findings add fuel to Collin's (2000) suggestion that encouraging people to seek out a stable and predictive career path is neither appropriate nor to the individuals advantage. Individuals rather need to be enabled to embrace change.

The use of narratives in this study has made it possible to explore the influence of contextual factors such as unemployment, financial constraints, career barriers, and the role of culture and gender on career development. It has, for example, explored the influence of gender constructs on the career development of Black South African women. It is argued that these understandings are essential if a South African gender-sensitive career theory is to be developed. This contributes to an understanding of the interplay between environmental and individual factors (Stead, 1996). It is argued that studies of this nature serve to compensate for career research that has largely omitted the role of such contextual factors in the process of career development. This study has illustrated how and individual's external contextual factors, the cultural environment in which they reside and the way in which they struggle with the options available to them, largely account for the direction of their career paths. It is argued that findings from qualitative studies that explore the impact of contextual factors, like this one, should be used in the formulation of new and more appropriate career theories in South Africa.

*Not only was the hermeneutical and narrative approach useful in exploring the role of various contextual factors on the career development of individuals, it was also useful in that it challenged the over-reliance of career researchers on quantitative career approaches, which are situated within a modernist framework. It is argued that more interpretivist (post-modern) research is needed to collect understandings that can contribute to the development of an indigenous career theory. Kim and Berry (1993) argue that the indigenisation of psychology underscores the employment of multiple research methods. *Stead and Watson (1998a) argue that there has been an over-reliance on quantitative research methods and minimal effort to use qualitative research methods. *Qualitative research methods give individuals an opportunity to expand on and explore in detail their career experiences. It is argued that this study has demonstrated that interpretivist research approaches are useful in collecting information that quantitative methods do not pick up, like tensions and conflicts within people's understandings of their lives.

More specifically the interpretations of the narratives in this study led to the discussion of four major themes, 1) contextualised career narratives, 2) positive non-directional career narratives, 3) the social embeddedness of the career narrative, and 4) gendered career development. Each of these themes were discussed in detail which in turn led to recommendations for career research, practice and theory-building.

In conclusion, it is hoped that other researchers will be encouraged to experiment with the narrative-based methodology of this study. It is hoped that future career research will use/develop the methodology of this study to investigate the career development of a variety of individuals at various stages of career development. Such studies will assist in further developing, refining and validating the methodology of this study (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). Hopefully, in the long run this will contribute toward the development of an appropriate and relevant career development theory in South Africa.

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APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Question:

Please will you tell me a story about how you arrived where you are now in terms of your career.

Probing Questions:

Depending on how the career narratives unravel, the following probing questions are anticipated:

- When do you think you first considered what career you would make?
- What other options or choices have you considered?
- What do you think motivated changes in your career path?
- Was there anything significant happening around you at the time you started thinking about a career choice (politically, in your family etc.)?
- In what ways do you think this 'time period' may have influenced your decision?
- What challenges or obstacles did you experience along the way?
- How did you overcome these obstacles?
- What/who assisted you in achieving your present career status?
- Who do you think influenced your career choice?
- Why do you think they, in particular, had an influence on your career choice?
- In what way did they influence your career decisions/choices?
- What did you feel your career choice would enable you to accomplish/achieve?
- What is it about the career you chose that motivated you to choose it?
- What was it about the other career choices you may have had in mind that motivated you to abandon them?
- What sort of conflicts did you (if you did) experience in the process of making your decisions?
- What does your career mean to you in your personal situation?
- What does your career mean to your family?
- What does your career mean to your community?