

# **A Narrative Exploration of the Social Implications of Career Choices by Indian South African Professionals**

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(Industrial Psychology), in the Graduate Programme in the School of Psychology, University of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the socio-economic factors that impacted the career narratives of South African Indian Professionals. A review of the literature suggested that traditional career theories viewed an individual in isolation of their context, allowing their career choice to be an independent decision. Further literature has, however, shown that with the constant evolution of an individual's context, their career choice was limited and promoted by factors in their environment which included, but were not limited to, the political era of the time, their access to education and the influences that their family provided.

This research drew upon two critical schools of thought, namely Social Constructionism and the Systems Theory Framework. These guided the research towards a qualitative research design that examined the career narratives of seven South African Indian professionals through semi-structured interviews conducted in the first half of 2017. In order to achieve the aims of the study, a thematic analysis, coupled with the voice-centred relation method was used to critically analyse the career narratives of these individuals. The results revealed three central themes, viz. Navigating Status: Exposure and Access; Construction of Self; and Family.

The manner in which the career choice of an individual was influenced existed external to the their self. The participants' environments dictated the manner in which they had access and exposure to information that informed their career choices. Beyond this, their environments impacted the manner in which they constructed their view of the self and

critical in this was that contrary to traditional career theory, their self was not created in isolation. In some instances, participants described the restrictive nature of elements within their environments but also highlighted potential buffers which included, but were not limited to, family support. The reflexive nature of the narratives allowed the participants to make these observations without being unduly influenced by the researcher.

Keywords: career theory, career choice, Indian professionals, narratives, Social Constructionism, self, voice-centred relation, South Africa.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Industrial Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

While career theories have had a relatively short history, the concept of career choice and development has developed dramatically over the past decade in order to adapt to the rapidly changing work environment (Chen, 1998). As a result, career theories have been developed around a variety of concepts and objectives that have enabled a healthy discourse around careers (Patton & McMahon (2006). In the advancements of career theories, however, theories have developed around a western paradigm and downplay the impact of context on the South African population (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). And Albien and Naidoo (2016) note that in post-Apartheid South Africa there is limited research that explores the influence of the wider social context on an individual's career choice.

The development of career theories in South Africa is widely influenced by the dynamic contextual nature of the environment in which individuals participate. Simultaneously interacting on an individual, the political and economic macro-environments play a crucial role upon an individual's decision-making abilities (Collin & Young, 1992; Watson, 2009).

This research gives a voice to Indian Professionals, so as to explore the nuances that are embedded in their ability to make career decisions. The intended exploration was to gain insight into the challenges that have been observed by these individuals, with the purpose being to highlight the impact of the wider social context on their career decisions. Indian professionals have been a largely ignored sample when it comes to career theory research.

The South African Indians present as a complex population whose livelihoods have evolved from being slaves during the emergent days of colonialism to being a buffer population between White and Black South Africans during apartheid, to now being considered 'Black' within the context and having to compete for resources as equal citizens no longer experiencing the perceived benefits that were given to them during Apartheid; such as quality of education and access to housing (Radhakrishnan, 2005).

## **1.2 South African Labour Arena**

With legislation such as the Mines and Works Act (Colour Bar Act) Act 25 of 1926; Manpower Training Act 56 of 1981; Guidance and Placement Act 62 of 1981; and the Indian Education Act 47 of 1963; the labour arena was largely segmented along racial lines. These legislations meant that skilled employment and meaningful education was reserved for White South Africans, with non-White South Africans being used as unskilled or semi-skilled labour (Albien & Naidoo, 2016). Furthermore, apartheid legislation limited the movement and exposure to knowledge by and from individuals (Watson, 2009). By dictating to and limiting these factors the apartheid government was able to curtail the career choices of individuals by controlling the environment in which they existed (Stead & Watson, 2006).

In contrast, the government in post-Apartheid South Africa recognised the urgent need to democratise the economic environment so that South Africa could be seen as competitive and legitimate in a global market (Albien & Naidoo, 2016). To this end, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 enshrined non-discrimination; non-racialism; and freedom and equality. As a result, the career choice of an individual is not limited within the confines of restrictive legislation.

The Constitution (1996) gave rise to the expression of the South African Labour Legislative Framework which aims at increasing the employability of all South Africans, as well as ensuring the protection of workers. Briefly, the following legislative pieces speak to the reshaping and democratising of the labour arena:

- The Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995; aims to advance social justice, economic development and democratising the workplace;
- The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 75 of 1997; aims to advance the social justice of employees within the workplace;
- The Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998; aims at achieving equity in the workplace and giving expression and support to the Constitution.

The above legislative Acts aim at addressing the restrictive labour arena of the apartheid era, by allowing for a diversified workforce and further allowing for a more permeable barrier between individuals and the employment market. The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 addresses the skills deficit that many non-White South Africans were subjected to (Wolpe, 1995). The Act specifically addresses the following:

- Increases the investment in individuals with regards to improving their skills so as to make them more employable;
- Regulates employment services in the market;
- Encourages employers to emphasise skills development amongst staff;
- Improves and encourages the focus on strategic skills development.

These inclusive legislative changes have resulted in significant changes in the economic arena (Albien & Naidoo, 2016). Between 1995 and 2002 the labour market grew by a tremendous 16 per cent as more individuals were allowed entrance into markets which they were historically barred from (Macleod, 2004; Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2005). Recent figures show that 72.9 per cent of the South African population are employed in both the formal and informal industries, with the White and Indian population dominating the skilled arena of employment (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

Furthermore, of the Indian population employed, 49.5 per cent contribute to the skilled labour market (Statistics South Africa, 2016). However, two decades after democracy South African society is still marred by divisions around inequality and the resultant effect is a disparate context wherein the majority of the population find themselves living in a third-world context, with an incomparable proportion enjoying a first-world-like context (Albien & Naidoo, 2016).

The increase in the employability of non-White South Africans has placed a spotlight on current career theories' ability to adequately consider factors that may affect an individual's career choice and as a result leaves the field marginally inadequate in addressing specific career-related issues such as choice (Albien & Naidoo, 2016; Maree, 2009; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Watson & Stead, 2002).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Traditional career theories place emphasis on an individual and fail to recognise social influences which the individual has limited control over (Stead & Watson, 2002). Career choice is not purely intrinsic but is influenced by an individual's relations with others and by

the manner in which their social reality is constructed (Burr, 1995; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Savickas, 2002). These influence and impact on an individual's decisions that are related to their career and shape the manner in which an individual views their career or career path (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Maree, 2009).

While there is renewed energy in redefining careers, there remains a tendency towards positivistic approaches when developing career theory, with traditional methods still being prevalent (Cohen, Duberley & Mallon, 2004). Furthermore, career theories remain embedded in the notion of being prescriptive rather than descriptive (Blustein, Schultheiss & Flum, 2004). In being prescriptive, career theories have failed to recognise the individual as a social agent in the career making process and rely heavily on the prescriptive laws that are embodied within the positivist framework of the social sciences (Chinyamurindi, 2012; Savickas, 2005; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Watson, 2009).

This has resulted in a slow movement away from the individual being viewed as a purely autonomous agent to one that looks at the individual as being part of an interactive environment in which development, meanings of reality and career choice are influenced (Burr, 1995; Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Savickas, 2002, 2005).

## **1.4 Study Aim**

The aim of this study is to understand some of the contextual issues that affect a sample of South African Indian Professionals' career choices. In doing so, an extension of this aim is to contribute to the growing discourse around holistic and contextual career theories.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The specific questions investigated are:

1. What are some of the prominent contextual factors which influence Indian South African Professionals' career choices?
2. How have social factors, such as family and education (to name a few), influenced career choice amongst Indian South African Professionals?
3. What are the implications of these social factors (for example, family and education)?

## **1.6 Chapter Demarcation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. An introduction (Chapter One), a theoretical component (Chapter Two), an empirical component (Chapter Three and Chapter Four) and a Conclusion (Chapter Five).

### **1.6.1 Chapter One: Introduction**

An introduction is provided to the reader in terms of the current labour arena within the South African context. The limited applicability of current career theory within the South African context is discussed, following which the study aim and research questions investigated in the current study are provided.

### **1.6.2 Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

The chapter comprises a literature review and the theoretical framework that is adopted in this study. A review of literature is presented in line with the research aims of this study. The reader is provided with a succinct understanding of the arrival of Indians in South Africa, as well as an in-depth exploration of the use of career theories within the South African context.

In this, a critical analysis on the adoption of career theories is explored, concluding with factors that traditional theories have ignored. Furthermore, a discussion of the theoretical framework adopted within this study is explored in relation to the literature, specifically Social Constructionism and the Systems Theory Framework

### **1.6.3 Chapter Three: Methodology**

The research methodology adopted by the current study is discussed in terms of: the research questions explored; the study design; the sampling technique; data collection and analysis methods; and the ethical considerations that are considered during the study.

### **1.6.4 Chapter Four: Results and Discussion**

A qualitative analysis of the results is presented in this chapter. The reader will be exposed to these results in a manner which incorporates the theoretical underpinning of the study, and in relation to the empirical literature that has been presented in Chapter Two.

### **1.6.5 Chapter Five: Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations**

The reader is provided with a succinct understanding of the conclusions drawn in the study. The conclusions provide the basis for recommendations for future studies and the limitations experienced in the current study are explored.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter consists of two components. The first component is a review of literature. This looks at the historical arrival of Indians in South Africa, a critical review of career theory in the context of South Africa and the social factors that may impact the career decision making process. The second component is an examination of the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study viz. Social Constructionism and the Systems Theory Framework. The assumptions of these frameworks will be discussed in relation to the literature and their relevance to the aims of the study's research which have been highlighted in Chapter One.

#### **2.2 Literature Review**

##### *2.2.1 The South African Indian*

At the advent of democracy, South Africa was praised for being an all-encompassing rainbow nation wherein equal opportunity existed for all. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, aimed to ensure that previously disadvantaged individuals, with their distinct racial and cultural identity, would be unified towards fostering a national identity of unity (Radhakrishnan, 2005). Indians in South Africa, however, experienced a unique transition; on the one hand, they were recognised as citizens of the Republic but on the other hand, their position of being the economic buffer between White and African South Africans was stripped away (Bhana, 2008).

The emergence of Indians in South Africa has been a well-documented occurrence (Hughes, 2007). The understanding that the Indian population within itself existed as a diverse population with its vast languages, class systems and religions (Radhakrishnan, 2005). That is, they existed as a heterogeneous group of individuals which were forced to exist as a homogenous group under the Colonial and Apartheid systems. The arrival of the first Indians in South Africa occurred in two stages: Indentured Labourers between 1853 and 1860, and the arrival of staggered Passenger Indians post 1880 that were brought in as merchants to serve the growing Indentured Labourer population (Vahed, 2000).

#### *2.2.1.1. Indentured Labourers*

The indentured labour system provided labour in the form of slavery to the British Colony, which was directed at supporting the agricultural hub of Natal and as a solution to the demands that were beginning to emerge amongst native Black South Africans (Hughes, 2007). The majority of indentured labourers were male, with the Indian Government of the time dictating a 10:4 ratio of females to males (Vahed, 2000). Besides being slaves, these labourers were both unskilled and illiterate (Bhana, 2008).

Beall (1990) notes that these individuals were often outcasts in their native India, with indentured females often being widowed and sickly. Literature has been critical of the health and status of indentured labourers, especially amongst the female cohort (Beall, 1990; Freund, 1995). Female indentured labourers were subjected to low wages, prostitution and dominant Indian patriarchal customs which left them disempowered and dependent on their male counterparts (Freund, 1995).

### *2.2.1.2 Merchants*

By 1890 there were more than 80 000 documented Indians working in Natal and as a result, British Colonialists in South Africa were unable to meet the trading demands of these labourers, and this paved the way for the emergence of Indian merchants in Natal (Bhana, 2008). The difference between these groups of individuals was that the merchants were not brought in as indentured labourers; they were a mix of professional and financially viable individuals (Bhana, 2008; Vahed, 2000).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the caste system that existed in native India dictated and guided the movement of Indians to South Africa (Bhana, 2008). That is, indentured labourers were of lower class and consisted of mainly south Indian individuals; whilst merchant Indians were of a higher class and came from north Indian regions (Bhana, 2008).

Due to this dynamic, Bhana (2008) finds that this segregation persists in post-Apartheid South Africa, where South African Indians of south Indian descent are amongst the lowest income bracket with few career opportunities existing for them. With this recognition, Ferrante (2008) goes on to argue that the caste segregation that existed amongst the Indian community has played a crucial role in the upward trajectory of South African Indians. As a result, the education and lifestyle of South African Indians were and are defined by the social class and caste to which they belonged, with 'Passenger Indians' experiencing a greater level of upward mobility (Bhana, 2008; Ferrante, 2008).

### *2.2.1.3 The Homogenous South African Indian*

With two distinct Indian cohorts arriving in South Africa, it was seemingly impossible for the state to give recognition to the diversity that existed amongst the Indian population and

consequently the homogenous Asiatic/Indian became the relevant classification that distinguished these individuals from the native African population (Radhakrishnan, 2005). While Indians existed in a subordinate position to their White counterparts, they experienced a superior position in this hierarchy to Africans (Bhana, 2008; Ferrante, 2008). Of importance with this observation of the arrivals of Indians is the forced homogeneity through the Group Areas Act which placed Indians as the symbolic buffer population between Whites and Africans (Xaba, 2001). The Group Areas Act fostered townships in which the Indian population created a unique identity around class and language and fostered a sense of superiority amongst the Indian communities (Radhakrishnan, 2005).

Consequently, and of relevance to the current study, Indian South Africans were exposed to relatively better resources around education, housing and opportunities (Radhakrishnan, 2005). To this end, the career choices of Indian South Africans, while still limited, allowed for a level of exploration into roles that were financially sustainable. This unique position, however, played out as a catch-22 situation for South African Indians at the dawn of democracy, with Desai (1996) reporting that the majority of Indian South Africans voted against the African National Congress during the first election. Radhakrishnan (2005) finds that in democratic South Africa, a large proportion of poor Indians must now contend for resources, with the majority feeling left-out while on the other end of the spectrum, highly-educated Indians are faced with the challenge of finding employment because of equal-opportunity legislation such as Affirmative Action.

Thus, this unique existence of the South African Indians calls to light the relevance of career theory in understanding the Indian experience. Add to this the limited research on the career

choices of South African Indians then the current study finds relevance in understanding career theory within South Africa and the ability of it to understand South African Indians.

### *2.2.2 Historical Context: Career Theory in South Africa*

Career theories provide a lens through which one can understand and hypothesise behaviour and career choice (Stead & Watson, 2006). In doing so, one is able to predict the possible future implications of a current choice. Historically, research into career development and career choice has been subject to the epistemological assumptions of the positivist era where significance lies in the ability to show objective proof, the ability to use scientific measurement and for linear progression to exist in an observable manner (McMahon, 2014; Savickas, 2002; Watson, 2006).

The transition from an Apartheid governed state to that of a democratic state ushered in an important era of transformation for South Africa. This period brought forward dramatic micro- and macro- environmental changes (Albien & Naidoo, 2016). Through this period of transformation, a spotlight was put on the field of psychology; with a common recognition that psychology within the South African context was less progressive and ignorant of the relationship between individuals and the wider social context (Albien & Naidoo, 2016; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Stauble, 2007; Watson & Stead, 2002).

Fundamental to the above was the question of the extent to which individuals were divorced from their cultural exposure, the extent to which they were able to form meaningful views of their environment and the extent to which their individual subjectivity played a role (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Watson & Stead, 2002).

Traditional approaches, notwithstanding their unequivocal contribution to the field of career psychology, have been shown to be limited in their ability to respond to the complexities of the 21st century (McMahon & Watson, 2009). The growing knowledge economy, globalisation, advancements in technology and the diversification of the workforce resulted in a resurgence of career research as traditional understandings of careers were becoming more and more inconsistent with the changes that were observed (Maree, 2009; Watson, 2009; Zunker, 2006).

From inception, the field of career psychology and career theory has often been reactive to the demands of the macro- and micro- environments in which organisations and individuals participated (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007; Prilleltensky, 1994; Zunker, 2006). As a result, the field of career psychology and its' allegiance to the epistemological assumptions of both the modernist era and the context in which it exists have often been criticised for maintaining and promulgating socio-political norms, to the detriment of marginalised groups of individuals (Moore, 2003).

At the very least, career psychology and mainstream theory reflects the moral and cultural beliefs of a particular context at both a practical and theoretical level (Baloyi, 2008) and is limited in applicability across factors such as gender, culture and socioeconomic factors, especially across indigenous people who may have their own interpretations of psychological constructs (Moore, 2003; Watson, 2009).

The assumption that positivistic-epistemologically-generated knowledge is the only form of legitimate knowing has resulted in the adoption of career theories that are not only blind to non-western human experience but which devalue the lived experiences that exist outside the

understanding of western thought (Baloyi, 2008). Staeuble (2007, p. 89) makes the same observation in stating that the "... dominant mode of psychological knowledge production has effectively marginalised, subalternised, or even precluded alternative modes of knowing".

In understanding the development of psychology and psychological constructs within the South African context, cognisance must be given to the acknowledgement that this was not a development; it was merely an import to South Africa which served at the behest of the governing authorities of the time (Louw & van Hoorn, 1997; Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998).

Given South Africa's Colonial and Apartheid past, psychology was seen as a legitimate tool of knowledge production around matters of racial segregation and domination (Seedat & Mackenzie, 2008). Louw and van Hoorn (1997) identified three components that psychological practices operated within: repression, segregation and assimilation of various races in line with their White counterparts; with segregation being the dominant component of psychological practice.

Racism was at the forefront of western psychological practices (Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008). While legislation was instrumental in the segregation of racial groups in South Africa, psychology provided a legitimate foundation wherein these laws were passed. The argument that existed was that White South Africans were fundamentally different in terms of their intellect and ability, and therefore they were required to be treated differently (Louw & van Hoorn, 1998).

Psychologists were tasked to scientifically prove this difference, with literature noting that in ability tests non-White South Africans performed at intellectual levels lower than their White counterpart's due to: the manner in which the constructs assessed mental ability; the fact that the majority of Black individuals were illiterate; and that the non-White experience in South Africa was fundamentally different to the that of White South Africans (Baloyi, 2008; Hammersmith, 2007). This exclusionary nature of psychological practices neglected to acknowledge the multicultural and diverse economic context that the Colonial and Apartheid state had created amongst the Indian population (Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008). "Psychology offered rationalisations for the oppression of Black people all over the world over, and helped to transform the mission of social sciences into an enterprise of acculturation, conquest and conversion" (Seedat & MacKenzie, 2008, p. 86-87).

Apart from the criticism levied against the use of western approaches in promulgating the segregation of minority groups; the adoption of western approaches within a South African context has failed to acknowledge the separation between observable traits and the unobservable subjective experiences of individuals (Stead & Watson, 2006; Stoljar, 2010). While South Africa has undergone a dramatic change since the transition to a democratic state, much of career theory and psychological constructs used to understand career theory are still embedded in western approaches (Stead & Watson, 2006).

Consequently, career theory shows limited applicability to cultural, gendered and socioeconomically diverse groups of individuals. Research that explores the fundamental constructs of career theory has been limited within the context of South Africa (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2012). In a study conducted by Schreuder and Coetzee (2010), 233 research articles within the ambit of career psychology were analysed to understand the key themes that were



explored between 1950 and 2008. The figure 2.1 below outlines these key themes (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2012, p. 4):

<b>Time period</b>	<b>Dominant themes</b>
1950–1959	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality and occupational adjustment</li> </ul>
1960–1969	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retirement planning</li> <li>• Vocational guidance</li> <li>• Role conflict (career women)</li> </ul>
1970–1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career stages</li> <li>• Occupational choices of women</li> <li>• Career counselling of Black people</li> <li>• Career mobility of Black people and graduates</li> </ul>
1980–1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career planning and development</li> <li>• Career advancement</li> <li>• Mid-career transition</li> <li>• Quality of work life</li> <li>• Organisational choice and personality</li> <li>• Occupational concerns, needs and aspirations of women</li> <li>• Work-home interface</li> <li>• Career orientations</li> <li>• Leadership styles</li> <li>• Promotion of Black managers</li> <li>• Black advancement</li> <li>• Person-job match</li> <li>• Self-concept (Black executives)</li> <li>• Time orientation, psychological depth orientation and occupational choice</li> </ul>
1990–1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentorship and coaching (women)</li> <li>• Job hunting skills (graduates)</li> <li>• Career exploration</li> <li>• Career self-management</li> <li>• Career advancement (Black people and women)</li> <li>• Job insecurity</li> <li>• Personality and careers</li> <li>• Career resilience</li> <li>• Career patterns and career orientations &amp; personality</li> <li>• Career maturity</li> <li>• Career expectations</li> <li>• Career salience</li> <li>• Career adjustment</li> <li>• Meaning of work</li> <li>• Qualifications and career success</li> <li>• Employability of graduates</li> <li>• Employee opinions of the psychological contract</li> <li>• Job loss and outplacement</li> <li>• Learning styles and occupational choice</li> </ul>
2000–2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological career resources</li> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Career orientations</li> <li>• Work-home interface</li> <li>• Work-life balance</li> <li>• Job insecurity</li> <li>• Career maturity</li> <li>• Career success and satisfaction</li> <li>• Career advancement</li> <li>• Career development</li> <li>• Job loss</li> <li>• Working women</li> <li>• Work experiences of gay people</li> <li>• Personality and career preferences</li> </ul>

*Figure 1: Overview of Career Psychology Research between 1950 and 2008*

Though the figure represents research revolving around career constructs, it represents only 10 per cent of the industrial and organisational psychology research (Schreuder & Coetzee,

2010). This observation is further supported by Watson (2009) who notes that when research around career psychology is conducted, emphasis is placed on the construction and deconstruction of the field from an epistemological underpinning and focus is placed on the limitations of the Apartheid system on the development of career psychology, with little emphasis being placed on career constructs themselves.

In moving forward, it is acknowledged that there needs to be a shift in the epistemological underpinnings of career theory so that a holistic view, beyond the realms of a purely quantitative approach, can be explored. However, this paradigm shift will only occur with the complete recognition that the two most prominently used career theories within the South African context, viz. John Holland's (1959) Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments and Donald Super's (1957) Life Span Approach, fall within the criticisms of adopted western approaches (Stead & Watson, 2006).

### *2.2.3 John Holland: Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments*

In generating knowledge around career development, assessment and career practice, John Holland has contributed insurmountably to the field of career psychology (Nauta, 2010). Holland's (1959) theory is based on the following assumptions:

1. In our culture, most persons can be categorised as one of six types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, or Conventional (RIASEC).
2. There are six model environments: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, or Conventional (RIASEC).
3. People search for environments that will let them exercise their skills and abilities, express their attitudes and values, and take on agreeable problems and roles.

4. Behaviour is determined by an interaction between personality and environment.

(Holland, 1997, p.4)

#### *2.2.3.1 Theoretical Foundation: Limited Applicability to the South African Context*

The central focus of Holland's theory (1959) is the inter-relationship between an individual's personality type and their working environment. Each personality type is characterised by a set of preferred beliefs, values and activities (Nauta, 2010; Zunker, 2006). An individual can thus be categorised according to a Holland code, which is usually the first three personality types configured through RIASEC and obtained through assessments (Self-Directed Search) (Holland, 1959; 1997). An individual's unique code can then be aligned to an environment in an objective manner so as to allow the individual to thrive in an environment that would best suit their personality (Holland, 1997). In support of his theory Holland (1997) postulates four constructs in which the relationship can be interpreted.

Firstly, the concept of congruence that relates to a person-environment fit. That is, an individual's personality that is shaped by their identity is in direct correlation to the vocational interest (environment), resulting in either job satisfaction and stability or job dissatisfaction and instability; depending on the level of congruence (Holland, 1997).

Secondly, the concept of consistency refers to the similarity between personality types and environments. High levels of consistency are seen when an individual identifies with environments that have similar traits. Thus, high levels of consistency provide for a strong prediction of career choice (Holland, 1997).

Thirdly, the concept of differentiation is important because it refers to whether or not there is a clearly defined relationship between an individual and a single environment type (Holland,

1997). The interaction between a decisive personality type and an equally defined environment is differentiated and provides the highest predictive value for the career choice of an individual (Holland, 1997).

A fundamental reliance of Holland's (1959; 1997) is the relationship exhibited between an individual's personality and the environment (Nauta, 2010). There have been multiple studies conducted to empirically validate Holland's typology codes. Spokane, Meier and Catalano (2000), in their review of Holland's codes, have identified numerous studies that have been published since 1985 that have aimed at validating Holland's codes. However, because of the lack of South African research in career theories, there is limited support to explain the popularity and validity of Holland's codes within the South African context (Watson, 2009).

Furthermore, Holland (1959) bases his view of the above constructs on the positivist epistemological assumption that individuals are able to move freely within an environment, ignoring the impact that dominant ideology has on the environment (Kazi, 2010; Miller, 1997; Zunker, 2006). Through dominant ideology, individuals then become victim to the environment in which they find themselves; and their goals, their participation in the economy and their roles as individuals either facilitates their career decision-making process or hinders it (Chen, 1998; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Prilleltensky, 2008).

Through legislative measures such as: the Mines and Works Act (Colour Bar Act) Act 25 of 1926; the Manpower Training Act 56 of 1981; the Guidance and Placement Act 62 of 1981; and the Indian Education Act 47 of 1963; the Apartheid government was able to restrict the movements of Indian South Africans across the elements of education and occupations. In this scenario Holland's (1959) theory fails to consider that an individual may not exist as a

free agent within the environment but is rather governed by restrictive ideologies which may be present (Kazi, 2010). Not neglecting the removal of restrictive legislation in democratic South Africa, Bhana (2008) and Vahed (2000) also note that the pervasive nature of Apartheid remains evident within the South African Indian population, resulting in limited upward mobility due to factors including their financial background and cultural mentality.

The final construct of Holland (1997), the concept of vocational identity, refers to the decisive nature of an individual, in which the individual has a clear understanding of their characteristics and goals. In saying that, Holland (1992) acknowledges that an individual's identity and preferences towards a particular behaviour or activity are as a result of the interaction between the individual and their environment resulting, in a "personal disposition that leads him or her to think, perceive, and act in special ways" (Holland, 1992, p. 2).

Research has found, however, that Holland's (1992) assertion of vocational identity has demonstrated no significant relationship between the consistency and differentiation construct with regards to the RIASEC profiles (Nauta, 2010). The manner in which western theory views identity construction in isolation from the environment has limited the understanding of the manner in which an individual makes a career decision (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). More specifically, Holland (1992) has been criticised for viewing identity as superficial and provides limited explanation in his definition of the construct (Chen, 1998; Patton & McMahon, 2006 Sharf, 2002).

Identities are socially, culturally and institutionally assigned, informed and produced by discourse in which the subject becomes defined (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). Identities are

often internalised by the subject, become an expression of their self and are understood contextually (Bujold, 2004; Rutherford, 1990).

Where western thought believes this to be an inherent need for an individual to develop a distinct separateness from others so that they can identify and express their unique characteristics (Yang & Lu, 2007), qualitative approaches guide individuals towards emphasising their connectedness within their culture (Edwards, 2011; Yang & Lu, 2007). In doing so, the self is seen in relation to social relationships, however, the conceptualisation of self within a qualitative approach is not purely limited to the connectedness of individuals. The self here is understood as including familial and universal ancestors, as well as nature (Edwards, 2011). In view of this, Holland (1992) failed to acknowledge the forced homogenous identity which the Group Areas Act had imposed on South African Indians by architecting an Indian community which was distinctly diverse in-terms of their race, language and class (Radhakrishnan, 2005).

Thus, the application of Holland's (1992) view on vocational identities assumes that an individual exists within a contextual vacuum, thus placing little to no emphasis on the interdependent nature of minority groups (Mhkize & Frizelle, 2000; Stead & Watson, 2006; Watson, 2009).

#### *2.2.3.2 Expression and Limitation through Self-Directed Search Interest Inventory*

The manner in which Holland's theory finds expression is through the Self-Directed Search (SDS) Interest Inventory (Holland, Fritzsche & Powell, 1994) and the Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996), research around the applicability of which has been limited in the South African context. When the SDS has been researched,

there has been a tendency for the research to focus on White males, with a disproportionate exploration of non-White South Africans (Watson & McMahon, 2004).

The SDS has also shown a tendency towards being gender biased in that females are identified as being suited for ‘softer’ occupational roles (Nel, 1999). In defence of this, Holland (1992) argues that this reflects the context that females find themselves in as a result of the pervasive nature that patriarchal societies have on the limitation of females within the environment (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Consequently, the SDS by design is inherently disadvantageous to South African Indian females as the Indian community is considered to be notoriously patriarchal (Bhana, 2008).

An alarming criticism of the SDS and its’ applicability to the South African context is found in a study conducted by Van der Merwe, Le Roux, Meyer and Van Niekerk (1990), which notes that the adapted version of the Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes (Taljaard & von Mollendorf, 1987) is significant to only 12 per cent of occupations within the South African context when aligning the RIASEC model.

The current study finds it concerning that more than 20 years after these discoveries were made the SDS is still widely used within the South African context by career counsellors and career practitioners to guide the career decision making process of an individual (Stead & Watson, 2006).

#### *2.2.4 Donald Super: Self-concept Theory of Career Development*

Similar to the popularity of John Holland within the South African context, Super's (1969, 1980, 1990) theory around life stages and life spaces has been a prominent feature in understanding the career choice and development of individuals (Stead & Watson, 2006). However, where Holland's theory has been criticised for neglecting to consider the impact of the wider social context, Super's (1969, 1980, 1990) theory has addressed this by acknowledging that context has an impact on the values and needs of an individual.

Super (1990) argues that the development of an individual's self-concept influences the implementation of an individual's career choice. For the development of an individual's self-concept, Super (1990) proposes the Life Stage Developmental Framework which looks at the transition of an individual through various life stages and the successful progression through these phases being consequent to an individual's career choice (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006).

Specifically, Super identifies five stages of career development through an individual's lifespan (Leung, 2008):

1. Growth Stage (birth – 15 years): an individual develops their interests and outlook on life (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006);
2. Exploratory Stage (15 years – 25 years): an individual navigates the choices they have made and no definitive career choice is made yet (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006);
3. Establishment Stage (25 years – 44 years): an individual locates a definitive career through trying various career options (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006);
4. Maintenance Stage (45 years – 64 years): an individual establishes themselves as an expert within the chosen field (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006);



5. Decline Stage (65 years – death): a reflective stage in an individual's life (Leung, 2008; Zunker, 2006).

In support of the above, the manner in which an individual is seen as successfully manoeuvring through each life stage occurs in accordance to three task specific behaviours which lead to career maturity (the degree of success), this involves: (i) crystallisation, which is the cognitive process of identifying and understanding an individual's skills and values; (ii) specification, wherein an individual is tasked with making a career decision based on the crystallisation process; (iii) implementation, the active participation of the individual in achieving success in their career choice (Leung, 2008).

While Super (1969, 1980, 1990) acknowledges the impact of the wider social context on an individual's development of self-concept through the Growth Stage, this is done in a manner which suggests that the impact of context on an individual positions the individual within a context that promotes growth and exposure (Leung & Chen, 2009). However, little acknowledgement is given to the repressive nature of context and little consideration is given to the role of diverse cultures wherein career choices are subjected to the approval of the family that the individual exists in (Leung, 2008; Miller & Brown, 2005). As a consequence of this, Super (1969, 1980, 1990) has limited applicability to the diverse South African Indian population which exists as diversities based on class, language and tradition (Bhana, 2008).

In addition, and with similarity to Holland (1992), Super assumes that an individual exists as a free agent within their context (Kazi, 2010; Zunker, 2006). By way of re-iteration, with legislative measures such as the Mines and Works Act (Colour Bar Act) Act 25 of 1926; the Manpower Training Act 56 of 1981; the Guidance and Placement Act 62 of 1981; and the

Indian Education Act 47 of 1963, the Apartheid government was able to restrict the movements of Indian South Africans across elements of education and occupations. Not neglecting the removal of restrictive legislation in democratic South Africa, Bhana (2008) notes that the pervasive nature of Apartheid remains evident within the South African Indian population, resulting in limited upward mobility due to factors including their financial background and caste-like cultural mentality.

Furthermore, given the changing nature of work; the increased exposure of individuals to information; the complex economic climate and the staggering unemployment rates within South Africa (Albien & Naidoo, 2016; McMahon & Watson, 2009), Super's (1990) view that the career decision making process is a static and linear process presents as a challenge within the South African context.

With recognition of the failures of western theory to adequately account for the South African experience, academics have been searching for a sustainable alternative and to this end, qualitative approaches to career psychology have been a prominent force within advancing career theory in the South African context (Stead & Watson, 2002).

#### *2.2.5 Contextual Understandings of Career Psychology*

The development of new theoretical approaches that look at individual narratives and social constructions, as well as hermeneutical approaches have offered attempts at moving away from positivist approaches to career theory and the reliance on psychometric assessments to guide career choice (Collin & Young, 1992; Kuit & Watson, 2005; Mkhize, 2005; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000).

Encouragingly, recent resurgences within the field of career psychology in South Africa have tended towards focusing on creative qualitative approaches to career psychology that find expression through the cultural nuances of an individual (McMahon, 2014). However, in the drive towards observing the implications of culture on career theory the field has placed too much emphasis on culture, where research looks at culture from a superficial level, ignoring themes such as role construction, economic oppression and power dynamics (Daya, 2001; Edwards, 2011; Moodley, 2007).

While there has been limited research conducted in the pursuit of an holistic qualitative approach to career theory, Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) have pointed to the rapid adoption of qualitative methods in career psychology in an attempt to understand the career decisions of South Africans. Social constructionism approaches have been largely adopted in career theory to understand the complex relationship that exists between an individual and their environment (McMahon, 2014). As a result, qualitative approaches to career theory move career theory into the realm of understanding the subjective experiences of an individual (Patton & McMahon, 2006).

#### *2.2.5.1 Family: Expectation, Needs and Gendered-Roles*

The most significant external factors influencing the career decision-making of an individual are the needs of their family and the expectations that are brought with them. While the family may be external to the individual: the values, skills and interests of the family become indoctrinated through the development of an individual from birth (Chen, 1998; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Savickas, 2013).

This dynamic then places immense pressure on the career choice of an individual, from their first job requiring financial stability to the long-term career choices that require both financial stability and familial stability (Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990). In addition, Miller and Brown (2005) support this by stating that within non-European societies an individual's parents already decide upon their career even before the individual begins identifying with their own career aspirations.

In a study conducted by Agarwala (2008) on the career choice of Indian MBA students, it was found that the collectivism nature of Indian culture plays a crucial role in career choice because this creates an environment in which parents provide dominating views of the career choice of an individual, to the extent that due to a father's position in a patriarchal society a student's decision is then based on the successes of the father within that context. Thus, an individual's career choice is based on the perceived successes of an occupation through their interaction with the family. Foucauldian thought (Foucault, 1980) lends support to this in that an individual through their interaction with various artefacts in a society internalises traits and perceptions of success.

Parents, and to a larger degree – the family, become idolised by children; to the extent that these figures are seen as role models by the individual. Due to the context of disadvantaged communities or existing in societies that are limited, many South African students have come to witness more failure and stagnation in careers than success (Swanson & Fouad, 1999). In a study conducted by Buthelezi, Alexander and Seabi (2009), it was found that there exists a strong relation between a role model and the career aspirations of an individual. The extent of the relationship is impacted by the role model's views on career barriers, their career indecisiveness and their perception of success (Buthelezi et al., 2009). The implication of this

is that the individual internalises these observations and bases their own career choice and aspirations on this.

Furthermore, the parents' occupational environment has an effect on their values and beliefs and in turn shapes the parenting styles of the individual, to the extent that the individual becomes indoctrinated towards the beliefs of the parents (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002). Individuals, then, tend to develop occupational preferences that are aligned to their same-sex parents (Ryu & Mortimer, 1996).

An extension of this alignment is found by Perry-Jenkins, Repetti and Crouter (2000) who have found that career decisions that individuals make are largely influenced by the gender roles they hold in society, or have been used to label the individuals; and, while traditional theory ignores the social connotations that are attached to gendered roles in patriarchal societies, the implications of the gendered identity plays a crucial role in terms of career choice (la Rey & Merle, 1999; Marome, 2005; Moodley, 2007).

Within patriarchal societies, man is viewed as the powerful masculine figure that is the protector of social and cultural views and the dictator of family values and ideologies; women on the other hand are viewed as objects of sexual desires and the care-giver to the man's needs, as well as those of the children (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, these societal roles may pose as a burden to the career choice of both males and females. However, it must be noted that Budig and England (2001, p. 216) find that while the role of women in society is confined to parenthood "there is no evidence that women select female jobs because they are more mother-friendly".

The entrenchment of masculine ideology has been a core foundation in both western and Indian cultures, with the emphasis being that the male figure is the dominant 'role' within society (Bhana, 2008). Therefore, it must be acknowledged that patriarchy and the practices thereof is a critical factor in the process of career decision-making (la Rey & Merle, 1999), especially amongst the South African Indian population.

Correl (2001) believes that within patriarchal systems the formation of the gendered identity is in constant conflict with various roles that women are expected to maintain in society while still attempting to create a sense of self and agency. Beall (1990) makes a critical observation on the role of South African Indian women within the patriarchal Indian society wherein the female's role is seen as being a care-giver, obedient to her husband, and with marriage being the epitome of success. Consequently, the Indian female relies heavily on the Indian male.

The argument put forward here by social theorists is that choice is not limited to the personal needs of individuals, but is also inclined towards the responsibilities and expectations of the individuals. In saying that, it cannot be ignored that the family dynamic is also a crucial mechanism of support for an individual in terms of financial and emotional support (Grabowski, Call & Mortimer, 2001).

#### *2.2.5.2 Access to Quality Education*

Education is a key external variable when it comes to the career decision-making process. Vocational knowledge that is provided by the educational system plays an important role from a social context in that education is associated with a reduced risk of unemployment (Arum & Shavit, 1995; Savickas, 2013; Watson, 2006). In contrast, Johnson and Mortimer (2002) note that in contexts where there exist vast amounts of choice in terms of educational

routes towards varied occupations, individuals make less informed decisions about careers as they lack a sense of direction which emerges from the lack of differentiation that surrounds occupations in the western context.

South Africa has had a long history with ideology that intended to create a society based on separatism, which stratified racial groups along social, economic and political lines. The education policies of the time mirrored these racial divisions, with Wolpe (1995) describing the landscape as a dual system in support of perpetuating the Apartheid ideology with advanced education opportunities being afforded to the White population of the country and individuals of colour being exposed to under developed education standards.

What is important to note is that education stratification followed a hierarchical structure in that while Indian South Africans received a lesser standard of education in comparison to their White counterparts, they were however exposed to relatively better access to education than the native Black population (la Rey & Merle, 1999).

#### *2.2.5.2.1. The Extension of University Education Act, 25 of 1959*

Tertiary education amongst the Indian South African population was an opportunity only attainable to a certain segment of the population and permission was only granted by the Minister of Education upon request by an individual (Duncan, 2003). Jain (1999) notes that the South African Indian population viewed gaining access to tertiary education as an opportunity to improve their occupational status and improve their financial standing.

As stated earlier, however, the Indian community practiced staunch patriarchal practices (Bhana, 2008). Consequently, the focus on further education was skewed towards the male offspring of an Indian family and was more accessible to them than to their female counterparts (Bhana, 2008).

#### *2.2.5.2.2 The Indian Education Act, 47 of 1963*

Furthermore, the Apartheid government systematically managed to control the career trajectory of the various racial groups and sustained their policies of segregation within the education system (Keim, 2003; Wolpe, 1995). The Indian Education Act allocated inferior classroom education, limited resourcing and a curriculum that was directed towards meeting the needs of the government (Cushner, 1998). Keim (2003) observed that the Apartheid government was able to instil a sense of inferiority amongst the South African Indian population by propagandising knowledge. To this end, the quality of education received amongst the Indian population of South Africa was limited in scope and provided little or no exposure to occupational opportunities (Keim, 2003; Wolpe, 1995).

#### *2.2.5.2.3 Beyond Apartheid: Barriers in Education*

In recognising the failures of the education arena during Apartheid the democratic state of South Africa abolished racial segmentation and acknowledged the importance of education through the implementation of various legislative measures (Watson, 2010). Despite these measures, barriers to the access to education are still prevalent within South Africa (McGrath & Akoojee, 2007).

One of the key barriers preventing access to education is that of poverty. Poverty is a crucial impairment to career choice as it impedes an individual's opportunities for furthering their



education (Watson, 2010). South African children who have come from backgrounds with limited financial resources have been shown to have higher academic dropout rates (Watson, 2010); while many South African students who do not drop out cannot finance their studies further and are therefore limited in their career choice (Ardington & Leibbrandt, 2010). Johnson and Mortimer (2002) examine career choice from a sociological perspective and find that socioeconomic inequalities are a strong determinant for the occupation of an individual.

While there is limited research on the barriers to education amongst the Indian population within South Africa, Watson (2010) notes that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have limited exposure to educational resources that guide occupational knowledge and as a result unrealistic career expectations are formed (Buthelezi et al., 2009)

The current state of the quality of the education still presents many challenges; classrooms remain poorly resourced and insufficient numbers of qualified teachers have resulted in overcrowding of classrooms (Buthelezi et al., 2009). Although new curriculums have been implemented over the years to try and correct the situation, there have been no evaluations of the effectiveness of these changes (Watson, 2010), thus their impact is marginally unknown.

#### *2.2.6 Conclusion*

The underlying theme which has directed the preceding literary component of this chapter has been in support of exploring the research aims that the current study has adopted: (i) What are some of the prominent contextual factors which influence Indian South African professionals' career choices? (ii) How have social factors influenced career choice amongst Indian South African professionals? (iii) What are the implications of these social factors?

In doing so, the literature has examined the emergence of Indians in South Africa and the initial challenges which they faced. These challenges were highlighted in an exploration of career theory within the South African context. Explicit in this review was the inability of western approaches to adequately explain the career choice of individuals that existed outside the norm of White middle-class men and the inadequacies of application across a minority group.

Implicit in this exploration was the identification of career theory's application in sustaining and promulgating suppressive ideologies and as an extension, failure to recognise the impact of isolating a minority group under the constructs of western theory and constructs. Such application has been shown to be oppressive and of no benefit to individuals.

Furthermore, the literature has shown support for the need to re-examine the use of popular career theories embedded in positivist epistemologies and has identified socio-economic factors such as the impact of the role of family and the impact that education has on making a career decision. In this, the literature revealed that these constructs exist within a macro-environment and are inherently shaped as such. The extent to which this is prevalent shall be explored within this study.

## **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

A Social Constructionism approach and a Systems Theory framework has been selected in this study to explore the socio-economic implications that may exist in determining the career choice of an individual. The discussion below will explore how the current study makes use of these approaches and will outline the implications of using these approaches in understanding the career choice of an individual within the South African context.

### *2.3.1 Social Constructionism*

Social Constructionism moves theory towards understanding that knowledge is not a true reflection of reality; where reality is perceived by the individual (Burr, 1995). Where traditional approaches to career theory have argued that knowledge production and language are objective constructs; Social Constructionism posits that these are socially shared perceptions (Burr, 1995).

Social Constructionism thus places knowledge and understanding within the realms of being culturally and historically specific (Burr, 1995; Durrheim, 1997). In support of this, Burr (1995) provides four key assumptions that underpin Social Constructionism: Firstly, one is guided towards taking a critical stance towards knowledge. That is, knowledge should not be seen as natural and the researcher must be reflexive to account for this understanding (Cohen et al., 2004). Secondly, the researcher is guided to understand that an individual's view of an environment is guided and placed within the specificities of a historical and cultural context (Cohen et al., 2004). Thirdly, knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through and by social processes and interaction (Cohen et al., 2004). Lastly, knowledge and social processes exist as co-dependent elements and neither can be explored without the other (Cohen et al., 2004).

The implication of Social Constructionism on understanding the career decision making process then becomes a critical analysis of the manner in which an individual chooses a career path and challenges the notion that careers are linear in existence (Cohen et al., 2004). Furthermore, it challenges the understanding of how power and ideology impact the manner in which an individual views their reality, inherently creating an understanding of their self

that is explained through a reflexive process in which an individual formulates a narrative (Burr, 1995; Durrheim, 1997).

Narratives become a process in which human beings are able to portray their realities by attributing a comprehensive meaning to them (Bujold, 2004). Within this process an individual comes to terms with their realities by acknowledging that their journey through life has allowed for the formulation of their identity (Bujold, 2004; Burr, 1995). This view allows for the understanding of career choice as being a socially constructed process and allows for the examination of career choice in a holistic manner that considers the complexities that may exist in subjectivities.

Beyond this, Social Constructionism provides the opportunity in which the understanding of an individual's career choice is not limited to that of an isolated process (Cohen et al., 2004). Rather, it empowers the narrator in allowing them to be an active participant of the career decision making process. However, this does not suggest that the individual has the freedom to make choices void of social interaction; rather it allows the individual to reconcile their decision in a manner that is both constructive and reflexive (Bujold, 2004; Cohen et al., 2004).

In doing so, Social Constructionism challenges the assumptions of traditional career theory by not prescribing a singular notion of understanding the manner in which career decisions are made and forces the researcher to give credence to the unique lived experiences of an individual (Cohen et al., 2004).

In recognition of the collectivist nature of South African Indians, Social Constructionism thus allows for the exploration of how individuals then create meaning within their social context and how these meanings are interpreted; thus, implying that career choice is a continuous navigation of these interpretations (Cohen et al., 2004).

### *2.3.2 Systems Theory Framework*

In reaction to the changing world of work and the complexities of developing theories in a non-western context, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006) of career development has emerged to deal with the lack of integration that exists within career theory. STF is focused on highlighting the complexities that surround an individual's career decision-making process, with McMahon and Patton (1995) noting the integral nature that context plays in terms of the career decision-making process. Within STF an individual is positioned as being the central focus of their careers in relation to the wider system.

To this end, McMahon, Patton and Watson (2004) have noted that an individual attaches various meanings to their system of influences that are based on their own personal perspectives, and expresses them through narratives. Patton and McMahon “deliberately chose the word ‘influence’ to describe intrapersonal and contextual factors relevant to the career development process” (2006, p. 196), as the aspect of influences cannot be viewed as singular, being either positive or negative; rather it is a dynamic concept that goes beyond a simple cause-and-effect relationship.

The STF has found itself at the centre of continuous reviews and refining over the years (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and it has been widely used in various contexts to help explain

career decisions, not only from a cultural perspective but also by looking at the effects of structural inequalities (Patton & McMahon, 2006). The STF has also found relevance in a vast array of studies that have attempted to move away from traditional theories (Dullabh, 2004).

The STF thus provides the platform upon which the current study can find theoretical relevance in a holistic manner. The reason for this is that the STF provides a structure in which the unique experiences of individuals can be explored, by examining the context of individuals as existing at a non-hierarchical systemic level that includes the individual system, the social system and the environmental system (Patton and McMahon, 1999).

#### *2.3.2.1 The Individual System*

The relevance of the systems approach lies within the emphasis of looking at experiences from a holistic perspective, rather than isolating various elements. An individual system is a prominent system within the framework as it incorporates various sub intrapersonal influences (Patton & McMahon, 1999). That is, the individual represents a unique entity that is reflective of their particular situation; a sense of personal agency.

The STF moves away from traditional views of personal agency and acknowledges that personal agency is not the inevitable decision-making criteria; rather, personal agency is viewed as the dynamic sense of self that an individual holds and is transformed over time due to the various influences that the individual is faced with over time (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Patton, McMahon & Watson, 2006). This view highlights the significance of giving importance to the understanding of self within a South African context as being constructed through and by the interaction of an individual with their environment (Bujold,

2004). That is, the development of agency is impacted by the social, cultural and institutional structures existing within their environment (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011).

#### *2.3.2.2 The Social System*

While traditional theorists favour the individual and the environment in isolated positions from one another, the STF emphasises that individuals do not live in a contextual vacuum and the influences of the environment should not be underestimated (Patton & McMahon, 1999). For Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) the social system represents an individual's family, their peers and the community as well as educational institutions and occupational environments, all of which shape the perception that the individual holds in terms of their self-concept and decision-making processes.

Career choice then becomes a dynamic process wherein the social system that an individual is exposed to plays a crucial role in the career decision making process. Through the restrictive nature of Apartheid ideology and through the limitations in access to and quality of education (Watson, 2006; Savickas, 2013), career choices made by an individual are then promoted or restricted based on the extent of the nature of their exposure (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

In addition, where the values, skills and interests of the family become indoctrinated throughout the development of an individual from birth (Duffy & Dik, 2009; Savickas, 2013); their career choice is then persuaded in the direction of these indoctrinations. The patriarchal ideology that exists within the South African Indian population (Bhana, 2008) then becomes an influential factor to the career making process as it either promulgates a

gender bias approach in achieving an occupation or fosters a critical approach to career choice.

#### *2.3.2.3 The Environmental-Societal System*

The STF addresses the failure of positivist career theory's view of an individual as isolated from the wider socio-political and economic context by acknowledging various influences that exist in the larger social context of an individual (Patton & McMahon, 2006). This larger social context looks at issues such as the political ideology and socioeconomic factors that influence the career choice of an individual.

This points to the development of career theory in psychology which has been victim to the changing political environment and changes in the social make-up of the country (Nicholas, Naidoo & Pretorius, 2006). The macro changes that took place post-Apartheid have been unpredictable and have thus negatively impacted the career opportunities and career decision making process for many adolescents within the context (Albien & Naidoo, 2016).

Within South Africa, the economic status of individuals plays a crucial role in their access to education, with career choice being dictated by the affordability of their occupational interest. South African children who have come from backgrounds with limited financial resources have been shown to have higher academic dropout rates (Watson, 2010) and an individual's financial background determines their exposure to knowledge around various occupations (Buthelzi et al., 2009).



### *2.3.3 Conclusion*

Given the research aims of the current study, by adopting a Social Constructionism approach and a Systems Theory Framework, career choice can be understood from the subjective experiences of an individual. The above theoretical approaches look beyond the traditional views of the career decision making process as being an objective process and align this study towards exploring the implications of the socio-economic and political context on an individual's career choice.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research methodology that has been used for this study. It outlines the research questions that the study explores and highlights the sampling methods that are used in acquiring the seven (n=7) narratives of the individuals who have participated in the study. A further description of the sample, data collection methods and data analysis methods is described in detail, and an account of the ethical considerations that this study adhered to is discussed.

#### **3.2 Research Questions**

The aim of this study is to understand some of the contextual issues that affect South African Indian Professionals' career choices. In doing so, an extension of this aim is to contribute to the growing discourse around holistic and contextual career theories. The specific questions investigated in this study are:

1. What are some of the prominent contextual factors which influence Indian South African Professionals' career choices?
2. How have social factors, such as family and education (to name a few), influenced career choice amongst Indian South African Professionals?
3. What are the implications of these social factors (for example, family and education)?

### **3.3 Research Design**

Studies within the field of career theory have constantly and consistently relied on the positivistic methods dictated by the modernist era of knowledge production (Watson, 2009). The limitation of this has often resulted in quantifiable measures which are void of context and results in research being descriptive rather than illuminating factors which aren't quantifiable in the sense of the word (Mertens, 2014). To this end, the approach employed in this study follows the epistemological guidelines put forth by Social Constructionism, supported by a narrative approach.

Social Constructionism guides the researcher to look at the social world as a dynamic phenomenon that exists beyond a quantifiable element and one that is constructed by an individual's interaction with the environment (Burr, 1995). This view enables the current research to understand career choice from the perspective that an individual exists in a wider social context, and through this interaction they are enabled to construct their careers within the structures that exist (Cohen et al., 2004).

By way of re-iteration, Burr (1995) provides four key assumptions that should be acknowledged when adopting a Social Constructionism approach. Firstly, one is guided towards taking a critical stance towards knowledge. That is, knowledge should not be seen as natural and the researcher must be reflexive to account for this understanding. Secondly, the researcher is guided to understand that an individual's view of an environment is guided and placed within the specificities of a historical and cultural context. Thirdly, knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through and by social process and interaction. Lastly, knowledge and the social context exist as co-dependent elements and neither can be explored without the other.

To achieve the tenets of a Social Constructionism approach, this study adopts a narrative approach to understand the dynamics behind the career decision of an individual. This requires the participant to provide a narrative account of their career journey. In acknowledging that careers represent a unique relationship between the environment and human subjectivity (Collin & Young, 1992; Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Savickas, 2005), narratives provide the means by which individuals can translate their experiences so that they can understand their experiences in a holistic manner (Bujold, 2004). Polkinghorne notes that narratives allow for an individual to comprehensively organise their experiences:

Continuity and change are emplotted in narrative form. A ‘good-enough’ narrative contains the past in terms of the present and points to a future that cannot be predicted, although it contains the elements out of which the future will be created (1988, p. 35).

Savickas (2005) and Cohen et al. (2004) state that the narrative approach provides a mechanism for understanding the career decision-making process from a non-positivist perspective, and Savickas (2005) adds that narratives then become a relevant means for studying careers and the decision-making process.

In attempting to address the aim of the current study, the above approach allows for the collection of meaningful data which enables the researcher to understand the macro and micro impacts that may exist in the career decision making process of an individual.

### **3.4 Research Population and Sampling Method**

The study adopted a random-purposive sampling method which enabled it to cater for inclusion criteria when selecting the sample (Neuman, 2011). The inclusion criteria adopted for the study was as follows: the individual must have been born prior to South Africa being recognised as a democratic state; the individuals were Indian South African Professionals, where professionals were seen as being employed in a specialised industry. While these participants worked in specialised industries, they were interviewed in their personal capacity and not as representatives of the industries they worked in.

The definition of ‘professional’ that this study relied on is described in Evetts (2014). That is, a ‘professional’ is described as either holding a specialist degree or existing within a specialist industry (Evetts, 2014). Examples of specialist industries can be described as those performing a function which require depth of knowledge; such as (to name a few) lawyers, doctors and accountants, or those existing within the finance industry and the corporate environment (Evetts, 2014)

A snowballing technique was also used to gain access to the sample. Snowballing allows for the ease of access to individuals who are particularly difficult to locate within a population (Neuman, 2011). After the first participant was identified, further participants were included by way of snowballing.

### 3.4.1 Participants' Demographics

Participant	Gender	Education	Industry	Position Level	Ethnicity
A	Female	Bachelor of Commerce: Economics	Finance	Senior Manager	Indian
B	Female	Bachelor of Education	Finance	Senior Manager	Indian
C	Female	Bachelor of Science: Acturial	Finance	Senior Manager	Indian
D	Female	Bachelor of Commerce	Finance	non-Executive Head	Indian
E	Male	Bachelor of Science	Finance	Manager	Indian
F	Male	Bachelor of Commerce: Honours	Finance	Manager	Indian
G	Male	No Tertiary Education	Finance	Managing Director	Indian

*Figure 2: Demographics of Participants*

The study consisted of seven participants (n=7); all of which were South African Indians, with four (n=4) being female and three (n=3) being male. Participants varied in terms of their position within their industries: three (n=3) participants worked at a Senior Manager level, two (n=2) were identified as Managers, one (n=1) participant was identified as a non-Executive Head and one (n=1) participant was a Managing Director.

In recognition of the definition used in this study of 'professionals', all participants worked in specialised industries: six (n=6) worked in the pure Finance industry and one (n=1) worked in the Agricultural Finance Industry. One anomaly existed in the study in that Participant G had no formal tertiary education, while the other six (n=6) had formal tertiary educations with their specialities listed in the table above. Henceforth, participants shall be referred to using their Participation pseudonym.

### 3.4.2 Position of the Researcher

In engaging with participants, the researcher found himself as both an insider and an outsider (Neuman, 2011). By existing as an Indian South African, the researcher found himself familiar with some of the contexts which the participants described. When describing their

narratives, the participants often acknowledged this familiarity as an element of relativity. Furthermore, the researcher was also employed in the Finance industry; however, was an outsider in the sense that his educational experience existed purely in democratic South Africa and he, therefore, had to be critically reflexive when interpreting the narratives of the participants. A further element of criticality was adopted in the way the data was analysed and by taking into consideration the elements put forth by Burr (1995) and Collin and Young (2004).

### **3.5 Data Collection Procedure**

In line with the epistemological requirements of a Social Constructionism approach, semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) were conducted as a means by which career narratives were collected and engaged with. As stated above, these narratives became the process by which the human beings participating in the study were able to actualise their realities, by attaching comprehensive meanings to them (Bujold, 2004). They allowed for the exploration of the participants' choices as a result of past events, as well as the way they identified with their contexts. Cochran (as cited in Bujold, 2004) noted that narratives enable a researcher to understand career choices from a perspective that is not embedded in a positivist view but rather by analysing their choices as comprising of a story.

The initial participant (*Participant A*) was identified using the inclusion criteria adopted by the study. Potential participants were approached. In this interaction, a brief overview of the study was discussed with the potential candidates before they had agreed to avail themselves for an interview. The interviews were conducted in their personal capacity and were, therefore, done in their free time. An initial participant shortlist of twelve (n=12) individuals was identified, but only seven (n=7) accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

The interviews were conducted individually in a quiet environment which each participant felt comfortable in. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher introduced himself, the research, their right of anonymity as a participant and provided them with a consent form. This consent form (see Appendix B) re-iterated the study to the individual and requested their permission to voice record the session so that it could be transcribed and analysed at a later stage.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data was guided by the research questions that this study set out to explore viz. (i) What are some of the prominent contextual factors which influence Indian South African Professionals career choices? (ii) How have social factors influenced career choice amongst Indian South African Professionals? (iii) What are the implications of these social factors? Each interview was then transcribed and each transcription was then read through and coded.

In order to find meaning in the data, the stories of each participant were made the focal point of the data-analysis process in which a voice-centred relational and thematic analysis method was used, in accordance with Mauthner and Doucet (2003).

The first step in analysing the transcripts involved a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative analytical tool that allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report on themes that may present themselves in the data (Neuman, 2011). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide six self-explanatory guidelines for conducting thematic analysis: 1) Becoming familiar with transcribed interviews; 2) Generating initial base themes that the researcher



expects to find; 3) Searching the data for themes; 4) Reviewing the themes; 5) Defining and naming the themes; and 6) Producing the report.

In addition to this, a crucial analysis technique that this study adopted was the voice-centred relation method. The voice-centred relation method described by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) involves the exploration of narrative texts in order to locate and identify an individual within their particular context, and their relationship with various actors within the same context. The four research steps (readings) prescribed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003) are summarised below:

1. Reading 1: Reading for the plot and for the researcher's responses to the narrative.  
This involves two elements: Firstly, an analysis of the main events and subplots needs to occur; Secondly, an analysis of the researcher's reactions which may have occurred in the first element i.e. be reflexive;
2. Reading 2: Reading for the voice of 'I'. This process is an attempt to understand how the respondent identifies with his/her self in comparison to the 'we's' which tends towards a more social convention;
3. Reading 3: Reading for the Relationship (ones that the respondent places emphasis on). This process identifies how the respondent identifies with their relations (family or wider social context);
4. Reading 4: Placing people within their cultural contexts.

The voice-centred relation method provided critical insights into the themes that were identified. As such, this study relied on Reading 1-3 as prescribed by Mauthner and Doucet (2003). The readings informed the level of engagement with the narratives and allowed for the evolution of themes that were identified within the thematic analysis. In doing so, the

language used by the participants informed the level of influence that the participant credited to a particular relationship and environment.

Furthermore, the voice-centred relation method provided the foundation in which the theoretical framework of this study, STF (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 2006) and Social Constructionism (Burr, 1995), found expression. It allowed for the exploration of used language in the broader societal context that the participants found themselves in.

### **3.7 Consideration of Validity and Rigor**

Within qualitative research, validity lends itself to two forms: Firstly, internal validity emphasises the consistency within the researcher's observations and that of the theoretical ideas that are being created; and secondly, external reliability refers to the generalizability of the findings (Sarantakos, 1994). With regards to reliability Sarantakos (1994) notes that in qualitative studies, so long as the researcher stays true to the findings and does not make exorbitant claims, then the study can be seen as being reliable. In the case of the current study it was recognised that the sample size did not provide for generalizability; however, the objective of the study was not to provide for a working model of career choices. Rather it attempted to show that career narratives provided the opportunity for the researcher to explore and better understand career choice.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting the study, permission to conduct the research was requested from and granted by the Ethics Committee of the Higher Degrees Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences (Appendix C). Because each participant was

interviewed in their personal capacity, no formal permission was required from any gatekeepers, and each participant signed an informed consent form which outlined their rights as participants (see Appendix B).

At the onset of each interview each participant signed the informed consent form. For the purpose of further clarity each participant was re-introduced to the topic and the requirements of the interview. It was further stated to each participant that they had the right to withdraw at any point throughout the interview process and that they were not obligated to answer any questions which they felt were an invasion of their privacy.

Because each interview was being recorded, the researcher reassured the participants that beyond the realms of the recordings their anonymity would be guaranteed by use of pseudonyms in the study, and further affirmed that the interview process was confidential in its entirety and that there would be no way that the reader would be able to identify them during and after the research process (Whitley, 2002). Furthermore, each recording was only accessible by the researcher and was secured safely on the iCloud behind encryption, with no duplications in existence.

### **3.9 Limitations**

The researcher noted that being an insider to the context of Indians, there was recognition of this by the participants and the researcher felt that there were opportunities for further exploration, but due to the participants' acknowledgement of the researcher's insider status they were often brief (Neuman, 2011). Further to this, due to the limited sample size the current study could not claim generalizability and future studies should expand and aim for this.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter discussed in detail the current study's methodology. With this, an in-depth discussion provided the methods of analysis that were adopted by the current study viz. thematic analysis and a voice-centred relational method. The current chapter will discuss the resulting findings.

Discussed extensively within the literature review, the adoption of western career theory has been largely criticised for failing to consider the impact that the wider socio-economic context has on the career choice of an individual. It was thus anticipated that some of the themes to emerge from the narratives of the individuals would identify numerous factors beyond their control which had guided and shaped their careers. The mistake could not, however, be made in assuming that 'impact' was connotative to a limitation.

The thematic analyses yielded three prominent themes that emerged from the narratives of all the participants. These themes were as follows: *Navigating Status: Exposure and Access*; *Construction of Self*; and *Family*. These themes are explored in the current chapter and will be looked at in relation to the participants' career choices, with the underpinnings of Social Constructionism guiding the discussion. The chapter then concludes with a brief overview of miscellaneous findings.

## 4.2 Theme One: Navigating Status: Exposure and Access

Composite within the ambit of Social Constructionism is the understanding that an individual's construction of reality and production of knowledge is a subjective occurrence wherein reality is shaped and sustained by their social interaction (Burr, 1995). As an extension, Foucault (1980) describes this shaping of knowledge as creating social truths where status and social class provide a fostering environment. Social class is then understood as being a subjective experience for an individual, dependent on their position within the environment and impacts on their structural inequality (Wright, 2003). To expand on this, Ash (2002) identifies social class as being an individual's position within a particular context; impacting their education, occupation and capital acquisition. Both Ash (2002) and Wright (2003) use the terms *social class* and *status* interchangeably.

At this juncture within the current study, when examining the career narratives of the individuals who participated in the study, the word *status* was understood in the same sense as *social class*. This first theme was based on the observation that South African Indians, through legislative frameworks, were often restricted in terms of their movement in society (Bhana, 2008). This lent support to the findings by Watson (2006, 2010) and Savickas (2013) that the background of an individual played an important role in their exposure and access to career opportunities within their context (Ash, 2002; Buthelzi et al., 2009; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000); as well as supported the views of the System Theory Framework in that various systems within an environment influenced the career decision making of an individual. In this case, it was argued that individuals often identified with their *status* by means of their social interactions and through these interactions they were then able to place themselves in a relative position in society.

Consequently, in describing their career narratives, the study participants made a linkage between their status and their career opportunities; their access to education and the influences thereof; and their exposure to knowledge. The discussion of this follows a purposive pursuit of understanding the impact of their *status* on their career choices and begins by looking at the constraints to exposure described by these participants.

In their journey towards making their career decisions, the narratives of the participants have identified that their positions within their environments played an important role. The analysis of their narratives identified *exposure* as being the component which they narrated. *Exposure* in this regard referred to two perspectives of the term. On the one hand, *exposure* related to their environment from a societal perspective where they were exposed to impressionable artefacts (Burr, 1995); while on the other hand, *exposure* was expressed in terms of the constraints under which they existed (lack of *access*) (Wright, 2003).

**Participant D:** ... Uhm so you had access to things that kind of the community was comfortable in doing, uhm...I think uhm, when you grow up in a community that's uhm, you know from a racial perspective we all pretty much look the same, you know you kind of socialise in the same spaces ... uhm, you don't really move too far out of where you... where you are at so, you know if you go to the doctor, it's an Indian doctor; if you go to the pharmacists it's an Indian pharmacist, if you uhm... my dad had a little business and there was accountants, it was Indian...

The above extract articulated the dichotomy of *Exposure* in a succinct manner. Firstly, Participant D acknowledged exposure from a constraint perspective in her narration that an individual had access to things that the community was comfortable with and comfortable

doing; the implication here was that through communal exposure, career opportunities were shaped in the direction of what was present within the context. Secondly, Participant D iterated that an individual did not really move too far away from what they knew: if they went to a doctor, then it was to an Indian doctor, and if they went to a pharmacist, then it was to an Indian pharmacist. This was consistent with Patton and McMahon's (2006) view on the Societal System and Burr's (1995) use of artefacts, in which career choice became a tainted process as the social system that an individual was exposed to played a crucial role in their career decision making process (Savickas, 2013; Watson, 2006).

Through the Group Areas Act the South African government was able to architect societies based on their racial make-up. As a result, the exposure that individuals had to career opportunities existed as a homogenous process (Radhakrishnan, 2005) and, consistent with the observations made by Chen (1998) and Mkhize and Frizelle (2000), career choice was limited by the pervasive ideologies that existed at the time. Compounding the effect of this, Foucauldian (1980) thought lent description to the above in noting that through identification and interaction with artefacts an individual internalised what they perceived to be effective traits in their navigation through their context. For instance, Participant D went on to further describe her career interests as being “*accountancy*”, “*law*” and “*medical stuff*”. This placed her interests within these specific fields as being an internalisation of artefacts as they were fields which she had been exposed to in her context. These artefacts were also internalised in the way in which she ascribed success to them:

*Participant D: ... I remember at the open days it was, it was the School of Accountancy [or] the School of Law. I went down to the science side because I was interested at the time in doing some of the medical stuff... You know, I would go with*

*her (sic mother) to office; she was the PA, Executive PA to the Heads of the Trading Floors. So you would walk in there and... 'oh this looks like fun, this is what trading looks like! And you go 'ok I want to study whatever they studied so I can get to do what they do'. Because it looked like they had good lives and [were] comfortable and drove good cars and lived in nice houses and ja...*

Similarly, Participant G, expressed that his socialisation provided a lens through which he viewed his career prospects:

**Participant G:** ... *Well like I grew up on a farm, when – throughout my schooling years and before obviously, [I] was exposed to farming life; something that I enjoyed as a – something that I enjoyed growing up, as having the opportunity to physically work on the farm and see the goings-on. But also, to be surrounded by school mates and friends that also came from the same sort of background. So it almost felt like something, you know, despite it not probably be sounding as cool as it might, but it was something to... make a career of...*

This observation was consistent with the Societal System within the Systems Theory (Patton & McMahon, 2006), where an individual's peers and their community at large assisted in their decision-making process, and through this process they developed their concept of self. This current finding lent support to Swanson and Fouad (1999), who state that an individual bases their perceptions of failure and stagnation on the performance of their community at large. As a result, the community shapes the career decision of an individual. By growing up on a farm and being exposed to peers from the same farming background, Participant G formed career expectations and identified a career that he could make a living doing. That is,



his truth around career choice was fostered through this exposure (Foucault, 1980). Further support of this was illustrated by Participant E, who stated:

***Participant E:** ... Pretty much everybody has the same perspective, they have the same goal. Uhm, you know, go to school, finish school, hopefully study if possible, or open a business for that matter, depending on your socioeconomic circumstances...*

While the above participants provided context to the internalisation of societal restrictions, they also alluded to the restrictive component of *exposure* and *access*. In stating that they were exposed to a community that were identical from a race perspective and that they came from the same sort of background and pretty much everybody had the same perspective, the participants implicitly acknowledged the restricted context of Indian South Africans in pre-democratic South Africa (Macleod, 2004; Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2005).

Firstly, from an Environmental System (Patton & McMahon, 2006) perspective, Participant B identified the limited careers that were available in 1985 due to the political climate. In an analysis of career theory, literature has shown that the Apartheid government was able to control the career decisions of individuals through restrictive legislature which dictated racial access to education and the economy (Macleod, 2004; Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2005). It was with this restriction that western career theory failed to compensate for the impact of the environment on the career opportunities of individuals (Collin & Young, 1992; Watson, 2009). This observation by the researcher lends support to career literature calling for a re-evaluation of traditional career theories:

**Participant B:** ...I matriculated in 1985 and at the time, there were very limited career opportunities for Indian females. Uhm, if you think of the political and socio-economic times in the 80's, they were very turbulent political times...

Secondly, Participant G supported this by noting that when entering the labour arena, the career opportunities that were available were those of lower level careers. Again, this observation was consistent with literature and supported the observation that career choice and career opportunities were then only as abundant as the *access* that the individual was exposed to:

**Participant G:** ... Having started work sort of in the pre-democracy era, it was – it was almost you know, you always ended up being in low level positions, very admin oriented, very er... you know, not necessarily too much room to grow...

Thirdly, support is found in Participant E's narrative that limited resources (McGrath & Akoojee, 2007) within the environment resulted in a change of academic choice in high school, and thus a change of career choice:

**Participant E:** ...Okay so within high school, uhm, what I think it was back in grade 10, I initially had IT as a choice subject, uhm, unfortunately that did get taken away due to the lack of teachers. Uhm, from there we then got in, we had to basically switch our subjects with one week's notice before exams started and I was given technical drawings as a substitute subject.

The effects of *exposure* and *access* that have been discussed above were not linear causal effects. That is, a lack of exposure was identified by the two participants as having a similar impact to the direct restrictive qualities of the *Environmental System*.

*Participant F: ...To be quite honest it was a little ill-informed at the beginning because uhm, in terms of the school that I went to as an example, there wasn't available [counsellors] that could potentially guide me in terms of what potential career opportunities are out there...*

Participant F found that his career decision was not well informed due to the lack of exposure he experienced in terms of career counselling. Watts (1996) observed that during Apartheid not many minority communities received access to career centres, and Career Theory finds expression through career counselling and career assessments (Watson, 2009). In not receiving career guidance Participant F found little to no guidance in identifying career opportunities that may have existed and as a result lent support to the observation made by Watts (1996) that career counselling impacted the career decision making process.

Participant C lent support to the observation made by Keim (2003) that the Apartheid government was able to limit the exposure of individuals to various career opportunities and was thus able to propagandise knowledge. Notice that Participant C referred to a lack of exposure and knowledge about careers that were beyond her immediate knowledge reference points:

*Participant C: ... I had to study something. Uhm, and then I read the newspaper; mom was reading the newspaper one day and she says, 'this called an actuary earns*

*the highest salary in the country'... So I was like, oh wow, that's what I want to do!*  
*First, I thought it had something to do with birds... [laughing].*

Despite the lack of knowledge as to what an actuary actually was, notice how Participant C immediately wanted to pursue this career option because it was the highest paying job in the country at the time. This observation directed attention back to an observation made by Foucault (1980) that individuals attached meaning and guided their choices based on their perceptions of what they believed to be successful within their context. In this case, even when not understanding what an actuary was, Participant C attached financial success to this career option. This finding also re-ignited the observation made by Jain (1999) that the South African Indian population viewed further education as the means to improve their financial standing.

Social Constructionism guided the researcher towards being critical and reflexive in their exploration of the individuals' narratives (Burr, 1995) and the above discussion provided insight into the career narratives of the participants and looked at their context in terms of their *exposure* to knowledge forming mechanisms, as well as their descriptions of the restriction of *access* that they have experienced.

By being critical, as per Burr (1995), literature was succinct in identifying the status of an individual as being a precursor in determining their career choice (Ardington & Leibbrandt, 2010; Savickas, 2013; Watson, 2006, 2010). While none of the participants in this study identified themselves as having come from a poor financial background; they provided support for the inverse. That is, they recognised that they were 'fortunate' in their experiences and through this fortune they were afforded career opportunities. As a

conclusion, it was an interesting observation which could be construed as a limitation to the finding; however, the finding gave credence to the observation that economic status played a critical role in these individuals' career choices (Johnson & Mortimer, 2002).

**Participant B:** *...I was fortunate enough that uhm, when I started school, I went to one of the last uh missionary schools which were uh conducted by nuns of uhm, Our Lady of Fatima... My grandfather was quite comfortable. Uh, he provided a good home, we were not short of anything. We certainly weren't rich people, but we were very comfortable...*

Participant B noted that while they were not rich they were still comfortable. This lent support to Johnson and Mortimer (2002) who identified socioeconomic inequalities as a determinant for the career choice of an individual. By not identifying as poor, Participant B acknowledged this as being fortunate and which allowed her to experience a better-quality education.

**Participant D:** *...So I was lucky in that sense in that I was the first in my family to even do that. To go to university, uhm you know, my, my dad's a qualified paramedic, he has got all those great things but it wasn't that he stepped out of school and studied, you know they worked through it. So, I was lucky in that I, I had the opportunity of studying straight out of school...*

Ardington and Leibbrandt (2010) observed that South Africans often dropped out of university because they were unable to fund their studies. Thus, the inverse would become true in that studies were continued when finances were available for that purpose. Participant

D supported this assumption when stating that she was able to study because she had the opportunity to do so. Similarly, Participant C, in being reflexive about acknowledging being able to attend university, was able to understand her position of fortune:

*Participant C: ...I mean when I, when I went to university and I spoke to other people, I realised I was much more fortunate than other people. My parents had a car...*

### **4.3 Theme Two: Construction of Self**

A prominent feature within western career theory has been the ability of an individual to act on free-will through the formation of their identity and by extension, being able to manoeuvre freely within their environment due to this (Chen, 1998; Holland, 1992; Kazi, 2010; Prilleltensky, 2008; Super, 1990). A point of departure from this theory has been Social Constructionism, where the creation of self is subject to the subjective construction of reality and provides a platform in which individuals can narrate their description of self (Burr, 1995). In support of this, literature has shown that in non-western contexts an individual's identity is socially, culturally and instructionally assigned (Bujold, 2004; Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Rutherford, 1990; Yang & Lu, 2007). Further to this, the self is seen to be a caldron that exists because of their interaction with all Systems of a context (Edwards, 2011; Patton & McMahon, 2006).

All seven (n=7) participants provided narratives wherein they identified elements which have shaped their careers from their perspectives of self. Within the current study, it was expected to be a prominent feature within the narratives (Burr, 1995), however the extent to which this actually had an impact on their career decisions was not expected.

The discussion below looks at the sub-themes that emerged in relation to the participants' descriptions of self. More specifically: grooming; introversion; gendered roles; and the internalisation of psychometric results.

#### *4.3.1 Grooming*

While there is no direct reference to *grooming* within career theory, there is mention of external factors and relationships shaping the career choice of individuals. In this regard, *grooming* is understood as a process in which an individual learns from and behaves in relation to this interaction (Abbott, 2001; Bandura, 1989; Sharf, 2002). The learning of this is still understood within the broader theoretical framework of Social Constructionism (Burr, 1995), where individuals are exposed to impressionable artefacts that exist within the environment and thus internalise them (Foucault, 1980).

***Participant B:** ...So I was taught in the old English method. So, if you looked at the uniforms I wore, the way I had to sit, the way I had to speak, the type of things we did... We did Music, we did uhm, bible studies, our English and Drama was different from those schools where it was just predominantly Indian teachers teaching Indian children in a closed community where the way of survival is working at the sugar mill or whatever it may have been... I was a uh, specialist in Language and Music, and those were my majors. Uh, so I taught English and uh, for a short while I conducted choirs and things like that...*

Participant B spoke directly to the grooming process. Firstly, she referred to being taught in accordance with old English practices, and as a result was exposed to different teaching

methodologies that existed in schools that were predominantly Indian (Cushner, 1998; la Rey & Merle, 1999; Wolpe, 1995). Secondly, she described the types of learning she experienced, namely music, bible studies and English and Drama (Abbott, 2001; Bandura, 1989). Lastly, from an Individual Systems perspective, her career practices of teaching English and conducting choirs were a phenomenon consistent with Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory which stated that the learning experiences of an individual influenced the development of their self-efficacy and as a result influenced their career interests and choices. While Participant B did not speak directly to her self-efficacy, her use of the word 'specialist' implied that she believed she was successful in this. This perceived grooming was also found in the narrative of Participant A:

**Participant A:** *...I think it was also driven by the teachers that I had; they were very good and they were very supportive... Ja, so the teachers had like a very positive influence for me, they were very... they, they themselves enjoyed the subjects and they were able to convey that in the way that they taught it. They made it seem, well it is interesting, it's not that they made it seem interesting...*

The *grooming* of an individual's perception of self was not limited in impact to their youth. The narratives of three participants have shown that the *grooming* process continued through their active participation in a career. This finding was consistent with Social Constructionism in that the construction of self is a recursive process and is not static; the self is created within multiple realities and upon exposure to multiple truths (Burr, 1995), as well as from an Individual System (Patton & McMahon, 1999) perspective where the self is dynamic and is transformed through various influences over time.



***Participant A:** ... from there I was just basically groomed into the current management position. And it was more actually I think, like I said, to come in with that non-traditional view, because uhm the previous, the department was managed, was very micromanaged, everything was done a certain way...*

Participant A reflected upon her ‘non-traditional view’ and approach, and noted that she was ‘groomed’ into the management position that she held at the time of the study. The *grooming* effect in this had a restrictive implication. While it allowed her to develop into a more senior role, it was an act which was incongruent with her view of self. It was this contextualisation of herself that Foucault (as cited in Hooks, 1989) viewed as a restricted self. That is, it created preferred behaviour within the context of work. In doing so, Participant A struggled with this conflict:

***Participant A:** ... if you are a manager, you have to behave in a certain way, and I think previous management was very..., it was micromanaged and for me I don't believe in that. I think we are all adults and we need to be responsible as adults, and I don't think I need to tell you how to behave as an adult...*

As an extension of this; in Foucault's (see 1979) conceptualisation of disciplinary power, in creating a restricted self an individual portrays an image of the self which is in line with the acceptable norms within that environment. That is, the individual is *groomed* into forming relative truths (Burr, 1995) of their self. Notice how Participant C disciplined herself in stating that maybe that was her place in the world:

**Participant C:** ... *I have got a big mouth and I question a lot of stuff, but you don't question everything. Sometimes when people put you in a box because you are a certain grey, you have learned to say 'okay fine, maybe that's my place in the world'...*

On the other hand, *grooming* could also be beneficial in the career trajectory of an individual:

**Participant G:** ... *a colleague of mine who worked with me in the financial services environment was heading up the Financial Services Division at an Agricultural – at the same agricultural company that I'm with at the moment, and he offered me the opportunity to come and start up formal financial services as part of the agricultural business which is, you know, the business that I'm pretty much heading up at the moment. So, it was, I guess, a – you know a stroke of luck...*

The discussions above highlighted key elements in which the individuals' descriptions of self were shaped by being *groomed*. The grooming process was understood as a mechanism of influence in which the individuals' interactions with elements external to themselves shaped the way they constructed their self and as a result impacted their career decisions (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1979; Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Furthermore, the grooming process described above supported the observation made by Del Corso and Rehfuß (2011) that the self was constructed through a process of social interaction. The consequence of this finding to career theory was that it challenged the notion of traditional career theory which stated that individuals created a distinct self, void of

external influences. Career decisions then became an expression of the self and were informed and developed through social and cultural appropriation (Bujold, 2004; Edwards, 2011).

#### *4.3.2 Wanting Improvement and a Need for Challenge*

In constructing the self, the narratives of the participants have eluded to a causal relationship between a need for challenge and wanting to improve in comparison to others. This phenomenon has been described in literature as self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is considered to be an individual's belief in their ability to perform or refrain from a task, emerging from the learning experiences of said individual (Bandura, 1977; Sharf, 2002). The source of self-efficacy identified in this study was that of vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977), which was also consistent with Social Constructionism from the perspective of forming normative truths (Burr, 1995).

Firstly, Participant A described what Bandura (1977) referred to as vicarious learning, where the perception of her self-efficacy was formed by observing the successes and failures of others. By voicing the sentiment that she wanted to achieve more than where she came from, she acknowledged that by observing the limitations experienced by her parents it made her determined to achieve her goals (Bandura, 1977):

***Participant A:** ... Uhm, I think to an extent because I, you know I think in..., everyone wants to do better than what they came from... limitations placed on us like in terms of my, my parents' upbringing, so obviously uhm you would want to be able to go further and to do better and to, you know, make a difference in that sense... I think being in that environment, it..., it made me want for more...*

Secondly, Participant F provided a view on the causal relationship between wanting improvement and a need for challenge. He acknowledged his reflexivity by observing that an individual who was married, had kids, a family, a full-time job and still prioritised education at the same time set a precedent to say that this could be done, and in order to succeed in life an individual always had to push himself/herself.

***Participant F:** ... It wasn't so much of a burden but rather a challenge that was set for us to basically say; if there's an individual who is married, has kids, has a family, has a full-time job and is able to still prioritise education at the same time, it almost set[s] a precedent to say that it can be done and if we are to succeed in life we must always push ourselves to the limit to make sure that we maximise on all the opportunities and not use time or circumstance as an excuse... You reflect in terms of seeing where you lived and how you lived and the state in which your parents lived and you almost think; is that acceptable for that to be my future, given the fact that my parents have sacrificed a whole lot to make sure that it isn't?*

Through this observation, Participant F was able to observe successful behaviour around him and the perceived behaviour of success was thus internalised (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1980).

***Participant F:** ...Okay, so the way I describe myself is very career oriented and goal driven; uhm, trying to always push myself to the next level and to push the limits and to push the envelope in everything I do. Constantly seeking a challenge in essence is how I would describe myself...*

Keeping within the ambit of Social Constructionism and the voice-centred relational method, which forced criticality on the part of the researcher, it was argued that through the socialisation process, the participants within a community that had experienced both challenges and successes were directed towards developing a need for challenge in order to improve their livelihoods (Bandura, 1977; Burr, 1995; Sharf, 2002). Participant G provided further support for this observation:

***Participant G:** ... I'm, I guess a focussed person, goal-oriented, you know. Never easily backing down from a challenge is something that I guess, you know, that comes from upbringing as well, as well as in my current job environment, never backing down. Because that's – that's I guess the key, one of my key strengths is making sure that I can follow through right up till the very end...*

#### *4.3.3 Gendered Roles*

Literature has identified the patriarchal system which female Indians in South Africa (Bhana, 2008) are exposed to, and while traditional theory has largely ignored the impact of gendered roles on the career decision-making process, it has been found that the gendered identity of an individual plays a critical role in their career choice. This finding in the current study was consistent with the observations made by la Rey & Merle (1999), Marome (2005) and Moodley (2007) that gendered identity has an impact on career decisions, especially in patriarchal systems.

Within a Social Constructionism perspective, gendered identity emerges through social interactions, thus becoming an internalised view of self. Two participants within the current

study noted that their career choices were based on their female identity; that of being a ‘daughter’, a ‘good wife’ and a ‘mother’ (Hayden, 2002).

***Participant B:*** ... *You raised a daughter, and the main intention of raising a daughter was to be a good wife and a mother. So the expectation is that your daughter is going to marry and leave your home and uhm, cook meals and look after children. And how best to do that? If you're going to have a career, be a teacher because during the school holidays, you'll be available to look after the children that you raise. Uhm, I married quite early in life...*

When reflecting on her career choice of initially being a teacher, Participant B provided a detailed view of the role of women in a patriarchal Indian society (Bhana, 2008). She negotiated her identity as being a ‘daughter’, with the resultant career choice that was available to her. For Participant B, being a teacher was a relevant career option because it enabled her to maintain her role as a mother while being a woman with an occupation. From a Social Identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) the identity of a woman constitutes a multitude of roles: ‘daughter’, ‘good wife’, ‘mother’ and ‘career woman’. Added to this, within patriarchal systems the formation of the gendered identity is in constant conflict with the various roles that women are expected to maintain in society while still attempting to create a sense of self and agency (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

It was interesting to note that Participant B specifically identified with this conflict and compromised by selecting a career as a teacher, as this afforded her the opportunity to have a career and still look after her children and spend time with them during their school holidays.

This observation challenged the finding by Budig and England that women fulfilled their parenting roles, with no evidence to suggest that they selected “female jobs” because they were more “mother-friendly” (2001, p. 216). Participant B specifically contradicted Budig and England’s (2001) claim by acknowledging that she had specifically chosen a career that would still allow her to raise her children. Thus, the role of a woman as ‘mother’ could take precedence over her role as a ‘career woman’.

Participant B expanded on this by identifying that this approach was not unique to her alone:

*“So that was, uhm... I remember clearly my friend was accepted for a B.Sc., and her father’s reaction to that was: ‘I don’t see how that’s going to help you in future because when you want to marry and have children, how’s that going to enable you in your life?’ ... And she went on to teach as well”.*

Of interest in this was that in order for Participant B’s friend to maintain her position within society and to maintain her female identity “*she went on to teach as well*”. West and Zimmerman (1987) considered action such as this to be maintenance of the normative attitudes created in society. Furthermore, this adoption of normative attitudes and behaviour was consistent with the manner in which individuals behaved in accordance with their relative success (Foucault, 1980), by internalising the artefacts within that context (Burr, 1995). The impact of this gendered, self-described, identity above was not limited to initial career choice:

***Participant D:*** *...And I may have turned down roles in the past where, for example, I was pregnant with my first child and I got lots of advice to say uhh you know, ‘keep*

*things as stable as possible because you have got a major life event that's about to change your everything' ...And I took longer to move out of, out of roles uhm, so my average tenure has been like four and a half years in a role.*

Participant D acknowledged that her role as a mother resulted in a slower than usual progression of her career as her average tenure in any position was about four and a half years, which was longer than usual in her particular work environment. This was similar to the findings of Marthur-Helm (2006). From a Social Constructionism perspective Participant D, through being reflexive and through the language used within her context, was consoled as the truth created was that she had received advice to keep her position as stable as possible because of her impending motherhood which was going to have a radical impact on every aspect of her life. The advice given to her thus sustained the gendered identity of women, where her role as a mother superseded her role as working woman and Participant D thus disciplined herself in line with the patriarchal view of the female role in society (Correl, 2001; Foucault, 1980). Supporting this was Connell's (1987) finding that patriarchal dominance was not always explicit and could be communicated in subtle manners, as observed by Participant D.

Participant B provided further iteration of the restrictions on career choice and reflected that divorce was an emancipatory process for her and gave her the freedom she needed:

*"I was divorced. So, it gave me the freedom to do what I wanted to, without having to uhm, get the blessing or consent of a husband, which is a traditional way that Indian families are run..."*



The restrictive nature of patriarchal systems on the progression of women through their careers has been largely ignored in career theory, as the assumption has been that their progression and decision of a career was linear and consistent with that of their male counterparts; largely ignoring the multiplicity of roles that females had to negotiate in society (Duberly, Carmichael & Szmigin, 2014; Perry-Jenkins, Repetti & Crouter, 2000).

#### *4.3.4 Internalisation of Psychometric Assessments*

Of the seven participants within the current study, only one mentioned the use of psychometric assessments as a guiding force in her career choice. Literature has highlighted the misuse of psychometric assessments in the South African context and has highlighted the norming used by many psychometric assessments as being naïve toward the experiences of women and to individuals within a multicultural context (Baloyi, 2008; Hammersmith, 2007; Moore, 2003).

Participant D noted that while she was in high school she had completed the Myers Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) which has been noted in literature to be one of the most well-known personality tools available (Sieff & Carstens, 2006). The MBTI is a personality tool which is based on the Jungian conception of psychological types. The tool identifies four personality types based on the self-actualisation of an individual. Similar to the criticisms levied against Holland (1959) and Super (1980), there have not been any studies conducted on the psychometric properties of the MBTI within the South African context (Taylor & Yiannakis, 2007; van Zyl & Taylor, 2012).

***Participant D:** And when I finished school it was you know, I, I would have, I wanted to study, I knew it was something that I would want to do and while you are at school*

*you know, especially when you kind of get to the, at that time, what standard 11, before you get to matric. You go through various, I attended a, a, a thing, I think it was at Damelin, I can't remember, but it was to decide you know, your personality. Ja no, so you try to figure out your personality and you do all these great things and while I was at school it was various things, I have been quieter, more introverted, and I came later to find out that it was actually a Meyers Briggs uhm assessment that was done, which was, you know came out as I am an introvert which is what I knew and it kind of almost boxed you into, okay these are kind of the things that you should study, this is what you should take on, uhm and really that was how I got interested in okay, it said that I should do something around in the accounting kind of side and that's what I was studying and I went on to kind of investigate that a little bit further, I looked at some of the medical options as well so I was interested in doing not really a doctor but pharmacy, biomedical technology I looked at and then uhm, accounting was kind of the other option. So, like doing a BCom or something similar and ja, I ended up with a BCom... It kind of indirectly linked back to what that assessment said I should do...*

Note that Participant D chose her degree because this was recommended by the personality and career assessment that she did upon completing high school; a phenomenon described in psychology as internalisation (Hannah, Schaubroek & Peng, 2016). While this phenomenon was beyond the scope of the current study it could be understood from a Social Constructionism perspective; where the psychometric assessment results were seen as the *language* to be used by this individual to construct their reality and to reinforce their view of self ( Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1980). Further to this, it acted as a reinforcing and restrictive (“*kind of almost boxed you*”) mechanism that this individual used to form truths about their

self, and as result pursued a career based on this (*"I ended up with a BCom"*) (Foucault, 1980).

The participants' narratives on their construction of self were consistent with literature in that their self was created through interaction with their environments (Bujold, 2004). The extracts above identified various socio-economic elements which guided and shaped their identities and consequently guided their career decision-making processes. These findings have thus highlighted the need to understand the construction of self as it played a crucial role in making choices related to their careers and was consistent with literature (Bujold, 2004; Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011; Rutherford, 1990; Yang & Lu, 2007).

#### **4.4 Theme Three: Family**

Within literature, the family has been identified as a key mechanism in the career decision-making process of an individual, where the values and beliefs of the family become indoctrinated in the individual (Chen, 1998; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Savickas, 2013). The participants within the current study viewed the impact of their families on their careers in two ways. Firstly, and consistent with literature, their families created career expectations (Miller & Brown, 2005; Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990) and secondly, their families represented a support structure (Grabowski et al., 2001). Families exist within a Societal System (Patton & McMahon, 2006) and by extension shape the construction of the realities held by the individuals (Burr, 1995).

##### *4.4.1 Family Expectations*

Miller and Brown (2005) noted that within non-European societies the parents of an individual decided their career choice even before the individual themselves was able to make

such decisions. This observation was consistent with the career choice of Participant B, where due to their parent's occupation there was an expectancy to follow suit:

**Participant B:** ...*Unfortunately uhm, being the child of a headmaster, the expectation was that I too would go into the field of education...*

Furthermore, Participant E provided support for Buthelezi et al.'s (2009) assertion that career aspirations were internalised through observation; Participant E acknowledged that parents desired particular occupations for their offspring because of the perceived successes that those occupations had to offer (Foucault, 1980):

**Participant E:** ... *Uhm, I think coming from an Indian background a lot of expectation is put on the person by their parents, you know for instance, uhm, you either need to be a doctor or you need to be a lawyer or you need to be a chartered accountant or something to do with in the financial industry; and those are pretty much the three main careers being, well the views that an Indian parent would want for their children as that is seen as what has been successful...*

Contextually, Participant's E narrative provided an interesting linkage between the emergence of Indians in South Africa, the existence of artefacts in society (Burr, 1995) and career choice. Literature has evidenced two arrivals of Indian South Africans and of particular interest within this finding was the arrival of *Passenger Indians*. Passenger Indians constituted professional individuals (Bhana, 2008; Vahed, 2000). In stating that one had to be a doctor, a lawyer, a chartered accountant, or be employed in the financial industry, Participant E was relaying the impact of what were seen as successful occupations within the

Indian community (Ferrante, 2008). The observations of success were then constructed within the reality of Indian parents and this knowledge was then shared with their offspring, further shaping their perceptions of success (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1980). This observation was further supported by Participant C who stated that her choice of career was to enable her parents to be able to “boast” about her success:

**Participant C:** ... *I had to study something, there was pressure to study something... You had to get something where you were successful; uhm, Indian families like to boast about what their children are doing... I chose something that allowed them to boast...*

Further to this Participant C acknowledged that her family’s expectations were restrictive in terms of her career choice and pursuing her passion. The expectations of her parents were thus seen as an insidious mechanism of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1980):

**Participant C:** ... *If I was really given freedom I would leave and I would open a beach bar in Durban... Social economic factors that prevent me from doing that is my mother saying, “you are taking too much of a risk” ... [laughing] ...*

Participant E and Participant G also supported the element of insidious control as they acknowledged that there was an unspoken obligation towards their parents due to the opportunities provided by them:

**Participant E:** ... *Uhm, I think you know obviously from a financial point of view, knowing that your parents are uhm supporting you, you know, potentially paying for*

*your career, you would do it to, to make them happy more than yourself and in most cases...*

**Participant G:** *... Ja, I guess more of a moral responsibility that I felt for everything that was afforded to me growing up. I felt it was – it was you know, my duty to give back...*

It must be noted, however, that a study conducted by Dietrich and Kracke (2009) found that parental expectations, when coupled with family support, acted as a motivating factor within the career decision-making process of an individual.

#### *4.4.2 Family Support*

Contrary to expectations, families also enabled individuals to make relevant career decisions and assisted in the development of their confidence (Amatea, Smith-Adcock & Villares, 2006). In doing so, family support enabled these individuals to utilise their opportunities and provided a barrier for them to explore their skills (Zellman & Waterman, 1998). Furthermore, in a study conducted by Simmons (2008) it was found that adolescent students leaned towards their parents for advice and support. The findings from the narratives of the participants were consistent with the views expressed above.

**Participant B:** *... I had a very uhm, strong support system from my family. Uhm, most especially, my father who encouraged free thinking and uhm he enabled us to be the best we can be. He always drove high standards; he had expectations that we would do what we set out to do...It's based solely on the fact that I never ever grew up wanting anything or being poverty-stricken or knowing. Even if my dad struggled, he*

*never let on to us. We don't know if he had financial difficulty or he was strained in any way. We were always in a safe environment; we were always uhm, mollycoddled to some extent because we were never exposed to it. Whereas you speak to many people and they tell you we grew up in such a tough environment; I grew up not even knowing that I was disempowered...*

Participant B referred to her father as enabling a fostering environment. This was consistent with Zellman and Waterman (1998) when noting that the family acted as a barrier for an individual: “*Whereas you speak to many people and they tell you we grew up in such a tough environment; I grew up not even knowing that I was disempowered*”. Notice how, due to the reflexive nature of narratives, she acknowledged her naivety towards being disempowered (Bujold, 2004).

Additionally, Keller and Whiston (2008) noted that familial support also provided love and support for an individual, where the family acted as an emotional support structure for the individual. According to Keller and Whiston (2008), the relevance of this was that the individual was thus able to make career decisions in an effective manner:

***Participant C:*** ... *I was very cushioned at home... Everything was taken care of, I mean you had a helper, your mom cooked the food; everything was taken care of. I didn't have to take care of anything...*

Dietrich and Kracke (2009) also noted that having involved parents during the academic life of an individual provided a positive influence in their career decision-making process. They observed that parents who assumed responsibility of their child's academic performance

outside the scope of the educators had a positive impact. Participant G provided acknowledgment of this:

***Participant G:** ... When you went home, you know there was strong support from family to make sure that you were doing well. And if you weren't, you know it was not just the teachers' responsibility to – to get it right. Parents took a lot of responsibility...*

In summary, the observations made by participants within this study showed support for literature in that their family structures played crucial roles in their decision-making processes. This influence was observed by the emotional support provided by their families on the one-hand and by the fact that these individuals had to negotiate their career choices in accordance with the expectations of their families on the other.

## **4.5 Miscellaneous: Dialogue into the Future**

This theme emerged as a dialogue between the researcher and the participants. In being reflexive of their career journey thus far, some participants identified elements which would dictate their career choice moving forward. In line with the criticisms levied against career theory viewing career choice as a linear process, which was discussed in Chapter Two, the researcher found it difficult locating literature around the career antecedents amongst adults beyond the impact of marriage and gender. To this end, only two participants referred to their marital status, however it was done outside the context of the current theme. Thus, in being



cautious and not assuming the marital status of the participants, the narratives of the participants are illustrated below, describing factors that would guide their career choice.

Firstly, Participant B noted that her career decision to move out of education and into the corporate world was based on the need for finances:

**Participant B:** ... *It was a pure uh financial decision for me because, unfortunately, working for the government wasn't bringing in the kind of income that private sector would pay you, but also, very early on, it might have been about 1991, '92, during the course of uhm, the whole transformation from a political sphere...*

Secondly, Participant C stated that her choice to remain within the corporate sector was based on the notion that the corporate was more stable:

**Participant C:** ... *You stay in corporate because it's stable...*

Thirdly, Participant E acknowledged the current turbulent financial climate (Albien & Naidoo, 2016) and asserted that this would guide his career choice moving forward:

**Participant E:** ... *It's obviously for me... it was more a case of what can I choose and what can I do in a career that will prevent me from being poor, to put it quite bluntly...The economy; we currently in a space where the country is being looked at in a very negative light. It almost makes you start thinking what the future for yourself is within the country and so far as job prospects and job growth prospects are in the future...*

Lastly, Participant B stated that her career choices were based on continuous self-development and the skills she brought to a team:

*Participant B: ... I'm resilient, and I'm open to change, which I don't think I've uhm shared with you, my age. I'm nearly 50 years old, but I maintain relevance in the world of work so that my role remains vital. I am viewed as... I hope to be viewed as a pivotal part of a team wherever I am...*

## **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter presented the emergent themes that participants described as being impactful on their career choices. Firstly, their *status* within society had an impact on their access and exposure to career determinants that existed within the System. This ranged from their education as well as socialising elements within their communities. Secondly, the participants identified that constructing their *self* was a crucial determinant of their career choices as this construction was influenced by various *truth* forming elements (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1980). Thirdly, participants identified the impact of their *families* on their career decision-making processes. Lastly, a brief dialogue presentation was made on the future career determinants of some of the participants.

In discussing the themes above, the study relied on Patton and McMahon's (2006) Systems Theory Framework; Burr's (1995) Social Constructionism; and various Foucauldian perspectives (1980). At each engagement, where relevant, new theory was introduced to discuss the findings and literature was used to support the findings.

### 4.6.1 Addressing the Research Questions

The current study emerged from the challenges in using traditional career theories to understand the career choice of South African Indian Professionals. Traditional career theories place emphasis on the individual and have subsequently failed to recognise the potential social influences which the individual has no control over (Stead & Watson, 2002). Career choice is not a purely intrinsic process; rather it is influenced by an individual's relations with others and by the manner in which their social reality is constructed (Burr, 1995; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Savickas, 2002). In order to address these challenges, the current study adopted three distinct research questions which will be discussed below.

#### *4.6.1.1 What are some of the Prominent Contextual Factors which Influence Indian South African Professionals' Career Choices?*

The question was distinctly discussed using the narratives of the participants. Emerging from the analysis, the study noted three distinct contextual factors which had an impact on their career decision making processes viz. *status*, the *construction of the self* and *family*.

Firstly, the status of the individual created an expression of their social class, which had an impact on their career opportunities and their access to education. This status was as a result of ideologies that shaped the context. In this case, the Apartheid ideology was able to create distinct communities which developed and existed in isolation to other communities.

Secondly, social and structural influences played a critical role in developing the individuals' perceptions of their selves, which in-turn influenced their career decisions. Subsequently, these factors included the grooming processes of these individuals, an intrinsic need to

overcome their contexts and most critically, gendered roles that existed in patriarchal societies.

Lastly, family emerged as a prominent factor in the career decision making process, as the family both created expectations for the individuals and provided financial and emotional support.

*4.6.1.2 How have Social Factors, such as Family and Education (to Name a Few), Influenced Career Choice amongst Indian South African Professionals? What are the Implications of these Social Factors (for Example, Family and Education)?*

A clear finding amongst all the participants was that career choice did not exist in isolation and was not an intrinsic process, as positioned within western career theory. That is, the environment which they were exposed to shaped the manner in which they had access to information around making informed career choices. This environmental exposure then played a critical role in shaping the manner in which these individuals viewed their selves. Critical in this was that the participants highlighted that their conceptualisation of the self was not an intrinsic process and that their self was guided by constructs within their environment. Participants also highlighted the role played by their families in compounding their environment.

Firstly, the status of these individuals provided access and exposure to various artefacts within their environments and they internalised effective traits and behaviours to guide their career decisions (Foucault, 1980). Secondly, through the socialisation process the participants identified the make-up of their communities and the influence of their peers as being determinants of their career choices. Lastly, their financial backgrounds meant that they were

fortunate to attain further education, thus allowing for development and growth of their status.

Furthermore, contrary to western theory belief (Holland 1992; Super, 1990), the participants within the study dispelled the view that the construction of their selves existed in isolation. Rather, these individuals learned from and behaved in a manner consistent with the observed behaviour in their environment; the impact of which was a life-process that did not exist in a linear manner. This learning also meant that individuals then witnessed successes and failures within their context, resulting in them developing a need to constantly challenge themselves.

In recognition that South Africa and the Indian Community is patriarchal (Bhana, 2008) the restrictive nature of this was highlighted as impacting the career decisions of females. The self of a woman was created through a negotiation between various roles which society dictated to be relevant; that is, being a daughter, being a wife and then being a mother while still attempting to forge a career (Hayden, 2002). As a result, the career choice of a female was governed by the multiplicity of roles that she held in society.

The last factor to have emerged from the current study was that of the influence of family on the career decision making process. The family was identified as acting as both a negative influence in the form of creating expectations and as a positive influence in the form of providing support. The participants identified that their parents informed their career choices based on the career roles of their parents at that time. That is, there was an expectancy that the career choice made by the individuals should be in alignment with the occupations of the parents. Parents developed a perception of successful careers and expected their children to choose their careers based on these perceptions (Foucault, 1980). Finally, the family structure

allowed for these individuals to lean on their parents for support and in doing so they were provided with a sustainable supply of emotional and financial support.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & LIMITATIONS**

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the study and concludes with recommendations for further research. The limitations that were experienced during the study are also discussed.

#### **5.1 Summary of the Main Findings**

The aim of the current research was to understand the social implications on the career choices of Indian South African Professionals and to contribute to the growing discourse on contextual career theories. The study drew upon the Social Constructionism perspective and the Systems Theory Framework to address three broad research directives: (i) What were some of the prominent contextual factors which influenced Indian South African Professionals' career choices? (ii) How have social factors influenced career choice amongst Indian South African Professionals? (iii) What were the implications of these social factors?

In order to attain the appropriate data, the study adopted a narrative approach allowing participants to describe their career journeys in a manner which was reflexive and elaborate. Furthermore, to make sense of the narratives provided the study made use of a thematic analysis approach to identify the emergent themes. Social Constructionism guided this study to look at the narratives of the individuals in a holistic manner and to be cognisant of the language used in constructing their realities.

A clear finding amongst all the participants was that career choice did not exist in isolation and was not an intrinsic process as positioned within western career theory. That is, that the

environment they were exposed to shaped the manner in which they had access to and were exposed to information around making informed career choices. This environmental exposure played a critical role in shaping the manner in which these individuals viewed their selves. Critical in this was that participants highlighted that their conceptualisation of self was not an intrinsic process and that their self was guided by constructs within their environments. Further to this, the participants highlighted the roles played by their families in compounding their environments.

The discussion that follows summarises the main findings in relation to their thematic emergence and has succinctly addressed the research aim of the study:

#### 1. Navigating Status: Exposure and Access

In identifying their status, the participants of the study noted the impact of their social class on their career opportunities; their access to education; and the impact of the community. The finding was consistent with literature in noting that the wider social context played a role in determining their career choices (Ash, 2002; Buthelezi et al., 2009; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Savickas, 2013; Watson, 2006). The manner in which these individuals related to their status had an impact on the subjective experiences of these individuals and their relative positions within society were thus identified.

According to Foucault (1980), the status of an individual provides access and exposure to various artefacts within an environment and the individual internalises effective traits and behaviour so as to guide their career decision. To this end, the study participants identified the available roles within society as a key mechanism influencing their career choices.



Secondly, through the socialisation process the participants identified the make-up of their communities and the influence of their peers as being determinants of their career choices. The participants acknowledged that the make-up of society was constituted by the nature of the political climate and the restrictive implications thereof, that is the available opportunities, the types of opportunities and the available resources (Bhana, 2008; Macleod, 2004; Oosthuizen & Bhorat, 2005).

Thirdly, it was identified that due to the restrictive nature of their communities there existed a limited availability of knowledge and this acted in the same manner as a constricted environment; that is, the effects of the exposure and access did not constitute a linear-causal relationship and the lack thereof had an equivalent effect.

Lastly, the participants acknowledged that their relative '*fortune*' in society resulted in a positive impact on their career choices as it allowed them access and exposure to elements in society which were not otherwise available.

## 2. Construction of Self

Contrary to western theory belief (Holland, 1992; Super, 1990), the participants within the study dispelled the view that the construction of their selves existed in isolation. The participants acknowledged and provided insight into the mechanisms which influenced their development and view of their selves by acknowledging the social, cultural and structural impacts of their selves. In this respect, the participants were consistent with literature that critiqued the development of self in isolation (Bujold, 2004; Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Rutherford, 1990; Yang & Lu, 2007). Furthermore, their view of the self was consistent with

the theoretical frameworks of Burr (1995) and Patton and McMahon (2002) adopted in this study.

a. Grooming

Firstly, participants identified grooming as the process in which they learned from and behaved in relation to the relationships fostered in the environment (Abbot, 2001; Sharf, 2002). The impact of which could be understood from a Social Constructionism perspective where, through exposure to impressionable artefacts within their society, they fostered interests and values in line with what was seen as beneficial (Foucault, 1980). The impact of grooming prevailed throughout the life-cycle of an individual and was not limited to their impressionable years. Furthermore, grooming acted both as a form of disciplinary power where the individual created a restricted version of their self so as to be successful within a career (Foucault, 1979), as well as a mechanism which assisted their career progression.

b. Wanting improvement and a need for challenge

Secondly, in creating a perception of the self, participants eluded to a relationship that existed between wanting to improve upon their context and seeking out challenges to achieve this. To this end, the study found that Bandura's (1977) iteration of vicarious learning was a concept which could be used to understand this. Participants learned through witnessing the successes and failures of their parents and through this they formed career perceptions in order to move beyond this (Bandura, 1977; Burr, 1995). Furthermore, through the socialisation process, participants then developed a need to constantly challenge themselves and sought career opportunities that allowed this to occur.

c. Gendered roles

Thirdly, in constructing the self, participants noted the restrictive nature of a patriarchal society in choosing a career path (la Rey & Merle, 1999; Marome, 2005; Moodley, 2007). Herein, the self of a woman was created through a negotiation between the various roles which society dictated to be relevant; that is, firstly being a daughter, then being a wife and then being a mother while still attempting to build a career (Hayden, 2002). The finding drew on the work of the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1986) which noted that females were expected to juggle various iterations of the self in attempting to forge their authentic self. The career choices of females then became a compromise so that they were still able to maintain the membership to various groups (Correl, 2001; Duberly et al., 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; West & Zimmerman; 1987).

d. Internalisation of psychometric assessments

Lastly, literature has noted the misuse of psychometric assessments throughout the development of career psychology within the South African context and highlighted the limitations of using assessments developed in a western context within the multi-cultural context of South Africa (Baloyi, 2008; Hammersmith, 2007; Moore, 2003). While only one participant identified using a career assessment, interest emerged around the use of the results to affirm her identity and thus directed her career choices in a manner which the assessment ‘advised’ her (Participant B). The study discussed this phenomenon within the ambits of Social Constructionism and concluded that assessment results operated in the same manner as the reinforcing elements of language and artefacts in constructing a reality (Burr, 1995; Foucault, 1980).

### 3. Family

The family has been a consistent feature in career choice within emerging qualitative approaches. The family has been identified to act as both a negative influence in the form of creating expectations and a positive influence in the form of providing support. The findings within the current study were consistent with the findings in the literature (Chen, 1998; Duffy & Dik, 2009; Grabowski et al., 2001; Johnson & Mortimer, 2002; Miller & Brown, 2005; Phillips & Sandstrom, 1990; Savickas, 2013), and family was viewed as existing within the Societal System (Patton & McMahon, 2006); resulting as a shaping mechanism in the career choice of an individual (Burr, 1995).

#### a. Family expectation

The participants identified that their parents informed their career choices based on the current career roles of their parents. That is, there was an expectancy that the career choices made by these individuals should be in alignment with the current occupations of their parents. Parents developed perceptions of successful careers and the expectation was created for the individuals to choose their careers based on these perceptions (Foucault, 1980). An interesting discovery was that the perception of successful career choices tied back to the emergence of passenger Indians in South Africa (Vahed, 2000). Furthermore, the participants described an element of insidious discipline (Foucault, 1980) as there was an unspoken obligation towards their parents for the sacrifices that they had made on their behalf.

#### b. Family Support

The family system also presented a support structure for individuals to harness their career choices. The family structure allowed for the individuals to lean on their parents for support and in doing so a sustainable supply of emotional and financial support was provided

(Amatea et al. 2006; Simmons, 2008). Beyond this the family represented a nurturing environment and acted as a barrier to outside conflict (Zellman & Waterman, 1998), and this support was extended to the academic performance of these individuals as their parents were active participants throughout the process (Dietrich & Kracke, 2009).

#### 4. Miscellaneous: dialogue into the future

This theme emerged from the findings as a forward-looking process for the individuals. The researcher found it difficult to locate relevant literature to support the claims made by the participants and they were thus presented as an interest. Firstly, the participants were adamant that their future career choices would be based on the stability of their environments and on pursuit of financial gain. Lastly, one participant asserted that their future career choice would be based on the opportunity for skills development.

## **5.2 Recommendations for Theory**

The findings that emerged within the current study supported the call for qualitative approaches towards career theory (Collin & Young, 1992; Kuit & Watson, 2005; Mkhize, 2005; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Stead & Watson, 2006). It is therefore recommended that career theory within South Africa adopt a Social Constructionism lens, in accordance with the suggestion by Burr (1995).

A Social Constructionism approach will allow for the analysis of the manner in which individuals construct their reality and as a result, a more holistic understanding of career choice and development can be formulated (Del Corso & Rehfuss, 2011; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000; Savickas, 2002, 2005). In no way is this study denouncing the unequivocal contributions made by traditional theory, however, it does call further attention to its limited

applicability across factors such as gender, culture and socioeconomic factors, especially across indigenous people who may have their own interpretations of psychological constructs (Moore, 2003; Watson, 2009).

This study, through the use of narratives, has shown the rich information which may be extracted when allowing individuals to interpret their career journeys. The journey towards creating a contextual career theory has called for more indigenous approaches to be adopted (Watson, 2009), however, the current study traversed on the side of caution in referring to the formation of an indigenous psychology, as Watson (2010) cautions against an exclusive indigenous psychology as it may act in the same isolating manner as western theory.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

Firstly, in engaging with the narratives of the participants the study has found a strong emergence of the participants' self as a determinant to career choice. There is a need to build on this so as to understand the identity construction of an individual. As an extension to this, there is a need for research that looks at the internalisation of personality tests by individuals and the impact that this has on career choice.

Secondly, there is a need for research that explores the validity and reliability of Holland et al.'s (1994) SDS assessment. The research should explore the consistency of the tool in correlating to occupations that exist in the South African context.

Thirdly, the current study has found a need for research around the career choice of adults. That is, beyond the scope of marriage and motherhood, what are the factors which impact the career decisions of adults? This is because it is no longer relevant to view careers as

progressing in a linear manner. Further to this, the insidious nature of family expectation is a point for further exploration.

Lastly, there is limited research within the South African context that explores the barriers to Indians attaining education. Future research should be conducted so as to understand the factors that may impact on the access to education.

## **5.4 Limitations**

The researcher noted that as an insider to the context of Indians, there was recognition of this by the participants and the researcher felt that there were opportunities for further exploration, but due to participants' acknowledgement of the researcher's insider status they were often brief in their responses (Neuman, 2011). Further to this, due to the limited sample size the current study makes no claim to generalizability and future studies should expand and aim for this.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **1. Opening**

- a. **Introduction of myself**
- b. **The purpose of this research and what my intentions are with the findings**
- c. **Setting of boundaries between myself and the respondent**

### **2. Body**

- a. **General demographic information, so as to have an understanding of who the respondent is**
  - i. **Age, Current Career, Education**
- b. **Knowing the respondent:**
  - i. **“How would you describe who you are?”**
  - ii. **“What relevance does this have on your career choice?”**
  - iii. **“Describe your social background?”**
  - iv. **“What effect, if any, did this have on your career choice?”**
  - v. **Thereafter questions will be based on probing within the interview**

c.

### **3. Closing**

- a. **Thanking the respondent for the time and reiterating the purpose of the interview.**

## APPENDIX B – CONSENT FORM

Dear Participant,

I am conducting research towards the completion of my Masters degree. The aim of this particular study is to engage with the career narratives of Indian South African Professionals. In doing so, I aim to look at the contextual issues which may have affected career choice. By looking at the contextual issues we will better be able to understand career decisions and look at the role of context when making these decisions.

The manner in which we will explore career narratives is through an open dialogue in which we will be able to understand the ‘story’ behind your career decision. To be able to grasp the essence of this session I seek your permission to record the audio of this interview. All information gathered will be securely kept for a period of five years. Thereafter it would be discarded in a secure manner. There will no violation of your privacy and your identity would not be reported on during the analysis of the research. Such reporting shall be done using a pseudo-name (a name which has no relation to you) thus protecting your anonymity.

During the interview you have the authority of not providing information that you deem private and may cause detriment to your person. As well as you have the authority of stopping the interview at any time if you feel that you do not wish to continue any longer in this research. All measures will be taken to ensure that your anonymity is protected and all information gathered in the interview shall be confidential and will be treated as such. To this end, on completion of all interviews I shall provide individual feedback of relevant themes that have emerged within the interview processes to you via email and if you request a soft copy of my research on completion I shall make this available to you.

### **Declaration of Informed Consent**

I have been informed about the nature, purpose and procedures for the study. I have also received, read and understood the written information about the study. I understand everything that has been explained to me and I consent to take part in the study and give consent for this session to be audio-recorded.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire and that the information that I provide will be anonymous and confidential and only be used for research purposes.

Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX C: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



18 November 2014

Mr Aavishkar Maharaj 210503414  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
Howard College Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/1227/014M

Project title: "A narrative exploration of social implications on career choices by Indian South African Professionals"

Dear Mr Maharaj

### Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 17 November 2014, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/px

cc Supervisor: Dr Shanya Reuben  
cc Academic Leader Research: Professor D McCracken  
cc School Administrator: Ms Ausie Luthuli

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