AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE FACTORS INFLUENCING CAREER CHOICE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PREVIOUSLY DISADVANTAGED MBA STUDENTS IN A BUSINESS SCHOOL IN KWAZULU- NATAL

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Contents

1. <u>Abstract</u>

This research paper aimed to investigate the factors influencing career choice and development among previously disadvantaged individuals, specifically focusing on MBA students. The core aim was to analyse and better understand the factors that have played a key role in shaping the careers of people of colour within the South African context, taking into consideration the political, social and economic climate and its impact on previously disadvantaged individuals from a career perspective.

The research group comprised of both male and female South Africans of colour, namely Indian or African or Coloured. These participants ranged in terms of age from thirty to forty one years old. Participants were sourced from a business school in Kwa Zulu - Natal and were all in the process of completing their MBA (Master of Business Administration) degrees. Participants were interviewed using semi- structured, in depth interviews that ran for approximately forty five minutes each. Each interview was recorded. This information was then transcribed and analysed using Inductive Thematic Analysis. This approach to data interpretation ensured that the rich wealth of information was analysed effectively by the researcher and more importantly, made sense of. Seven key themes emerged from the data.

Themes such as the impact of circumstance, parental and family life, culture and society, and context and the environment emerged and were discussed further. Other key themes emerging from the data included identity and self awareness, interests versus goals, and drive and self belief.

Findings indicated that the careers of previously disadvantaged individuals were impacted by unique circumstances experienced by these individuals. The political, social and economic climate had a profound role to play in shaping the paths taken by these individuals and also significantly impacted their development within organisations thereafter.

Findings indicated mixed reactions to the pro transformation policies and unveiled thought provoking feedback from participants on their experiences and opinions with regards to the above.

2. <u>Introduction</u>

Organisational Psychology, as a discipline looks at individuals and groups within the working context and theorises behaviour and thinking in line with the work context. Career and career theories are an interesting area in organisational psychology. This paper is therefore career centric in that it will look at the factors influencing career choice and development of previously disadvantaged individuals. The investigation will assess those areas/ factors that have had a significant impact on the career choices made by previously disadvantaged individuals and that have shaped their paths followed. Furthermore, the study will aim to understand the impact of these factors and unpack them so as to give meaning to them and draw conclusions. The study will also focus on previously disadvantaged individuals specifically. Focusing on them will provide interesting data on their own experiences, opinions and concerns with regards to their career choices and career development.

The literature on career choice and development is extensive. For the purposes of this study, some of these theoretical viewpoints will be taken into consideration and will form the basis of the literature aspect of the paper. Some of the theorists acknowledged include Donald Super and his Career Development Theory, Lent's Social Cognitive Career Theory and Shreuder and Theron's views on identity and career.

The concepts of disadvantage, affirmative action and employment equity will also be reviewed, discussed and acknowledged as issues key to this research study.

This research will therefore take these factors into consideration together with the literature on career development in analysing the data and presenting the findings via discussion. Importantly, the research will aim to provide insight and depth into the factors that have influenced career choice and development of previously disadvantaged individuals within the working context with the aim to make marked steps forward in a limited area of research.

3. <u>Literature Review</u>

3.1 <u>Introduction</u>

South Africa is a land characterised by change. Substantial social, economic and political change has taken place over the years, specifically post 1994 with the emergence of democracy. These changes are vividly portrayed in all aspects of South African life, in this case, the focus being on career development issues. Previously disadvantaged groups (all people of colour in S.A. who were not classified as White as well as women and disabled individuals) were discriminated against. Job opportunities were minimal or limited to specific types of jobs and the government policy in terms of work served to uplift White employees. Thus African, Indian and Coloured people, and women were subjected to menial work positions despite any academic requirement fulfilment or skill proficiency (Moleah, 1993). Today, however these previously disadvantaged groups' circumstances have changed. There have been changes in law and policies related to work/labour and these have improved job opportunities and job acquisition for them. (Moleah, 1993). This in turn has had a profound effect on the factors that today influence career development choices in previously disadvantaged groups and these will be further investigated.

3.2 <u>South African Context</u>

There is extensive literature on South Africa's history and the changes that took place pre 1994. Much has also been written about the "new South Africa", characterised by principles of equality and democracy. However, not much work has

been conducted specifically on the effects of these changes on the career choices of previously disadvantaged groups. It would be short-sighted to adopt western perspectives of career theory here as the South African context is unique and distinct from other countries. Social, political, economic and historical factors have shaped our present day situation and the way that we as South Africans view ourselves (previously advantaged and disadvantaged groups) and more specifically our career choices.

The world is changing at a rapid pace and these changes –economic, political, technological and cultural have profound effects on the world of work. Along with this is a degree of uncertainty that is playing havoc with people's careers and lives (Greenhaus, Callana & Godshalk, 2000). There is also intense competition in the corporate world for position and power and coupled with an uncertain economy, many South Africans are feeling pressure to secure themselves financially by succeeding in the workplace.

Changes such as restructuring of work, changes in technology, downsizing, mergers, takeovers and so forth have an impact on individuals who will apply for jobs and those already within the workplace. Since organisational structures and workplaces are changing at such an alarming rate, traditional approaches to career planning and counselling are today obsolete and inadequate (Hardijzer, 1999). This coupled with the empowerment policies at many organisations and the governmental drive to uplift the previously disadvantaged has resulted in a new genre of employees who do not rely on the organisation to promote them but rather shape their own destiny through hard work and commitment. Twenty first century careers are

dynamic and there is a noticeable reduction in linear, hierarchical patterns of advancement. Rather, people are changing jobs very often and are hardly seen doing one job the same way for long periods of time (Hardijzer, 1999).

3.3 Career Defined

According to Hall (1976), cited in Collin&Young (2000), career is, "the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work related experiences and activities over the span of the person's life". Career brings together the individual's occupational, professional and organisational experiences with other aspects of their life. However, more importantly, career also involves self-identity because it reflects an individual's sense of self, who they are, who they wish to be. It may also reflect the individual's hopes, dreams, frustrations and fears.

Definitions of career have changed profoundly over the years. Research has shown that we now have what is termed, "a multiple career concept". This can be distinguished along four lines – (1) a traditional linear career concept which emphasises upward mobility; (2) an expert career that focuses on stability in a speciality area for example as a financial analyst with minimal advancement; (3) a spiral career in which there are major shifts in career every 7-10 years and (4) a transitory career which is characterised by changes in career as frequently as every 3-5 years (Greenhaus et al.2000).

Due to the constant and dynamic changes occurring in government legislature, work structure, policies and job opportunities in South Africa, people especially those

who were historically disadvantaged concept of career may be multiple. This was since they were not afforded the opportunities to follow desired careers and have more opportunities available to them in present day South Africa. There is much opportunity to grow in terms of career now and many avenues within which to do it (Greenhaus et.al, 2000).

3.4 Super's Career Development Theory

In order to understand career development and career choices made by individuals, it is essential to locate them within theories of career development and career choice that were developed by theorists such as Super (1996) and Lent (1996).

Donald Super developed his theory of career development over forty years of research. This theory involves a process of five life stages from childhood to old age (Schreuder & Theron, 1997). The theory essentially revolves around the premise that career development is a compromise between self concept (individuals) and aspects of reality including social, economic and cultural factors. Self- concept refers to one's sense of identity that is the way one views him/her own personal characteristics. These self-concepts are formed through the individual's interaction with the environment within which they exist. Thus people identify themselves within roles such as family member, student, employee etc. Self –concepts that are not stagnant but may change with changes in the social world such as social, economic, cultural, occupational, technological changes and there may be positive or negative images of the self.

Thus career development theory is about the implementation of self-concepts within occupational contexts. In this sense Super's theory can be used within the

South African context. Previously disadvantaged groups self-concepts related to their career development (occupational context) have changed fundamentally as a direct result of social, economic, political and cultural changes. Thus they find themselves today with many new opportunities for career development that were not open to them before.

Super (1992) as cited in Schreuder & Theron (1997) identifies five-life stages-:

- **Growth (Birth – 12/14 yrs) -** Parents are role models to children who develop a self concept via the contact with adults. Children interact with the social environment. Thus children are driven to explore and experience their world. The pleasant experiences they have, in turn become interests and these interwoven with the development of self-esteem, independence and ideas about the future result in an ability to plan one's future (career).

- **Exploration (14-25 yrs) -** At this stage adolescents make uncertain career choices. They begin exploring different job opportunities through vacation and part-time work and this often leads to choosing a particular field of work to be explored thoroughly.

- **Establishment (25-45) -** This is the period of trial and stabilisation. The trial period usually occurs within the twenties; people try different jobs and finally decide on the one that best fits. This is the stabilisation period, usually in the thirties and early forties. This period is characterised by change, some individuals may thrive on change while others may become frustrated by it.

- **Maintenance (45-65) -** At this stage there appears to be a continuation of a stabilised work situation. Some individuals may stagnate at this stage due to

non-acquisition of desired goals, others may be further motivated to succeed by furthering education, capitalising on opportunities and so forth, while others may still be inspired to bring about change.

- **Decline (+/- 65) -** As people get older, their involvement in work activities also declines. They may change work roles, seek less responsibility. This leads to retirement, which can be either a positive or negative thing for the individual.

Super argues that his life stages are not distinct and invariable; the ages at which they start and end are flexible and characteristics of one stage may be carried through to other stages. His Life-Career Rainbow model thus portrays a series of life stages in the course of the total life span (Schreuder & Theron, 1997).

South African society is characterised by cultural diversity and any theory of career development adopted within our context must take this factor of cultural diversity into consideration. A strength of Super's theory is its flexibility in incorporating cultural variables (Langley as cited in Stead & Watson, 1999). Super takes cognisance of the influence of culture on career development processes. As mentioned earlier, Super suggests that career development is as a result of a dynamic interaction between the individual and his/her environment. This includes the cultural context within which the individual exists (Stead & Watson, 1999)

There are limitations to Super's theory of career development. This theory has gained enormous recognition and acceptance worldwide; however there are still inherent shortcomings when applying it to the South African context. Super's theory

does not take into account fundamental aspects relevant to our context such as ethnic identity, discrimination (prejudice), unemployment and worldview (Stead & Watson, 1999). Super's theory does not take the enormous unemployment problem S.A faces today into consideration. According to the theory, individuals may have different job options available to them when deciding on a career path to follow. This is certainly not the case in South Africa. Furthermore, although Super makes mention of the impact on socio-economic, political, familial factors, it is vital to study these within our unique context (Stead & Watson, 1999). It would also be important in this context to look at career adaptability to a changing world from younger than the adult group as in South Africa people are faced with dynamic changes from a very young age. Role-modelling is an essential part of children's career development; the South African context must be taken into consideration here, as many young children are the first generation to go to school and tertiary institutions.

3.5 Social Cognitive Career Theory

Research has shown that South Africa needs to adopt theories of career development and counselling that acknowledge our unique circumstances, that is, our sociocultural and socio-economic context into consideration. The assumptions of western models do not, as highlighted earlier necessarily hold true for individuals within our context. Many young people do not have access to adequate education, social and economic resources. In South Africa many do not have the financial stability to ensure a smooth path through school and into tertiary education. Many live amidst poverty and squalor and it is vital for these aspects to be recognised. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) of Lent (1996) as cited in Stead & Watson (1999)

may be used to explain career behaviour within our context. The concepts of SCCT include triadic reciprocity, self-efficacy expectations, outcome expectations and goals.

Triadic reciprocity refers to a triadic relationship between personal attributes (such as feelings, attitudes, gender and aptitude), the external environment and overt behaviour (Bruin as cited in Stead & Watson. 1999). These three mechanisms are interlocking and affect one another bidirectionally; this means that while the environment influences individuals' behaviour and personal attributes, the same behaviour and personal attributes also influence the environment. In the same way, personal attributes may influence behaviour and behaviour can lead to change in personal attributes. This view portrays the idea that people actively shape their environment (the environment shapes them too) and they are therefore not passive recipients of their environment. Self- efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their ability to perform specific tasks. People who believe that they will be successful at a task will be more likely to attempt it and perform better than those who have the same capabilities and skills but lack the belief that they will succeed.

Outcome expectations are what people believe the results of their behaviour will be. People are more likely to attempt behaviours when they feel those such behaviours will lead to desirable/positive outcomes. Goals as defined by Stead and Watson (1999) are the –"determination to engage in a particular activity or to affect a particular future outcome" (pg.381). Goals help individuals to organise and plan their action and behaviour. SCCT sees people as providing direction to their lives. According to SCCT, if people have positive self-efficacy and outcome expectations, they will develop interests in those particular areas. Therefore people will be

interested in activities in which they feel secure and confident and where they believe they will succeed as a result of their participation. According to Lent & Brown (1996), as cited in Stead & Watson (1999), people's interests are tied to their learning experiences. Interests will therefore change through a person's lifespan and this depends on the learning experiences the individual may have.

SCCT explains the career choice process as flowing from goals and activities that develop out of interests. People will therefore pursue a career and set career goals in fields in which they are interested. When individuals' perform career related activities, their self-efficacy and outcome expectations are either strengthened or weakened depending on their level of performance. This in turns forms a feedback system to determine the kind of career that person will pursue. There are however also cases where career choices are made that are not congruent with the individual's interests. Here career choices are made based on self-efficacy and outcome expectations for jobs that are available. This is true of the South African context. Oftentimes, jobs are scarce and people are forced to choose certain careers because they are the only ones available. Due to lack of financial resources and scarcity of jobs, it is not feasible for individuals to pursue jobs relative to their interests.

According to SCCT the environment plays a role in career choices made by individuals. During the Apartheid era, Africans, Indians and Coloureds were restricted by law from acquiring jobs that were reserved for whites. They were not free to pursue occupations that interested them. They couldn't develop their career interests into career related goals and activities. Thus the environment and specific variables such as race and gender played a fundamental role in the career choices made. Today,

legislation has changed profoundly and previously disadvantaged individuals in South Africa are free to develop their career interests by pursuing careers of their choice. There are government initiatives in place for the advancement of PDI's, women and people with disabilities at the workplace and education structures are being improved to expose previously disadvantaged adolescents to many different fields so that they can be exposed to new material and decide on careers that best suit them and interest them.

SCCT is a very useful model in understanding career behaviour within the South African context, especially that of the youth. It takes into consideration the socio-cultural context of learning and does not assume that individuals follow the same route to career development. Furthermore, the model takes variables such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status into consideration when explaining career development and choices made and places emphasis on the influence of the environment/context on the individual's career development. It is however important that more research on SCCT is conducted in South Africa to substantiate its usefulness within this unique context.

3.6 Identity

The concept of identity within the South African context must be discussed if one is to understand career behaviour. The self-concept of people in South Africa has changed fundamentally over the years since the transition from the Apartheid government which was built on principles of racial segregation and prejudice. Previously disadvantaged people today face a plethora of opportunity. The way they

view themselves in terms of education, career possibilities, goals, desires, needs and so forth was greatly impacted by the environment pre and post 1994. Thus the concept of identity will be further discussed. Identity involves questions such as, "What do I want to make of myself?" and, "Who am I?" Thus it involves self-concepts which become actualised through work.

According to Schreuder& Theron (1997), people identify themselves with others through work and also see themselves as distinct and different. However, over time self-concepts may change as work structures change. As highlighted earlier, the structure of the workplace has changed fundamentally in South Africa post 1994, new jobs were created, new requirements and criteria for job attainment for those previously disadvantaged at the workplace were set and so forth. Thus this change at the workplace would, according to the literature impact on identity. According to Young & Collin (2000), there is a very close relationship between career and personal identity. Our lives, careers and identities are also influenced by the information society. The information society refers to information in the social world used to categorise us as employed, unemployed, victims, survivors and so forth. Our careers and personal identities are influenced by informationalism, globalisation and technology.

The identity construct plays an important role in career development (Blustein, 1994; Galinsky & Fast, 1996) as cited in Stead (1996). Adolescents are forced into discovering their own identity due to an awareness of the need to make career decisions. The individual's surrounding environment and living standards also impact on the individual's identity formation and career development. The environment is

therefore very important in providing the support and assistance needed to encourage the career and self-exploration that is essential to the process of identity formation (Stead, 1996).

According to Bhavnani & Phoenix (1994), identity was historically seen as a static, unitary trait, residing within human beings instead of an interactional and contextual feature of all social relationships. These ideas have since been revised. These theorists argue that identity is a dynamic aspect of social relationships, it is embedded and reproduced through the agency/ structure dyad and is inscribed within unequal power relationships. What this means is that identity varies for individuals, each individual is located in and opts for varying and sometimes conflicting identities depending on the social, political, economic and ideological aspects of their situation. This could be said of many South African individuals. Historically disadvantaged people were made to feel inferior, persecuted against and restricted in all aspects of their lives, especially at the workplace.

African South Africans in terms of their self-concept realised that they would not be able to fulfil powerful positions at the workplace or pursue careers that interested them (Internet source ,South Africa.info, 2000). Rather they were forced to work within certain arenas only, for example Africans were viewed as unskilled labour and forced to reside within homesteads/ Bantustans. Indians and Coloureds, although to a lesser degree, were also discriminated against and were subordinate to White managers and leaders. Previously disadvantaged individuals can today view themselves as capable and due to the avenues of opportunity open to them; they can

feel confident in bettering themselves academically, at the workplace and in life generally (Ramphele, 1999).

New job opportunities are available for the previously disadvantaged in South Africa. Government is putting pressure on organisations to train and develop Africans, Indians, Coloureds and women to occupy better positions of power and be empowered through the acquisition of new skills and acquiring of new knowledge about the job (Ramphele, 1999). Furthermore, there are also government initiatives to improve the housing, sanitation and security of previously disadvantaged groups in the country (Wallman, 1979).

3.7 <u>Self Awareness</u>

According to Greenhaus et.al, (2000), self-awareness is the cornerstone of effective career management. If one is to discover an occupation that is best suited to that individual, a deep understanding of one's talents, interests, values and preferred lifestyle is of the essence. Thus self- awareness is the relatively complete and accurate perception of one's own qualities and this is an essential component of one's identity formation, since identity involves understanding who one is as an individual (Greenhaus et.al, 2000)

We have gathered that the way South Africans today perceive themselves has changed fundamentally. Since the previously disadvantaged are allowed opportunities to better themselves in all aspects of their lives, in this case, specifically career wise, they see themselves as the "chosen " generation who are capable of landing high

profile jobs and earning large salaries that were reserved historically for the White elite. Due to the changes politically, economically and socially there is a definite drive in South Africa by the previously disadvantaged, especially African individuals to better themselves by studying at tertiary institutions and pursuing careers that they are interested in and that will afford them better lives. Government initiatives which have spilled over into organisations make these positive possibilities a reality for the previously disadvantaged.

Concepts such as disadvantage, discrimination and ethnicity need to be reviewed. They play a role in understanding the situation (in this case that of career choice) in terms of those who were previously disadvantaged in South Africa.

3.8 <u>Disadvantage</u>

Disadvantage is an important issue that according to Noon & Ogbonna (2001) can be a result of four types of differences- gender, race/ethnicity, disability and age. Interestingly, they exclude religion, language and sexual orientation which are other key differences. They further argue that there is no reason to believe that there is similarity in either the experiences of disadvantage or the potential needs of the various groups. The definition and type of disadvantage endured is distinct and as a result the different groups have different requirements. Moodood (1997) cited in Noon & Ogbonna (2001) mentions that it is essential to recognise the differences between ethnic groups not only in terms of their experiences of discrimination but also in their varied requirements for redressing the discrimination. This is very important within the South African context since our society is characterised by

diversity. There are many culturally and racially/ethnically different people in South Africa. Their unique circumstances which have been shaped by socio-political economic and political factors must be considered.

3.9 <u>Ethnicity</u>

Ethnicity usually refers to the perception of group difference and also to social boundaries between sections of a population. Ethnic difference in this sense refers to the recognition of a contrast between "us "and "them". However, ethnicity does not mean the same as culture or race. It is not simply difference; it is a sense of difference which occurs when members of a particular cultural or racial group interact with non-members (Wallman, 1979). Throughout the world there have been instances and there still exists periods when fixed or ethnic boundaries deny people access to particular spheres of power, status or activity as occurred in South Africa. The reason is that ethnic groups may be boxed out of the mainstream by the discriminatory attitudes and practices of ethnic groups to which they do not belong. Racist exclusion is a type of ethnic boundary keeping and results in disadvantage to those discriminated against. Ethnic groups in Southern Africa were historically clustered in particular occupations /jobs. These were the effect of apartheid rules of explicit job restriction (Wallman, 1979).

3.10 <u>Discrimination</u>

Discrimination has played a fundamental role in severely limiting the advancement of Africans, Indians, Coloureds and women up the professional and

occupational ladder in South Africa. These restrictions have hampered the development of human resources resulting in lower labour productivity, weak international competitiveness and damage to the economy (Langa, 1987). Discrimination, in short, involves the failure to treat fellow human beings as individuals. It is to allot to an individual characteristics which are not necessarily true but which is a generalised assumption about groups of people.

Direct discrimination, as an example can be described as an instance when an employee is treated less fairly on irrelevant or arbitrary grounds. Indirect discrimination is often encountered in recruitment and selection criteria where the discrimination is aimed at groups of people as opposed to individuals. It has also become apparent that stipulated criteria, which is neutral on the face of it (prima facie), may be discriminatory when applied (Bean, 1996). Indirect discrimination may be understood by asking certain questions. Is there a requirement for the job which: (1) is such that the proportion of a group of people who can comply with it is considerably smaller than any other group who can apply; (2) cannot be shown to be justifiable (such as differentiating between male and female for a secretarial job) and; (3) is to the detriment of one group of people? (Bean, 1996).

According to Ezorsky (1991), historically disadvantaged groups in South Africa were discriminated against because they were not "White". This prejudice permeated all aspects of their lives, dictating where these ethnic groups lived and controlling their work/job options. African people, during the Apartheid Era were viewed as "unskilled labourers", while Indians and coloureds were also persecuted against but to a lesser degree (Madi, 1993). Institutional racism according to Ezorsky (1991) took

place in many South African organisations. It occurs when firms claim to be race-neutral (racism free) but nevertheless have adverse effects on people categorised as other than White, especially Africans as a group. Socio-political events after 1990 have had major implications for career development. These highlight a dynamic interaction between the career development of individuals and the contextual factors surrounding them. The result is that in order to succeed, individuals now have to make career decisions that take cognisance of the individuals predicted outcome of recent political developments (Stead, 1996). Thus career development has changed for South Africans.

3.11 <u>Affirmative action</u>

Ramphele (1995) argues that our history of apartheid and colonial conquest has given rise to a society with the highest levels of inequality in the world. She suggests that affirmative action policies situated within an equity framework are a powerful tool to enable previously disadvantaged people to gain access to equal opportunities. This equity framework includes – increased access to resources and opportunities, greater focus on the development of people and a change in the institutional culture to allow for greater diversity, recognising the contributions of men and women, Africans, Whites, Indians and Coloureds and rural and urban dwellers.

According to Charlton & Van Niekerk (1994), South Africa can be characterised as a land of contrast. Yes, indeed the country is beautiful and boasts a wealth in natural resources but amidst this lays third world poverty, squalor of overcrowded squatter camps, senseless violence and major conflict of power (The "haves" clinging

to their traditional positions of privilege and power and the "have-nots" fighting for justice and equality). The only solution to the problem appears to be the process and practice of Affirmative action. Affirmative action policies may benefit severely disadvantaged groups in the following ways-

- Economic empowerment (improved education, the generation of employment opportunities);

- Access to resources (transport, crèches, social welfare);

- The meeting of basic needs (security, food and housing);

- Political rights (the vote);

- Psychological growth (instilling confidence, improving quality of life, repairing human dignity, providing confidence and sense of responsibility to effect change).

Affirmative action policies have therefore been implemented in South Africa; these have had a fundamental impact on previously advantaged and disadvantaged groups at the workplace. This has further influenced career choices made (Madi, 1993). Today, we have initiatives such as Positive Discrimination, Employment Equity, Diversity Management and so forth. These aim to uplift those previously discriminated against and provide a balance of the "colours / races" within organisations. According to Madi (1993), South African organisations are emphasising affirmative action due to pressure from government. They realise that unless they impose racial quotas on their recruitment and advancement policies in favour of Africans particularly, the new government will do it for them.

Affirmative action has therefore become an integral part of the country's democratisation process. Following the 1994 election and the resultant emphasis on reconstruction and development, it is now a major focus. The motives behind its implementation in South Africa includes the implications of legislation, the focus on employment equity, pressure from suppliers and customers, the skills shortage, political pressure from the trade unions to engage in reconstruction and development programmes and ethical obligations associated with the abolition of the Apartheid system (Herholdt & Marx, 1999).

Affirmative action has evolved from a tool set in order to eradicate discrimination to a strategy focusing on equal employment opportunity, forced black advancement, black upliftment and the development of blacks, all this is situated within a principle of managing diversity (Herholdt & Marx, 1999).

Affirmative action policies for the previously disadvantaged also include new structuring of educational institution policies and programmes. Literacy, life skills and formal schooling must all be addressed in order to correct the current situation. The problem is that less than a third of African children who enter primary school eventually matriculate. The result is that the African student population at tertiary institutions is far less than the White population. A massive task in education reconstruction has therefore been undertaken by the current government. The gender and racial imbalances at schools, technikons and at universities are being addressed.

Ramphele (1993) argues that despite higher education revolving around individual achievement and competitiveness, equal opportunity principles can still be applied.

This means that everyone should have an equitable chance to succeed. In terms of the University of Cape Town's equity policy to redress past imbalances and empower the previously disadvantaged, Ramphele (1993) claims that changes have been made at the university around issues of access to students, financial support, residential space, teacher support and so forth. Access to African students at UCT from less than 10% grew to 33% by 1993 and this has certainly increased largely today. African students were for the first time admitted to the engineering and science faculties, representing more than 56% of that student population. Student assistance programmes are in place to assist African students experiencing difficulty; this allows students (all) to complete their degree in five years as opposed to the original four-year degree.

3.12 Employment Equity

Ramphele (1993) further states that employment equity policies also extend to the question of staff members. Audits at UCT showed an imbalance of staff members in favour of white males. However, strategies have since been developed in terms of recruitment, selection and appointment procedures to ensure that the number of African and women staff members increase. These changes occurring at UCT are an example of the re-structuring of organisations to incorporate the previously disadvantaged

Organisations in South Africa are under immense political pressure both internationally and locally to participate fully in the country's democratisation process by curbing discriminatory employment practices and by correcting the injustices of apartheid. Many South African companies are still largely comprised of White

employees, specifically White males who arose from the norms and practices adopted during the apartheid era. These members of society often resist change and see affirmative action as a form of reverse discrimination and as counterproductive (Herholdtz & Marx, 1999).

Equal opportunity programmes implemented by South African organisations are aimed at removing all visible discriminatory barriers and to ensure that all individuals are treated equally in the employment and promotion process. This equal opportunity strategy prevents managers from tailoring job descriptions to suit the profile of people they wish to promote. African development programmes and strategies are in place in South African organisations today and serve as a proactive approach to identify the developing needs of the individual concerned and devise individualised development programmes which include both career planning and mentorship (Herholdtz & Marx, 1999).

Diversity management in organisations across South Africa is of the essence (Ramphele, 1999). This involves maximising the full potential of every employee without allowing racial or cultural differences to influence the process.   In South Africa, the term diversity usually refers to racial/cultural differences; however it may be extended to include other factors such as gender, values, religion, sexual orientation, language, education and wealth.

Anti –discrimination legislation has been implemented to break down barriers for those individuals who were previously disadvantaged in terms of the jobs they seek, housing, education and their human right in general to safety, shelter, freedom of

speech and association (Hepple, 1997). Today, racism and sexism which pervaded legislation post 1994 has been eradicated. This has helped to create a new social consensus which views individuals in terms of their merits instead of on the basis of stereotypes and prejudice (Hepple, 1997).

The unemployment figure for Africans in South Africa is higher than in the White population. Indians and Coloureds are also affected to a lesser degree. Thus the government initiative for advancement at work and job acquisition is much greater in the country today (Internet source, 2000). The racial divide is still actively present in the employment arena in South Africa. The largest number of employed South Africans do unskilled work. This figure is highest with African women, many of whom occupy positions as domestic workers. Coloured women, Coloured men and African men follow this. Nearly fifty per cent of White men and women in the year 2000, on the other hand, classified their work as managerial or professional (Internet source, 2000).

The new SA government, initially under Nelson Mandela follows a plan in which African South Africans must constitute 69% of the workforce at all levels from the top down. This is a not yet a reality and the government is determined to see it materialise (Israelstam, 1999). The job equity measure is set in place and serves to prevent discrimination, provide affirmative action and bridge the wage gap between management and workers. Change has taken place considerably thus far. According to a CNN article by Anne Jeffreys (1998), South Africa's railway system provides a clear idea of the new policy in action. Transnet, in less than two years had changed from a 90% white employed company to 23% black. As much as it is difficult to

blatantly admit, people were shifted out of positions and others into the organisation based on the colour of their skin. The basis-if you are African in South Africa, your chance of job acquisition is excellent (CNN, 2000).

According to Israelstam (1999), the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998 was introduced because the new government had little faith in the willingness of the private sector to implement employment equity voluntarily and it was thus entrenched in the Constitution. The extreme level of inequality, injustice and suffering caused by the Apartheid government needed required correction. Thus Employment Equity is the achievement of workplace fairness in terms of race, gender and state of health /fitness of employees. The Act aims to create workplace equity and fairness by legislating against discriminatory practices such as wage gaps at all workplaces, and by imposing affirmative action requirements on employers. Nelson Mandela (1991) said as follows, "nor are we saying that just as white skin was a passport to privilege in the past, so a black skin should be the basis of privilege in the future, "and "not intended to ensure the advancement of unqualified persons but to see to it that those who have been denied access to qualifications in the past can become qualified now." (Israelstam, 1999). This speech forms part of the memorandum for the EE bill.

The memorandum also highlights recent research in the late nineties showing that:

- A White South African male was 5000 times more likely than an African woman to be in a top management position.
- Despite African people representing more than 76% of South Africa's population, they accounted for fewer than 5% of managers across the economy in 1996.

- In 1996 women occupied only 12.2% of senior management positions.

- While Africans constituted 67% of the public service, they constituted only 31% of management.

These figures above showed the effects of past discriminatory practices and law which succeeded in creating an imbalanced labour arena.

Thus the EE Act, in an attempt to correct this problem states that every "designated" employer will have to start a plan within their organisation towards correcting the employment imbalances of the past and simultaneously minimising damage to the success of their business. Since the EE act makes affirmative action compulsory and prohibits unfair discrimination, companies have no choice but to comply (Israelstam, 1999).

The Skills Development Act, 97 of 1998, is another bill passed to benefit and provide the previously disadvantaged with opportunities to gain skills and thus acquire better jobs and ultimately achieve success at the workplace. The Act aims to develop the skills of the South African workforce through a national and comprehensive strategy (Keightley & Babb, 1999). These strategies will be incorporated within the National Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995.

De Villiers (1996) argues that there is a clear distinction between affirmative action and employment equity. Affirmative action can be seen as a means to an end while employment equity involves dealing with current discrimination and preventing

future discrimination. Sustainable growth and development is an ultimate goal. If this is to be achieved, then a radical change in the environment in which people have to operate must take place and it is critical that it is made meaningful to people at the bottom of the organisation (De Villiers, 1996). Historically, it is "normal" in South Africa to assume that an African person would sell newspapers or sweep the factory floor while it is a "normal" task for a White man to be supervisor or higher. Thus Affirmative Action at the workplace serves to eradicate this problem. The new Labour Relations Act incorporates Affirmative Action in the statute books within the context of collective bargaining. The Department of Labour in South Africa plays a large role in enabling, guiding and educating in the process of employment equity (Fischer, 1996).

The policies of equal opportunity serve to promote the interests of historically disadvantaged people. This includes women; people with disabilities and previously disadvantaged race groups (as in African, Coloured and Indian people).

South Africa is today an African run state. African people are in the majority and since they were deprived of basic human rights and opportunities historically, it is their right to demand opportunities and upliftment now (Manning, 1996). It is naïve to assume that the pressure for Affirmative Action will die down in a few years time. What is likely to happen and has already started to play itself out is that there is a significant growth in the number of Africans in managerial positions in companies. Manning (1996) argues that market forces are today working for African work-seekers. They have the privilege of being able to job-hop because Africans are in great demand at the workplace today. Furthermore, they are able to command far

better salaries and perks than Whites and almost any job experience catapults them into a job and a good salary.

Affirmative action has different meanings for different people. For the millions of African South Africans it represents hope and a chance for a better life. For White South Africans, on the other hand, it has come to symbolise a new form of discrimination that threatens their future (Fischer, 1996). Affirmative action is however one of the most positive tools to be built into the Constitution, if it is utilised to its fullest potential. The new affirmative action law states clearly that once an employee has been placed in a specific position, that individual is entitled to all the training and education needed to fulfil the requirements of that job/position. For previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa, this is certainly a very useful application of the law. It means that they are entitled to training and education to perform well on the job and will not be discarded due to ill efficiency (Bean, 1996).

On paper affirmative action is largely aimed at Black people (African, Indian, and Coloured) and women. However, in practice it means that Africans who were subjected to the most severe forms of oppression, will be most compensated or be the main beneficiaries of this corrective action (Ismail, 1994). The African National Congress (ANC) in its policy document described Affirmative Action as "taking special measures to enable persons discriminated against on grounds of colour, gender and disability to break into fields from which they have been excluded by past discrimination."

3.13 <u>Conclusion</u>

The literature shows clearly that previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa face better possibilities today. Legislation has changed, organisations are transforming rapidly to incorporate diversity and the government is behind a new policy to create equality but more importantly uplift those who were discriminated against pre 1994. African advancement is on the agenda within organisations and Africans today have a great opportunity to attain top management jobs around the country. Previously disadvantaged individuals who have the capability and skills required are free to choose a career path that interests them and one that they feel they may be successful at.

The concept of career and career choice may well have changed for millions of South Africans especially those who were previously disadvantaged. If a country's policies change fundamentally over a sixteen year period to reverse the power base from White to African, it is hardly surprising that this would significantly impact the careers of the previously disadvantaged. Factors prior to and after democracy will be key. It is indeed very interesting to further explore this concept as it will have significant effects on the future of this country and its people.

4. <u>Rationale</u>

There are volumes of literature on career development that stem from the western world's understanding and experience of career within their context. Not much research has been conducted specifically within the South African context that addresses and takes cognisance of our unique circumstances that are shaped by our history. This is limiting as there is much to learn about career choice and development within South Africa. Since policies have changed in the country and are now focused on transforming the world of work to equip and empower the previously disadvantaged, this research has purposely chosen to focus on these particular groups in South Africa and investigate the factors that played a key role in shaping their careers.

This research will examine these factors and provide insight into their impact on career choice and development. More importantly, it will highlight the experiences of PDI's in pre and post democratic South Africa and provide a critical view of the career and work situation for previously disadvantaged groups.

5. Method

5.1 Introduction

This research paper aims to identify the factors influencing career choice and development of previously disadvantaged MBA students in KZN .It will acknowledge the factors post 1994 in South Africa that played a role in shaping the working context for these individuals and investigate which factors have impacted the career choices that they have made.

Previously disadvantaged individuals/participants within South African (non White individuals) will therefore play a significant role in this research paper in providing their insight and views on their career choices made and factors that influenced their development within the world of work. I decided to focus on employed MBA students at a business school in KwaZulu- Natal as these individuals would be actively involved in building and shaping their careers and could provide important information to effectively address the research question.

It is critically important for the participants to be employed and to have studied further as these criteria ensure that they will be able to provide insight and relevant information in terms of their personal career choices made and career development. Furthermore, having a tertiary qualification and then doing an MBA indicates that they are serious about their careers and this should provide rich data for research purposes.

5.2 Participants

As highlighted earlier this research paper will focus on previously disadvantaged MBA students who are currently employed. The desired population group comprised of previously disadvantaged male or female South Africans exclusively, in other words African, Indian or Coloured individuals are required for research purposes. They would need to have completed an initial tertiary qualification and work experience is required. The requirements for selection into the MBA programme are in keeping with this as a tertiary qualification and work experience is necessary. As the researcher, I needed both these factors – studying further and significant work experience. The next point would be to focus on participants with at least four years solid work experience and solid tertiary qualifications. These individuals would be in a position to critically assess their career choices made and their personal career development as previously disadvantaged individuals in South Africa.

Participants would be required to be over the age of thirty as their understanding and experience of disadvantage is necessary for this research project. The research aims to investigate the impact of being a previously disadvantaged individual in terms of career. Participants over the age of thirty are therefore able to assess the context and factors impacting their career choices and development pre and post 1994 in South Africa. This is necessary as circumstances in South Africa changed dramatically for previously disadvantaged individuals after 1994.

The selection criteria above ensure that I am best able to address the research question by targeting the correct population group. A qualitative approach has been

adopted for this research paper and the method for data collection involves face to face, semi structured, open ended interviews. The sample size is therefore smaller and a sample size of six participants was decided on.

These participants were accessed via the University of KwaZulu- Natal Business School and those individuals meeting the requirements and available to be interviewed were selected. Non probability means was used to determine the sample size since there is no direct access information on employed previously disadvantaged MBA students with at least four years experience. As researcher, I needed to define the sample size in terms of access to the population group required. A purposive sample method was adopted as this research paper will target specific individuals meeting specific criteria. It must be understood that this is a small sample group and is therefore not indicative of and cannot represent the entire population (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000)

5.3 <u>Demographics</u>

All six participants were recognised as previously disadvantaged. Participant ages ranged between thirty two and forty one. All individuals were currently employed and in their final year of their MBA. They also grew up in varying socio – economic circumstances, some in rural areas and others in designated suburbs for people of colour.

6. <u>Materials</u>

6.1 <u>Interview Schedule</u>

An interview schedule was used as the main method for obtaining the information required for this qualitative study. The interview schedule was made up of in depth, semi – structured questions focusing on questions relevant to the study. The interview had its basis in literature regarding careers, career development and factors influencing this in previously disadvantaged individuals.

6.2 <u>Recording Method</u>

An Olympic digital dictaphone was used to record the interviews. The dictaphone proved useful for transcribing purposes as the recordings were then downloaded to a laptop and transcribed thereafter.

6.3 <u>Process</u>

As the researcher, I was mindful of the fact that I needed to obtain rich information or data that would serve well for qualitative purposes. The in depth, semi structured interview was decided on as a good method to obtain information from participants as they were given the opportunity to share as much as they needed to on the various questions in the interview schedule. Participants were encouraged to be open and honest and evaluate their circumstances and the factors influencing their career choice and development. All six participants were interviewed. The process

was thorough and ran for forty five minutes to an hour. My experience of this was that this research topic mattered to participants and they seemed to want to share a lot. There was no need for a second interview as the rapport developed between the participants and myself, as the researcher was excellent and ensured that I was able to take in sufficient information and clarify grey areas. I was able to understand them and probe effectively. They in turn shared information openly and built on the questions posed.

Mutually agreeable interview times, dates and locations were confirmed with participants. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and discretion that would be executed by the researcher.

Participants were provided with a brief overview of my research topic and the purpose of it and I requested their permission to record the interviews. All interviews were therefore recorded on consent only. The participants were encouraged to take their time and feel at ease in the interview process. If they were uncertain or required clarification on a question, I recommended that they communicate this to me. Most importantly, they were encouraged to speak openly and honestly and just share their thoughts on the subject matter. I ensured that they did not feel judged or threatened in any way but that a relaxed, safe environment was created for the interview. They were also informed that a carefully constructed interview schedule was designed and that their cooperation in responding to the questions was critical. There would be instances when questions would require clarifying or may even appear repetitive but that this was part of the process of obtaining rich data.

Once all interviews were conducted, the interviews were transcribed thereafter. The method for transcribing involved bringing together of the notes from the interview and typing out the interview recording verbatim. This ensured that no relevant points, probes or elaborations were missed and that data accuracy was ensured. More importantly, high ethical standards were adhered to at all times.

As researcher, I ensured that I did not ask leading questions or influence the participants in any way. Furthermore, respect for participants' opinions and insight was portrayed at all times. They were afforded the opportunity and time needed to think through the questions and respond. Effective listening and observing skills were executed throughout the process. This resulted in an ethical, effective and hassle free interview process. Objectivity, on the part of the researcher is critical and I tried to remain neutral at all times and acknowledge the information shared without my own judgement and views affecting it in any way. As with any qualitative study, this is difficult to do as the researcher is not separate from the research and his/her interpretation of the data will play a role (Braun & Clark, 2006).

6.4 <u>Data Analysis</u>

Qualitative research, by its very nature provides rich data as participants are encouraged to speak and share information. This rich data then needs to be interpreted. Connections must be made and themes emerge as the purpose of research is to gain insight into the research question. The most appropriate method of interpretation decided on for this purpose was Thematic Analysis.

Thematic Analysis can be defined as a process that involves identifying themes which arise from the rich data that has been collected. It is an approach that enables the researcher to identify, analyse and describe themes or patterns that emerge from the data (Braun& Clarke, 2006). On analysing the data, themes emerge from repetitive statements, assumptions, ideas and the like that have been made by the participants (Hayes, 2000). Thematic analysis would therefore allow the researcher to analyse the data and sort it into themes that have emerged from the in depth discussions with the participants. It would afford the researcher the opportunity to fully understand the participants' thoughts and experiences in making connections and deductions for the purpose of addressing the core research purpose. It is recognised as a theoretically flexible and accessible approach to analysing information and it is critical for researchers to gain experience in applying thematic analysis as it forms the basis for conducting other forms of qualitative analysis and therefore will provide a good skill base to work from (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Theory driven thematic analysis refers to themes that have been defined prior to the analytical process and the purpose of analysis would then be to identify links between the data and the prior assumptions made. It has its basis in the researcher's theoretical area of interest (Braun& Clarke, 2006) .The assumptions are therefore embedded in theory and this theory needs to be tested against the data that has been obtained.

Researcher focus and diligence in analysing the material is critical as themes may be described in varying words, contexts and examples. The researcher would need to be committed to working effectively through the data (Hayes, 2000). This process is

rigorous and can be tedious as the researcher must spend time working through the information and this can take hours. It is important to note that the themes don't just reside in the data and that if they are looked for they will be found. They reside in the ability of the researcher to analyse the data effectively, creating links, referring to the transcriptions and critically assessing the information (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The more common approach to Thematic Analysis is Inductive Thematic Analysis. This is generally referred to as Thematic Analysis. In this approach, the themes emerge from the data and it is data driven. For the purposes of this research study, it was felt that Inductive Thematic Analysis would be a more appropriate method to use. A specific process was followed and will be discussed further below.

Stages of the Thematic Analysis Process

Stage 1:

Transcribing – Transcribing refers to the process of turning the data into a transcript. The transcript can be hand written or typed out but should be a verbatim copy of the interview process. The transcribing process must be done carefully and effectively as information should not be lost. The purpose of transcription is to enable the researcher to refer to the information frequently when analysing and writing up. In other words, the researcher will require a transcript of the interviews once they are concluded. As highlighted earlier, this process allows the researcher to immerse him/herself into the information /data and this enables great insight and understanding of the research material.

My experience of the process is that the transcribing of the information on the part of the researcher assists significantly in immersing oneself in the information/ data. This makes the process of analysing that much easier. Had the transcribing been undertaken by someone else it would've failed to give the researcher the insight and understanding of the participants' responses as the transcription process so effectively did. The process of transcription is an excellent way of becoming familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Hayes (2000) suggests that it is critically important to first decide on the method of analysis to be used in the research project as this will inform the way that the data is collected and ensure that the researcher obtains the correct type of information needed. Writing will take place throughout the process of interpretation and analysis as the researcher will be making notes, jotting ideas and interesting points and moving back and forth through the transcripts and groupings up until the themes emerge and the final write up takes place (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Stage 2:

Reading - At this stage, the researcher must read through all of the transcripts thoroughly. This process will require diligence and focus on the part of the researcher in understanding the transcripts and making sense of it. The researcher must immerse him/herself in the data and this involves effective reading (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At this stage, the researcher must make note of any ideas, areas of interest and any points

that would be relevant to the research area. Themes will not emerge at this stage as the aim is to read and pick up on relevant or interesting areas that are significant.

Stage 3:

Sorting – This stage involves sorting the information in a meaningful way. Topics, points, and interesting areas that are similar will be grouped together. It is at this stage that the themes begin to emerge. The different groupings will eventually give rise to the themes (Hayes, 2000). This can be done via the computer or by grouping pieces of paper together in piles that make sense – manually (Hayes, 2000). Each of these piles / groupings are representative of the beginning of a theme otherwise referred to as a proto – theme. These proto – themes will then be shaped and developed further as the analysis and writing process unfolds. The researcher will now need to focus on each grouping / proto- theme and begin to finalise and construct a final theme that will be an area to focus on in the research findings. The theme is at this stage given a provisional name and the researcher can begin the process of the write up on that particular theme. Importantly, the relevance or "keyness" of a theme must be determined by its ability to capture something important that ultimately links it to the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process requires much painstaking work and effort as the researcher must then revisit the themes against the transcripts and read and re- read each one ensuring that all relevant information to the theme is noted. This will ensure that the researcher does not in error miss an important link or area.

Once this process is concluded, the researcher can then focus on the finalisation of theme- analysis and breaking it down. This is a three phased process and involves:

- Labelling or titling the theme. The name decided on for the theme will more than likely change from the initial grouping title as the theme focus becomes more apparent on analysis.

- The theme is defined. This will also have developed via the analysis process.

- Identification of the data relevant to the theme. This consists of quotations from the transcriptions that are connected to and validate the theme against the responses from the participants (Hayes, 2000). The role of the researcher would be to closely analyse and highlight quotes that reflect the theme most effectively.

Thematic Qualitative Analysis therefore involves time, focus and diligence on the part of the researcher. There is no quick win solution. The researcher needs to immerse him/herself in the data and fully understand it. The process of identifying quotations can also be time consuming and requires insight as these quotations must be relevant and must be discussed and broken down together with the theme in the write up process.

7. <u>Presentation and Discussion of Key Findings</u>

This discussion will be unpacked by referring to the literature and theory reviewed. For the purposes of this discussion, references to the six participants in the sample will be indicated as- R1, R2, R3, R4, R5 and R6 respectively.

7.1 <u>Theme 1: Circumstance versus Opportunity</u>

Super's theory suggests that individuals have different job opportunities available to them when deciding on a career path to follow. In critiquing this theory, we note that this is not a true reflection of the South African context in respect of career choice and development. Previously disadvantaged individuals growing up in South Africa post 1994 were exposed to the effects of a segregationalist government, one that did not embrace equal opportunity for all. The result of which was that upon finishing matric one did not have many choices or opportunities available to choose from. Research participants stated that they simply fell into career paths where opportunities were available. It was a matter of being at the right place at the right time and having luck on your side. They indicated that as a previously disadvantaged individual you were not presented with exciting careers ahead but had to make do with what came your way.

"A lot of it had to do with circumstance; there weren't a variety of options available to us (previously disadvantage). Career Choices were limited due to economic and political circumstances and a lot of where you got to was left to chance and luck,

being at the right place at the right time. I am not from a generation that had career choices, we had circumstances" R2

"Factors pre 1994 had a big impact. It was more about where you found yourself at that point in time"R5

"One would take whatever comes their way" R5

Circumstance therefore played a significant role in determining career choice. Research feedback indicates that most PDI's in the participating group grew up in low income households. Parents were not highly educated and could not finance their children's tertiary studies. The most they could afford was to assist them to obtain a matric qualification. Participants then had to look for opportunities to work and build a career.

7.2 Theme 2 - Parental and Family Life Impact

In his career development theory, Super identifies five life stages that one will experience in ultimately finding and pursuing a suitable career. In his growth stage, Super highlights that parents are role models to children who in turn develop a self concept via interaction with adults (Super, 1992 as cited in Shreuder and Theron, 1997).

Research participants indicated that their parents were highly influential in determining their career paths as they were in most cases inspired by the effort and

commitment exhibited by parents in overcoming obstacles due to being marginalised. Most participants felt a sense of respect and acknowledgement for their parents' hard work in providing food, shelter and safety for their families. They acknowledged that they wanted to do their parents proud and build a good career so as to in turn look after their parents and give back. They were highly motivated by behaviour displayed by parents in getting them through school and in most cases despite not completing matric, still being able to take care of the family. Parents' behaviour was role modelled by participants in achieving their own career goals.

"My parents have motivated me in that I want to achieve more than they were able to." R2

"Parents had great aspirations for us to do better than they had. My mom was a quality controller in a factory. You want to take care of them one day" R1

"My mother was a housewife and my father was a labourer. I felt like I had bigger dreams, I wanted to do better than they had. My father wanted the better things for us and the best for us." R3

"My *parents are not very educated and both haven't completed matric but personality wise my mother has great ambition. Because of cultural influences, she had to get married at an early age and she hadn't completed matric but her ambition was there and that's what I actually took from her. She had gone to Hindi school and learn't the vernacular and in the area that we lived in she actually formed a Hindi school herself and she got the kids to do extracurricular activities. Although she wasn't educated ,*

she was always striving to improve herself and to do things in the community and to

be involved so she has influenced me as I found that even when the circumstances

may not permit it, I've wanted to further myself. She's helped give me that drive." R4

"You want a career that has the financial rewards and offers you security so that you

in turn can give back. I am very aware that your parents are your central, your core

and they have done as much as they can to bring you up. Now you in turn must give

back – that's family." R1

The South African Context must be well understood in order to make the link between parental influence and career. I was acutely aware when engaging with the participants that all of their parents, i.e. all six sets did not achieve well academically. Most took on roles such as factory worker and labourer and the mothers tended to stay at work and manage the household. The research participants therefore identified that they clearly wanted to do better than their parents had but their parents behaviour role modelled significant attributes that they wanted to exhibit too – determination, courage, commitment and so forth. Research feedback highlighted a common thread, that in South Africa post 1994 most previously disadvantaged individuals were the first to finish high school and the first generation to attend tertiary institutions. Parents were restricted due to the political situation and could not develop further even if they had potential to do so. Siblings were also encouraged to study hard and make a better life for themselves. Participants indicated that it was a matter of survival. You knew you had to do better in life so as to avoid poverty.

"My parents didn't have much of a career choice, it was more about mine. There weren't many jobs for them and didn't have much education." R6

"My sister was a lawyer and I was told that that was what I should've done. When one member is doing a career then everybody else must do it. It has its advantages because you are made to work harder.' R1

"For me it was a matter of life and death, you knew what was coming down the line if you don't achieve and have a career. There's no way and there is nothing to fall back on, absolutely nothing. It was like you have no choice boetie, you have to. If I don't get educated and if I don't end up somewhere in the industry working, you knew what was coming- just poverty. If you look around, it's poverty all around. I didn't want that." R5

7.3 Theme 3 - The Impact of Culture and Society.

The findings show that culture and societal influence appear to have minimally affected career choices made by previously disadvantaged individuals in the research group.

Participants acknowledged that significant societal pressure did exist to pursue high status professions such as medicine, law and teaching. It was strongly felt that these career paths would ensure direct access to wealth and would ultimately provide a better life for one. Interestingly enough, the notion that these professions were best to follow and would yield a promising future was agreed on across previously

disadvantaged races within the participating group. Research feedback indicated that in the Indian and African communities there was a strong sense post 1994 that these disciplines would be most beneficial. Research findings clearly show that this has a direct link to a lack of information and understanding of the corporate world in South Africa. Previously disadvantaged individuals did not have access to top calibre schools, career counselling and guidance due to the fact that the government marginalised non whites (Moleah, 1993). PDI's in the research group were aware that they could not pursue roles in business, finance, IT and so forth as their chances of being considered for these roles were low and the possibility of climbing the corporate ladder did not exist.

Since the education system for PDI's suffered in that it did not have access to sufficient government funding or support, as a PDI one did not have access to excellent facilities, good textbooks, better teaching methods and so forth. The direct result of this was that it was difficult for previously disadvantaged matriculants to achieve the results required for acceptance into tertiary institutions that were open to people of colour. Participants in the research group highlighted that they were unable to meet requirements and this closed the door on opportunities to study in the so – called desired fields. Their future in most cases was then left to chance; one would need to grab any options that came their way.

"In the Indian community you either became a teacher, a lawyer or a doctor." R1

"My sister was a lawyer and there was pressure for me to follow her." R1

"Very limited opportunities for trade schools" R2

"People attached status to the roles of teacher, doctor or lawyer and that's where you were perceived to earn good money." R2

"We didn't know that you could be a production or governance manager, be successful and earn even more than a doctor. " R5

Cultural or traditional roles for woman of colour in South Africa appear to have created conflict in terms of the roles they pursue and their focus. Research participants indicated that conflict existed between one's career and following the traditional role of becoming a wife and mother. Women from traditional backgrounds may also be required to look after the family, parents, children of siblings and so forth. This from the research is shown to culminate in pressure and tension for these females as they would like to give a hundred per cent commitment to their careers but are unable to.

"Culture and tradition, not too much, I was aware though that I would need to one day be a mother and look after my husband and take care of the home." R1

"Balance, to be the wife and the mother and look after your family and husband. To be a sustainable unit you have to work and contribute. It sometimes makes you very angry, very cross that you have to do all this balancing .As hard as my husband works, we have a lot of arguments because with the child I have to run , drop , fetch and I have all the responsibility. It's nothing because my mom did it and I grew up

thinking that this is what is expected of a typical Indian housewife. After four degrees I'm still making tea and putting cheese in the crackers." R1

Super's theory of career development incorporates cultural variables (Langley as cited in Watson Stead, 1999). He highlights that culture will definitely have a hand to play in an individual's journey to establishing a career path. The findings have shown that although cultural and societal variables do exist, the impact on career choices of previously disadvantaged is limited. Other critical factors such as the context and environment within which the person exists has played a fundamental role in shaping the career they are now in. This in itself is a limitation of Super's theory as it does not take note of factors specific to the South African context that would play a dynamic role in shaping the career landscape especially for those who were previously disadvantaged. Poverty, unemployment, discrimination and segregation had a significant hand to play and the theory fails to recognise these critical factors.

7.4 Theme 4 – The Impact of Context and the Environment

Super suggests that career development is as a result of a dynamic interaction between the individual and his/ her environment (Schreuder & Theron 1997). Social Cognitive Career theory of Lent as cited in Stead and Watson (1999) emphasises that the environment plays a significant role in career choices made.

Growing up in SA prior to 1994, all people of colour were exposed to the policies of the Apartheid government. These were segregationalist policies that created a wedge between the white population in SA and Africans, Indians and Coloureds

(Ezorsky, 1991). The Apartheid government ensured that people of colour were marginalised; they were not allowed to live in prime areas but were moved to demarcated – African only areas. All aspects of life were impacted - schools attended, tertiary institutions open to people of colour, options to study after school, careers one could pursue and this laid the ground work for the present day situation in South Africa. Moleah (1993) indicates that African, Indian and Coloured people were subject to menial work positions. Professional and high income roles were reserved for Whites in South Africa. The policies have changed since 1994 but previously disadvantaged individuals have felt the impact of being marginalised historically and this has had a direct impact on their career choices made. Factors stemming out of apartheid include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, affirmative action and employment equity. The research findings will provide more detail on these factors.

Analysis of the research material showed a direct link between the impact of the environment and career choices made by previously disadvantaged individuals. Poverty was a critical issue. Most participants came from very low income households. Their parents could not afford much more than to clothe and feed them. Studying further was not an option without financial support. Two participants grew up in rural areas without basic amenities. It was a matter of survival for them as they struggled with poverty on a day to day basis. The impact of poverty or limited financial resources mean't that the PDI's in the research group needed to be resourceful and find ways of funding themselves. This would involve working and studying at the same time. Factors such as discrimination and limited access to top quality schools, facilities such as libraries and career counselling centres disadvantaged the research group as it limited their ability to grow academically and

choices available to them after school. Super's theory lacks within the South African context as it fails to take factors such as poverty into consideration. Research findings indicated that poverty played a key role in shaping career possibilities for the PDI's in the research group.

"Prior to the latter 90's, we (people of colour) were all affected by the afflictions of Apartheid. We did not have the luxuries then that we have today. Simple things like having a motor car, we did not have one. I was born and brought up in a household with no electricity; we had communal toilets and lived in communal surroundings. We had no access to luxuries at all. My kids today have a lot more than I had" R 2.

*"When you talk about the unemployment rate and poverty, it had a significant impact on me. We only had one family member working at one stage and that was me. A person can then never move forward. Continuing studying – I had to take a break to look after the family. I had to buy a house for my family. I have to look after my parents and educate my siblings' children. My sister passed away. I am the first born to have a degree. All the others that came after me, I have to look after. I have to pay for their school fees. For some I have seen them through school, uniforms, travelling and my plans have to wait. I have put them on hold. "*R3.

"Poverty had a hundred per cent contribution to where I am today. If my mom and dad were rich I would've been able study more and maybe work towards my Bsc and fulfil my dream of studying medicine. It would've been easier to gain access to medical school. It was not an option, my dad had retired and my mother was a housewife." R5

Due to the political climate in South Africa – people of colour were historically oppressed and therefore research participants indicated that their parents were greatly disadvantaged by this. They could not study further and ended up in very low income roles- labourers, factory workers and so forth. According to Madi (1993), Africans, during Apartheid were viewed as "unskilled" labourers, while Indians and Coloureds were also persecuted but to a lesser degree. The context and environmental climate therefore played a significant role in shaping the financial foundation for households of previously disadvantaged individuals.

"Between my mom and dad, the most educated one was my mom and she had standard six. They were not professionals but supported me in terms of what I needed to do and what I felt I wanted to pursue". R5

Interestingly enough, in some cases the context had a more positive impact on PDI's. I have elaborated on the fact that Apartheid policies resulted in segregation and injustice in South Africa and gave rise to other factors such as poverty and unemployment. It would seem that the poverty and inequality also served to motivate PDI's to make certain career decisions. One participant felt stirred to make a difference and support the community in South Africa.

"Poverty and unemployment has impacted me to such an extent that the reason I got into development was because I had an idea in my head that I wanted to help people and go and actually physically work in rural areas. I wanted to get involved in local economic development strategies. I now write these strategies and policies and engage with the community. It has impacted to such a high degree, high rates of

poverty is what we try to alleviate. We look at sustainable employment initiatives so that poverty in communities can be decreased" R1

The working landscape (context) changed significantly from 1994 onwards as democracy reigned in South Africa with new policies being developed. Research participants acknowledged that the circumstances for previously disadvantaged individuals did change. Organisations have revised the way they perceive PDI's. They are now required by law to start recruiting people of colour and improve their numbers.

"There is no doubt that affirmative action facilitated change – we started getting invited to the boardroom in the nineties. White managers felt pressured to show a few black faces in the boardroom. I was not at management level at that stage. Subconsciously, they knew that they had to promote people.' R2

"In the past it was difficult for a black person like to me to be in certain positions. The position that I am in now has never been occupied by a black person before. So yes, the changes in South Africa have indeed opened doors for people like us who have potential but were not afforded the opportunities previously to exercise our skills because of the colour of our skin." R5

Affirmative action and employment equity policies were implemented. Employers now had to comply and recruit people of colour. Certain positions were now reserved for previously disadvantaged individuals and the employment equity figures or targets needed to be met. This was required by law. According to Charlton & van Niekerk

(1994), affirmative action policies were implemented in order to serve severely disadvantaged groups by improving economic empowerment (improved education, generate employment opportunities), provide access to resources (transport, crèches, social welfare), meet basic needs (security , food and housing), ensure political rights of those previously oppressed (the vote) and provide psychological growth (instilling confidence, improve quality of life, repairing human dignity, sense of responsibility to effect change).

Research findings indicate that participants in the research group had mixed feelings on affirmative action and anti- discriminatory laws. Ironically, they view it as creating more complexities in the work situation than before. Furthermore, participants indicated that it didn't always benefit them as PDI's and that they still attribute their growth and success mostly to their own initiative and drive.

For non African participants, the new working landscape that was pro transformation saw the reverse happen. Africans now moved into the role that Whites had occupied previously. Now roles are reserved for African people specifically and being Indian or Coloured means that you will grow but only to a certain level as Africans now have to occupy higher paying, more senior roles within the organisational context. It therefore begs the question – is affirmative action merely operating as a reverse discrimination mechanism?

"One has to work harder now to get to where you want to be. For a person like me with my experience, qualifications and ability to work hard, I would think that there would be more opportunities. I often find myself making my own opportunities rather

than them coming to me. It is harder now, in a way it may seem easier now on a very macroeconomic scale but when you get down to the nitty gritties of competition and fighting for a role, it's much harder." R1.

"It's gotten worse, anti discriminatory laws make people resentful, you have laws but in practice they don't work well. In my company they still rope in the white architects for the better projects and then a few blacks for the sake of it- tokenism. It's made people who employ you feel frustrated. They need you on the basis of colour but if they had a choice they probably wouldn't. I would say that they recruit non whites in a very resentful way." R1

"Post 1994 has not made things easier, that's a fallacy. For African individuals maybe but for me as an individual in some circumstances you are regarded as black and in others not. It has actually made it more difficult because I'm finding that your career progression in certain respects is being limited because of pressure to promote and achieve transformation and the existing holders of capital in the country are still holding on. Most of the top executives are still largely white so you are almost sandwiched somewhere in between as a manager of colour as you are not black enough to be promoted but neither are you white enough to be held back. You exist in this flux that is frustrating at times. I believe that I can add a lot of value in roles but they don't necessarily come my way. I am not bitter but the choice one has is to stay or become an entrepreneur." R2

Research findings clearly indicate that the experience of affirmative action and employment equity for non African previously disadvantaged individuals has in most

cases been negative. Participants felt strongly that it has resulted in a situation where they need to work harder for positions and are still in a state of uncertainty as they are not, *"Black enough to be promoted but neither are you White enough to be held back"*. The result is that one has to work harder to be recognised and win that opportunity or be promoted above an African person. Hardijzer (1999) highlights this very fact – a new genre of employee has stemmed out of the changes in policies from a work force perspective. These employees do not rely on the organisation to promote them but rather shape their own destiny. As one participant indicated, there is no room for complacency as she has to be proactive in making her own opportunities rather than them coming to her.

While non African PDI's acknowledge that the level of disadvantage varied across the racial groups, they are also now not fully reaping the benefits of being "previously disadvantaged" as they are not viewed as disadvantaged at the level as African individuals were in pre democratic South Africa. Noon and Ogbonna (2001) highlight that experiences of disadvantage will vary and the different groups will require different methods for addressing this. Stead (1996) suggests that in order to succeed individuals must now make career decisions that take cognisance of the individual's predicted outcome of recent political developments. For non African PDI's this rings true, they are aware that the transformation policies are mainly aimed at African individuals and have to therefore be creative in terms of their own career progression and development.

Participants indicated that they would need to look to start their own businesses or move out of organisations where they did not grow. According to Herholdt & Marx

(1999), forced African advancement, African upliftment and development of Africans specifically face people in the work situation. The result is a frustrated and unsatisfied group of non African PDI's. They are neither here nor there. African employees within organisations are prioritised and their development accelerated via learning and development programmes, career planning and mentorship and coaching (Herholdtz& Marx, 1999).

Ramphele (1999) suggests that it is critical that the full potential of every employee is maximised without allowing racial or cultural differences to influence the process. This should be at the heart of diversity management. The important question is does this actually take place? According to participant feedback, no it doesn't. Non African PDI's appear to be insufficiently looked after in the working context.

More so, research feedback indicates that PDI's experience of affirmative action is that it is being mismanaged within the SA context.

"The issue with law is the policing of the laws. You can have great legislation but it needs to be managed well. The bottom line in business is the way the targets of affirmative action are set out. They are hugely misleading and subject to wholesale manipulation. I am a firm believer in affirmative action but it has to happen in a way that is managed properly and delivers results." R2

I will need to give more thought to this notion of reverse discrimination. Fischer (1996) identifies this very concept by suggesting that affirmative action has different meanings for different people. It would seem in terms of the research findings that for

Africans in South Africa it represents an opportunity for a better life and possibilities. For White South Africans on the other hand, a very different scenario in that it symbolises a new form of discrimination that threatens their future. Interestingly, data analysis revealed that not all African participants have experienced the positive impact of affirmative action and employment equity policies. Within the education arena, Africans have struggled as much as other race groups to secure employment at a better remuneration rate. One participant, a teacher by profession struggled to find employment and is bitter about salary. To this participant, the focus on African employment and transformation has not been beneficial at all.

"It's both negative and positive impact. The change was mean't to be good but the education system has gone down year by year. There are changes all the time but they are not good enough and they don't benefit a person. As a result of this children from poor families are not motivated to study. Graduates are not employed because of lack of jobs. Young ones are asking, why must I study when so and so has studied and doesn't have a job? I don't believe there are more opportunities available to me because I'm African. I believe that there is nepotism here and there and that you have to know someone to get where you want to. There's still corruption." R4

"No, affirmative action has not helped my career progression as a teacher. I don't believe in it. It's there and good on paper but practically I don't think it works. I haven't reaped rewards from it. Affirmative action puts certain people in higher positions but they might lack the skills. "R4

One can conclude that the political context by way of labour practices, policies, laws and so forth to date has been influential in determining the career opportunities available to previously disadvantaged individuals. This has given rise to other factors that currently affect previously disadvantaged individuals' progression and development within organisations.

On analysing the data, a critical concept was brought to light – "tokenism", the practice of employing people of colour purely to meet targets – *"There's tons of window dressing in corporate South Africa "R2*. PDI's in the research group agreed that this does exist and that the sad reality of this situation is that incompetent people are being brought into the working world purely to meet the numbers. The consequence of this is heightened levels of frustration, resentment and dissatisfaction in the working situation. This has given way to a new genre of African professionals who tend to job hop as they are aware that they are in demand. They do not stay long enough to acquire the necessary skills nor impact the organisation significantly. Manning (1996) concurs with this notion by adding that the market is today pro African job seekers. They have the privilege of being able to job hop due to the fact that they are in demand. This also empowers them to demand far better salaries and perks than Whites. Hardijzer (1999) suggests that careers in the 21st century are fast changing; there is a reduction in linear, hierarchical patterns of advancement. People are changing jobs more often and research findings are in keeping with this notion.

"There's tons of window dressing in corporate South Africa and then the other extreme in the parastatals is they have gone the complete opposite and have just taken on many African individuals regardless of competence so you don't have a healthy

mix of people. Huge disparities as the parastatals are almost completely Black whereas in the corporate South Africa you have a grudging few Black faces, majority are White and there is always the situation where one complains about the other and raises issues of governance etc. It's a self perpetuating, unstable situation which needs to be addressed. Needs to be specific measurements put in place. Now we have huge disparities in terms of performance, delivery of value and it's not having the desired results. I think we all know that". R2

Findings show that the reality of the situation is being masked. This window dressing that exists within the corporate context shed's a positive light on an ill managed transformation process.   It may at times appear that the numbers are being met but the question to be asked is if it is surface level addressing of employment equity. Are PDI's recruited purely to meet government requirements? The above participant's comments would indicate that in corporate South Africa, much has been done to create a façade that all is seemingly well from a transformation perspective by adding a few faces of colour. The parastatals, on the other hand appear to have adopted extreme measures to transforming their business.

"Tokenism exists and at senior levels. Difficulty is that people at the top who should change things, don't do it. At grassroots level they have to make sure that the numbers reflect the demographics of the country. Those individuals must work through the ranks. Otherwise, we have the situation at the moment with highly paid, highly sort after African individuals and they just job hop. They get more and more expensive and add little or no value. Must bring African individuals through but

educate and groom them. It's not done correctly at the moment within organizations."

R2

Another significant factor which is commonly referred to as the "top – deck effect" is shown to have a bearing on the career progression of PDI's within the work situation. Participants were unanimous in highlighting this effect as a real factor affecting their development. Findings indicated that while affirmative action policies are in place and transformation is required at the work place, people of colour are disadvantaged as White individuals still assume high level roles within organisations. Executives, directors and chiefs tend to be White dominant while due to the requirements of transformation; Indians, Africans and Coloureds are placed in lower level roles and grow to senior management level creating a hierarchy that is brown at the bottom and white as you go higher up. Once they reach senior management it is difficult to move further up the hierarchy. According to Herholdtz & Marx (1999), many South African companies still largely comprise of White management / employees, specifically White males who rose within the corporate context during Apartheid. These individuals tend to resist change and see affirmative action as a form of reverse discrimination and as counterproductive.

"The top deck phenomena has certainly impacted me, there would be a lot more opportunities for non Whites to progress. If you look at recent appointments in my own organisation for every one African senior appointment there are four or five White appointments, so it's still there. It has discouraged me to a certain extent in that I realise that there are certain things I cannot change, I will work as much as I can within the system and keep my eye out for other opportunities" R2

"What I have observed is if you look at the senior levels, it is still predominantly White. What organisations do is that they employ so called PDI managers in junior and middle management positions. When I go to senior manager meetings, I'm the only Black and then one or two Indians, if you are lucky one Coloured. The rest are White." R5

"People call this the cappuccino effect, it's a real issue in the workplace, it's a real situation and a difficult one. I believe if I am stuck then I must move sideways or I need to find another company and move" R6

Research participants also raised the following issues as playing a role in their development within organisations. The size of the company has an impact on growth and career progression for PDI's. The larger the company, the more options are available. Culture of the organisation also plays a role. If the organisation is focused on development and transformation, this would positively affect PDI's. Furthermore, a bureaucratic, controlling culture can be limiting for those who want to grow quickly. Organisations focused on development and transformation better equip PDI's to move into bigger roles. Learning and development is key to this as individuals' skill gaps are addressed. Research participants' responses suggested that a high level of corruption and nepotism still exists within the working world in SA. Career choice and progression tends to be influenced by who you know. Inferiority also emerged as a factor influencing careers within the workplace. An educated and experienced PDI poses a threat within the work situation. Managers may become threatened and act out and colleagues become more competitive and less supportive.

"Size of the organisation makes a difference. If it's a small organisation, there isn't much scope for growth. The current manager would have to leave for you to grow. You have to squeeze as much out of the organisation as possible as you will have to leave." R1

"A commanding and controlled culture at the top restricts employees. Corporate culture closes you down; it's strict and narrows your ability to operate openly as an entrepreneur almost. In that sense it has hampered my progress." R2

"Inferiority complexes among the people you work with, when you are educated and make suggestions people are threatened. Manager may see it as being undermined by you. These issues face PDI's. "R3

"My manager recognised my talent and I was groomed to be a manager within five years. Other organisations are different. They don't have the same development programmes. Development is left to fate" R5

"Nepotism, connections etc exist. The extent that it is allowed to fester is a problem. Causing the collapse of structures within organisations." R2

7.5 Theme 5 – Identity and Self Awareness

Research findings suggested a link between one's notion of oneself or how one perceives oneself and career choices made by previously disadvantaged individuals.

The self concepts of previously disadvantaged individuals have changed significantly over the year's pre and post 1994**.** Schreuder and Theron (1997), propose that people identify themselves with others through work. Self – concepts change over time as work changes. Young and Collin (2000) further support this argument as confirming that there is a very close relationship between career and personal identity. Bhavnani &Phoenix (1994) suggest that identities will vary as individuals opt for varying and at times conflicting identities depending on the social, political, economic and ideological aspects of their situation.

Research findings suggest that PDI's definitely identify with the term previously disadvantaged. They perceive themselves as being marginalised historically and not being given equal opportunities. A critical point here is that while they see themselves as being disadvantaged, they recognise that the level of disadvantage and discrimination has certainly changed. Noon & Ogbonna (2001) suggest that disadvantage can be as a result of differences and they highlight four specific types – gender, race/ethnicity, disability and age. According to Moodood (1997) as cited in Noon & Ogbonna (2001), it is critical for one to be aware of marginalised groups' experience of disadvantage and their requirements for redressing the discrimination. This cannot be overemphasised within the South African context as PDI's experience of disadvantage is paramount in understanding the factors that influenced their

perception of themselves. The political, social and economic changes in South Africa have seen their self concepts changed too. Super (as cited in Stead & Watson 1999) suggests that individual identities are formed via the interaction of the individual with the environment. Since the working landscape has now changed in favour of previously disadvantaged individuals, their perception of who they are has in turn changed.

According to Stead (1996), the individual's surrounding environment and living standards also impact on the individual's identity formation and in turn career development. The environment is very important in providing the support and assistance needed to encourage the career and self exploration that is essential to the process of identity formation. PDI's in the research group indicated that they can now transcend boundaries that existed previously, climb the corporate ladder, study further and better themselves. Non African PDI's in the group also recognised that they were not as severely disadvantaged as Africans in South Africa. A strength and contribution of Super's theory is that it recognises that self- concepts change and develop throughout the span of a person's life due to experiences such as social, economic and cultural as in the case of the participants in the research group.

"There were generations of people that did not have full access to citizenship. Did not have full access to education, health care and public facilities. In that way your opportunity to develop and grow as individuals was stunted through lack of access. Some people in SA were more disadvantaged than others- Africans were much worse off than Indians and Coloureds and I do not begrudge that at all. At the same time I

believe personally that I could've progressed much faster in my career and that's why I identify myself as previously disadvantaged" R2

"You belong to the race that was discriminated against in the past and were not afforded the opportunities that other people were afforded opportunities, in any respect. It could be education, it could be career wise and if you had to go to the law itself it is Africans, Indians and Coloureds." R6

"I like to identify with the term previously disadvantaged when it suits me. Now, in my job when I go into the rural areas I truly understand what a disadvantaged person is. I cannot identify with them and I'm blessed compared to them and I think I am so not a previously disadvantaged individual but when you put it in context you think you are not but then again context wise when you look at other people's achievements , other people's backgrounds and when you want that position then you are yes, I am a previously disadvantaged individual." R2

"You walk into a company and if you want to be successful and are hungry for information and are committed and dedicated , the foundation has been laid down for us now (PDI's) and you just have to prove yourself. I've seen in the jobs I've been in that if you are willing, people are willing to take you and make you what you want to be." R6

The concept of adopting conflicting identities did emerge from the research analysis. Findings indicated that women in the participating group experience much conflict in identifying themselves as working / career women or traditional wife and

mother. They see themselves as both and this creates conflict in determining which self concept to prioritise – to either place emphasis on motherhood and caring for the family or on focusing on career and climbing the corporate ladder in the work context. An important point that stems from the research is that they are able to juggle both senses of the self quite effectively despite heightened levels of work and personal life conflict and stress. One is therefore able to adopt varying and at times conflicting identities depending on the social, political, cultural and economic circumstances.

"Motherhood, career, motherhood, career- it's a big conflict for me especially. In five years time I'd like to see myself with one more child, earning a good salary. Having a safety net, being able to save and more stable and mature in terms of my career." R1

Another key point that emerged from the research findings is that previously disadvantaged individuals tend to identify themselves as playing a key role within South Africa. They see themselves as fulfilling key careers and roles. This could quite possibly stem from the fact that South Africa has now emerged as a country that focuses on transformation and equality for all. Having experienced disadvantage and the negative consequences of the previous government, they now see themselves as people of colour making a difference and adding value. There is a sense of loyalty and deep rooted identity and pride in being a South African citizen.

"I do not have a desire to live elsewhere in the world. This is who I am. This is where I am from. I have been shaped by the realities of my past and my history and I am here to stay and I will shape the future by making sure that I am good at what I do. I run this business and it employees over two hundred people and indirectly impacts

around four hundred people so a lot of people depend on this business for their livelihood. I believe I have a huge responsibility to manage it efficiently. At the same time I am consciously aware of the environment, how our business impacts it, ethical behaviour, making sure that we comply and we don't destroy the environment and reduce wastage. I have got to do my bit to ensure that we do not destroy the country while trying to develop it, to employ people and get them out of poverty. I am keenly aware of this." R2

"As a South African citizen, we lived through such political turmoil that I didn't understand at the time. Then things in the country started to change and they wanted to develop the country. I then decided that yes, I want to be part of that growth and development. That's exactly what happened; I decided to work in the development area." R1

Literature on identity and careers propose that people are defined by their careers as their careers are an extension of who they are and how they perceive themselves. Research findings were mixed on this point. As discussed earlier, as a previously disadvantaged individual one did not have many opportunities available to choose from or be able to finance a career path due to the challenges politically, socially and economically in South Africa. Research findings suggest that PDI's relied on circumstance, luck and chance and therefore in most instances fell into their careers. Findings showed that whilst most PDI's agree that their careers are now certainly a huge part of who they are, they are not necessarily truly defined by their careers. In time their careers have become an extension of who they are as in most cases they

were not able to pursue desired careers due to obstacles- finance, matric pass and so on.

"My career does not define me. I'm who I am irrespective of what I do and where I am. I do not walk around telling others about my career and what manager I am. I am simple. My religion helps me." R5

"My career has taken different turns; I also get bored very quickly. I started on the bench as a mechanic and it's still a very interesting part of my life. If I get a chance to fix something then I do it. At this point in time I am working in health and safety and it's not really who I am. It was just something that I fell into."R6

"I understand the needs of people in poor rural communities. My career started as an interest and grew into passion." R1.

7.6 <u>Theme 6 – Interests and Goals versus Circumstance</u>

SCCT suggests that the career choice processes flow from goals and activities that develop out of interests. Interests and goals therefore play a significant role in deciding on a career path to follow. The theory highlights that people will pursue and set career goals in fields in which they are interested. It also suggests that career choices made that are not congruent with the individual's interests tend to be based on available jobs and opportunities.

As discussed earlier, findings indicated that whilst previously disadvantaged individuals in the participating group do have certain interests and hobbies, these have in most cases not translated into the career they decided to pursue. The reason for this has been emphasised earlier; they did not have the financial or educational backing required to follow through with their interests. One participant was motivated by her circumstances growing up and wanted to work in the community. After falling out of a number of other careers she was able to eventually pursue her interest as a development economist.

Participants have highlighted that they may not have had much choice in deciding on a career path to choose from but now have goals in place to address their interests going forward. A critical point to note is that since the organisational landscape in South Africa has been transformed and is now supportive of previously disadvantaged individuals, these individuals are now presented with opportunities to grow and develop and more importantly to pursue areas of interest. There is much opportunity to study further via tertiary institutions and learning and development programmes within organisations. Informal opportunities for learning such as coaching and mentoring, job shadowing and rotation are also in place in most companies.

Herholdtz & Marx (1999) state that African development programmes and strategies are now in place in South African organisations to proactively address and identify development gaps and upskill African individuals via career planning, mentoring and coaching. All participants have opted to study towards a master's degree in business administration in order to pursue their interests going forward -

that of improving their business acumen skills, opening possibilities to run their own businesses, grow within the corporate environment, be promoted and so forth.

"My hobbies have not influenced my career choice. I now have a keen interest in business and decided to complete an MBA degree." R2

"My aspiration right now is to run a bigger business or a few businesses for the next four to five years. Thereafter I see myself more as an entrepreneur. As I progress in life, I also see myself as some sort of academic giving back to the community. I believe in learning and developing oneself along the way and I'd like to teach and dispense some of that knowledge." R2

"I just fell into the area of work that I am in now and made the best of it as I went along. I wanted to be a medical doctor." R5

"I have dreams to go further than teaching." R3

"I love reading and read everything that comes in front of my eyes. I just read. A teacher needs to be educated but also a person who likes reading and keeping up with current affairs." R3

Research findings as outlined in the above indicated that participants in the research group have a positive self image and have ambitions in place. They believe that they have the skills to perform tasks required to achieve their goals. They are therefore interested in business and have decided to study further. They believe that

they will be able to succeed in that area of work. This is in keeping with SCCT which highlights that if people have positive self efficacy and outcome expectations, they will develop interests in those particular areas (Stead & Watson, 1999).

7.7 <u>Theme 7 – Drive and Self Belief versus the Impact of Change</u>

As highlighted earlier, the working world has changed significantly for previously disadvantaged individuals and opportunities have been presented to them in the new South Africa. In analysing the data, an important concept emerged that of one's own drive and initiative and the impact of positive self belief.

Participants acknowledged that the circumstances for previously disadvantaged individuals in South Africa have changed significantly over the years and that this has had both positive and negative effects. They however also indicated that their growth career wise was as a result of their own hard work, initiative and drive as opposed to it being a direct and sole result of change within the working situation in South Africa. They have competed against other skilled previously disadvantaged individuals for roles, development and promotions and their own drive and hunger for improvement must be recognised in order to fully understand career choice and development of these groups in South Africa. Furthermore, it would seem that their drive and focus stems from positive self belief. In believing that they are capable, they are able to then perform tasks enabling success and achievement career wise.

"I have pushed the envelope and stretched myself hence I have made progress. A lot of it is the individuals own initiative. I do not believe that my progression has been

because of the changes such as affirmative action and employment and that alone. I believe it has been because of my hard work, my propensity to learn, develop and grow and I say that because there were three or four other youngsters who started when I did and they were also Indian guys. When I left that department after ten years I was second to the most senior manager in terms of stature and the other guys were basically in the same position as when they started." R2

"My drive is about being better, continuous improvement. That's what drives me, I want to do better. If I have the opportunity, I take it. I don't let go of opportunities even if I don't think it's very much important and I don't have to invest so much like companies are willing to educate us then why not get educated, they are sending you on a course and if you learn one thing on that course then why not. So that's the most important thing. You just keep acquiring knowledge and you never know where it takes you." R6

SCCT theory proposes that people provide direction in their lives. This is in keeping with the theme highlighted above. Findings indicated that participants felt a strong sense of drive and direction in their lives. They view their career development as a result of their own control and involvement, amongst other factors. According to SCCT theory, if people have positive self efficacy or positive self belief, they will naturally then believe that they will succeed and will participate in activities and interests that will help them realise their goals and ambitions. People who believe that they will be successful at a task are more likely to attempt and perform better than those who have the same capabilities but lack the belief to succeed.

SCCT theory highlights that outcome expectations are what people believe the results of their behaviour will be. Participants in the research group saw their hard work and commitment as resulting in achieving success in their careers. They believed that as PDI's they needed to work harder, achieve more and focus on the end result of success at work. They recognised that circumstances had changed politically and socially in South Africa and leveraged off this by developing themselves further and believing that these activities would result in success on the job.

"You have to prove that you know your stuff and that you are going to give more than expected. You must be an asset. I want to grow and develop and show my company that I am an asset to them. "R1

"I have had to look at my career goals and focus on qualifications, expand myself and sometimes move sideways in order to move up. I am the type of person who always puts my hand up to accept different challenges. That's very important because if you don't do that a lot of opportunities pass you by. I want to run a bigger business within the corporate world. Learning and educating oneself along the way is quite valuable." R2

"We are performance based at work. I am just busy with my MBA and my boss says to me that he expects more. For me, there is always something more to achieve. Together with education comes performance. In the next three to four years time, I would like to do my PHD." R4

"You need to work ten times more to compete with a white person. Not that we are incompetent but you need to prove that you are capable. You have to work very hard. R5

8. Limitations of this study

8.1 Sample Size:

One of the main limitations of this study was the size of the sample population. Since the sample was small, comprising of six participants it does not allow this study or the researcher to make assumptions and generalisations about the entire population group i.e. all previously disadvantaged individuals who have studied further and are employed. This in itself is limiting as we cannot confirm and substantiate findings for all PDI's. Further studies would need to be undertaken in order to shed more light on the subject matter.

8.2 Nature of the study:

The data was extremely rich and a wealth of information was obtained that was incredibly useful and interesting to read and understand. The nature of this study was in itself limiting as it is strongly felt that this topic can and should be investigated on a larger , more intense and investigative scale. There is much more to be learn't and unpacked from this research topic.

8.3 Other Studies and Literature:

There is plenty of literature and research on careers and career development but the focus on previously disadvantaged individuals in respect of career is limited. This was limiting as the researcher did not have much to work from. The South African

context is of critical importance as we have a rich history and there are factors that are unique to South Africa. Career literature falls short in this area as our specific context cannot, in most cases be applied to it. Further studies would benefit from more research in this thought provoking and phenomenally interesting area of investigation.

8.4 <u>Previously Disadvantaged Groups</u>:

It would be interesting to focus on each racial and previously marginalised group more intensely as their experiences of discrimination differ. There were different levels of discrimination in South Africa and Africans experienced the worst of it. Participants' acknowledged that the level of disadvantage varied in terms of the race group you fell into.

8.5 <u>Researcher Interpretation and Bias</u>:

As the researcher, I was acutely aware of the fact that I needed to be cognisant of my own opinions and bias and not allow this to taint the research in anyway. It must however be understood and accepted that with interpretative analysis such as thematic analysis it is almost impossible to separate researcher thoughts from the research at hand. The researcher must work through the information and highlight themes which must then be discussed. This is a highly cognitive process which involves making links, connections, critically assessing the information and forming conclusions. Researcher interpretation is therefore critical.

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

This area of research is incredibly interesting and yielded fascinating data. As researcher, I could not help but feel that I had touched on an area that desperately needed a voice. The experiences and views of previously disadvantaged individuals with regards to career provide so much information about the South African context and the factors specific and unique to it. It is difficult for one to easily sum up and understand the extent of the impact on previously disadvantaged individuals. Their sense of self, opportunities presented to them growing up from a basic facilities perspective to education, finances and so forth.

The landscape prior to 1994 shaped the world of work for these individuals in that it either provided a doorway to follow one's dreams and aspirations or it restricted one despite potential and capability. On investigating this topic and analysing the feedback, as a researcher, one is compelled to feel compassion for those who had experienced the oppression of the previous regime in South Africa as it had a direct impact on the future of these individuals. Present day South Africa is riddled with the impact of the past government policies. Participants' experiences of poverty, financial instability and a legacy of deprivation are still felt in their households today. Participants highlighted that they look after their parents and siblings and are in most cases responsible for the family financially as they were the first to get educated and earn a better salary.

Concepts such as affirmative action, employment equity and disadvantage played a major role in the research findings and in the literature supporting the research.

These concepts were shown to impact career development and career choice. PDI's within organisations today face new challenges that stem from our rich history in South Africa and these have a bearing on their development and progression. That said, the landscape has changed significantly and is now supportive of transformation, this has reshaped the way PDI's perceive themselves as they are now able to better themselves .South African law now dictates freedom and equality for all and more importantly that organisations are well represented demographically.

Career literature despite providing a platform to understand career choice and development failed to take into consideration the unique circumstances in South Africa and this cannot be under- emphasised. The South African context is unique and has shaped and created a history and future that cannot be explained via generalist theories. As highlighted earlier in this paper, the need for more research in the area of career development within South Africa specifically is vitally important.

It is recommended that this research topic be investigated further on a larger scale and more intensely as there is much depth in the information and the findings will add incredible value and provide much insight into the area of career choice and development of previously disadvantaged individuals. Since there is a focus within South Africa to empower and develop PDI's , further studies may provide greater insight into the challenges and positives, what has worked and what hasn't thus far and what can be done to effectively eradicate the historical consequences and maximise the potential of previously disadvantaged people in the working arena in South Africa.

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11. <u>Appendix A</u>

<u>Interview Schedule</u>

I am currently conducting research in the area of career choices made by previously disadvantaged South African individuals. I understand that you have consented to be part of this study. As you are aware, you are under no obligation and may withdraw from this study at any stage. This is a totally voluntary process. Take your time in answering questions and if you are uncomfortable, do not feel pressurised to answer, in this case, you may choose not to answer a question. Do you have any questions before we start? Ok, let's begin…

Factors Influencing Career Choice

1) Tell me about the most significant factors that influenced your career choices made?

   - Can you expand on that and elaborate on the reasons these factors had an impact.

2) How and why has your career aspirations changed over the years?

     - Can you tell me more about what you wanted to study at school and why you have or haven't achieved this?

3) To what extent have your parent's career choices impacted on your own career choices made?

   - Can you expand on this a bit more?

5) To what extent did cultural or social expectations influence your career choices?

- Tell me more about the role of culture and society on career choices made.

6) Let's discuss the factors specific to South Africa that has had an impact on your career choices made and progression - to what extent has the large scale poverty and the unemployment rate in SA impacted career choices made by PDI's?

- Please elaborate on the effects, if any of poverty and unemployment on your options career wise.

-South Africa has undergone significant change over the last ten years politically,   socially and economically. Specifically looking at career, to what extent would you say this change has impacted on your own career choice and opportunities available to you?

7) Growing up in SA, did you have access to facilities to aid your academic growth such as libraries, career counselling centres etc and how did this impact your development at school and ultimately your career choice?

Factors influencing Career Development

8) To what extent has affirmative action influenced your career choice and career progression

- Tell me more about the role of affirmative action and anti discriminatory laws playing in reshaping the working world for PDI's.

- Tell me more about your experience of this post 1994?

-There has been much talk of PDI's being tokens that are employed purely to meet the numbers- is this an accurate picture in your view and how has it impacted your approach in the workplace in terms of growing your career?

9) How has the "top-deck" phenomena within organisations impacted on your career development?

    - Tell me more about whether this has motivated or discouraged you and in what way.

10) Tell me about obstacles from an organisational perspective at present that hinder your ability to develop career wise and which factors have helped you overcome these career obstacles?

11) Which factors influenced your decision to you study towards an MBA?

12) In terms of your career development at present, do you feel that being a person of colour within the corporate context in SA has hampered or positively affected your career progression?

Identity, Motives, Interests and Life roles

13) What does the term previously disadvantaged mean to you and do you identify with this terms?

  - Tell me more about your view and understanding of being previously disadvantaged

14) If you are a working parent, has the role of mother/ father had an impact on your career choice and development and to what extent?

  - Tell me more about your role as parent and the impact this had on your career development and career choices made.

15) How has work- family conflict affected and influenced your career choices/ development.

- Tell me more about the role of work stress and balancing work/ family life.

16) Have your hobbies or interests influenced your career choice and in what way?

17) Do you identify yourself as fulfilling a key role within South Africa and doing your bit as a loyal citizen- In what way your has your identification as an SA citizen impacted your career development and choices made?

18) Tell me more about what motivated you to pursue the career you have - did you want to grow from a leadership perspective, grow financially or was it security or stability?

19) Would you say that your career truly defines you? Tell me about your best describing attributes and if this is in keeping with your career choice.

20) Many argue that society's definition of work has changed significantly and that this has impacted on the way people perceive work and their career choices and progression within organisations. Would you say that as a PDI you are required to achieve more (qualifications, awards etc) in order to climb the corporate ladder and what impact has this has on your career goals?

- Tell me more about your present day goals and where you see yourself in the next five ten years.

21) Have changes in technology and the way business is done changed the roles people play at work and what impact has this had in building ones career?