THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF LOW SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN ADOLESCENTS: A CAREER SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

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For Anton and our little sweetpea,

may the next chapter of our lives be

filled with beautiful memories.
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ABSTRACT

The adolescent stage of development entails many overt and covert challenges and influences that have bearing on spheres of later life, including career development. With South African counsellors being largely dependent on Western career theories, the influence of contextual factors such as cultural beliefs and historical background on the career development of South African adolescents has been largely ignored. The recent acknowledgement of the unique and complex interrelationship between individuals and their specific social, environmental and societal context has motivated the development of an overarching theoretical framework of career development, the Systems Theory Framework (STF).

The present study has therefore employed the STF and a qualitative career assessment measure, the My System of Career Influences (MSCI), to facilitate in exploring and describing the unique systems of career influence on the career development of a group of South African adolescents. A non-probability, purposive sampling technique was employed to obtain the sample from a co-educational, Xhosa-speaking secondary school situated in a low socioeconomic area. The research approach was exploratory and descriptive in nature, and the MSCI assisted in the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of 64 Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male black adolescents from low socioeconomic status environments. The qualitative data was subjected to content analysis to identify themes, while frequency counts/percentages were used for the quantitative data.

The results of the study indicate that all influences within the three interrelated career systems have an influence on the career development of black adolescents. Furthermore, the MSCI workbook was shown to assist participants in identifying and evaluating significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development to date. Participants from both genders and all grade levels were able to successfully complete the MSCI
workbook and provide reflective comments on their MSCI personalised diagrams. The applicability of both the STF and the MSCI are acknowledged. Limitations and recommendations for future research based on the present findings are suggested.

Key words: adolescents, career development, Systems Theory Framework, My Systems of Career Influences, South Africa
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The history of career development theory has been relatively short and, while the number of career development models has progressively grown over recent decades, the concepts of career and career development have broadened at a considerably faster pace (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). There is conflicting opinion about what the definition of the term career entails, and this lack of conceptual clarity reinforces the ambiguous nature of this term. Traditional definitions of career restricted its meaning to only incorporate an individual’s professional work life, whereas later definitions have included the concepts of time and other life roles. For example, Super (1976) broadened the concept of career by including pre-vocational and post-vocational activities, as well as other life roles and contexts. More recently, Patton and McMahon (1999) have defined career as “the pattern of influences that coexist in an individual’s life over time” (p. 170).

The concept of career development has also been variously defined by a number of authors. In earlier decades, several authors (e.g., Ginzberg, 1972, 1984; Super, 1990) acknowledged career development as a lifelong process. In agreement, Sharf (1997, 2006) comments that career development is a continuous process occurring throughout an individual’s lifetime, and that being satisfied with one’s career is one of the most important aspects of an individual’s personal happiness. The meaning of the terms career and career development in the present research goes beyond occupational activities and incorporates the dynamic interaction of systemic influences between individuals and their environment.

While advancement in career development theory and research continues to increase our overall understanding of career behaviour, various authors have emphasised the inadequate status of career theory and the need for a more holistic, systemic approach to career psychology (e.g., Young, Valach, & Colin, 1996, 2002). Also, most career theory continues
to be based on westernised principles, using middle class samples, and South African career researchers have consequently questioned the universality of such career theory for this country’s population (Watson & Stead, 2006). This inappropriate use of Western, middle class based career theory on South African population groups neglects to acknowledge the multicultural and economic contexts of this country, and thereby prescribes an incomplete collection of influences to be considered in an individual’s career development. In other words, these career theories are not adequate to account for the career behaviours of individuals from a range of socioeconomic, cultural and other marginalised groups that are inclusive of the South African context.

This difficult situation calls for a more indigenous approach to the conceptualisation of career development, that is the country’s local cultural traditions or frames of reference should be understood and used in defining career psychology concepts (Stead & Watson, 2006). For example, the use of Western values and beliefs such as individualism, independent career decision-making, and the nuclear family structure in South African career research leads to the disregard of prevalent African cultural concepts. Therefore, instead of being viewed through the lens of Western values and beliefs, indigenous cultural concepts need to be examined in order to gain an in-depth understanding of career development within a particular culture’s context. Other contextual factors such as unemployment, a weak national economy and the shifting requirements for entry into various occupations also need to be considered (Stead & Watson, 2006). All of these macro (e.g., socioeconomic) and micro (e.g., cultural) systemic factors need to be acknowledged and understood in order to comprehend the systemic nature of career development and how a system of influences may impact on an individual’s career development.

Recognising and acknowledging such contextual factors is important in understanding career development in South Africa. This is not sufficient, however, as there is also the need
for a theoretical framework that will accommodate such influences in the understanding of an individual’s career development. Over two decades ago, Osipow (1983) stated that “the systems approach is in a position to take the most useful concepts of each theory of career development and apply them to the understanding of individual behavior” (p. 320). In response to this failure to acknowledge the multiplicity of systemic factors influencing South African population groups and the need for a theoretical framework, the Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) of career development has been proposed as a potential overarching framework that considers the relationship between career theories.

Systems theory is well established in other fields of psychology, such as family therapy, but it is comparatively recent to career development theory. Systems theory is broadly based and, with regards to career development, is able to take into account the diversity and complexity of influences on career development. More specifically, the STF has been broadly applied to a range of groups and settings, thereby demonstrating its capacity to address career theory’s failure to account for structural and cultural factors (Stead, 2004; Watson, 2004). Of specific importance to this present study, the STF has also proven to be useful in better accounting for the career development of South African adolescents (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006).

In summary, the multicultural and economic contexts of South Africa are important factors in understanding the career development of this population, yet these and other systemic factors have received insufficient attention in South African career literature and research. The STF is a comparatively recent framework that addresses criticisms that career theory does not sufficiently focus on contextual factors. In addition, it is acknowledged for its valuable contribution in understanding the systemic influences on the career development of South African adolescents. Since this present study aims to explore and describe the systemic
influences on the career development of black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment, the STF is a valuable theoretical framework chosen to assist in accomplishing this study’s aims. In highlighting the importance of understanding the indigenous context of a country, it makes sense that the socio-political history of South Africa, the structure of the traditional black family, and how this family structure has changed over time due to changing socio-political conditions be discussed. In the next section, the socio-political historical context of South Africa will be presented.

The Socio-Political Historical Context of South Africa

In 1994 South Africa became a democracy, effectively ending forty years of apartheid rule. This apartheid rule deprived the majority of the population of political, economic and social benefits. Beggs (1990) stated that the political and economic system of apartheid created mutually exclusive cultures. For forty years, the dominant culture was an individualistic Western worldview perpetuated by a ruling minority on the one end of the socio-political spectrum. On the other and opposing end, a marginalised majority African culture operated on the fringes of the dominant society (Marais, 2001).

During the apartheid era, black people were marginalised in all spheres of life. For example, the black majority were denied access to the superior health and education systems that were provided for the white population. Also, black South Africans were bound by pass laws that restricted their movement within certain urban areas, forcing them to settle in allocated areas on the outskirts of towns and cities, thereby greatly increasing travelling costs. Other laws prohibited the black population from engaging in certain occupations, thus creating job reservation for white people (Watts, 1980). Similarly, Nicholas, Naidoo, and Pretorius (2006) state that black people were not only prevented from seeking employment in a range of occupations but also found it difficult to gain tertiary qualifications due to racial
quota regulations. All of these contextual factors prevented the black majority from maintaining even a marginally decent standard of living.

Over a decade has passed since the abolishment of apartheid rule in 1994 and, although South Africa is undergoing significant and progressive change, the legacy of apartheid has not yet been overcome in a country where half the population still lives below poverty level and where wealth continues to be divided along colour lines. In agreement, Leach, Akhurst, and Basson (2003) explain that contemporary South Africa is facing challenges relating to extremely high unemployment and crime rates, limited national financial resources and numerous health care challenges, specifically the AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis.

Regarding South Africa’s unemployment rate, data calculations (Statistics South Africa, 2007) indicate that the country’s overall unemployment rate is 25.5%. When comparing the unemployment rate per population group, it can be seen that black South Africans have a considerably higher unemployment rate (30.5%) in comparison to white South Africans (4.5%), hence highlighting an ongoing inequitable economic struggle. Seidman-Makgetla (2004) observes that black women are still more likely to be unemployed, to be paid less than men when employed, and to perform unpaid labour. These statistics reveal the considerable inequalities between genders as well as population groups.

The inequality across South African population groups can also be seen in the country’s high poverty levels. Homelessness, casual labour, poor infrastructure and lack of access to basic services are all prevalent concerns in South Africa that confirm high poverty levels. It is estimated that just over twenty two million people in South Africa (around 45% of the country’s population) live in poverty (Development Bank of South Africa, 2005). Poverty and inequality in South Africa have racial, gender, spatial and age dimensions. Thus, the concentration of poverty lies predominantly with black Africans, women, rural areas and
black youth (Triegaardt, 2006). Regarding geographical area, international centres of commerce, education, and recreation are mostly found in major urban areas such as Cape Town, Pretoria, Durban, and Johannesburg, while small villages in outlying provinces, such as the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal, are characterized by extreme economic deprivation and hardship (Leach, Akhurst, & Basson, 2003).

When examining black youth of today, it can be said that they too continue to face an ongoing legacy of apartheid, especially regarding the quality of their education. The unequal distribution of public educational resources, coupled with preexisting economic constraints on black families, has resulted in limited educational opportunities and lower attainment for blacks (Lam, 1999; Thomas, 1996). Also, Anderson (2000) suggests that the lower educational attainment for blacks results partly from their slow progress in school, given that limited educational resources, grade repetition and school interruption are commonly observed for black youth. The restructuring of the school curriculum after 1994 may have exacerbated educational inequalities, as teachers in schools in poor neighbourhoods often lack the skills or motivation to apply the new curriculum. Although the government has attempted to alleviate the shortage of skilled black labour through expansion of black education, this has resulted in a major increase in black primary school enrolment but not a consequent increase at the secondary school level (Maharaj, Kaufman, & Richter, 2000).

Despite progressive legislation to promote education, most South African schools provide a low quality of education, especially in disadvantaged schools (Seeking, 2007). In some cases, the quality is clearly constrained by inadequate conditions such as a lack of evenly distributed educational resources, overcrowding in schools, criminal behaviour, high teacher-pupil ratios, and limited qualified teachers (Townsend et al., 2002). Additionally, many of the problems mentioned earlier such as poverty, infrastructural limitations and the AIDS pandemic also impact on black students’ education. This can be seen in the country’s low
pass rate (65.2%) in the recent matriculation examinations, with the Eastern Cape having the second lowest pass rate in the country (57.1%).

In these post-apartheid years, the South African population has experienced a more multicultural and open society through the influence of a revamped single education system, changed policies in the work environment, an evolved mass media and an economic inclusive approach. But, the reality of persistent unemployment and crime rates, high poverty levels, infrastructural limitations, and limited national financial resources significantly contribute to the serious challenges that South Africans, especially black adolescents, currently face in their everyday lives. This discussion on the socio-political historical context of South Africa attempts to provide the necessary background for the following section, which examines the changing structure of the black South African family.

The Changing Structure of the Black Family

Traditionally, the family structure of black families was predominantly patriarchal in nature and polygamy was widely practised and accepted. Extended families were the norm, with three or more generations sharing homes, and the characteristics of these families included an emphasis on loyalty towards the group, large households and mutual support (Steyn, 1993, 1994). The values and norms for the traditional black family were to respect the elderly, conform to tradition and endure strict discipline administered by the father as undisputed head of the family. In traditional black culture, the individual is virtually non-existent (Siqwana-Ndulo, 1998). In fact, individuals define themselves within the context of others.

When looking at contemporary South African black families and taking into account all the socio-political factors that they have been exposed to, there have been pronounced changes in family structure. It is generally accepted that the family is a dynamic, ever-changing institution that reflects societal changes. The changes that can be seen in the
contemporary black family are inextricably linked to the socio-economic and political history of South Africa. Factors that have exerted pressure on the black family were colonialism, industrialization and urbanization, as well as the political system of apartheid. Westernization was the inevitable result of industrialization and urbanization. Although westernization did not necessarily imply the full incorporation and acceptance of a western lifestyle and value system (Bester, 1994; Carstens, 1995), it did impact significantly on the traditional African culture. As mentioned earlier, the extended family comprises the typical family structure in traditional black families. In Western societies, on the other hand, the nuclear family is perceived as the ideal family structure.

Although it is clear that the extended family is still the dominant family structure among black South African families, there is sufficient evidence that a variety of other family structures are emerging (Ziehl, 2002). Boult and Cunningham (1992) view the female-headed, single-parent family as the fastest growing family structure in society. Factors that led to the formation of new family types among black South Africans include the adoption of Western values and norms, which led to people opting for nuclear families. In addition, economic constraints have prevented people from providing and receiving support in the way that this used to be done in the traditional black family (Van Vuuren, 1997).

In the traditional black family, parental authority and the dominance of the father figure were non-negotiable. However, there seems to be consensus among most authors that this picture is changing and that there is a definite decline in parental authority (Theklisho, 1990; Viljoen, 1994). There are several possible explanations for this trend. Children are in a much better position than their parents were to obtain, and further, their education. This has also widened the gap between parent and child. In schools, children are exposed to new ideas and values and this results in parents and children who have very little in common. Phewa (1992) comments that mass media communication may have replaced parent-child communication
and that it has often conveyed questionable values that opposed parental values. Children may also find it easier to reconcile traditional culture and western influences. The work of Ngwane (2002) has demonstrated how African youth, through education, are displacing old traditions and are moving towards a greater sense of themselves. The shift for African youth appears to be away from the values of the old and towards a stronger sense of individualism (Soudien & Alexander, 2003).

The origin of poverty among black South Africans is rooted in the country’s socio-political history. High poverty levels and the serious HIV AIDS issue in black communities have contributed to a decline in parental authority and support as parents are forced to find employment elsewhere or as parents have died due to HIV, thereby leaving their children unattended or sending them to extended family members to be fostered (Noumbissi & Zuberi, 2001; van de Walle, 1999; Viljoen, 1994). Structural factors, such as the long distances that parents may have to travel between their homes and places of employment, leave them with even less time to spend with their children.

When considering all the factors that have impacted negatively on black families in South Africa, one might expect that the black family structure would have completely disintegrated by now. However, black South Africans’ cultural preference for extended living arrangements persists in spite of modernisation and urbanisation (Amoateng, 2004; Russell, 2004). Smit (2001) illustrated situations within which black families utilise traditional values and survival strategies actively to adapt to economic and social changes, and to ensure that modernisation does not uproot their traditional way of life. A major strength of black people is their keen emphasis on kinship and community support. African extended kinship operates as a way of coping with vulnerability by pooling resources and providing assistance when needed (Amoateng, 1997; Makosana, 2001; Thomas, 1996). The burden of children, and the benefits of income and access to housing, is not only shared by kinship members (Burman,
Black people attach a very high value to “ubuntu”, which means that community members support one another and accept responsibility for one another (Van Vuuren, 1997).

Rationale for the Present Study

This introductory chapter has emphasised that extant career theory largely fails to acknowledge multicultural and economic contexts in career development and that a more indigenous approach to the conceptualisation of career development is needed. A short introduction into the socio-political history of South Africa and the ongoing struggle facing black families due to the inequalities of the past is offered in an attempt to provide the necessary background when studying the career development of black adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. This study aims to explore and describe systemic influences impacting on such adolescents’ career development. In order to remain sensitive to a particular culture, an indigenous approach needs to be implemented that understands the cultural traditions of that particular group. Therefore, an introduction into the structure of black families and the numerous challenges that they have to deal with on a daily basis provides a background to the potential individual, social and environmental-societal systems of influence that can impact on a black South African adolescent’s career development.

Since the participants from this study come from a low socioeconomic status environment, the introduction provided in the preceding sections of this chapter brings awareness to the ongoing struggles a black adolescent faces. For example, it has been shown how the lack of financial resources and disruptive class environments can seriously hamper the quality of an adolescent’s education. Also, the high levels of poverty and unemployment in the country add to the poor infrastructure, heightened crime rates, and transmission of infectious diseases that are seen in areas of low socioeconomic status as additional influences that affect black adolescents’ career development.
With the paucity of South African research on previously marginalised population groups and the need for a systemic understanding of black adolescents’ career development, the need to undertake the present study is emphasised. By exploring and describing the systems of influences on the career development of low socioeconomic status, black adolescents, the field of career development will strengthen its understanding of this previously marginalised group. The Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) provides a valuable theoretical framework that has proven to be sensitive to cultural and contextual factors, and that would assist this study in realising its aims. A brief description of the structure of the present study will now follow.

Structure of the Study

After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 focuses on the relevant theoretical foundation necessary for studying adolescents’ systemic career development. In this chapter, the dynamic nature of career development theory is introduced, followed by a detailed description of the comparatively recent Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development. Also, Super’s (1980, 1990) life-span, life-space theory is utilised in order to explain career development from the stage of childhood into adolescence. An overview of international and national career research that emphasises the integrative perspective of systems theory influence is provided in Chapter 3. This research review groups the relevant findings of several influences that impact on adolescent career development within the three interrelated systems of the STF, namely the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems.

In Chapter 4, the problem formulation and the aims of the study are presented. In this research methodology chapter, a detailed explanation of the current study’s research methods and procedures used to execute this study are offered. A profile of the participants is provided, as well as a thorough description of the utilised career assessment measure, the My
System of Career Influences workbook (MSCI; McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005a). Chapter 4 concludes with an overview of the means of data analysis used to analyse the collected data. Chapter 5 then presents the study’s empirical findings, with these results presented in accordance with the three specific aims of the study. Additionally, a detailed account of the systemic and interrelated career development trends and themes is presented. Lastly, Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the present study’s findings and underscores the conclusions drawn from the research results. The limitations of the study are examined and recommendations for future research are suggested. A list of references and appendices are provided at the end of the treatise.

The following chapter presents a theoretical overview of career development theory, as well as a detailed description of the Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development. Super’s life-span, life-space theory will also be discussed in order to explain career development through the life stages of childhood and adolescence.
CHAPTER 2

THEORY REVIEW

The aim of this study is to explore and describe the systems of influence in the career development of black, South African adolescents. This chapter focuses on relevant theoretical considerations in an endeavour to provide the necessary foundation for studying adolescents’ systemic career development. The first section of the chapter provides a brief background into the dynamic nature of career development theory and the need for an overarching framework to unify existing career theories. This notion of a metatheoretical framework then introduces the comparatively recent Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) of career development, which is the major focus of this chapter. This second section of the chapter examines the broader systemic context within which the STF was developed, and a detailed description of its composition is discussed. The section concludes with a discussion of the advantages of the STF, thereby providing a motivation for the use of this perspective as the theoretical base for this research study. The motivation for using Super’s theory to describe career development in childhood and adolescence is also offered. Consequently, the remainder of this chapter uses Super’s life-span, life-space theory to explain career development from the stage of childhood into adolescence. To end this chapter, an evaluation of Super’s theory is presented and comments from other theorists concerning Super’s theory are highlighted.

Career Development Theory

In general, the history of career development theory has been relatively short (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006), although the concept of career development has progressed considerably over a relatively short period of time in order to adapt to ongoing rapid changes occurring within the workplace (Amundson, 2005). While advancement in the field of career development theory and research has continued to be both noteworthy and valuable, many
career development theories still emanate from the United States and are based on westernised universal principles and terminology. In addition, the main focus of career development theory in the past has been on either content or process. Theories of content identify the influences of intrapersonal (such as age, ethnicity and gender) and contextual (such as family, community groups and geographic location) variables relevant to individuals and their career development, whereas theories of process acknowledge the importance of decision-making and change over time (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

The earliest career theories of content include the work of Parsons (1909), emphasising intrapersonal and interpersonal concerns in career decision-making processes (O’Brien, 2001). Thereafter, Holland’s (1973, 1985, 1992, 1997) theory of personalities (later renamed the person-environmental fit approach) was introduced and focused on suitably matching the characteristics of the individual to those of a particular work setting, resulting in career satisfaction for the individual. This requires a clear understanding of one’s strengths and weaknesses, abilities, resources and interests, as well as knowledge of the existing career choices. Other valuable contributors to this category of theories of content include Bordin’s (1990) psychodynamic theory, Brown’s (1996, 2002) value-based theory, and McRae and John’s (1992) five factor theory. Although these theories differ in certain aspects, the similarities between them include the importance placed on the congruent match between self-knowledge in the decision-making process and knowledge about the world of work. Content theories were criticised for being static and not providing adequate explanations of the process of career development. This omission of satisfactory explanations contributed to the development of career theories of process that recognised career choice as being “not just a single static decision, but rather (is) a dynamic developmental process involving a series of decisions made over time” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 49).
Known for their contributions to this category of theories of process are Ginzberg’s (1972, 1984) developmental theory, Super’s (1953, 1957, 1980, 1990, 1992, 1994) life-span, life-space theory, and Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman’s (1990; Miller-Tiedeman, 1999) individualistic approach. Although all of these theories predominately originate from developmental psychology and focus on longitudinal manifestations of behaviour, they do acknowledge the significant content influence of self-concept. Subsequently, other theories have attempted to include both content and process variables in their explanation of career behaviour (Lent, 2005; Lent & Brown, 2002; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996, 2002; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1990, 1996; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986).

With each developing theory comes a concomitant review of its strengths and weaknesses and, for some theorists, an on-going attempt at improving and refining their theories. Other theorists disagree with this striving towards one perfect theory and have shifted their thinking to focus rather on convergence of theories (McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999, 2006; Savickas, 2005; Savickas & Lent, 1994). This convergence of theories requires an overarching framework to unify the existing multifaceted and dynamic status of career development theory. The body of work in this field can be described as both expansive and varied, but it also remains “disparate and segmented” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 167) and continues to be criticised for its failure to deal significantly with variables such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Stead, 2004) and the career development of women (Bimrose, 2001; Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001; Patton & McMahon, 2005). Over a decade ago, Savickas and Lent (1994) recognised the need for an integrated theory that could acknowledge the complexity of career development theory while, at the same time, providing a framework that would appreciate the contexts of that complexity.

Recently emerged as challenges to traditional empiricist-positivist assumptions are contextually embedded accounts and assessments of career development that respect this
complexity of career theory (McMahon & Patton, 2002a). This challenge is reflected in the constructivist worldview reflected in the work of theorists such as Savickas (1993) and Peavy (1997). In contrast to the positivist worldview, which assumes the passive nature of the individual who is at the whim of maturational and developmental stages, constructivism “views the person as an open system, constantly interacting with the environment, seeking stability through ongoing change” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 149). Constructivist approaches place emphasis on individuals as central to their unique career construction and include the theoretical approaches of career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), chaos theory (Pryor & Bright, 2003), and ecological career theory (Conyne & Cook, 2004). Although it is clear that the constructivist worldview has been an important influence in the move towards the integration of career theories, there is still the need for some combination of constructs and theories to provide a coherent and practical overarching picture (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

The Systems Theory Framework (STF), based on systems theory, has been suggested as an overarching framework to unify existing career theories. The STF was the first attempt to comprehensively present a metatheoretical framework constructed using systems theory. The STF is a framework that addresses the disunity between various theoretical perspectives of career development by reflecting a macropicture of career theories, illustrating the contribution of each theory and its interrelationship with others (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). In this regard, Patton and McMahon (2006) state:

The STF is not designed to be a theory of career development; rather systems theory is being introduced as the basis for an overarching, or metatheoretical, framework within which all concepts of career development described in the plethora of career theories can be usefully positioned and utilised in theory and practice. (p. 196)
The following section explains the development of the STF, as well as a detailed description of its composition.

The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

To restate, the broadening of the concept of career development, as well as ongoing rapid changes occurring within the workplace and in individual careers, demands a “flexible and adaptive career theory” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 3). In reaction to this, Savickas and Lent (1994) called for the integration of career theory through the development of an overarching framework of career development. This has ultimately resulted in the development of the Systems Theory Framework (STF; McMahon & Patton, 1995; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) of career development. This framework highlights the complexity and uniqueness of an individual’s career development, as well as the influences and interrelated systems within which development occurs. Within this framework, the individual is acknowledged as the central focus and is offered the opportunity to identify the systems that are influential in his or her specific career development. Each individual allocates meaning to their systems of influence from their own personal perspective by telling their career stories in a narrative manner (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004).

The concept of the STF was first proposed as a contextual model for understanding adolescent career decision-making (McMahon, 1992) and it stressed the integral nature of context with regard to decision-making and career development. The initial publication of the STF (McMahon & Patton, 1995) has not only been significantly revised and refined (Patton & McMahon, 1997, 1999, 2006), but it has also been broadly applied to a range of cultural groups and settings in demonstrating its capacity to address career theory’s failure to account for structural and cultural factors (Stead, 2004; Watson, 2004). In addition, the STF has proven to be useful in better accounting for the career development of women (Patton, 1997), Australian Aboriginal people (Sarra, 1997), Chinese students (Back, 1997), and South
African adolescents (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006). It has been further applied in the study of contextual issues such as rural location (Collett, 1997), socioeconomic disadvantage (Taylor, 1997) and specific organisational settings (Dunn, 1997).

Although the STF was originally driven by its focus on integrating theory, it has increasingly been adapted to serve the purposes of divergent and unique career situations within which the relevance of career theory can be evaluated. Along with its application to diverse cultural groups and settings, it has become increasingly apparent that the STF’s utility lies especially in the development of qualitative career assessment processes (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004; McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005), career counselling (McMahon, 2005), and multicultural career counselling (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). Therefore, a shift can be noticed in the significance of the STF to the field of career psychology from a theoretical integrative function towards the application and adaptation of such integration within career counselling relationships. In order to fully understand the value of the STF the following section will expand on the STF’s capacity to represent the dynamic nature of career development within and between its systems through its inclusion of the process influences of recursiveness, change over time and chance.

Construction of STF

Being motivated by their aim of integration, Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) have identified the two broad components of career development which identify the significant influences outlined by existing career theories, namely content and process influences. These two categories provide an amalgamation of the multifaceted ideas about influences on career development that have been identified by many researchers and theorists in career psychology. Content influences include variables relevant to the individual including intrapersonal variables such as personality, gender, and age as well as contextual variables, which comprise social influences such as family and peers, and environmental-societal
influences such as geographic location, socioeconomic status and globalisation (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2006). Process influences include three important considerations, namely recursiveness, change over time, and chance. The STF clearly illustrates both the content and process influences of career development and maps out several interrelated systems of influence that shape the career decisions and development of individuals within their specific contexts over time (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

The authors of the STF “deliberately chose the word influence to describe intrapersonal and contextual factors relevant to the career development process” (Patton, & McMahon, 2006, p. 196) as they believe it is a dynamic term that offers the individual the opportunity to assign his or her own meaning to each influence, without assuming positive or negative connotations. This thinking is consistent with the systems ontology that resists the cause and effect determinism of mechanistic models of career development. As systems perspectives conceive of person and environment as interdependent entities that dynamically interact, the STF is reflective of the constructivist worldview with its emphasis on holism, personal meaning, subjectivity and recursiveness between influences. In the next section, the first component of STF theory (i.e., content influences) will be further described. Thereafter, a more detailed description of process influences will follow.

Content Influences

As mentioned earlier, content influences include variables relevant to the individual and to the context and, although the STF offers several examples of common variables, it also allows for the construction of other influences that may be unique and meaningful to that individual’s career development. Intrapersonal influences are depicted at the core of the STF as part of the individual system; thus the individual is both a system in his or her own right and a subsystem of a broader macro contextual system represented by the social system and the environmental-societal system. Therefore, the STF provides a manageable structure
within which individuals’ unique experiences of career, as well as various theoretical contributions, can be located and mapped (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Dividing the micro and macro contexts of career development, the STF comprises of interrelated but non-hierarchical systemic levels, namely the individual system, the social system, and the environmental-societal system (all of which are described in greater detail in the section to follow).

The Individual System

Systems theoretical principles emphasise the importance of the whole (i.e., the individual) being greater than the sum of its parts (i.e., the intrapersonal influences). The individual is therefore seen as a system in its own right, comprising of subsystems that are termed by the STF as the intrapersonal influences. These intrapersonal influences are portrayed at the heart of the STF as part of the individual system. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the individual system as outlined by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

Patton and McMahon (2006) chose the word “individual” to describe a person in their framework because it suggests the “uniqueness of a person and his or her situation, and reflects the concept of personal agency” (p. 198). Many of the existing theorists (Holland, 1985, 1997; Super, 1990; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulenberg, 1986) have emphasised the importance of the individual as the centre of career choice, as well as a range of intrapersonal influences that shape an individual’s career development. Traditionally seen in the literature on career theories, influences such as personality, values, interests and self-concept have been measured and used exclusively in an attempt to successfully match an individual to a suitable career. While the STF agrees with these extant theories that state that intrapersonal influences have the potential to form part of the content influences that influence an individual’s career, it departs from the statement that these are inevitable determinants of career identity. In addition, the STF acknowledges that the individual is not an empirically measurable entity,
but rather a dynamic collection of interrelated influences that constantly shifts and transforms an individual’s description of his or her self over time (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Keeping in mind that the STF is based on a systems theory perspective, it follows that the STF accentuates the importance of allowing individuals to make meaning of the influences on their career development, which includes going into greater detail about the intrapersonal variables that specifically apply to each individual’s reality.

Figure 1. The individual system.

Several intrapersonal influences have traditionally received a great deal of attention in career theory, such as those mentioned earlier (i.e., personality, values, interests and self-concept). While others (such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability) have generally received less attention, their potential influence on the career choice and development of an individual should not be underestimated. However, individuals do not live in isolation and the meanings they ascribe to such intrapersonal variables are not produced in
a vacuum, but are rather produced within a much larger contextual system (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2006). Therefore meanings attributed to intrapersonal influences are viewed as shaped by many other systemic relationships of which the individual forms a part. In the STF, this larger contextual system is represented by the social system and the environmental-societal system (of which the social system will be discussed next).

The Social System

The social system comprises of the “other people systems” (Patton & McMahon, 2006, p. 201) with which individuals interact and is thus considered influential in shaping their perception of themselves and the meaning attributed to their life and career. The STF identifies the social systems most common to all individuals, such as family, peers, educational institutions, community groups and the workplace, which is illustrated in Figure 2 below (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

However, it is acknowledged that most individuals will experience some degree of change over time (such as relocating residence, changing jobs), which results in movement in and out of significantly more social groups (such as church groups, interest groups and self-help groups). Therefore, the composition of an individual’s social system will also adjust and change accordingly throughout one’s lifetime. It is however important that an individual can identify and explore the social systems relevant to their life in order to understand and evaluate to what extent they are influencing their career choices and development.
Vondracek, Lerner and Schulenberg (1983) recognise other potential influences within the social context such as community structure and size, school climate, and family context influences (which includes birth order, family size, ethnicity, parental employment status and paternal encouragement). These authors describe such influences as being of great importance. Referring more specifically to adolescents, several authors draw attention to the social environment of an adolescent as being made up of extended family members (Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005), teachers (Gushue & Whitson, 2006) and peer groups (Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005). Blustein (1997) explains that differences in social learning factors and career exploration can best be understood from a context-rich perspective where a variety of social factors are considered.
Education institutions and the workplace are two areas of influence that are also recognised and incorporated within the social context of the STF. There have been significant changes occurring worldwide in educational institutions, in the workplace and the world of work, thereby bringing consequent changes in the role of career in an individual’s life. An example of the significant influence that educational institutions have had on the career development of individual South Africans occurred during the apartheid era and involved a long-standing policy of restricted access to education for black individuals. Nicholas, Naidoo, and Pretorius (2006) point out that restricting access to education for this marginalised group was deliberately arranged to perform a strategic gate-keeping function to regulate career development, i.e., ensuring the social and economic control of the white population. This is a good example of recursiveness (one of the process influences discussed later in this chapter) that explains how change in one part of the system produces change in another part of the system. By allowing a limited number of black individuals into universities, as well as distributing financial resources based on racial segregation, black individuals’ career choices and their overall career development in this political era were severely limited. The discussion on the political decisions and historical trends of South Africa will continue under the section on the environmental-societal system.

All of these social structures are sources of values, beliefs and attitudes that are conveyed to, and thus influence, individuals and their career development in both direct and indirect ways (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). What is of great importance to individuals is the need to identify the influential social systems specific to them, in order for them to be able to evaluate the degree to which these influences are impacting on their lives and career identity. For instance, the media is a socialising influence that has previously received little attention but, in fact, may play a prominent role in shaping the way in which career identities are represented to the public. The media, as well as other social system variables, should be
recognised for being potentially powerful mediums, either directly or indirectly, that construct career knowledge and norms around which people are often prompted to form their career opinions. Following on from this, further influences such as political decisions and employment markets are acknowledged as forming part of the broader context within which the social and individual systems engage. This broader context, which represents a further level of influence on individuals’ career development, is called the environmental-societal system by the STF. This system will be described in the next section.

The Environmental-Societal System

McMahon and Patton (2002) remind us that western individualist-humanist approaches to career are based on the assumption that human beings have fundamental traits that remain fixed regardless of their environment. These authors go on to say that one of the effects of this type of approach is the exclusion of a macro-perspective of societal structures that impact on an individual’s career identity and development. The STF overcomes this issue by drawing attention to a range of influences within the broader context of the environmental-societal system (such as globalisation, geographic location, political decisions, historical trends and socioeconomic circumstances) that impact on an individual’s career, often in an indirect manner (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Figure 3 provides a diagrammatic representation of the environmental-societal system as outlined by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

Because many of the influences identified in the environmental-societal system have received less attention in career theory to date, their degree of influence on career development is less clearly understood at a both a micro- and macro-level. For instance, the influence of geographic isolation and socioeconomic status has been previously underrated and, as Roberts (2005) explains, rural isolation and socioeconomic power may have an influence on the nature of schooling received, employment opportunities, and access to
information, all of which impacts on an individual’s career knowledge, career choice and overall career development. As stated by Patton and McMahon (2006), “there is often a close link between political, socioeconomic, historical, and geographic influences in cities and in rural locations” (p. 204). Government decisions on funding the infrastructure of a particular geographic area (such as public transport, educational institutions, and telecommunications) can have profound effects on individuals and the members of their social system. Another element of the environmental-societal system, which has far-reaching and unimagined effects on individuals' lives, is globalisation. The consequence of globalisation coupled with advancements in technology has resulted in increased communication and access to information through the resource of the internet (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

Figure 3. The environmental-societal system.
With regards to political decisions and the South African context, a prominent political system that affected and impeded the careers of many individuals is that of apartheid. Nicholas, Naidoo, and Pretorius (2006) concur by arguing that the diverse inequities of apartheid in the South African context led to differential access to educational and vocational opportunities for different racial groups. The consequences of apartheid included inequitable distribution of financial resources and racial segregation, which prevented marginalised groups from pursuing their careers in local educational institutions and enforced them to make use of separate transportation and housing. In addition to this, their socioeconomic level and geographic location profoundly limited their career potential and choices.

With regard to career theories, Watson and Stead (2002) mention that applying international, westernised assumptions to South Africa’s diverse population groups further marginalises an already disadvantaged majority of the population. Examples of these westernised assumptions underlying career theories are independence, individualism, and rational decision-making. Focusing on these values and beliefs has precluded the study of variables prevalent in African cultures. For example, Stead and Watson (1998a) bring to our attention the Xhosa expression “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (i.e., a person is a person through others) that “has yet to be explained in relation to the career choice process” (p. 292). By attending to the macro-level of career development, the STF provides a mechanism for engaging with individuals from groups which have traditionally been ignored in career development theory, and offers them the opportunity to identify and externalise prescriptive or oppressive influences within their environmental-societal system. Therefore, the STF accommodates the aspects of culture that are relevant for each individual, be they individualistic or collectivist cultures. Arthur and McMahon (2005) acknowledge this valuable potential of the STF to account for diversity and the complexity of influences on career development.
As explained earlier in this chapter, the STF comprises of two broad components of career development, namely content and process influences. Since content influences have been discussed in this section, the following section will elaborate on process influences.

Process Influences: Recursiveness, Change Over Time and Chance

The nature of career development has been recognised and described earlier on in this chapter as being dynamic. One of the advantages of the STF lies in its ability to represent this dynamic quality through the inclusion of the process influences of recursiveness, change over time, and chance. The first process influence is recursiveness which draws from a systems theory perspective by acknowledging that change in one part of the system produces change in another part of the system. The STF emphasises the recursive interaction within the individual, within the context, as well as between the individual and the context. Recursive interactions are mutually shaping processes that occur between systems, but they should not be confused with linear cause and effect relationships or reciprocal relationships that presume equal reactions to an action. Patton and McMahon (2006) rejected the notion of reciprocal interaction because “many of the influences are not reciprocal in size or direction” (p. 205). Figure 4 depicts this multidirectional, nonlinear interaction by broken lines that indicate the permeable boundaries of influence between all systems (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

Change over time is the second process influence and it reflects career development theory’s emphasis on career development as a continuous process throughout one’s lifetime. Super (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) and Gottfredson (1996) both agree that an individual must pass through a series of successive stages in order to develop in his or her career. The STF departs in some ways from these theorists because, as Patton and McMahon (2006) describe it, “the path of career development is one of constant evolution, and may incorporate forward and backward movements as well as movements that are multi-directional and multi-levelled” (p. 207). In addition, change over time refers to ongoing decision-making
processes that are influenced by the integral role of past, present and future (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). As seen in Figure 4, time is depicted by circular shapes that emphasis the nonlinear nature of career development.

Figure 4. Process influences.

Recursive change over time may be abrupt and illogical, and not necessarily predictive and normative as some career theories suggest. By recognising that career development may involve multi-directional movements, the STF challenges traditional theories by emphasising the influence of chance as the third process influence. Chance is defined as “an unplanned
event that measurably alters one’s behavior” (Miller, 1983, p. 17). The importance of unexpected or chance events such as accidents or illness is acknowledged by the STF as being potentially profound in the development of an individual’s career (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). However, it is more important to understand and assess the impact of a chance event from the individual’s perspective, rather than to evaluate an occurrence based purely on the characteristics of that event. Chance is depicted in the STF by lightning flashes (see Figure 4).

Figure 4, depicting the STF as a whole, offers a visual representation of the collation of influential systems and the processes influences. The concentric and overlapping circles represent the systems and subsystems identified by individuals as significantly influential and the interrelationship existing between these systems. The process influences of recursiveness, change over time and chance are represented respectively in Figure 4 by broken lines, circular shapes, and lightning flashes. In practice, individuals can explore and identify their own unique system of career influences and then continue to construct their personal STF diagram.

Providing an evaluation of any theoretical framework is important, and the following section provides a brief evaluation of the STF and its positive implications for this study in terms of describing and understanding career development during adolescence.

Advantages of the STF

The STF addresses many of the criticisms evident in previous literature on career theory. The value of the STF is in its ability to unite various career theories within one metatheoretical framework while, at the same time, focusing on the individual and his or her own career construction (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). As a result, the STF’s metatheoretical account of career development offers many advantages for the field of career psychology, and for the integration of career theory and career practice.
The STF adequately focuses on the dynamic interaction between the individual and historical, social, political, economic, and cultural influences in understanding an individual’s career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Thus the STF is utilised in this study because of its capacity to acknowledge the integral historical, political, economic, and cultural influences relevant to black South African adolescents residing in a low socioeconomic environment. Utilising the STF perspective, the participants in this study will be offered the opportunity to describe and explore their unique systems of influence from their perspective, in order to assist them in understanding their career development so far.

Another major contribution of the STF is in its ability to recognise the contributions of all career theories and their interconnecting influences on career development. Patton and McMahon (2006) state further that a “systems theory perspective enables practitioners to choose from that theory which is most relevant to the needs and situation of the individual” (p. 213). Since this study focuses on the stage of adolescence, the aforementioned advantage of the STF encourages the researcher to choose the most relevant career theory to facilitate fulfilling the research aim of accounting for career development in adolescence. Thus, the work of the career theorist Donald Super (1953, 1957, 1980, 1990, 1992, 1994) has been selected as it emphasises a developmental series of life stages to explain career development and, more specifically, the adolescence stage as one of these life stages. Since this research study focuses on adolescence and comprises participants from this particular age group, Super’s life-span, life-space theory of career development was selected as a basis for understanding the stage of adolescent career development as it provides a comprehensive account of career behaviour, with specific emphasis on the life stages of childhood and adolescence (i.e., the developmental stages of growth and exploration). As the stage of childhood occurs prior to adolescence and is therefore identified as the foundation period for career development, the following section includes an explanation of the childhood stage of
growth in order to provide a foundation on which subsequent career developmental stages are built. Super’s life-span, life-space theory will now be introduced and the two life stages relevant to this research study will be elucidated.

Super’s life-span, life-space theory

One of the most influential writers in the field of career development has been Donald Super. Both developmental psychology and self-concept theory were a major influence on Super’s work. Super (1990) describes career development as continuing across the lifespan, and therefore his theory is noted as a developmental one. His prominent contribution to career theory is his shift in thinking from seeing individual career choice as a static point-in-time event towards viewing it as a continuous process. Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) regard this as Super’s “single most important idea” (p. 122). Super’s life-span, life-space approach to career development combines “life-stage psychology and social role theory to convey a comprehensive picture of multiple-role careers, together with their determinants and interactions” (Super et al., 1996, p. 126). Because of its ongoing adaptation, Super’s theory continues to be an eminently useful model for the comprehension of career development (Blustein, 1997; Brown & Brooks, 1996; Savickas, 2002).

One of the core aspects of Super’s theory is his emphasis on the self-concept. Super explains that an individual’s evaluation of self is continuously being redefined throughout the lifespan. An individual’s self-concept will develop and be refined in relation to the multiple roles that may be experienced at different stages of life and the changing context these roles may create. In addition, Super also highlights various personal (e.g., interests, values, and personality factors) and situational (e.g., socio-historical, economic, education, and familial) determinants that influence career decisions.

Super (1990) used the terms life-span and life-space to describe his approach to career development, which includes the principle that career development continues throughout
one’s lifetime, while taking into account the context and roles an individual progresses through during the various recognised life stages. Super’s life-span, life-space theory therefore takes into account both the process and content of career development. Super (Super, et al., 1996) provides a life-career rainbow to graphically portray this concept of life-span, life-space career development (see Figure 5).

![Image of the life-career rainbow](image-url)

**Figure 5.** The life-career rainbow (from Guided Career Exploration, 1979).

This life-career rainbow has two primary dimensions: developmental stages and life roles. The life-span dimension of the rainbow depicts a life stage developmental sequence that coincides with the age-related stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle adulthood, and old age. According to Super (1990; Super et al., 1996), an individual will move through five sequential life stages throughout their lifetime (Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance, and Disengagement), and each of these developmental stages requires the accomplishment of different career developmental tasks in order to achieve career maturity. Super (1990) stated that career maturity is the “individual’s readiness to cope with the developmental tasks with which they are confronted because of their biological and social developments and because of society’s expectations of people who have reached that
stage of development” (p. 213). The life-space dimension depicts life roles and takes into consideration that the work role may not be the central or only role an individual may hold at one time. Super et al. (1996) remind us that, “while making a living, people live a life” (p. 128). Therefore, the work role needs to be understood within the context of all the life roles of an individual, including the potential relationships between the major life roles of child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, and homemaker during any particular life stage (Super et al., 1996). As mentioned, Super (1990; Super et al., 1996) proposed five major life stages, of which only the first two will be explored because of this study’s focus on adolescence. Since it is necessary to understand the foundation period of career development, the stage of childhood will be explored in the following paragraphs.

Career development begins early in childhood, with the basic drive of curiosity resulting in exploration and the imitation of role models that then leads to the acquisition of information. Corresponding to childhood, Super’s (1980, 1990, 1992) first life stage is that of Growth (4 to 13 years of age) where children begin to curiously explore their surroundings, develop a sense of time, and begin to form a self-concept of who they are and how they differ from others. Sharf (2002) explains that, “the self-concept derives from the child’s exploratory behavior, which leads to acquiring occupational information, imitating key figures, and developing interests” (p. 163). During this Growth period, children begin to develop basic abilities, social skills and attitudes through play and fantasy that will equip them eventually for future work opportunities in the broader community. With the acquisition of an adult conception of time, children become more aware of their long-term future (Super et al., 1996). This acquiring of a time perspective, combined with the development of a self-concept, will eventually lead to planful career decision-making. The four major career development tasks that apply to the Growth stage are: becoming more future-oriented,
gaining more personal control over one’s life, encouraging oneself to succeed in school, and developing competent work habits (Super et al., 1996).

The second of Super’s stages is that of Exploration (14 to 24 years of age) in which adolescents begin to develop ideas about what type of work would best suit their personality and interests. They also begin to explore the world of work in order to make initial choices that will result in the implementation of a career choice. Patton and McMahon (2006) stated that “it is during this stage that a vocational identity develops” (p. 58). Adolescents also deepen their understanding of their self-concept, understanding themselves and their abilities. A great deal of Super’s research has centred on investigating this Exploration stage, particularly studying how high school and college students grow in readiness (i.e., career maturity) to make educational and career choices (Phillips & Blustein, 1994). In this second stage, adolescents encounter the career developmental tasks of crystallising, specifying and implementing a career choice. Super (1990) indicated that exploring and crystallising career choice is an important developmental task for adolescents. Crystallization is defined as the cognitive process of formulating what career the individual is tentatively moving towards (Super, 1990). This occurs through increasing awareness of one’s resources, interests and values (Peterson & Gonzalez, 2005). One of the primary outcomes of career exploration in adolescence is the articulation of career plans, which culminates in coherent goals and choices that are well integrated with the adolescent’s self-concept (Super et al., 1996).

As mentioned earlier, central to Super’s theory is the implementation of self-concept in relation to career development. Super (1990) saw the self-concept as the outcome of the interaction between inherited aptitudes and the perception of the extent to which one’s activities meet the approval of significant others. Stead and Watson (1998b) have questioned the appropriateness of the definition of self-concept as applied to black South Africans if the impact of socio-political and familial factors is not examined. It can be argued that identity
formation is dependent on historical events, and therefore the personal identity of black South Africans can be linked to the struggle against apartheid. Some studies suggest that such concepts as career exploration and planning may not apply to individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds (Sharf, 2006) and that many black South African adolescents may leave school prematurely as a result of external contextual factors, such as to find employment for economic survival. These Western theoretical perspectives fail to conceptualize how cultural beliefs and values, specific to black South African communities, influence career development in unique ways.

Although Super has received criticism regarding the lack of research validation of several components of his theory (Salomone, 1996) as well as concerns about “the indiscriminate and prescriptive use of his theory in different South African contexts” (Stead & Watson, 1998b, p. 61), the positive evaluations far outweigh the criticisms. Osipow and Fitzgerald (1996) describe Super’s theory as being consistently regarded as a well-ordered and systematic formulation of career development, with potential for both career practice and career research. In agreement, Hackett, Lent, and Greenhaus (1991) commented that Super’s theory provides a systematic examination of important components of career behaviour with extensive empirical support. Others have added that Super’s theory remains relevant for the new millennium (Marques, 2001) and for diverse cultures and countries (Savickas, 2001).

Despite the acknowledged weaknesses, Blustein (1997) recognised significant value in the ongoing adaptable nature of Super’s theory and remarked at this noteworthy contribution to career psychology. This continuing adaptation and refinement to Super’s theory is seen recently in comments and recommendations made by Herr (1997) and Savickas (2002). In an attempt to further advance Super’s life-span, life-space theory, Herr (1997) identified the improvement of several fundamental concepts such as replacing self-concept dimensions and meta-dimensions with a social constructionist framework and replacing career maturity with
career adaptability. Herr also highlighted the need for continued increased attention to the impact of economic change and the reaction of social barriers to career development as well as the awareness of gender and cultural differences. Continuing to adapt Super’s theory since his death, Savickas (2002) has reinterpreted and reconstructed Super’s career development theory into what he has termed career construction theory, which focuses on a contextualist worldview. One of the significant and well received adaptations that Savickas proposed was the replacement of the concept of career maturity with career adaptability as the central construct in career development theory. In this regard, Watson and Stead (2006) state that “career adaptability takes on a more holistic meaning that is equally applicable across all stages of the lifespan” (p. 57). This implies that individuals are able to respond to their changing circumstances and that individual career development is more the result of ongoing adaptation to the individual’s changing contexts, than of a maturation of prescribed career behaviours (Savickas, 2002).

Summary

This chapter presents a theoretical overview of the dynamic nature of career development theory, as well as a detailed description of the comparatively recent Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development. This framework highlights the complexity and uniqueness of an individual’s career development, as well as the influences and interrelated systems within which career development occurs. Following this, a developmental series of life stages was introduced in order to explain career development in childhood and adolescence using Super’s life-span, life-space theory.

In the research review chapter to follow, research conducted both internationally and nationally will be examined within the three interrelated systems of the STF, namely the individual, social and environmental-societal systems.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH REVIEW

This research review chapter will provide an overview of recent trends in international and national career research in terms of the broader concept of career development and, more specifically, adolescent career development that emphasises the integrative perspective of systems theory influence. The review will attempt to group and describe relevant research findings of several content influences that impact on adolescent career development within the three well-defined and interrelated systems of the STF, namely the individual system, the social system, and the environmental-societal system. While many of these content influences within all three systems of the STF have been broadly researched, other influences still require research attention. Further, a review of research that has focused on the implementation and adaptation of the Systems Theory Framework (STF) within the South African context is included. Firstly, we will begin with a review of international career research on the career development of adolescents, followed by a national career research review.

International Career Research

The Individual System

The individual system of the STF comprises several intrapersonal influences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, abilities and interests, as stated in the theory chapter. There has been a vast amount of international research conducted on adolescent career development over the past decade, with the largest portion of this focusing on influences and theoretical constructs related to individual (rather than social and environmental-societal) system-related influences of adolescent career development. The majority of these studies have investigated the interrelationship between individual system influences or the association of particular theoretical constructs to such influences. With traditional methodological approaches having
dominated the career research field, many of the methods used to study these influences have been structured around quantitative research designs associated within the modernist-empiricist theoretical tradition.

One of the variables that has received comprehensive attention as an influence in adolescent career development is that of age and, more specifically, age in relation to other career constructs such as career knowledge, career maturity, and career self-efficacy. Several researchers agree that age in childhood and adolescence is clearly an influential factor in any understanding of career development (McCallion & Trew, 2000; Seligman, Weinstock, & Heflin, 1991; Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002). For example, Seligman et al. (1991) discovered that children’s knowledge of occupations seems to become more comprehensive and detailed as they become older, thereby suggesting that age does play a role in an individual’s career development. Although theoretical assumptions suggest the chronological age of individuals is an important link to the concept of maturation, several career development theorists have recognised the level of schooling as being an important indicator of career development over time. For example, research in this area has revealed that the school grade of adolescents, rather than their age, is more positively related to career maturity (Guthrie & Herman, 1982) and level of occupational knowledge (Walls, 2000).

Theoretical assumptions have also suggested a strong relationship between age and career maturity; however research findings have been varied in this regard. A number of researchers have found a developmental increase in career maturity and career decision-making self-efficacy across age (Creed, Patton, & Watson, 2002; Patton & Creed, 2001; Wallace-Broscious, Serafica & Osipow, 1994). In contrast, other research has reported no relationship between age or grade of participants and their levels of career maturity (e.g., Powell & Luzzo, 1998).
Already mentioned in the previous paragraphs, another noteworthy focus of research has been on the theoretical career construct of career maturity. The association between this career construct and a range of other individual system-related influences has been broadly examined. Examples of studies on the interrelationship of career maturity and a range of individual system-related variables and theoretical constructs include: career maturity and self-efficacy, age, career decidedness, gender and work commitment of adolescents (Creed & Patton, 2003); career maturity and attitudes toward career planning and personality style of students (Savickas, Briddick, & Watkins, 2002); and career maturity and career beliefs among ethnically diverse and academically at-risk adolescents (Schnorr & Ware, 2001). Some researchers have noted that individual system-related variables and contextual issues need to be included in career maturity studies in order to gain a more holistic understanding of career development in adolescence. For example, Schmitt-Rodermund and Silbereisen’s (1998) research investigated the career maturity of adolescents in two cultural and social environments and demonstrated that adolescents’ career maturation is influenced by differences in social and political systems. Further, Raskin (1998) emphasised the importance of integrating personality, decision-making style and contextual issues into research on adolescents’ career maturity.

Another important influence that falls into the category of the individual system is that of gender. Differences in gender have continued to be an area of focus in international career studies for many years, most of which demonstrates general trends that suggest the important role gender plays in the career development of adolescents. Although substantial research has found that females have higher scores on career maturity measures than males (Brown, 1997; Luzzo, 1995; Rojewski, Wicklein, & Schell, 1995; Taveira, Silva, Rodriguez, & Maia, 1998), other studies have failed to find any gender differences in relation to career maturity (Creed, Patton, & Watson, 2002; Kelly & Colangelo, 1990; Rojewski, 1994b).
Other research studies (e.g., Creed & Patton, 2003; Gati & Saka, 2001; Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Patton & Creed, 2001; Powell & Luzzo, 1998) have focused on the relationship between gender differences and other career influences, such as career decision-making, career planning, and self-efficacy. The results of these studies reveal that gender plays a role in influencing several areas in the career development of adolescents. For example, Powell and Luzzo (1998) suggested that adolescent males believed they have more control over their career decision-making, whereas Wallous-Brosious, Serafica, and Osipow (1994) found that adolescent females engaged in greater career exploration and planning. In another study, Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt (2004) examined the relationship between gender and self-efficacy in adolescents, with their results indicating that the primary predictor of self-efficacy was parental emotional support for females and parental career-related modelling for males.

As seen from the above studies, there seems to be research that is shifting away from isolated individual system-related influences and that is examining the contextual influences that contribute to individual differences in the career development of male and female adolescents. In relation to female career development, Flores and O'Brien (2002) examined the influence of contextual and social cognitive influences on Mexican American adolescent females’ career goals. Acculturation and self-efficacy were the strongest predictors of career choice, and feminist attitudes and parental support were the strongest predictors of high career aspirations. Since the individual system-related factor of ethnicity has now been introduced, the following section will discuss studies and trends that indicate the degree to which this factor has influenced the career development process in adolescence.

Several recent reviews have noted a trend towards increased multicultural career development research in the literature (e.g., Arbona, 2000; Flores et. al., 2003; Luzzo & Wright MacGregor, 2001; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002). Given that these reviews have
emphasised the significant impact of cultural and contextual issues in career development, continued research on diverse racial and ethnic groups has been called for in the future. Looking more specifically at studies focusing on *ethnicity*, the following results have been noted: ethnic and family factors have emerged as salient features in the career development of ethnic minority adolescents (Bullington & Arbona, 2001); ethnicity has been the noted cause for differences in career decision-making, occupational knowledge, locus of control (Lease, 2004) and occupational choices (Tang, 2002) between different racial adolescent groups; and ethnicity has been established as moderating the relationships between occupational choice and the influences of interests and abilities in a nationally representative sample of adolescents (Tracey & Hopkins, 2001).

Although the trends in research described in the previous paragraph report results supporting the important influence that ethnicity has on career development in adolescence, there are some studies that have found ethnicity to have little influence on career aspirations (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005), career self-efficacy expectations and career interests in adolescence (Turner & Lapan, 2003b). For example, Turner and Lapan (2003b) compared the environmental barriers and supports as related to career self-efficacy expectations and career interests of a group of Native American adolescents, in contrast to a comparison group of Caucasian adolescents. Their results demonstrated a strong similarity in the two adolescent groups, particularly in the direct relationship of perceived parental support and confidence to succeed. This confidence or belief in one’s abilities (i.e., self-efficacy) has been mentioned in several previous studies, and it is another career construct that has been recognised as impacting on career development.

In Dagley and Salter’s (2004) annual review of career research and practice that had been published during 2003, several studies revealed a fairly consistent endorsement of the importance of *self-efficacy* in career development. Examples of the results of these studies
found self-efficacy, as well as personality and interest influences, to be predictors of educational and occupational aspirations (Rottinghaus, Lindley, Green, & Borgen, 2002), and several studies indicated that adolescents with higher self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to report higher levels of job satisfaction in young adulthood (Hoi, Keng-Howe, & Fie, 2003; Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2003).

Other individual system-related influences that are acknowledged by the STF as potential influences on career development are personality, interests and abilities. Interestingly, several studies have attempted to further understand the potential relationship between these three influences (e.g., Ackerman & Beier, 2003; Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997). The general trends in international career research on these influences in relation to career choice and development support the importance of including these influences in research studies on career development during adolescence. For example, studies have found that adolescents’ interests and abilities are highly correlated with their occupational aspirations (Tracey & Hopkins, 2001) and their educational aspirations (Rottinghaus et al., 2002). Also, the results of a study conducted over a five-year time span demonstrated a high degree of stability in interest and academic skill scores of adolescents (Tracey, Robbins, & Hofess, 2005). Another research study endorsing the correlations between interests and personality has examined the relationship between these two influences in a sample of gifted adolescents (Larson & Borgen, 2002). Results indicated that extraversion was related to Holland's (1985) Enterprising and Social interests, agreeableness was related to Social interests, and openness was related to both Artistic and Investigative interests. These findings were consistent with the results of a meta-analysis conducted by Larson, Rottinghaus, and Borgen (2002) that examined the correlations of Holland's six interest types to the Five-Factor model (Costa & McCrae, 1992) of personality. Results indicated strong correlations between Artistic-
openness, Enterprising-extraversion, Social-extraversion, Investigative-openness, and Social-agreeableness.

In mentioning research on abilities, it is also important to explore international studies for research on disabilities, which has been acknowledged and incorporated into the individual system of the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). In comparison with other individual system-related influences and theoretical career constructs, there are few international research studies that have focused on the impact of disability in the career development of adolescents (e.g., Ochs & Roessler, 2001; Ohler, Levinson, & Barker, 1996). A study that explored the career maturity of high school students with special educational needs found that these students reported significantly lower levels of career decision-making self-efficacy, career outcome expectancies, career exploration intentions, and vocational identity than did their general education peers (Ochs & Roessler, 2001). On the other hand, the students with disabilities who possessed positive expectations about career exploration and life outcomes, were moderately confident about their ability to make career decisions, and had positive intentions to participate in career-related behaviours.

Summary

The contextual framework provided by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) has been utilised to categorise general trends of international research within individual system-related influences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, and interests. Individual system-related studies were also reviewed in relation to broader theoretical career development constructs, such as career maturity and career self-efficacy. It was found that international research studies on career development in adolescence have examined, to varying degrees, the majority of individual system-related influences and relevant theoretical career constructs mentioned by the STF of career development. Even though some influences such as disability
have received little attention, they have been highlighted sufficiently to bring awareness to researchers that there is a need for future research on these factors.

A large proportion of the research studies reviewed have been based on traditional quantitative research designs that have focused on isolated and clustered influences and theoretical career constructs. Qualitative and meaning-focused approaches to career development research have been consistently called for (Savickas & Lent, 1994) in order to understand the uniqueness of each individual’s career development in a holistic manner. As Kuit (2006) explains, this focus on universal theoretical career constructs and the consequent lack of consideration for the relational contexts of an individual’s career development results in a shift away from the complexity of the socially embedded experiences of individuals’ lives towards abstracted constituents of career development. Admittedly, there has been a gradual but evident shift away from exclusively individual system-related studies towards an increasing interest in the social and contextual influences relevant to career development in adolescence (Kuit, 2006). The following section will examine international research that has focused on the influences and theoretical career constructs related to the social system influences on adolescent career development.

The Social System

As discussed in Chapter 2, the social system is part of the broader system within which the individual coexists. The STF identifies social systems most common to all individuals, such as family, peers, educational institutions, community groups and the workplace. However, the STF also acknowledges that the composition of an individual’s social system will also adjust and change throughout an individual’s lifetime (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). This review will examine previous career research that has identified a range of variables and theoretical constructs related to social system-related influences in career development. Some variables such as family, specifically parental influence, have been more
widely researched, whereas others such as media and community groups have received little attention (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

A fundamental aspect of the career development process is exploring different vocational options, and it is often during the stage of adolescence that individuals actively begin to gather occupational information in order to consider their future career possibilities. Blustein (1997) explains that factors such as individual differences and social learning factors have been found to explain only modest amounts of variance in exploratory career behaviour, and that differences in career exploration can best be understood from a context-rich perspective where a variety of influences including family variables are considered. Most studies on the social system influences on the career development of adolescents have focused on the importance of family (e.g., Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt, 2004; Bullington & Arbona, 2001; Tang, 2002; Trusty, Plata, & Salazar, 2003; Turner, 2007) and thus this becomes the predominant focus of the present research review.

The influence of family on adolescent career development has been researched in terms of parental education (e.g., Penick & Jepsen, 1992), parental involvement (e.g., Kracke, 1997), attachment styles (e.g., Ketterson & Blustein, 1997), sibling support (e.g., Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005), as well as in relation to career maturity, occupational aspirations and exploration, and decision-making amongst others. Several studies (e.g., Garg, Kauppi, Lewko, & Urajnik, 2002; Mortimer, 1992; Penick & Jepsen, 1992; Schoon & Parsons, 2002) have noted the influence of parental education on adolescents' career development and demonstrated that lower levels of parental education can retard adolescents' career development. Specific to Germany, Canada, and England, research has established that parental social class, parental aspirations, and parental educational level were all predictive of adolescents' occupational aspirations, as well as of their educational and career attainment (Garg, Kauppi, Lewko, & Urajnik, 2002; Schnabel et al, 2002; Schoon & Parsons, 2002).
In terms of the relevance of family, much research has concluded that the parent-child relationship is a significant influence in the encouragement and support of their adolescent’s positive career development (e.g., Constantine, Wallace, & Kindaichi, 2005; Flores & O’Brien, 2002; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997; Kracke, 1997; O’Brien, 1996; Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & Whote, 2002; Trusty, 1996; Young, 1994). For example, Kracke (1997) found that parents who encouraged their adolescents to think independently and who encouraged career exploration tended to have adolescents who participated in greater career exploration than parents who did not implement these strategies. The results of this study also demonstrated that the degree of individuation in the adolescent-parent relationship related significantly positively to occupational exploration. The qualitative studies of Young and his colleagues (e.g., Young et al., 2001; Young & Friesen, 1992) have also provided some rich descriptions of how family members (particularly parents) attempt to influence their adolescent children’s career development in various and complex ways. Their results suggested that psychological variables such as parental support and expectations may influence adolescents’ career development to a greater degree than demographic variables.

In addition to parental influence, other studies have emphasised the significant influence of extended family members and siblings on the career development of adolescents (e.g., Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005; Kenny & Perez, 1996; Schultheiss, Buhin, Medina, & Spillance, 1997; Turner, 2007). With regard to sibling support, Ali et al. (2005) found that sibling support accounted for a significant amount of the variance in the vocational and educational self-efficacy beliefs of adolescents. When investigating college students, Schultheiss, Palma, Predragovich, and Glasscock (2002) also established that the students’ most important sibling was influential in their career transitions and career decision-making.

Expanding on the parent-adolescent relational context of career development, several researchers have highlighted the relationship between different parental attachment styles and
how this affects adolescents’ career development (e.g., Hargrove, Inman, & Crane, 2005; Ketterson & Blustein, 1997; O’Brien, 1996; Penick & Jepsen, 1992). For example, Ketterson and Blustein (1997) demonstrated that secure parent-adolescent relationships are associated with progress in career decision-making, affirmative career self-efficacy beliefs and career planfulness. Their study found that adolescents who have secure attachments to parents engage in greater levels of environmental and self-exploratory activity. Regarding enmeshed parental attachment styles, Penick and Jepsen (1992) noted the difficulty that adolescents from enmeshed families might experience when attempting to accomplish career development tasks because of the complexity in differentiating their career goals from their parents’ career expectations for them.

Several studies have investigated family influences on the occupational aspirations and expectations of adolescents (e.g., Dillard & Campbell, 1981; Kenny et al., 2003; Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Poole, Langan-Fox, Ciavarella, & Omodei, 1991; Rosenthal & Hansen, 1981; Wall, Covell, & MacIntyre, 1999), with results indicating that a number of family variables have a significant influence on adolescent career development. Adolescents often report that their parents influence their occupational aspirations and expectations, and that relational factors (particularly parental support) have a positive influence on their occupational aspirations. For example, Wall, Covell, and MacIntyre (1999) established that family support was predictive of perceived career opportunities in Canadian adolescents, and Paa and McWhirter (2000) found that the same-sex parent had the most effect on an adolescent’s career expectations. In agreement with these findings, Poole et al. (1991) established that adolescents’ perceived parental expectations and support was an initial influence on adolescents’ occupational status expectations, especially for males. Furthermore, the results of the latter study demonstrated that parental expectations had a greater influence on occupational status expectations than socioeconomic background and socialization factors.
With regard to career orientation (a general term encompassing the concepts of career exploration, career planning, career decision-making, and career information), several researchers (e.g., O’Brien, 1996; O’Brien & Fassinger, 1993; Rainey & Borders, 1997) have established that the career orientation of adolescent females is influenced by a complex interplay of their abilities, gender role attitudes, and their relationship with their mothers. These studies suggest that female adolescent career orientation and the relationship with the mother is salient, although this relationship represents a combination of attachment with a degree of independence, as well as possibly conflicting feelings towards the mother.

Whiston and Keller (2004), in recognising that adolescents are most likely to seek assistance with career decisions from family members, provided a review and analysis of family of origin on the career development of adolescents from the perspective of the developmental contextual theory of Vondracek, Lerner, and Schulenberg (1986). This approach is based on understanding career development from a relational perspective that focuses on the developing individual in a changing context. Whiston and Keller (2004) highlighted the fact that career development is an interactive process in which the individual and the environment influence each other. Thus, they felt it important to understand how families can have an influence on and facilitate adolescent career development. These authors believe that the process by which families influence career development is complex and is affected by contextual factors such as race, gender, and age. In their review, Whiston and Keller conclude that adolescent career development is influenced by two interdependent family contextual factors. While family structure influences (such as parents’ occupational and educational level) affect adolescents’ occupational aspirations and expectations, family process influences (such as support and mutual respect) affect other career-related factors (e.g., career maturity) both positively and negatively. These findings indicate that family
factors cannot be examined in isolation and that other contextual factors need to be considered in order to accurately understand adolescent career development and choice.

Other social influences on adolescents’ career development that have received some attention in previous research studies are teacher and peer support (e.g., Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Paa & McWhirter, 2000; Turner, 2007), although the degree of influence of these variables compared to other social system variables (specifically the family) appears less significant. Gushue and Whitson’s (2006) study on African American ninth-grade adolescents found that teacher support is positively related to career decision-making self-efficacy and career outcome expectations. Kenny and Bledsoe’s (2005) study demonstrated that the perception of higher levels of support from their teachers and peers, and positive peer attitudes about school led to increased levels of school identification and career expectations. Similarly, Paa and McWhirter (2000) reported a positive influence of peers on adolescents’ career expectations, although they acknowledged that peers had less influence on adolescents’ career expectations than their parents. In agreement with this, other studies (e.g., Bregman & Killen, 1999; Kotrlik & Harrison, 1989; Young et al., 1999) found that family members had more influence than peers on adolescents’ career decision-making.

Another social system-related influence that requires discussion is the impact that the media has on the career development of adolescents. Television, a form of media, is one of several important sources of occupational information for adolescents as it often depicts the work-related activities of fictional characters (Hoffner et al., 2006). Although there is limited research on the influence of media on career development in adolescence, there have been several international studies conducted with children and adolescents that indicate that watching television has a positive influence on occupational aspirations (e.g., Hoffner et al., 2006; Signorielli, 1993; Wroblewski & Huston, 1987).
Summary

Reflecting on the focus of research over the past decade, there seems to be a shift from studies focusing on the interrelationship between theoretical constructs and isolated social system influences to an acknowledgement and inclusion of a broader range of relational and contextual influences that significantly contribute to a more holistic understanding of career development.

The large quantity of international research that endorses the important influence of family clearly demonstrates general trends that indicate that parents can influence adolescents' career development. While teachers and peers play an influential role in the career development of adolescents as well, parents are acknowledged as having considerably more influence on their adolescents. This suggests that school and career counsellors should be encouraged to work with parents in order to promote adolescents’ career self-efficacy, and that career counsellors should consider the contextual and environmental influences that are related to the educational and career behaviour of adolescents. The following section will examine international research focusing on influences and theoretical career constructs related to the third system of the STF, i.e., the environmental-societal systemic influence on adolescent career development.

The Environmental-Societal System

The STF depicts a range of influences within the broader context of the environmental-societal system such as globalisation, geographic location, political decisions, historical trends and socioeconomic circumstances that may impact on an adolescent’s career development in an indirect manner (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Although there are several theorists (e.g., Gottfredson, 1996, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) that acknowledge the influence of environmental-societal variables, both international and national research investigating these influences on career development in adolescence is
limited. However, in more recent research there seems to be a growing awareness of the potential impact that environmental-societal variables can have on an adolescent’s career development.

Within the environmental-societal system, *socioeconomic status* is one important influence that has gained the attention of several researchers (e.g., Blustein et al., 2002; Brown, 2004; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Rojewski & Kim, 2003; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). Socioeconomic status can influence career decision-making and attainment by opening and closing opportunities, as well as by influencing career self-concept and decision-making (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter’s (1984) review on contextual influences revealed that one of the most powerful and consistent environmental predictors of occupational aspirations and attainment is socioeconomic status. More recently, Rojewski and Kim’s (2003) longitudinal study examining the occupational aspirations and work experiences of a group of work-bound, college-bound, and unemployment-bound adolescents found that low socioeconomic status has a considerable negative influence on occupational aspirations. In a review of literature on children and adolescents, Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) also established that socioeconomic status played a central role in determining educational and occupational aspirations.

Other researchers have studied the career values of adolescents from different socioeconomic classes (e.g., Rojewski, 1994a; Turner & Lapan, 2003a), reporting inconsistencies within the results. For instance, Rojewski (1994a) found that adolescents from lower socioeconomic status groups identified the nature of work and its compensations as being of greatest importance, whereas adolescents from a higher socioeconomic class ranked security and personal satisfaction as the most important career values. Regarding career interests, Turner and Lapan (2003a) found no socioeconomic status difference in the
career interests, across four of Holland’s (1997) types, of inner-city, at-risk adolescents from low socioeconomic backgrounds compared with middle-class suburban adolescents.

Another environmental-societal influence is that of geographic location. When examining both geographic location and economic factors, research indicates that noteworthy changes in economic conditions in a specific geographic location can impact considerably on the career development process of those individuals residing in that community. For example, Chisholm and Edmunds (2001) examined the levels of career decision-making self-efficacy in high school adolescents living in communities with recent closures of mining and steel industries. The results showed significantly increased confidence in their career decision-making abilities. The authors account for these results by explaining that substantive economic recessions may create urgency that spurs career decision-making.

Other career development research has focused on a broader range of environmental-societal influences (e.g., Popova, 2003; Schoon & Parsons, 2002; Whiston & Bouwkamp, 2003). For example, Popova (2003) demonstrated that the dramatic economic, political, and cultural changes in Russia over the last several decades have contributed to teachers taking new career development approaches to preparing adolescents for employment. Also, Schoon and Parsons (2002) examined the impact of changes in social, economic and historical context on the formation of adolescent occupational aspirations, and they reported that adolescents' occupational aspirations, in addition to the labour market and economic conditions, strongly predicted later occupational attainment.

There seem to be numerous overlaps between environmental-societal studies and studies from the other systems of influence (e.g., the individual system and the social system). Some studies have a particularly broad research focus and attempt to extend across all three systemic levels, thereby making it difficult to place these studies exclusively in one system of influence only. For instance, researchers have investigated the relationship between adaptive
transitions from school to work as well as a range of individual, familial and institutional factors (Blustein, Philips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997), while other researchers have examined a variety of individual, familial, and societal influences that instigated changes in the career decisions of adolescents facing German unification (Piquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2004).

Summary

As with the trends identified in the individual and social systems, the environmental-societal focus of research has begun to extend its scope. Additionally, research related to the environmental-societal system has increasingly included the interrelationships between systemic influences from all three sub-systems of the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). This is vitally important when attempting to understand the complexity and uniqueness of an adolescent’s career development. In addition, the need to research environmental-societal influences is reinforced by the many changes that the world of work has seen over recent decades and how these changes have impacted on many areas of career development for all ages.

In relation to worldwide political, economic, and social changes, there has been a noticeable transformation in the nature of the world of work due to changes in the global economy, continually advancing technologies, and vastly challenging and competitive job markets (Guindon & Richmond, 2005). All these changes naturally affect the career development process both directly and indirectly. For example, advancing technologies can vastly improve communication and transportation over great distances, therefore creating an increase in educational and career opportunities. Furthermore, the rise of capitalism throughout the world, ongoing warfare, and the resultant changes in the global economy has had momentous impact on career development and the career opportunities available for all ages (Guindon & Richmond, 2005).
All of these seemingly indirect influences on career development need to be acknowledged and researched further in order for career counsellors to accurately assist adolescents in exploring and understanding the systems of influence that impact on their unique career development process. Having reviewed the international research on adolescent career development using the contextual framework of the STF, a similar approach will now be taken to review South African adolescent career development research.

South African Career Research

Internationally, researchers have provided a wealth of research material that can assist in understanding worldwide trends in the career development of adolescents. This current research study involves investigating a sample of black adolescents residing in a country experiencing ongoing changes in the nature of its social and environmental-societal influences, as explained in Chapter 1. Therefore, any emergent trends in South African research need to be explored in order to gain an accurate appreciation of the diversity of systemic influences in the career development of adolescents from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. As stated earlier, Watson and Stead (2002) have cautioned South African career researchers against the indiscriminate acceptance of international career theories to guide them in describing the career development of South Africa’s diverse population groups. Similarly, de Bruin and Nel (1996) warned about the interpretation of trends in national career development research conducted during the 1980s because the focus of much of this research was predominantly on white, middle class samples, thus revealing a distorted perspective of trends.

As with the earlier review of international research, the contextual framework provided by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) was utilised to categorise South African research according to the STF’s three systems of influence (i.e., the individual system, the social system and the environmental-societal system). As will be demonstrated, the majority
of South African research is based on more traditional quantitative research designs, and focuses on isolated and clustered influences and theoretical constructs. Earlier mention was made of the call for qualitative and meaning-focused approaches to career development research (McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2003c; Savickas & Lent, 1994) in order to respectfully understand the uniqueness of each adolescent’s career development in a holistic manner. To some degree there has been a shift in South African research towards focusing on contextual, systemic conceptualisations of adolescent career development. Thus Kuit (2006) commented that there has been an emergence of career research that considers the impact of the changing nature of South Africa’s social and environmental-societal influences on adolescents’ career development. The following section will examine South African career research focusing on influences and theoretical career constructs related to the individual system-related influences on adolescent career development.

The Individual System

As seen in the review of international career research, national career research relating to the individual system of influences (in comparison to the social and environmental-societal systems) has dominated the field of reviewed research conducted on South African adolescent career development. The majority of these studies have investigated the interrelationship between individual system influences and theoretical constructs relating to adolescent career development.

Regarding age, there seems to be mixed trends in national studies. Research on South African high school adolescents has demonstrated a developmental trend with constructs such as career decision-making self-efficacy (e.g., Eaton, 2001; Williams, 2001) and career maturity (e.g., Patton, Watson, & Creed, 2004). However, there has also been some research investigating the career identity development of adolescents that has revealed no significant differences across age (e.g., Ackermann, 1995). When exploring the influence of gender, no
significant gender differences have been found in studies on South African adolescents in relation to career maturity (Patton, Watson, & Creed, 2004; Watson, Stead, & de Jager, 1995), career self-efficacy (Eaton, 1996), and career decision-making self-efficacy (Williams, 2001). But, when investigating career identity development, researchers have reported significant gender differences among Xhosa-speaking adolescents (Botha & Ackermann, 1997).

With South Africa having undergone considerable change since the dismantling of the apartheid system, samples from a range of previously marginalised cultural groups have been increasingly included in career research studies. Such studies have included the following: career identity development among Xhosa-speaking adolescents (Botha, 1996); career indecision of semi-rural Zulu-speaking black adolescents (Setshedi, 2003); career maturity and aspirations of black adolescents in rural communities (Sibilanga, 2003); occupational aspirations of black South African adolescents (Watson, Foxcroft, Horn, & Stead, 1997); and career decision-making self-efficacy and career identity amongst black high school students (Williams, 2001). The impact of culture on South African adolescents’ career maturity has been found to be significant (Langley, 1990; Watson, Stead, & de Jager, 1995). Having said this, there is concern that some South African research results, by using assessment instruments based on westernised, middle-class principles (Reid-Van Niekerk & Van Niekerk, 1990; Watson et al, 1995), may not be reflecting the reality and complexity of South Africans’ diverse career development. Stead and Watson (1998b) suggest further that career maturity, in particular, may be an inappropriate construct to use in a society such as South Africa that has such cultural diversity.

When examining the construct of career identity in South Africa, the changing socio-political situation and economic needs of the country need to be considered. Socio-political changes can make the task of career choice increasingly more complex for black South
African adolescents (Botha & Ackermann, 1997). For instance, investigating the process of career identity development among Xhosa-speaking adolescents, Botha and Ackermann (1997) established significant differences in career identity development between male and female adolescents, and between adolescents of different age groups. Examples of research that has focused on other career theoretical constructs with a diversity of South African cultural groups are career decision-making self-efficacy (Eaton, 2001; Muller, 2005; Williams, 2001), career indecision (Gordon, 2000; Setshedi, 2003), career maturity (Herr, 2003; Sibilanga, 2003), and career self-efficacy (Seane, 1998). Williams (2001) established a developmental trend in black adolescents’ career decision-making self-efficacy i.e., levels of career decision-making self-efficacy increase with age. No significant gender differences in relation to career decision-making self-efficacy were noted in this study. In examining career self-efficacy, Seane (1998) demonstrated a positive relationship between career self-efficacy and the range of occupations considered by black adolescents (i.e., the higher the self-efficacy, the greater the range of occupations).

Lacking in national research are studies on the individual-related influences of personality, abilities and disabilities. Also absent from many of these previously discussed studies is a consideration of the relational contexts within which these career influences exist. The scope of South African individual system-related research has not been significantly expanded to include interrelationships between a range of influences, as well as the influence of context (Kuit, 2006). The following section will examine national research focusing on influences and theoretical career constructs related to the social system influences of adolescent career development.

The Social System

Reviewing South African research in relation to the range of social systemic influences that may contribute to adolescent career development reveals a paucity of studies. While
national career research on social system influences has been limited in quantity, its focus has primarily been on the influence of family on adolescents’ career development, a similar focus to that of international career research.

Several researchers agree that parents are an important resource and influence in the career development of adolescents. According to Ackermann and Botha (1998), family factors play an important role in the career development of black adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. In their research they established a high correlation between the career status of parents and the career identity development of their adolescents. They also pointed out that often there are no proper role models with regard to high status careers due to a lack of exposure of the parents to various Western occupations. In another study, Botha and Ackermann (1997) studied the potential influence of parental occupational status on the development of career identity in Xhosa-speaking adolescents. Their results highlighted a significant positive correlation between the adolescents’ career identity development and the educational level of the mother as well as the occupational status of both parents i.e., the higher the educational level and occupational status the higher the level of career identity. With regards to career choice, other South African studies have shown that the same sex parent appears to have a more influential role on black adolescents’ career development (Maesela, 1994; Thom, 1988).

In addition to research studies investigating family influences, a number of studies have begun to examine particular social and cultural influential factors in South African adolescents’ career development. For example, researchers (Thom, 1988; White, 1986) have examined the relationship between career maturity and other social systemic influences, such as parental occupational level on disadvantaged cultural groups. These two researchers established that the occupational level of parents had no significant influence on the career maturity of their adolescents. Another study focused on the relationship between black South
African adolescents’ occupational aspirations and level of occupational information and the degree of influence of guidance teachers and parents (Watson & Stead, 1993). This study demonstrated that guidance teachers and parents were far more important sources of occupational information than all other social sources (e.g., the media). In related research, Mathabe and Temane (1993) argued that the teacher-parent relationship in schools is by far the weakest in Africa and in South Africa. These authors argue that there is negligible involvement of parents in the career development of their children, and that this unfortunately has a severe impact on black adolescents’ career development.

The paucity of national research in this field presents a challenge for the description of general trends in the range of social system-related influences on adolescent career development. However, some national studies have become increasingly aware of the integrative impact of relational and contextual influences, and consequently have widened their focus to include these social system influences that contribute to holistically understanding South African adolescents’ career development (e.g., Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006). These studies are discussed in greater detail in the last section of this chapter. The following section will describe South African research focusing on influences and theoretical career constructs related to the environmental-societal system-related influences on adolescent career development.

The Environmental-Societal System

A review of South African research reveals, as with international career research, that there is limited research that investigates environmental-societal influences in relation to adolescent career development. De Bruin and Nel (1996) claim that national studies conducted in the 1980s revealed a distorted view of trends in South African career development research due to the predominant focus of these studies on white, middle class samples. However, over the past decade there has been a progressive emergence of a greater
inclusion of previously marginalised ethnic and racial groups in career research (Kuit, 2006). Furthermore, several researchers have increasingly recognised the important role that contextual factors play in the career choice process of South African adolescents (Dullabh, 2004; Naicker, 1994; Stead, 1996; Stead & Watson, 1998a; Van Niekerk & Van Daalen, 1991).

Nicholas, Naidoo, and Pretorius (2006) have discussed how the development of career psychology in South Africa has been prescribed by the country’s changing political, social and economic conditions. With the dismantling of the apartheid system, the unpredictable and unstable nature of South Africa’s environmental-societal factors has impacted on previously disadvantaged adolescents’ career development by limiting their opportunities to long-term careers commitments (Van Niekerk & Van Daalen, 1991) and making it difficult to conceptualise their career development in terms of sequential, orderly career developmental stages (Stead & Watson, 1998a).

Socioeconomic status is one environmental-societal influence that has received a considerable amount of attention in national research with regard to career development in adolescence. Several researchers have discussed the interrelationship between socioeconomic influences and other influences and career constructs such as career values (Alexander, 1990), career interests, goals and choices (Fouad & Brown, 2000), occupational aspirations (Horn, 1995; Maesela, 1994), and career maturity (Watson, 1984). General trends from these studies demonstrate that higher levels of socioeconomic status correlate with higher career maturity scores and higher importance being placed on the values of security and personal satisfaction in career choice. Lower socioeconomic status levels correlate with lower career maturity scores and the importance of employment remuneration is emphasised. Many black adolescents aspire to occupations that do not require further post-secondary education due to
the consequence of the socioeconomic conditions of many black families in South Africa (Horn, 1995).

In terms of economic conditions and changing trends within the labour market, research (Watson, Foxcroft, Horn, & Stead, 1997) has investigated the relationship between black adolescents’ occupational aspirations and the following influences: age, gender, socioeconomic status, knowledge of self, and occupational knowledge. The results of this study demonstrated that most black adolescents’ occupational and self-knowledge was rated as low and that they aspired to occupations of a high status, which was viewed as unrealistic in terms of trends within the labour market. This study revealed the important need for active career education relating to realistic occupational aspirations and an understanding of labour market trends as this impacts on the employability of previously disadvantaged adolescents. In addition to matching their occupational aspirations to current economic trends, adolescents have experienced other challenges in South Africa’s post-apartheid era. Researchers (Leach, 1994; Naicker, 1994) have discussed these challenges brought about by historical, social and political changes, highlighting the fact that black adolescents have undergone rapid social adjustments when preparing to enter occupations that were previously denied to them. Currently, sociopolitical and socioeconomic changes in South Africa can potentially complicate career choice for black adolescents because of their recent exposure to a much wider spectrum of career opportunities (Dullabh, 2004). As Dullabh predicts, the focus of future South African research needs to be on critical issues such as unemployment, career barriers, education and economic factors in order to facilitate constructive career development in the future.

This review of South African research demonstrates that the impact of environmental-societal influences on the career development of South African adolescents is gradually becoming a more prominent focus of recent national research. Kuit (2006) has noted this
changing nature of South African research, as well as highlighted that the limited quantitative methodological frameworks that have been used in South African research do not always account for the local and specific meanings attributed to societal and environmental changes within communities. Once again, the Systems Theory Framework (STF) is suggested as a means to fulfilling these previously neglected gaps in research by offering a framework that provides a holistic understanding of the career development of adolescents. The final section of this research review chapter will discuss two comprehensive and systemically rich South African studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) that have utilised the STF in an attempt to understand and acknowledge the career development of South African adolescents within their unique and specific contexts.

South African research using STF

International and national career research has attempted to understand different aspects of adolescent career development by studying a range of individual, social and environmental-societal influences. While making a valuable contribution to the career literature, there is a lack of qualitative, personally meaningful studies that incorporate the holistic and unique career development of an adolescent through an awareness of the recursive and complex relationship between the micro individual system, meso social system, and macro environmental-societal system. The suggested contextual framework that comprehensively integrates the recursive relationship between these above-mentioned systems when attempting to understand career development in adolescence is the Systems Theory Framework (STF).

Research conducted by Dullabh (2004) with a group of adolescents from a children’s home allowed her to pioneer the implementation and adaptation of the STF as an inclusive framework in a specified South African context. Dullabh’s study is an important example of the potential that qualitatively oriented research studies, examining a wide range of
recursively interacting systems within a variety of contexts, can offer to the field of career development. The qualitative career assessment measure that was utilised in Dullabh’s study is the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI; McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005a) workbook, which is based on the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006).

The findings of Dullabh’s study suggested that the STF provides coherence to describing the many influences on the career development of adolescents living in a children’s home while, at the same time, allowing for a contribution from an array of available theories of career development. Dullabh found that all the influences within the three interrelated systems of the STF, namely the individual, social and environmental-societal systems, had an influence on the adolescents’ career development. A proposed limitation of Dullabh’s study is that the results could not be generalized to the greater population due to the small and unique sample group studied. Dullabh recommends that further research or comparative studies be conducted to describe the career development of adolescents in other unique South African contexts. Dullabh also suggests that, although systems theory is well established, considerable research is needed that examines the impact of various systems on career development at different developmental stages, with different cultural and gender groups, and within a variety of contexts (Dullabh, 2004).

The second qualitative and systemically rich study that offers important contributions to South African research studies on adolescents’ career development is that of Kuit (2006). This national research study explored the career development of Grade 11 South African adolescents from middle socioeconomic status environments. As with Dullabh (2004), the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook was utilised in this study, and the results revealed the positive value of the MSCI booklet in assisting adolescents to identify and evaluate the significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development.
Furthermore, the MSCI allowed the participants of this study to explore and identify systemic career influences across the individual, social, and environmental-societal contexts of the participants’ lives, as well as the recursive interrelationships between these extensive ranges of variables. There were trends in a range of subjectively evaluated career influences identified across the systemic contexts of the adolescents’ lives. The study established that personality, interests, abilities and values were considered the most important individual-related influences on both male and female participants’ career development, whereas health and physical attributes were rated considerably higher in importance for males than females. The social systemic influence rated as the single most important influence for both male and female adolescents was parental influence, whereas the two environmental-societal influences that were highlighted as impacting on both male and female adolescents’ career development were work overseas and the availability of jobs. As Kuit (2006) stated:

Such trends have been introduced, not as universal knowledge claims about what adolescent career development in South Africa is or should be, but as one contribution to the ongoing research conversation that constantly tells and re-tells the adolescent career development narratives in South Africa (as these are shaped, constructed and lived within local communities in unique ways).

Kuit (2006) recommended that the alliance between STF (as a theory integrating framework) and the MSCI (as a qualitative career assessment measure) should be further explored in a greater diversity of social and cultural South African contexts, and with individuals of varying ages in various career situations.

In conclusion, this review has demonstrated that a large quantity of both international and national career research studies have investigated isolated variables of influence based on
universal theoretical constructs and approaches to adolescent career development. More recently there has been a gradual shift in both the research and theoretical literature within the career field that argues for contextual, holistic and meaning-focused approaches to career development and counselling. The following chapter describes the methodology of the present study which utilises the Systems Theory Framework and the My Systems of Career Influences workbook to explore and describe the career development of black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment.
CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical base and research trends of career development in adolescents have been established in the previous chapters, and the significance of the interrelationship of systemic career influences within and between the three systems of the Systems Theory Framework has been highlighted and acknowledged. This research methodology chapter will offer a detailed explanation of the current research’s methods and procedures used to execute this study. The chapter provides the problem formulation and aims of the study, as well as a detailed description of the research design, a profile of participants, the career assessment measure utilised and, lastly, the means of data analysis. The next section will begin with the problem formulation.

Problem Formulation

In the previous chapter it was highlighted that the majority of international and national research studies on career development in adolescence have mainly been based on westernised assumptions, using traditional quantitative research designs that focus on isolated and clustered variables and theoretical constructs. The consequence of this is the failure to include the dynamic and recursive nature of both contextual and environmental factors when studying an individual’s unique career development. This lack of consideration for the relational contexts of an individual’s career development results in a shift away from the complexity of the socially embedded experiences of peoples’ lives towards abstracted constituents of career development (Kuit, 2006). In Chapter 3, it was also noted that much of the previous research has predominantly focused on white, middle-class men. This is also seen in career theory development to date. Harris-Bowlsbey (2003) comments that there has been a disproportionate attention to the career development of white, middle-class, young men and that, given the societal changes and diversity of the twenty-first century, it is
essential that more attention be given to the career development of women, members of racial/ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men and women. Therefore with this in mind the current study aims to explore and describe the career development of adolescents that have been traditionally marginalised from career research.

Chartrand and Walsh (2001) comment that career assessment has been an integral part of career research for most of the present decade, and that the majority of studies have focused on quantitative methods of assessment. However, with a noticeable transformation in the nature of the world of work due to changes in the global economy, continually advancing technologies, and challenging and competitive job markets (Guindon & Richmond, 2005), an appeal has been made for career assessment to "keep pace with changes in the workforce and society" (Subich, 1996, p. 277). Corresponding to these changes, the potential contribution of qualitative assessment processes has been increasingly emphasised (Goldman, 1992). Moving away from the traditional logical-positivist worldview and objective reality of quantitative assessment, qualitative career assessment introduces a subjective, holistic and flexible nature when individuals are encouraged to tell their own career stories (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003c). In agreement with these changes, Savickas and Lent (1994) call for both qualitative and meaning-focused approaches to career development research in order to respectfully understand the uniqueness of each individual’s career development in a holistic manner. Therefore, in contrast to the dominant quantitative approaches that generate universal theoretical claims, this study chose to employ a research methodology that would result in qualitatively described themes within the career stories of a sample of adolescent participants.

The qualitative career measure, the My System of Career Influences workbook (MSCI; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a), utilised in this study ensured that a holistic and context-sensitive overview of information was gained from exploring and describing the
career development of the group of adolescent participants partaking in the study. The reflection process towards the end of the MSCI acted as a debriefing exercise by allowing participants to reflect on their integrated personalised career development information, thereby maximising the learning experience. This MSCI research tool accommodates a broad variety of socio-cultural backgrounds of individuals and draws on the subjective evaluation of the unique career development of an individual.

Earlier chapters have also revealed considerable empirical evidence for the role of systems theory in the field of career psychology, and the Systems Theory Framework has made a significant contribution to understanding the contextually negotiated systems of influence in all individuals from a variety of socio-cultural environments. This evidence provides good reason for employing this framework to the current research study, which focuses on broadening the view of black adolescents’ career development from a low socioeconomic status environment. Since there is a paucity of contextually orientated approaches to the career development of adolescents in the South African context, this study aims to explore and describe the development of a particular group of South African adolescents from a collaborative and context-bound approach. This leads to the following section which will discuss the aims and sub-aims of this research study.

Aims of the Study

The primary aim of the present research study is to explore and describe the systems of influence in the career development of Grade 9, 10, and 11 male and female black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. A career systems theory perspective is utilised to assist in this exploration and description of these participants’ career development in terms of three interrelated systems of influence, namely: the individual, social and environmental-societal systems. In addition, the participants’ career development is situated within the context of time and, thus, consideration of the past, present and future
influences are also investigated. To achieve the primary aim, the following specific aims and sub-aims have been formulated:

1. To explore and describe the present career situation of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 male and female black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment

2. To explore and describe the influences of the three interrelated systems of the Systems Theory Framework on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment

   2.1 To explore and describe the influence of individual system influences on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents

   2.2 To explore and describe the influence of social system influences on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents

   2.3 To explore and describe the influence of environmental-societal influences on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents

   2.4 To explore and describe the influence of past, present and future influences on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents

3. To explore and describe a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 low socioeconomic status, black South African adolescents’ reflections of their selected influences from the three interrelated systems, namely the individual, social and environmental-societal systems

The following section describes the research design of this current study, as well as drawing attention to the advantages and disadvantages of different research designs available.
The strategic framework that serves as a bridge between the research aims and the execution of the research is called a research design. The research design guides the research activity in order to ensure that sound conclusions are reached. In short, the present research study employed an exploratory-descriptive design (De Vos, 1998; Neuman, 2006; Silverman, 1997), and the methodological approach used included both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The research design for this present study will now be described in greater detail, and the advantages and disadvantages of such a design will be explained.

The present research is described as exploratory in nature because this study’s purpose was to conduct preliminary investigations into a relatively unknown area of research. An open and flexible approach is employed when attempting to look for new insights into a phenomenon, and in order to develop hypotheses with regards to the specific phenomenon for more precise investigation later. The relatively unknown area of research applicable to this study involves the attempt to understand the contextual and relational influences on the career development of black adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. Although many adolescents, like some participants of this study, are experiencing growth in their career knowledge and decision-making skills, the overall systemic view of their career development may be relatively unfamiliar to them. Therefore, this exploratory study utilised the STF as the guiding framework to assist participants in clarifying their career experiences and career development, and this in turn formulated further questions and hypotheses with regard to career development that could be areas of investigation for future career research.

As indicated in the opening paragraph of this section, this study is also descriptive in nature as it aimed to accurately portray the characteristics of a particular sample of individuals within their unique context. In other words, this study aimed to describe the career development and the systems of influences of low socioeconomic status, black Grade
9, 10 and 11 adolescents. According to Cozby (1993), the primary aim for exploratory-descriptive research is the development of scientific knowledge. The advantage of exploratory-descriptive research is that it increases the understanding of a particular phenomenon, generates additional hypotheses and further research investigations, and therefore allows for the meaningful development of theory in that particular area.

At a surface level, qualitative and quantitative researchers base their conclusions on different kinds of information and employ different techniques of data analysis. Quantitative researchers collect data in the form of numbers and use statistical types of data analysis, whereas qualitative researchers collect data in the form of written or spoken language and analyse the data by identifying and categorising themes (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2007; Silverman, 1997). This study falls within the broad sphere of both qualitative and quantitative research, as the data gathered was both verbal and numerical in nature. The primary source of data took the form of written responses to open-ended questions, as well as the completion of diagrams by means of ticking appropriate influences (and adding additional influences) that may have an impact on the adolescent’s career development. Participants of this research study were given the opportunity to complete the career assessment measure in a group setting and the resultant data was subjected to content analyses in order to identify themes.

The qualitative career assessment measure employed as a research tool was the My System of Career Influences Workbook (MSCI; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a). The MSCI invites participants to complete diagrams and provide written responses to open-ended questions by drawing on their own career experiences that have taken place in their unique contexts. A selection of possible influences is presented in the MSCI workbook, but participants are given the chance to include their own personalised influences in their workbook. The open-ended questions in the MSCI workbook provide the participant with an
opportunity to write any answer in the open space provided. Open-ended questions have advantages when a variable is relatively unknown or unexplored. In such a case, open-ended questions enable the researcher to better explore the variable and to obtain some idea of the spectrum of possible responses. The data obtained from the written responses to open-ended questions provides the qualitative verbal data, while the frequency of responses on the diagrams provides the quantitative numerical data.

Qualitative career assessment enhances a collaborative client and counsellor relationship because its open-ended and holistic manner enriches the process of working together to form the career story (McMahon, Watson, & Patton, 2005). Therefore, a qualitative career assessment process takes the form of a collaborative rather than an expert driven process (Peavy, 1996), and the role of the client is to actively participate rather than just passively respond (McMahon & Patton, 2002b). Goldman (1990, 1992) states that qualitative assessment methods are conducive to group work and are valuable for relating to different ethnic groups and socioeconomic levels. Therefore, using qualitative career assessment (i.e., the MSCI workbook) in this present research study is deemed appropriate. Even though the large sample size for this research study is outside the specifications of qualitative case study research, the verbal data collected through the utilisation of the MSCI workbook is described as qualitative in nature. This research study generated a wide spectrum of qualitative information from which the main themes were drawn. The advantage of this research method is that it provides a richly detailed account of the real-life phenomena that privileges the career developments of the participants, while eliciting more general trends and themes specific to the context in which these participants’ career development is taking place. On the other hand, the potential disadvantages of this exploratory-descriptive method include the time-consuming processes of data collection and analysis (Silverman, 1997; Struwig & Stead, 2001).
Participants

The technique used to select participants for this study was a non-probability purposive sampling technique. Due to the fact that the relevant population was easily accessible, this method of sampling was seen as an appropriate choice. An advantage of non-probability purposive sampling is that it significantly reduces aspects of time and cost. The disadvantage of this method of sampling is that the researcher can easily introduce bias into the study and the participants have unequal chances of being included in the sample (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2007). Therefore, even though a non-probability purposive sampling technique is a convenient, quick and cheap way to select a sample, the sample may be biased and would probably not be representative of the broader population. This poses limitations on the extent to which this study’s results can be generalised to the larger population. However, it is not the intention of the present study that the findings should be generalised, since this study is exploratory in nature.

The population sample selected to take part in the present study comprised of 64 black male and female Grade 9, 10, and 11 scholars from a low socioeconomic status environment in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. Although the aim of the study was to explore and describe a total of 60 adolescents’ career development (n=20 per grade level), a larger amount of adolescents (n=30 per grade level) were selected to participate in order to allow for the inevitable dropout rate that occurred over the research period. The distribution of female and male participants according to grade level and gender is as follows: 9 female and 12 males from Grade 9, 8 female and 15 males from Grade 10, and 15 female and 5 males from Grade 11. The mean age for Grade 9 participants was 16 years, 17 years for Grade 10 participants, and 18 years for Grade 11 participants. One low socioeconomic, Xhosa-speaking, coeducational school was randomly chosen from a list provided by the education authorities at the Education Support Centre. For the purposes of this study, a low socioeconomic level was
defined according to the low school fee-paying structure and the geographic location from which the students were drawn. The participants involved in this study were male and female students, with ages ranging between 14 to 19 years. As this study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, the variables of gender and age were not used as inclusion or exclusion variables for the sample. The participants were Xhosa-speaking, although they studied English as their first or second language subject in school. In addition, the language of instruction for all subjects at the selected school was English. Therefore, the requirements of the participants included that they all have a proficiency in English to ensure that they fully comprehended what was required of them, thereby enhancing the validity of the results.

Measure

As described in Chapter 2, the Systems Theory Framework is a metatheoretical framework that portrays the multitude of influences on individuals’ career development. In suggesting a qualitative assessment process to guide individuals in reflecting on their career development, the STF provided the stimulus for the development and refinement of the My System of Career Influences Workbook (MSCI; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a). The MSCI is a qualitative career assessment measure that draws on the Systems Theory Framework of career development and it has been described by McMahon, Watson, and Patton (2005) as a valuable qualitative assessment instrument that may be used across cultures to facilitate career development learning. Since two of the three authors were involved in the development of both the STF and the MSCI, and all three authors are specialists in career development, it can be said that the relatively newly developed measure has a sound theoretical foundation. Therefore, the MSCI was seen as being the most appropriate measure to be used for this present research study. The development and refinement of the MSCI will now be discussed, followed by a more detailed description of the MSCI workbook and the Facilitators’ Guide.
The development of the MSCI has involved a four-year and three-stage trialling process in Australia and South Africa (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2000, 2003a, 2003b). The MSCI is now presently available in a final revised form (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a). Stage one of the trialling process was based on a pilot version of the MSCI instrument (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2000). The testing was conducted in university settings in South Africa and Australia, and the participants involved were masters level students enrolled in career development courses. After comparing analyses across the two nations, the MSCI was further refined in areas of language, instructions, terminology and examples used, developmental appropriateness, and layout of the booklet. In addition, feedback from this stage suggested the need for an adult and adolescent version of the MSCI. This resulted in the trialling of an adolescent version of the MSCI (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003) in Stage two. Feedback from the second stage revealed uniform agreement that the MSCI initiated a self-discovery process that allowed adolescents to explore their dynamic career development process.

In Stage three, the MSCI was conducted individually on South African adolescents from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Dullabh, 2004). This stage of the trialling process consisted of two phases. After the first pilot phase, suggestions were made and further refinements occurred. The second phase was well received, and Dullabh (2004) reported that the MSCI booklet positively assisted adolescent participants in identifying and evaluating the systemic influences that contributed to their career development. The development of a Facilitators’ Guide was recommended and later developed (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b). Thus, the trialling and four-year refinement process demonstrated that “the MSCI is a theoretically grounded, client-oriented, holistic, sequential and meaningful learning experience” (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b, p. 30).
After this rigorous and time-consuming process of theoretical, practical and conceptual refinements, the STF has now been complimented on its adaptability to diverse cultural groups and settings (Arthur & McMahon, 2005) and its offering individuals the opportunity to meaningfully create their own career stories through reflection (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004). The final revised adolescent version of the MSCI (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a) was the version utilised in this study.

The MSCI workbook contains questions and themes that are directly related to the Systems Theory Framework of career development. The workbook consists of a structured format that provides participants with an opportunity to represent and reflect on the necessary and relevant information about their career decision-making and development. They are offered the opportunity to examine their unique systems of influence and evaluate how their career development thus far has been influenced by their own intrapersonal, relational and environmental-societal contexts. Furthermore, the reflective process section of the MSCI workbook described below provides additional opportunities for further discoveries regarding participants’ career development. The advantage of this structure is that it provided the present study with a substantial amount of qualitative and contextual information about a fairly large group of individuals, while minimising the reductionistic effect of quantitative measures that often focus on singular variables. The STF’s adaptability and elasticity is well illustrated by the MSCI workbook. The MSCI allows participants to visually represent their career stories within important systems of influence that have impacted on their career development. As described in Chapter 3, the MSCI has been utilised in two South African research studies investigating the career development of adolescents (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006), and both studies found the MSCI to be a positive tool in eliciting significant and useful information that is not usually available in quantitative career measures.
The MSCI is an eleven-page workbook that is divided into a sequence of three well-defined sections, guiding respondents through their career development process thus far. As will be described in more detail below, the three sections include the presenting of their present career situation, followed by exploring the three interrelated systemic levels, and lastly the integration and reflection on their personalised account of the participants’ own unique system of career influences. The workbook offers clear step-by-step client-focused instructions and examples as to how and where to respond to the questions. The cover page introduces the systemic notion that several influences contribute to one’s career decision-making, and that the completion of the MSCI workbook will assist each individual in understanding the unique influences impacting on his or her career development.

The first section of the workbook, titled My Present Career Situation, addresses the first aim of this study, and relates to exploring and describing the respondent’s present career situation. The seven open-ended questions in this section encourage respondents to provide information on topics such as life-roles, strategies for career decision-making, career-related experiences, and career options considered to date. These open-ended questions are advantageous to both the researcher and the participant because career development is explored in a broader manner, eliciting a spectrum of possible responses from which career-related information can be sourced (De Vos, 1998). In addition, when all possible answers are not known, open-ended questions are useful in drawing out respondents’ views of a range of appropriate categories, although the disadvantage of these open-ended questions can result in the collection of a degree of irrelevant information (Bailey, 2007). To overcome the potential disadvantages created by open-ended questions, trained and experienced bilingual postgraduate counsellors conducted the administration and facilitation of this section during the fieldwork process. Led by the Facilitators’ Guide (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b), these facilitators provided standardized clarification and guidance with regards to queries
posed by the participants with regards to these open-ended questions. Even though open-ended questions require more effort from the respondent and can cause discouragement (Bailey, 2007), the MSCI workbook is well-balanced in that there are certain sections making use of open-ended questions to yield verbal data as well as a large section utilising diagrams to yield numerical data.

The second section of the MSCI workbook provides visual representation of the three interrelated systemic levels identified by the STF (the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems) and is titled: Thinking about who I am, Thinking about the people around me, and Thinking about society and my environment. This section of the measure addressed the second aim and sub-aims of the study, i.e., exploring and describing identified influential variables from the interrelated systems. Each participant is encouraged to identify from the standard influences for each of the interrelated systemic levels proposed by the MSCI, and to decide which of these influences have been significant in their career decision-making processes thus far. Extra space is made available on each page in order for participants to insert additional influences that may be unique to their career development. Once the significant influences have been chosen, the participants are then invited to allocate the level of importance of each respective influential variable. For example, marking an influence with an asterisk indicates a greater level of influence for that particular variable.

The section titled Thinking about my past, present and future measures the processes between these three interrelated systems via the recursive nature of interaction within and between the systems, change over time, and chance. Participants are given the opportunity to explore influences that have contributed to their career development in the past, are contributing in the present, or potentially can contribute to their career development in the future. Once again, indicating the level of importance of identified variables is encouraged, and extra space is provided if participants want to insert additional variables.
Lastly, the third section of the workbook relates to the third aim of the study and provides the participants with a step-by-step diagram and clear instructions on how to utilise the large empty circle that is drawn on the page to follow. This section requires participants to integrate all the information from the previous diagrams into this empty circle, following the step-by-step diagram and example offered. The completed diagram provides the participants with a personalised account of their own unique system of career influences, which they can now reflect on. A series of ten open-ended questions facilitate this reflection process of the integrated information on the page titled *Reflecting on My System of Career Influences*. Participants are encouraged to carefully answer the questions by studying their personalised diagram that reveals significant influences from the three interrelated systems. This process of reflection is seen as a debriefing exercise that is essential in order to maximise the learning experience offered by the MSCI workbook. Although the MSCI workbook is self-guided, the authors of this measure suggest that support and clarification provided by the counsellors or teachers involved is significantly beneficial for the enrichment of the exercise (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2003c). Additionally, since this exercise is conducive to collaborative discussions between participants and counsellors or teachers, these discussions assist in the systemic understanding of significant influences in each participant’s life and the emergence of their developing career identity. The reflective process described above provides data for the third aim of the study, which is to explore and describe the participants’ reflections of their selected influences from the three interrelated systems.

The final page of the measure is titled *My System of Career Influences-2* and is provided as an encouragement to complete a second personalized diagram of their career development at a later stage, and then to compare the two diagrams in order to explore the similarities and differences in their system of career influences over a certain time period. This will offer
further knowledge and understanding of each respondent’s unique career development process.

As mentioned earlier, the need for a Facilitators’ Guide was suggested after the four-year trialling process was completed. This Facilitators’ Guide (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b) has now been developed with the intention of assisting and guiding counsellors and teachers involved in the MSCI career assessment process, whether the workbook be completed by respondents on a one-to-one basis or in groups. The Guide consists of the necessary theoretical background on qualitative career assessment and the development of the MSCI measure. This effectively contributes to the counsellors and teachers’ grounding and understanding of respondents’ career development within the systems theory framework.

Furthermore, step-by-step administrative guidelines are provided for each section, as well as a range of preliminary, supplementary and follow-up activities that can enrich the understanding of each respondent’s unique career experiences and overall career development. For this present study, the participants were given the opportunity to complete the MSCI workbook within a group setting facilitated by trained and experienced bilingual postgraduate counsellors. These counsellors were specifically trained in the use of the MSCI booklet, using the Facilitators’ Guide (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b), prior to commencement of this study’s data collection. Both Kuit (2006) and this present study have acknowledged the Facilitators’ Guide as being clear and concise, as well as significantly assisting in the group facilitation of the MSCI workbook. Additionally, the Guide explains each section of the MSCI comprehensively, which ensures consistent and uniform input from different facilitators.

Procedure

The Educational Support Centre was formally contacted in order to obtain permission for conducting the study and to allocate a school that met all the relevant and necessary sample
requirements, such as age, race, gender, language medium of school, and socioeconomic status. Once written permission and the details of the assigned school were received, the principal of the secondary school was formally contacted, both telephonically and in writing (Appendix A). It was explained to the principal that the benefit for the participants taking part in this study included offering the participants an experiential exercise in order for them to gain insight into their systemic influences that have contributed to their career development thus far. The principal granted permission in writing, and the vice-principal was introduced to assist with further organisational matters. A meeting was conducted between the vice-principal, guidance teacher and researcher in order to discuss all the specific aspects of the testing procedure. A general discussion took place during the meeting about the timing of the administration and consent forms, the optimal time of the day to ensure active participation, suitable desk space and writing materials for each participant, and the proficiency of participants in the English language. Since all the participants were enrolled in the subject of English as either their first or second language and since the language for instruction at the school was English, the researcher was assured of the participants’ proficiency in the English language. All of these queries were fully addressed and all members involved in the study were content with the final testing arrangements.

The dates of administration were arranged and potential participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the study in the form of a letter (Appendix B). The letter highlighted that the nature of the research was anonymous, confidential and voluntary. Therefore, any participant was free to withdraw at any stage of the research if desired. Three consecutive days were set aside for the administration of the test material. Since the school day was closing considerably earlier during the allocated week, the time set aside for the administration of the testing was after the close of school for two hours for three consecutive days. A short time period after school ended and before testing began was allocated to the
participants in order for them to experience some rejuvenation and increased concentration for the afternoon session. Before the commencement of the fieldwork, consent was obtained from the legal guardians of all participants who were participating in the study (see Appendix C).

Seven bilingual postgraduate counsellors (fluent in English and Xhosa) were chosen as facilitators in the MSCI administration process, and their dual language skills were seen as an additional potential benefit if language-related queries from any participants arose. These facilitators were trained in the administration procedures and the use of the MSCI, which was conducted in a group context. As described earlier, the step-by-step Facilitators’ Guide (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b) was utilised for this study, and assisted the trained facilitators in following the correct procedures for appropriately facilitating the individual use of the MSCI in a group context. This ensured the effective and consistent use of the MSCI workbook.

The administration of the MSCI was conducted over three sessions. The first introductory session included a brief opening into the purpose and procedure of the research. This assisted in establishing an initial relationship between facilitators and participants. Thereafter, the participants were invited to complete the consent form if they wished to partake in the study. The bulk of this session then involved the administration of the two case studies that are included in the Supplementary career learning processes section of the Facilitators’ Guide. As mentioned earlier, these case studies aid participants in beginning to think systemically and introduce them to the language relating to career development. The facilitators followed the Facilitators’ Guide in order to prompt group discussion around the career-related questions and potential influences that were identified in each case study. Two case studies were completed in this research study, based on the recommendation from the authors of the MSCI workbook and Facilitators’ Guide that “learning is a process that is stimulated by
experience and interaction with others and the environment” (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b, p. 17).

At the beginning of the second session, the activities from the previous day were summarised. Then the commencement of the MSCI workbook began, facilitated by the trained counsellors. The third session consisted of the completion of the workbook, as well as debriefing and reflecting on the experience. The data obtained from the participants’ workbooks was analysed and interpreted through content analysis. As addressed earlier, career development is understood as a lifelong process and, therefore, the authors of the MSCI encourage students to complete the booklet at a second and later opportunity. Keeping this in mind, the participants’ booklets were returned to them for future comparison and use after the completion of the data analysis procedure. The guidance teacher was present throughout the three sessions, and was therefore familiarised in how to use this career aid in future classroom situations. The researcher ensured that the study met the ethical standards of the Human Ethics Committee of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Data Analysis

Since the MSCI workbook generates both verbal responses to open-ended questions and diagrams that yield numerical data, this study falls within the broad sphere of both qualitative and quantitative research. With regards to the first aim of the study, the participants’ verbal responses to the open-ended questions on the topic of their Present Career Situation were analysed using qualitative content analysis to identify themes. Content analysis is defined as a method of analysing written or oral communication in a systematic and objective manner in order to assess certain psychological variables (Aiken, 2000). Tesch’s (1990) model for qualitative content analysis was used as a framework for analysing the data of the first aim of this study. This step-by-step process ensured a systematic method of data analysis. The first step is referred to as familiarisation and immersion, and it involved reading through all of the
responses carefully in order to gain a sense of general themes. Step 2 involved inducing specific themes for each question, and thereafter coding according to similar responses was conducted in step 3. Finally, step 4 entailed the interpretation by grouping responses into categories of dominant and less dominant themes. The analysis produced a description of general trends of significant influence pertaining to the participants’ particular context.

For the second aim (and first three sub-aims) of the study, quantitative data were collected from the MSCI’s diagrams and were quantified by adding the responses made by each respondent across all diagrams. The responses were in the form of ticks and asterisks, with the ticks representing the significant influences in each participant’s career development across the three interrelated systems constructed within the MSCI, and asterisks representing the greater degree of importance of a particular influence that has been ticked. This data has been presented as frequency counts in the format of bar graphs. The fourth sub-aim, which explored and described the influences of past, present and future, was analysed by means of qualitative content analysis to identify themes.

The data for the third and final aim of the study was drawn from the participants’ reflections on their personalised diagrams of systemic influences. These personalised diagrams formed part of the third section within the MSCI workbook, which asked a series of questions in order to facilitate the reflection process. This verbal data was once again analysed by means of content analysis to identify themes.

An experienced and trained independent coder was used to verify the identified themes and to oversee the data analysis process. Table 1 provides a summary of the various data analysis techniques employed in relation to the aims of the study.
Table 1

Data Analysis Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Aims of the Study</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
<th>Representation of Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To explore and describe the current career development status of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 male and female black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment.</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis to identify themes</td>
<td>Significant themes presented in table format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To explore and describe the influences of the three interrelated systems of the Systems Theory Framework on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents. More specifically to explore and describe: 2.1 Individual system influences 2.2 Social system influences 2.3 Environmental-societal system influences 2.4 To explore and describe the past, present and future influences on the career development of a group of Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents.</td>
<td>Quantitative methods of data analysis by means of frequency counts for the first three sub-aims</td>
<td>Results presented by means of bar charts for the first three sub-aims. Frequency counts are provided Significant themes presented in table format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To explore and describe the Grade 9, 10 and 11 black South African adolescents’ reflections of their selected influences from the three interrelated systems, namely: the individual, social and environmental-societal systems.</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis to identify themes</td>
<td>Significant themes provided in table format</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

The research methodology utilised in this research study has been outlined within this chapter. An introduction explained the reasoning for the execution of the present study, and this was followed by the aims and sub-aims that the study worked towards achieving. Once the exploratory-descriptive nature of the study was deemed appropriate, the participants involved in the study were described, as well as an in-depth description of the qualitative career assessment measure, the MSCI workbook. This led to an explanation of the procedure that was followed and, lastly, an overview of the means of data analysis used to analyse the collected data.

In the next chapter, the study’s findings regarding the results of the research will be presented in accordance with the aims of the study.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

Structure of Chapter

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study and the results are structured according to the study’s aims. The primary aim is to explore and describe the career development of Grade 9, 10 and 11 low socio-economic status, black adolescents from a systems theory perspective in terms of three interrelated systems, namely the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems. To explore the primary aim, three specific aims were formulated that are closely aligned to the data gathered from the MSCI career measure. To reiterate, these three aims are to explore and describe: the adolescents’ present career situation; the influences of the three interrelated systems of the STF on the adolescents’ career development; and the adolescents’ reflections of their selected influences. The results will be presented in accordance with these three specific aims of the study.

The first part of this chapter addresses the first aim of this study and provides a comprehensive description of the themes in the present career situation of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 low socio-economic status, black South African adolescents. As explained in Chapter 4, the data for this aim is considered qualitative in nature and major themes of the participants’ subjective responses to questions posed by the MSCI were identified using content analysis. Additionally, randomly selected verbatim responses from participants are provided to illustrate the variations of the major and minor themes identified.

The second part of this chapter addresses the second aim of this study, which has four sub-aims. The first three sub-aims explore the dominant themes of influences identified by the participants within the three distinct systems of the STF, namely the individual, social and environmental-societal systems. The fourth sub-aim represents the themes identified by the participants as significant with regards to the past, present and future influences on their
career development. Bar graphs have been used to graphically portray the participants’ selected career influences as well as the ratings of importance of these influences.

The third part of the chapter addresses the third aim of this study and focuses on the qualitative content analysis of participants’ reflections on their personalised diagrams constructed during the reflection process section of the MSCI workbook.

Qualitative Results of Present Career Situation

This section addresses the first aim of this study and the qualitative data analysed for this section was obtained from section one of the MSCI workbook, namely My Present Career Situation, which is described in more detail in Chapter 4. This section provides a range of seven open-ended questions encouraging participants to explore their present career position and hence provide personal/subjective information about various topics such as their life roles, their future career options and their approaches to decision-making. Table 2 provides a summary of these topics derived from this first section of the MSCI. The seven questions are listed below in order to offer a richer understanding of the generated topics, and this is followed by the table of topics.

1. What career decisions do you need to make in the future? For example, you may need to choose subjects at school, or you may be thinking about your first part-time job or what you will do when you leave school.

2. List the part-time or volunteer work you do, have considered or have done at any time in the past.

3. Think about life roles you have other than that of student. These may include roles such as sportsperson, choir member, class captain, youth group member.

4. List any jobs that you have considered for your future.
5. List any previous career decisions that you have made (for example, choosing subjects to study, choosing to continue or discontinue activities such as music or sport).

6. What strategies or approaches have you used in your previous decision-making?

7. Who has helped you or provided advice with your previous career decisions?

These seven questions can be represented as topics in Table 2 below.

Table 2

*Topics Related to Present Career Development*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description of present career situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Part-time or voluntary work done or considered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Life roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Future employment options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Previous career decisions encountered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Strategies or approaches in previous decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Help with decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After analysing the participants’ responses to the questions relating to these seven topics, certain major and minor themes were identified. These identified themes are outlined in Tables 3 to 32, with these tables being categorised based on gender and grade of the participants (i.e., a separate table for females and males from each grade level). The importance of the themes is based on the frequency with which each theme was mentioned. A frequency count representing 40% or more of each respective sample (i.e., females and males from each grade level) was used to denote major themes, whereas a frequency count representing less than 40% denoted a minor theme. These frequency parameters were guided by an initial investigation of the distribution of frequencies across the identified themes and influences. These parameters effectively separated major themes from minor themes throughout the sets of data related to the various sub-aims. All of the participants’ responses
were covered by the identified themes. All tables contain randomly selected verbatim responses from participants that demonstrate variations of the major and minor themes identified. Some of participants’ responses included more than one theme. Each of the seven topics will now be discussed in order, with the first four topics being discussed under separate subheadings and the last three topics being grouped and discussed under the general heading of Career Decision-Making.

Present Career Situation

The first topic will now be discussed, with the results obtained from the content analysis of the participants’ present career situation presented in Tables 3 to 8 below. The identified themes include *continuing to study further, making subject choices, part-time jobs* and *thinking about career option*. Tables 3 and 4 present the results for females and males in Grade 9, Tables 5 and 6 present the results for females and males in Grade 10, and Tables 7 and 8 present the results for females and males in Grade 11. The number of participants in a particular sample group is indicated in brackets in the table heading.

Table 3

*Present Career Situation: Grade 9 Females (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I want to finish school and go to university”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“study something to do with teaching”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I will get a part-time job to earn money”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When looking at the results for the Grade 9 participants (Tables 3 and 4), a major theme for both female and male participants is *continuing to study further*. The females’ results also include the additional major themes of *thinking about career options* and *part-time jobs*, which suggests a more extensive career exploration process. In contrast, the frequency of the
themes of thinking about career options and part-time jobs revealed a minor theme for the male participants.

Table 4

*Present Career Situation: Grade 9 Males (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“go to university to become a doctor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I want to do history and English”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I want to do designing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I’ll look for a part-time job”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the Grade 10 results (Tables 5 and 6), a major theme for both female and male participants is thinking about career options. The frequency of this theme does not necessarily correspond with continuing to study further, which was a minor theme. This suggests that the participants are in the process of developing an interest in exploring career options, but still need to find the practical steps to reach their envisioned future career status.

The minor themes revealed by both genders in this grade include making subject choices, continuing to study further and part-time jobs, confirming that several of the participants have given little attention to these areas of career development.

Table 5

*Present Career Situation: Grade 10 Females (n=8)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“thinking about my career in dancing”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“take Maths and Tourism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“want to go to university”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“thinking about my first part-time job”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Present Career Situation: Grade 10 Males (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“I want to be in the SA Navy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Subjects I’ve taken are Maths and Science”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“go to university and study media”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“first a job to earn some money”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from Tables 7 and 8, the results from the female and male Grade 11 participants reveal as major themes both thinking about career options and continuing to study further. Additionally, the male results also included a major theme in making subject choices, whereas the frequency count for the females revealed a minor theme. Overall, both genders’ correspondence between thinking about career options and continuing to study further suggests more thorough and extensive thinking about their career development. This increase in career exploration and career thinking by the Grade 11 participants may suggest an increase in career maturity at this grade level.

Table 7

Present Career Situation: Grade 11 Females (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“maybe a managing director”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I want to study further”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“choose subjects for my career”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I will get a job to earn money”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

Present Career Situation: Grade 11 Males \(n=5\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“go to a shop to see what a manager does”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making subject choices</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“choose life orientation because...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuing to study further</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“want to go to university”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part-time or Voluntary Work Done or Considered

Tables 9 to 14 present the results obtained from the content analysis of the participants’ responses to the question of any part-time or voluntary work that has been considered or undertaken by the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. The identified themes are *arts and culture, family business, retail, services and voluntary work*.

Table 9

Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 9 Females \(n=9\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“hairdresser”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I sell vegetables”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I help my mom at her daycentre”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“volunteer with HIV people”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10

Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 9 Males \(n=12\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“washing cars”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I sell fruit and vegetables”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“sell my paintings”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“work in my mom’s cafe”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I volunteer at an organisation”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Regarding the female and male Grade 9 participants, the results reveal that a higher frequency of participants have considered or engaged in part-time work, with both female and male participants showing major themes in *services* and *retail* part-time work, such as washing cars or selling fruit and vegetables. All identified themes for the females were major themes, including working in the *family business* and doing *voluntary work*; whereas the male participants revealed minor themes of *arts and culture*, *family business* and *voluntary work*. For both genders, the lowest frequency count was the theme of *voluntary work*, indicating that it was more likely for these Grade 9 participants to partake in part-time work rather than voluntary work.

Table 11

*Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 10 Females (n=8)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“hairdresser”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“selling fruit and vegetables”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“teacher to Hope organisation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“help my mom in her café”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12

*Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 10 Males (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“petrol attendant”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“selling sweets”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“helping in the community”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“music DJ”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen in Tables 11 and 12, a major theme for Grade 10 female and male participants is considering or working in *services*, such as gardening or painting. Minor
themes for female participants included *retail* and *family business*, whereas minor themes for male participants included *retail* and *arts and culture*. Less than a quarter of Grade 10 participants engage in voluntary work, whereas a much larger number (over three quarters) are involved in part-time work. This reveals a theme for both female and male Grade 10 participants to engage in part-time work rather than voluntary work.

Table 13

*Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 11 Females (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Love Life volunteer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“waitress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“seller at shop”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“modelling”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14

*Part-time or Voluntary Work: Grade 11 Males (n=5)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“petrol attendant”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“sell cigarettes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“volunteer at game reserve”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining the results for the Grade 11 participants (Tables 13 and 14), it can be seen that two thirds of the females reported having done voluntary work, which is a greater percentage than females doing other forms of part-time work. In contrast, voluntary work was a minor theme for the male participants. A similarity between the two genders can be seen in that the major themes for both Grade 11 females and males are *services* and *retail*. Female
participants displayed a greater range of types of part-time work including *arts and culture*, although the latter fell within the minor theme category.

The major theme for both female and male participants across all three grade levels is *services*. This dominant theme suggests that the participants have started to participate in the world of work around them and that this may have provided an opportunity to explore their roles and abilities in the part-time workplace. Another prominent theme across all three grades is *retail*.

Life Roles

Tables 15 to 20 represent the themes identified with regards to the participants’ life roles. The identified themes are *arts and culture, family member, friends, group member, leader* and *sportsperson*.

Table 15

*Life Roles: Grade 9 Females (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Ballet member”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Netball player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I’m a sister”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I’m a leader in Sunday school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Member</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I’m part of a support group”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The major theme that can be seen in the Grade 9 participants’ results (Tables 15 and 16) is that both females and males regard the two themes of *sportsperson* and *arts and culture* as important. While both of these themes were dominant, it can be seen that all females considered their role in activities relating to *arts and culture* to be of importance, with only five of the twelve males selecting *arts and culture* as a life-role. Also, all males considered their role as a *sportsperson* to be of importance, with eight out of nine females selecting *sportsperson* as a present life role. Additionally, both genders in Grade 9 show other
similarities in that both their minor themes include leader and group member. One third of female participants also considered family member with regards to their life roles, whereas no males mentioned this as a life role.

Table 16

*Life Roles: Grade 9 Males (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Soccer player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Dancer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Member</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Member of Hope Worldwide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Cricket captain”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results for the Grade 10 participants show similarities between the gender groups within the major themes of their present life roles. From Tables 17 and 18 it can be noted that both female and male participants place considerable emphasis on life roles that involve family member, friends and arts and culture activities. A difference in the two genders can be seen when examining the frequency count for the theme of sportsperson. Nine out of fifteen males considered their role as a sportsperson to be of importance, while only one out of eight females noted this as an important life role. Additionally, half of the Grade 10 female participants indicated that being a group member was an important life role, whereas only one out of fifteen males noted this as important. One third of the Grade 10 males also marked leader as a life role, whereas none of the females noted this life role as important.
Table 17

*Life Roles: Grade 10 Females (n=8)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I am someone’s sister”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I am a friend to my friends”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I am a brass band player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Member</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I am a youth member”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I am a squash player”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18

*Life Roles: Grade 10 Males (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“best friend to someone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“soccer player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“I am a musician”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“son”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Themes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I am a soccer team captain”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Member</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I belong to a group”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 19 and 20 represent the themes identified with regards to Grade 11 participants’ present life roles. As can been in these tables, the major themes for both female and male participants were *sportsperson* and *leader*. Additionally, females considered activities related to *arts and culture* and *group membership* to be rated as important. There were no minor themes for females. In contrast, one fifth of the male participants noted *arts and culture* as a minor theme. Since neither gender considered family member as an important life role, it can be suggested that these Grade 11 participants may be focusing on a stronger involvement in
the student role to assist with the development of their interpersonal skills, rather than on a role based on home activities.

Table 19

*Life Roles: Grade 11 Females (n=15)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Member</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“youth league member”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“class captain”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“singer in the choir”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“hockey player”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20

*Life Roles: Grade 11 Males (n=5)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sportsperson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“soccer player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“prefect”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“tenor in my choir”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When examining life role results across all three grades, the dominant themes that apply to most gender and grade levels are *sportsperson* (with the exception of Grade 10 females) and *arts and culture* (with the exception of Grade 11 males). *Family member* and *friends* are considered important life roles in Grade 10 but not in the other grade levels. *Leader* and *group membership* seem to increase in importance as the level of grade increases.

Future Employment Options

Tables 21 to 26 represent the results and themes for the future employment options considered by the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. The participants could choose more than one employment option. The eight coded groups (e.g., health profession, education) were guided by an initial investigation of the identified employment options.
across the overall sample of participants and the frequency at which an employment option was selected. Employment options were then grouped according to general professional sectors. These coded groups are health profession, legal profession, education, law enforcement, professional services, business/commerce, arts and culture, and sports-related professions. While a definition of each sector is not provided, the examples of verbatim responses clarify the type of occupations falling into each coded occupational group.

Table 21

*Employment Options: Grade 9 Females (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Profession</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Social worker”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Profession</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Lawyer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Class teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Police and security woman”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Hairdresser”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Professional actress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Business woman”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22

*Employment Options: Grade 9 Males (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Businessman”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Police”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Profession</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Doctor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Profession</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Lawyer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Taxi driver”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports-related Professions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Soccer player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Actor”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From the information regarding Grade 9 participants’ employment options (Tables 21 and 22), it can be seen that all females are drawn to the health profession, whereas only half of the males indicated an interest in this employment option. Both female and male participants display interest in the legal profession, making it one of the major themes for both genders. Male participants display a higher frequency of interest in business/commerce professions and law enforcement. In contrast, females rate these two employment options, as well as the professions of education, arts and culture, and professional services, as minor themes. Similarly, male participants also rate the professions of education and arts and culture as minor themes and a small number of them introduce the employment option of sports-related professions, although this theme is a minor one. Generally, both male and female participants display a similar range of professional career interest fields, apart from the theme of males being substantially more drawn to professions in business/commerce.

Table 23

Employment Options: Grade 10 Females (n=8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Profession</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“to be a doctor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“a dancer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“a tour guide”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“teacher”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal Profession</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“to be a lawyer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“to own a business”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the Grade 9 participants, a major theme for both female and male participants in Grade 10 is the health professions (see Tables 23 and 24). Additionally, over half of both Grade 10 females and males display a higher frequency of interest for the employment option of professional services. Whereas female participants rate education and arts and culture as
major themes, males rate them as minor themes. As can be seen in Tables 23 and 24 below, males display a broader range of themes of employment options than females, although six of the eight themes for males can be classified as minor. Similarly to the Grade 9 females, the females in Grade 10 display the least interest in the professions relating to business/commerce.

Table 24

Employment Options: Grade 10 Males (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“electrician”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Profession</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“to become a doctor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“professional orchestra conductor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“bank manager”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports-related Professions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“professional soccer coach”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Profession</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“lawyer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“scorpion”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25

Employment Options: Grade 11 Females (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“financial manager”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“work in a call centre”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“choreographer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Profession</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“nurse”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports-related Professions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“netball player”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“police woman”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables 25 and 26 reveal that both Grade 11 female and male participants display a high frequency of interest in professions relating to business/commerce, with female participants also rating professional services and arts and culture as major themes. In contrast, only a fifth of the male participants show interest in these two employment options. Within this grade level, females present a broader range of professional career interest fields, although options such as health professions, sports-related professions and law enforcement are rated as minor themes.

Table 26

Employment Options: Grade 11 Males (n=5)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business / Commerce</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“own my own taxi business”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“choir conductor”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports-related Professions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“sports analyst”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“electrician”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing results and themes across all grade levels, it can been seen that for Grades 9 and 10 employment options within the health professions was of high interest to participants, whereas Grade 11 females rate this category as a minor theme and this category is nonexistent for males. Both Grade 10 and 11 females display an interest in the employment options of arts and culture and professional services. Other than for Grade 9 males, business/commerce remains a minor theme until gaining substantially more interest by both genders in Grade 11. The interest in sports-related professions is seen throughout all grade levels for male participants, although remaining a minor theme. Overall, the three grade levels display a similar broad range of themes of employment options for both genders and, apart from arts and culture for females and sports-related professions for males, the interest range does not seem to be limited within one gender group.
Career Decision-Making

Tables 27 to 32 represent the results and themes for the Grade 9, 10 and 11 participants with regards to the three questions in the MSCI relating to decision-making activities, i.e., previous career decisions made, strategies or approaches in decision-making, and help regarding career decisions. These three questions make up the topics represented in Tables 27 to 32. The chosen themes (e.g., individual strategy, systemic strategy) were based on an initial investigation of the responses across the overall sample, as well as the distribution of frequencies. Similar responses were then grouped together to make up a specific theme. These chosen themes effectively separated major from minor themes. The chosen themes for the topic of previous career decisions made are school-related activities (e.g., choosing school subjects) and choice of sport/activity (e.g., discontinuing with a sport). Under the topic of decision-making strategies, the three themes are individual strategy, systemic strategy or no strategy. The last topic regarding help with career decisions includes family, school-related people, and friends as themes. The major and minor themes are indicated in Tables 27 to 32 by using an uppercase “M” for major themes and a lowercase “m” for minor themes.

From the information shown in Tables 27 and 28, it can be seen that decisions regarding Grade 9 participants’ school-related activities (such as choosing school subjects) and decisions regarding choice of sport/activity (such as discontinuing with soccer) are the most frequent decisions for both females and males. Similarly, both genders place more frequent emphasis on an individual strategy when making decisions, rather than a systemic strategy that involves their social system. Again, both genders acknowledge a considerable influence and support from family regarding their career decisions, and minor themes of support from school-related people and friends.
### Table 27

**Decision-Making: Grade 9 Females (n=9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School-related activities (M)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“choosing subjects…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“stopped with netball”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies / approaches</td>
<td>Individual strategy (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I extend my study time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systemic strategy (m)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“gather information from others around me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No strategy (m)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“no real strategy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family (M)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“My parents advise me”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-related (m)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“My teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (m)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“My friends”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 28

**Decision-Making: Grade 9 Males (n=12)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School-related activities (M)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I want to continue Maths”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity (M)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“decided to leave soccer”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies / approaches</td>
<td>Individual strategy (M)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“concentrate on school”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No strategy (m)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I just see what happens”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systemic strategy (m)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“I get advice from others”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family (M)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“my mother”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (m)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“friends”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-related (m)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“my teacher”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the career decision-making activities of the Grade 10 participants (Tables 29 and 30), the results indicate some contrast between female and male themes. Concerning the answer to the question regarding *previous career decisions made*, female participants placed more frequent emphasis on decisions relating to *choice of sport/activity*, whereas males
focused more on school-related activities. Over half of both female and male participants described a more frequent reliance on an individual strategy for making career decisions, although a smaller number of males reported having no strategy when making career decisions and a systemic strategy was a minor theme. The females reported no systemic strategy when making career decisions.

Table 29

Decision-Making: Grade 10 Females (n=8)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity (M)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I used to play volleyball”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-related activities (m)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“choosing subject like…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies /</td>
<td>Individual strategy (M)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“look at my personality”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No strategy (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>School-related (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“class teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“my family”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“my boyfriend”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 30

Decision-Making: Grade 10 Males (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School-related activities (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“left Physics for Tourism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity (m)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“stopped cricket”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies /</td>
<td>Individual strategy (M)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I know what I want in life”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No strategy (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“none”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic strategy (m)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“go to library, look for help”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family (M)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“grandmother, parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-related (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“life orientation teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends (M)</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“my friends”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The decision-making activities of the Grade 11 female and male participants show several similarities. It can be seen from the information in Tables 31 and 32 that decisions regarding school-related activities are the most frequent types of decisions for both genders. More similarities are also noted when examining the subthemes of decision-making strategies as both genders describe a more frequent reliance on a systemic strategy and, less frequently, a reliance on an individual strategy for their decision-making, although this difference in frequency is marginal. Additionally, major themes in both female and male participants are the acknowledgement of considerable influence and support from their social system (i.e., family, school-related people and friends) when making career decisions.

Table 31

Decision-Making: Grade 11 Females (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Examples of Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School-related activities (M)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“changed to Economics”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity (m)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“continue with (musical) activity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies / approaches</td>
<td>Systemic strategy (M)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“searching in books...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual strategy (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“my strengths and weaknesses”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No strategy (m)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“I don’t have any strategies”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family (M)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School-related (M)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“teacher”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (M)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“my friends”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When examining the decision-making activities across all three grade levels, it can be seen that the majority of participants have made previous career decisions regarding their school-related activities such as subject choices. Both the Grade 9 and 10 participants displayed an individual strategy for decision-making, whereas Grade 11 participants also reported the importance of a systemic strategy when making career decisions. A major theme across all three grade levels was the acknowledgement by participants of the family in supporting them with their career decisions. Apart from Grade 9, other grade levels were also appreciative of school-related people and, specifically for the Grade 11 participants, the help of friends was also acknowledged.

Summary of Qualitative Results

The first part of this chapter has addressed the first aim of this study in which the current career development of Grade 9, 10 and 11 low socioeconomic status, black female and male adolescents was explored and described. Major and minor themes were identified across seven career-related topics as outlined in Table 2. Contrasts and similarities between general
themes (both major and minor) were identified for females and males from the three grade levels.

Apart from Grade 9 males, the remaining grade levels displayed a major theme in thinking about career options, and it seems that continuing to study further is a major theme at the Grade 9 and 11 levels. Another similarity across grade levels and gender is the major theme of participants considering part-time work relating to services such as gardening and, washing cars. A quarter of participants from each gender and grade level also considered part-time work in retail as a major theme. Apart from the females in Grades 9 and 11, voluntary work was a minor theme across all participants.

Regarding life roles, with the exception of sportsperson from the Grade 10 females’ life roles and arts and culture from the Grade 11 males’ life roles, it can be seen that there were major themes of identifying with sportsperson and arts and culture as life roles across both genders and all grade levels. When examining the themes for employment options, it can be seen that both females and males across all three grade levels display a similar broad range of professional career interest fields and, apart from arts and culture for females and sports-related professions for males, the interest range does not seem to be limited by gender.

With regards to decision-making activities, a major theme across all participants (with the exception of Grade 10 females) is that previous career decisions made relate to school-related activities such as subject choices. Also, across all grade levels and gender, participants displayed an individual strategy for making career decisions, with the Grade 11 participants also reporting the importance of a systemic strategy for making career decisions. The major theme across all grade levels and gender was the acknowledgement of support from family regarding their career decisions. This summary suggests that, when prompted, the participants can identify the influences of individual and social systemic variables on their present career development, but that they did not consider any environmental-societal
influences as important. This can be seen in the participants’ identified themes for career decision-making where only the individual and social systems of the STF are represented.

The second part of this chapter examines and represents diagrammatically the influences within the three interrelated systems of the STF that were considered by the participants as significant in shaping their career development. This relates to the second aim of the study and the results are quantitative in nature.

Quantitative Results Regarding System Influences

This second section of the chapter addresses the second aim of this study which explores and describes the interrelated systems of the STF, namely the individual, social and environmental-societal systems, as well as their relation to past, present and future influences. As stated in Chapter 4, the second aim has been subdivided into four sub-aims, thereby allowing for the exploration of each system, as well as their relation to past, present and future influences. The second part of the MSCI workbook provides the framework for participants to subjectively identify and select the systemic influences that are relevant to their unique career development. These influences are selected from a standard set of influences within each system that are provided to the participants. Additionally, participants are provided with the opportunity to nominate their own unique career development influences. These additional influences and their percentages are specifically highlighted in this second section under the relevant system to which they relate.

The results have been represented numerically based on percentages for each identified influence and displayed graphically in the form of bar graphs. These numerical and visual representations of influences from each of the three MSCI systems have been represented separately and further subdivided according to gender and grade level. The Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male results within each of the three systems (i.e., the individual, social and environmental-societal systems) will be presented by means of a separate bar graph per
gender/grade level. Each bar graph represents the percentage of systemic influences that were considered influential across the particular sub-sample (indicated by the blue bar in the graph), as well as indicating which of those influential influences were given additional ratings of importance by the same sample (indicated by the red bar in the graph). This format for presenting the results will remain consistent for the exploration of the first three sub-aims. The results of the individual system will now be presented and discussed.

The Individual System

The MSCI encourages participants to explore the influences related to their individual system by proposing a range of eleven *intraperusal* influences, all of which are potentially influential in the participants’ career development. The eleven individual influences include *ability, age, beliefs, coping strategies, culture, disability, gender, health, interests, personality and values*. The participants were asked to identify influences, or add their own additional influences, that they considered influential to their career development and to further indicate which of the selected influences were of greater significance. Throughout the total sample, none of the participants modified or added additional individual system influences and only selected from the proposed influences. As seen in Figures 6 to 11, the blue bars in the bar graphs titled *Individual System Influences* provide results (represented as a percentage) for each individual system influence selected by participants as having an influence on their career development. The red bars represent the *ratings of importance*, and indicate the percentages for individual system influences considered to be of greater importance to participants. Figures 6 to 11 represent the results for the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. The frequencies of selected individual system influences have been categorised into three groups, namely major (selected by 50% or more of the sample), moderate (selected by between 20% and 50 % of the sample), and minor (selected by 20% or less of the sample). These category parameters were guided by an initial investigation of the
distribution of frequencies across the influences. These parameters effectively separated major, moderate and minor themes throughout the sets of data.

**Grade 9**

As can be seen in Figures 6 and 7, the overall Grade 9 sample considered all eleven of the individual system influences proposed by the MSCI to be of some degree of influence on their career development. The only influence that none of the Grade 9 females selected as having an influence on their career development was coping strategies, whereas gender was not selected by any males in Grade 9.

*Figure 6. Individual system influences: Grade 9 females (n=9).*

When examining percentages regarding the Grade 9 females’ individual influences, it can be seen that the major influences were ability (78%) and values (56%). Influences that were moderately selected were personality (44%), health (44%), beliefs (44%), culture (33%), and gender (33%). Minor influences in the female sample were age (11%), disability (11%), and interests (11%). Furthermore, when examining the female sample’s ratings of importance of the individual system influences, a fairly consistent pattern can be found between the frequency at which an influence was selected and the frequency at which it was rated as
important. The only influence that fell into the major category and was not given any rating of importance was ability. The minor influence of interests also received no ratings of importance.

Figure 7. Individual system influences: Grade 9 males (n=12).

As far as the Grade 9 male sample is concerned, the influences that were categorised as major were health (50%) and ability (50%). Influences that were moderately selected by the male sample were coping strategies (42%), beliefs (33%), culture (33%), and personality (25%). Minor influences were age (17%), values (17%), interests (17%), and disability (8%). Regarding ratings of importance, a less consistent pattern can be found with the Grade 9 males than with the Grade 9 females. The selected influences that received more than fifty percent ratings of importance were disability (100%), health (83%), culture (75%) and coping strategies (60%). Influences such as interests, age, beliefs and ability received importance ratings from only half of the participants (50%) who selected them as influential. Personality only received one rating of importance (33%) from the three participants who selected them, while the influence of values received no ratings of importance.
Grade 10

The results for the Grade 10 female and male individual system influences will now be discussed, with the bar graphs represented in Figures 8 and 9. Apart from the fact that no Grade 10 females selected disability as an influence, it can be seen from Figures 8 and 9 that all eleven of the individual system influences proposed by the MSCI were considered to be of some degree of influence on the career development of these participants.

![Bar graph showing individual system influences for Grade 10 females (n=8).]

**Figure 8.** Individual system influences: Grade 10 females (n=8).

When examining the percentages regarding the Grade 10 females’ individual influences, it can be seen that the major influences were personality (88%), health (75%), age (75%), values (75%), gender (75%), ability (63%), beliefs (63%), and culture (63%). The influence that was moderately selected was interests (38%), and a minor influence was coping strategies (13%). Furthermore, when examining the female participants’ ratings of importance of the individual system influences, a fairly consistent pattern can be found between the frequency at which an influence was selected and the frequency at which it was rated as important. The majority of the selected influences received ratings of importance from 50% or more of the participants who selected them as influential, with coping strategies
(100%) receiving the highest rating. There were few selected influences that received ratings of importance of less than 50%, namely personality (43%), interests (33%) and values (17%).

![Individual Influences and Ratings of Importance](chart.png)

**Figure 9.** Individual system influences: Grade 10 males (n=15).

Regarding the Grade 10 male participants (see Figure 9), the major influences were personality (80%), beliefs (60%), and values (53%). Influences that were moderately selected by the male participants were health (47%), culture (47%), ability (33%), interests (27%), and age (27%). Minor influences were coping strategies (7%), disability (7%), and gender (7%). In terms of ratings of importance, a similarly consistent pattern could be found in the Grade 10 male participants as in the Grade 10 female participants. The majority of the influences received ratings of importance from 50% or more of the participants who selected them as influential. Both coping strategies and disability received the highest ratings of importance (100%). The influence of age received half the number of importance ratings (50%) from the participants who selected it as influential, while interests received 25% and gender receiving no ratings of importance.
Grade 11

Figures 10 and 11 offer a visual representation of the percentages for the Grade 11 female and male participants’ individual influences. Apart from none of the Grade 11 males selecting disability as an influence, all eleven of the individual system influences proposed by the MSCI were considered to be of some degree of influence on the career development of these participants.

![Bar chart showing individual system influences for Grade 11 females (n=15).](image)

**Figure 10.** Individual system influences: Grade 11 females (n=15).

Regarding the results of the Grade 11 female participants’ individual system influences, the major influences were personality (80%), ability (80%), values (67%), and interests (53%). Influences that were moderately selected by this female sample were coping strategies (40%), health (40%), beliefs (33%), and culture (27%). Minor influences were gender (20%), age (13%), and disability (13%). As far as the female participants’ ratings of importance of the influences are concerned, an inconsistent pattern can be found between the frequency at which an influence was selected and the frequency at which it was rated as important. For example, the following influences received importance ratings of over 65%, namely disability (100%), culture (75%), personality (67%) and health (67%); whereas beliefs (40%), coping
strategies (33%) and gender (33%) received ratings of importance of 40% or less. The influences of ability, values, interests and age all received importance ratings of 50% from the participants who selected them as influential.

Figure 11. Individual system influences: Grade 11 males (n=5).

In terms of the Grade 11 males’ individual system results, the major influences were personality (80%), values (80%), ability (80%), coping strategies (60%), and beliefs (60%). Influences that were moderately selected were health (40%), culture (40%), age (40%), gender (40%), and interests (40%). As stated earlier, disability was not selected by any Grade 11 male as being of influence in his career development. As far as the male participants’ ratings of importance of the influences are concerned, an inconsistent pattern can be found. Culture and beliefs received the two highest ratings of importance (100% and 67% respectively), while the influences of health, values, personality and interests received ratings of importance of 50%. Age and gender influences did not receive any ratings of importance.
Summary

When examining the higher percentages for individual system influences across the three grade levels, it can be noted that personality, ability and values are considered to be major influences on career development by the overall sample, with personality being the most influential of the three influences. With regards to ratings of importance, these three major influences all received importance ratings of around 50%, which was lower than all the other influences except for interests. Although the influence of disability was the only minor influence across the overall sample, it was however also the only influence that received ratings of importance as many times as being selected (i.e., 100%). This suggests that the influence disability has on the limited participants in this study is in fact seen as being of great importance for their career development.

A similarity between the female and male participants, as well as across the grade levels, relates to the infrequent selection of age and gender influences. These results seem consistent with the earlier results on employment options (see Tables 21 to 26) where the range of careers considered by female and male participants did not seem to be bound to traditional career gender stereotypes. Another influence that was selected by just under half (49%) of the total sample was health, with the rating of importance being 64%.

Although results indicate that a larger proportion of these participants placed emphasis on intrapersonal influences that are generally considered to be part of an individual’s internal composition, nearly half of the participants selected what can arguably be viewed as contextually influenced variables, namely beliefs (49%) and culture (41%). In fact, these two influences received the second and third highest rating of importance across the three grade levels (83% for culture and 67% for beliefs). What needs to be highlighted is that the individual system influences are embedded within a larger system, the social system. The
following subsection thus investigates the themes of the social system influences on the career development of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants.

The Social System

In addition to the individual system, there are other social influences within a larger system that potentially impact on the career development of adolescents. The MSCI encourages adolescents to explore their social relationships and variables related to this larger system, namely the social system. By proposing six social system influences in the MSCI, participants can select those influences that impact on their unique career development process. These six proposed influences include friends, parents, reading, teachers, television and youth leader. The participants are also provided with the opportunity to add their own influences or modify those proposed. Apart from one Grade 10 female participant who added pastor as an influence, none of the other participants modified or added influences. Figures 12 to 17 offer visual representations of the percentages and ratings of importance of these six influences selected by the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. The bar graphs titled Social System Influences provide percentage representations (indicated by the blue bar) for each social system influence selected by the participants as having an influence on their career development. The red bars in the bar graphs indicate the results (represented as a percentage) for the ratings of importance for the social system influences considered to be of greater importance to the participants.

As can be seen from Figures 12 to 17, both females and males across all three grade levels considered all social system influences proposed by the MSCI as influential in their career development to some degree. The same clustering categories utilised with the individual system (i.e., major, moderate and minor) will be utilised in the description of the social system influence results.
**Grade 9**

Regarding the Grade 9 female participants (see Figure 12), the major social system influences were parents (89%) and teachers (56%). The moderately selected influences were friends (33%), reading (33%), television (22%), and youth leader (22%). None of the influences selected by the female participants fell within the minor category. In terms of the ratings of importance, the two major influences also received the highest ratings of importance from the participants that selected them as influential (with parents receiving 63% and teachers receiving 83%). Therefore, although parents were selected as more influential, teachers received a higher importance rating. In contrast, two of the four moderately selected influences, namely television and youth leader, received ratings of importance from half (50%) of the participants that selected them as influential, with friends receiving ratings from a third of participants (33%) and reading receiving no importance rating.

![Figure 12. Social system influences: Grade 9 females (n=9).](image)

Regarding the Grade 9 male participants (see Figure 13), the major social system influences were parents (100%) and teachers (58%). The moderately selected influences were friends (33%) and television (25%). Minor influences selected by the male participants were
youth leader (17%) and reading (8%). Apart from the influence of parents receiving only half the frequency of importance ratings (50%) and reading receiving no importance rating, the ratings of importance of the remaining influences for the Grade 9 male participants showed fairly consistently high ratings (67% and above) from the participants that selected them as influential. The influence receiving the highest rating of importance was youth leader (100%).

![Social Influences and Ratings of Importance](image)

**Figure 13.** Social system influences: Grade 9 males (n=12).

**Grade 10**

Regarding the Grade 10 female participants (see Figure 14), the major social system influence was parents (88%). Moderately selected influences were youth leader (38%), teachers (25%), friends (25%), television (25%) and reading (25%). None of the influences selected by the female participants fell within the minor category. In terms of ratings of importance, while teachers were only moderately considered influential to the participants’ career development, this influence received the highest rating of importance (100%) from those participants who selected this as influential. Parental influence also received a relatively high rating of importance (86%), while only half or less of the participants rated television...
(50%) and youth leader (33%) as additionally important. Both friends and reading received no ratings of importance. The additional influence added by one Grade 10 female participant is that of pastor and she rated this influence as additionally important.

![Social system influences: Grade 10 females (n=8).](image)

**Figure 14.** Social system influences: Grade 10 females (n=8).

Regarding the Grade 10 male sample (see Figure 15), the major social system influences were parents (87%), teachers (80%), and television (53%). Minor influences were reading (20%), youth leader (20%), and friends (13%). None of the influences that were selected by these participants fell within the moderate category. With regards to the ratings of importance, the Grade 10 male participants considered parental influence to be of great importance to their career development (92%). This percentage is similar to the percentage seen in the Grade 10 females’ ratings of importance for parental influences. Although youth leader and reading fell within the minor category of influence, they both received considerably higher ratings of importance in the Grade 10 male sample (100% and 67% respectively). Also, teacher and friends received importance ratings from half of the participants (50%) that selected them as influential.
Figure 15. Social system influences: Grade 10 males (n=15).

Grade 11

Regarding the Grade 11 female participants (see Figure 16), the major social system influences were parents (80%), television (73%), reading (73%), youth leader (60%), and teachers (53%). A moderately selected influence was friends (40%). None of the influences selected by these participants fell within the minor category. In terms of the ratings of importance, several of the influences (parents, television, reading and friends) received importance ratings from less than half of the participants, while teachers and youth leader received ratings from over half of the participants that selected them as influential (63% and 56% respectively).

Regarding the Grade 11 male participants (see Figure 17), the major social system influences were teachers (100%), television (60%), and reading (60%). The moderately selected influences were youth leader (40%) and parents (40%). The minor influence selected by the male participants was friends (20%). When examining the ratings of importance for the Grade 11 male participants, it can be seen that the majority of the influences consistently received considerably few or no ratings of importance. Teachers received ratings of 40%,
reading 33%, and parents, friends and television received no ratings of importance. The only influence receiving a relatively higher rating of importance was youth leader (50%).

**Figure 16.** Social system influences: Grade 11 females (n=15).

**Figure 17.** Social system influences: Grade 11 males (n=5).
Summary

In comparing the results of the social system influences across the three grade levels, it can be noted that parents and teachers are considered to be of major influence and importance to the career development of these participants. Parents were selected as more influential than teachers, but teachers received a higher rating of importance. The influence of television was selected by slightly less than half of the overall sample (43%), with around a third of the participants selecting reading (37%) and youth leader (33%) as influential to their career development. Although television was the third highest influence to be selected as influential, this influence received the lowest rating of importance, with reading being the second lowest. The social system influence that was least selected to be of influence was friends.

These findings suggest that participants from this sample could readily identify and evaluate the impact of social system influences on their career development when given the opportunity to do so. Also, the extent of influence that the social system influences were subjectively evaluated as having an impact on career development of these participants suggests that the earlier identified intrapersonal influences cannot be disassociated from the social context within which they are expressed and evaluated. Additionally, these social system influences can be further contextualised within a broader system identified by the STF as the environmental-societal system. The following subsection investigates the themes of environmental-societal system influences on the career development of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants.

The Environmental-Societal System

An even larger system that forms a broader context for both the individual and social systems is the environmental-societal system. Additional influences also exist within this system that can potentially impact on the career development of adolescents. The MSCI encourages participants to select from six proposed influences, and to modify or add
additional influences, in order to establish the broader context of their career development. These six proposed influences are availability of jobs, financial cost, financial support, local area, location of university and overseas work opportunities. Figures 18 to 23 offer visual representations of the percentages and ratings of importance of these six influences selected by the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. The blue bars in the bar graphs titled Environmental-societal system influences provide percentages for each environmental-societal system influence selected by the participants as having an influence on their career development. The red bar in the bar graphs indicates the ratings of importance for the environmental-societal system influences considered to be of greater importance to the participants.

Apart from Grade 9 females and Grade 10 males not selecting financial cost as having an impact on their career development, the rest of the participants across the three grade levels considered all the environmental-societal system influences proposed by the MSCI as influential in their career development to some degree. The same clustering categories utilised with the individual and social systems (i.e., major, moderate and minor) will be utilised in the description of the environmental-societal system influence frequencies.

**Grade 9**

Figure 18 visually displays the results of the Grade 9 female participants’ environmental-societal system influences. The major influences were local area (78%), financial support (56%), and overseas work opportunities (56%). Moderately selected influences were location of university (33%) and availability of jobs (22%). As stated earlier, the female participants did not select financial cost as an influential factor on their career development. With regards to the Grade 9 female participants’ ratings of importance, both location of university and availability of jobs were selected as having the highest importance (100%) on these participants’ career development. Although local area was one of the major influences, it only
received ratings of importance from less than half of the participants (43%). Financial support and overseas work opportunities received ratings of sixty percent and forty percent respectively.

*Figure 18.* Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 9 females (n=9).

*Figure 19.* Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 9 males (n=12).
Regarding the Grade 9 male participants (see Figure 19), the major influences were financial support (58%) and overseas work opportunities (50%). Moderately selected influences were location of university (42%), availability of jobs (42%), and local area (25%). A minor influence was financial cost (17%). With regards to the male participants’ ratings of importance, the minor influence of financial cost received the highest rating of importance (100%). Two of remaining five influences (location of university and financial support) received relatively high ratings of importance (80% and 57% respectively), whereas the remaining three influences, namely local area, overseas work opportunities and availability of jobs, received limited ratings (33%, 33% and 20% respectively).

**Grade 10**

Regarding the Grade 10 female participants (see Figure 20), the major influence selected was overseas work opportunities (100%). The moderately selected influences were availability of jobs (38%), location of university (25%), financial support (25%) and financial cost (25%). A minor influence was local area (13%). Although financial cost fell within the moderately selected influence, it received the highest rating of importance (100%). Availability of jobs and overseas work opportunities also received ratings of importance from over half of the participants who selected them as influential (67% and 63% respectively), with financial support receiving ratings from half of the participants (50%). Both local area and location of university did not receive ratings of importance.

Similar to the Grade 9 females, the Grade 10 male participants (see Figure 21) selected overseas work opportunities most often (60%). This influence, as well as financial support, was selected as major influences for this male sample. The moderately selected influences were local area (47%), location of university (27%), and availability of jobs (27%). As stated earlier, the influence of financial cost was not selected by any of the Grade 10 male participants, which is a similar finding to that of the Grade 9 females. Regarding ratings of
importance, local area received the highest rating (71%), while the influences of financial support, overseas work opportunities and location of university all received ratings from less than half of the participants who selected them as influential (44%, 33% and 25% respectively). Availability of jobs did not receive ratings of importance.

Figure 20. Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 10 females (n=8).

Figure 21. Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 10 males (n=15).
Grade 11

Figure 22 visually displays the results of the Grade 11 female participants’ environmental-societal system influences. The major influences were financial support (73%), local area (67%), and location of university (53%). The moderately selected influences were financial costs (47%), overseas work opportunities (40%), and availability of jobs (33%). None of the selected influences fell within the minor category. Regarding ratings of importance, a fairly consistent pattern of limited ratings can be seen across the six influences. Although local area and availability of jobs received the highest number of importance ratings (both 40%) for this sample, these influences are not that much higher than the influence rated the lowest, namely financial cost (29%).

Figure 22. Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 11 females (n=15).

Regarding the Grade 11 male participants (see Figure 23), the major influences were financial support (60%), overseas work opportunities (60%), and availability of jobs (60%). A moderately selected influence was local area (40%), with both location of university (20%) and financial costs (20%) being minor environmental-societal influences. Apart from financial support (67%), the ratings of importance were consistently limited or non-existent
throughout all influences. Both overseas work opportunities and availability of jobs received ratings from a third of the participants (33%) who selected them as influential, with local area, location of university and financial costs receiving no ratings of importance.

![Environmental-Societal System Influences and Ratings of Importance](image)

**Figure 23.** Environmental-societal system influences: Grade 11 males (n=5).

**Summary**

The two environmental-societal system influences that have emerged as of major influence to the career development of the total sample are overseas work opportunities and financial support. Both financial support and financial cost are considered to be of greatest importance for these participants. Additionally, less than half (45%) of the participants selected local area as being an influence on their career development. Regarding availability of jobs (37%) and location of university (33%), it can be seen that approximately a third of the participants selected these as being influential on their career development. Additionally, location of university was rated as important by nearly half of the participants (48%) that selected it as influential, whereas availability of jobs received the lowest rating of important (36%) compared to the other five influences. Also, financial cost was seen as a minor
influence on the total sample’s career development, but it was rated as having the greatest importance.

These results indicate that the participants could readily identify and evaluate the impact of environmental-societal system influences on their career development when given the opportunity to do so. A limited number of ratings of importance allocated to the influences of local area and overseas work opportunities indicate a theme amongst the present participants to consider these influences as influential but not of great importance. The following subsection investigates the themes of past, present and future influences on the career development of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants.

Past, Present and Future Influences

This section addresses the fourth sub-aim of this study in exploring and describing the subjectively evaluated impact of the past, present and future influences on the career development of the participants. On the page titled *Thinking about my past, present and future*, the MSCI encourages participants to select from four proposed influences that can be considered to have an impact on their career development. These four proposed influences include *anticipated lifestyle, combine family and work, not wanting to move* and *working overseas*. Additionally, the participants are provided with the opportunity to add or modify the proposed influences. Although the frequency count was limited, eight participants across the three grade levels added an influence named *I want to move away from where I live*, as this additional influence was seen as impacting on their present career decisions and career development.

Of the four proposed influences in the MSCI, one falls within the *present influence* and is named *I don’t want to move away from where I live*. The other three proposed influences fall within the *future influences* and are named *The lifestyle I anticipate, I want to work overseas*, and *I want to combine family and work*. While no past influences were proposed in the
MSCI’s past, present and future diagram, participants were given the example of a past influence in the MSCI workbook instructions of a movie seen in the past that may have influenced their career decision-making and career development. The bar graphs in Figures 24 to 29 represent the level of influence and ratings of importance of the past, present and future influences of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 female and male participants. As with the three systems of influence, the blue bar in the bar graphs represent the level of influences, while the red bar indicates the ratings of importance.

Interestingly, none of the participants across all three grade levels volunteered information about the impact of past influences on their career development. It is difficult to make conclusive statements about this result but it is noted that the participants rarely modified or added their own influences to any of the three systems throughout the MSCI workbook. The consistent theme with the participants is that they mainly selected from the proposed influences and, since there were no past influences proposed in this particular section, this perhaps has resulted in participants not offering any qualitative information about their influential past influences. It can also be hypothesised that asking participants to look into their past to identify potential influential people, events, and experiences may require a great deal of mental energy as the focus and range of the request is potentially a broad and extensive one.

Grade 9

Regarding the Grade 9 female and male participants, it can be seen from Figures 24 and 25 that participants selected the influence of future-orientated factors more frequently than past and present influences. Concerning future influences, eight females (89%) and six males (50%) considered combining family and work to be of influence on their career development, with half (50%) of these females and males also rating it as of greater importance. It can be hypothesised that, because many women need to work due to the financial demands of this
century, they are therefore placed in a position that compels them to manage work and family roles. Although the last few decades may have seen an increased number of women employed, both genders in this study have considered combining family and work as influential and important to their career development. Therefore, both women and men, such as the participants in this study, may be encouraged to pursue careers that allow them to fulfil both family and occupational responsibilities.

![Bar chart](image)

**Figure 24.** Past, present and future influences: Grade 9 females (n=9).

Fewer Grade 9 females (22%) than males (42%) considered their career development to be influenced by the lifestyle they anticipate, with all twelve male participants attributing considerable importance to this future influence. Regarding wanting to work overseas, more males (67%) than females (44%) considered this an influential future influence in their career development. This is fairly consistent with results from the environmental-societal system influences where over half of the Grade 9 participants selected *overseas work opportunities* as a major influence. Regarding present influences, a limited number of female (11%) and male (17%) participants added the influence of wanting to move, although it received no additional ratings of importance from the females and 50% importance ratings from the
males. The other present influence of not wanting to move received similar results of influence for the females (44%) and the males (42%), although a difference between females and males can be seen in the ratings of importance (75% and 20% respectively).

*Figure 25. Past, present and future influences: Grade 9 males (n=12).*

**Grade 10**

Regarding the present influences of the Grade 10 female and male participants (see Figures 26 and 27), three females (38%) and four males (27%) selected *I don’t want to move away from where I live* as an influence on their career development, with half of the males (50%) and none of the females rating this influence as important. This suggests a link with the high frequency from eight females (100%) and ten males (67%) of wanting to work overseas in the future. Only one female (13%) modified the *I don’t want to move away from where I live* influence to *I want to move away from where I live* (13%), but she did not consider this of great importance.
Figure 26. Past, present and future influences: Grade 10 females (n=8).

Figure 27. Past, present and future influences: Grade 10 males (n=15).

Similar to the Grade 9 participants, it can be seen from Figures 26 and 27 that Grade 10 female and male participants selected the influence of future-orientated factors more frequently than past and present influences. The influence considered influential by the highest number of female (100%) and male (60%) participants is working overseas, receiving
ratings of importance of 50% from females and 40% from males. Regarding another future influence, four females (50%) and ten males (67%) considered combining family and work to be of influence on their career development. More female (75%) than male (50%) participants who selected this influence considered it to be of considerable importance to them. Concerning anticipated lifestyle, more males (27%) than females (13%) considered their career development to be influenced by the lifestyle they anticipate, although more females (100%) than males (25%) regarded this influence as of great importance.

**Grade 11**

Once again, it can be seen from Figures 28 and 29 that Grade 11 participants selected the influence of future-orientated factors more frequently than past and present influences. No past influences were considered by the Grade 11 participants, and only a small portion of females (40%) and males (20%) considered the present influence of not wanting to move as important for their careers, with only the females giving this influence an additional rating of importance (17%). This suggests a link with the high percentage of females (47%) and males (80%) wanting to work overseas in the future. The contrasting influence of wanting to move was selected by a limited number of females (13%) and a larger number of males (40%), although neither of the two genders rated this influence of great importance.

Approximately half of the female participants consistently selected the three future influences as being of influence to their career development, with the percentages showing anticipated lifestyle (53%), combining family and work (53%), and working overseas (47%). The male participants also selected working overseas (80%) and anticipated lifestyle (60%) as being influential, but the influence of combining family and work received no interest from the males, suggesting that this is not considered as having an influence on their career development.
Figure 28. Past, present and future influences: Grade 11 females (n=15).

Figure 29. Past, present and future influences: Grade 11 males (n=5).

Summary

In concluding this section, it can be seen that there are some general themes across the grade levels. Firstly, none of the participants across the three grade levels selected any past influences as having an impact on their career development. Secondly, the results suggest that
the majority of the participants selected the influence of future-orientated factors more frequently than past and present influences. Thirdly, there were only a small proportion of participants that selected the influence *I do not want to move away from where I live* and a larger majority of the participants focused on working overseas and combining family and work in their future. The future influences *I want to combine family and work* and *anticipated lifestyle* received the two highest ratings of importance for the participants’ career development.

*Summary of Quantitative Results*

The third section of the MSCI workbook allows participants to integrate all the subjectively significant information from all three systems of influence, as well as the past, present and future influences, and thereby create a personalised diagram of their own unique system of career influences. Each participant’s personalised diagram is thus a visual representation of all the influences impacting on the career development of that particular participant. This integration and summation of the findings into a constellation of influences is an important step in the reflection process that follows.

The summary of the themes identified over the three interrelated systems, as well as the past, present and future influences, will be presented in a diagrammatic manner in Figure 30. This diagram is based on the top two major influences (marked with a tick) and the top two influences rated as most important (marked with asterisks) from each system of influences for all participants across the three grade levels. If a major influence is also one of the top influences rated as most important, this influence will be distinguished by the use of both a tick and an asterisk. The size of the bubble in the diagram represents the frequency at which each influence was considered influential or important (i.e., the larger the bubble, the higher the percentage that that influence was selected as influential or rated as important). This size differentiation applies within each particular system and not across the systemic levels. The
resultant diagram (see Figure 30) not only serves as an example of how participants formulated their own personalised diagram, but it also serves to provide a summary of the quantitative findings of career development influences across all the participants.

Following this diagram representing the summary of themes is a further representation of one particular participant’s collection of most prominent influences (see Figure 31). This participant, a Grade 10 male, was randomly selected from the total sample. This example of a unique system of influences both corresponds to and contrasts with the dominant themes for the total sample represented in Figure 30. This diagram is presented in the same format as Figure 30. Asterisks will be used to indicate those selected influences that were additionally rated as important.

As seen in Figures 30 and 31, the three interrelated systems are differentiated according to colour. Pink represents the major individual system influences, purple represents the major social system influences, and blue represents the major environmental-societal system influences. Lastly, green represents the influences of past, present and future. The following section presents the qualitative results of the reflection process of the Grade 9, 10 and 11 participants.

As can be seen in Figure 30, the top two individual system influences selected by the majority of the participants was personality and ability, with disability and culture being rated as of greatest importance to the participants’ career development. Regarding the social influences, parents and teachers were the top two influences impacting on their career development, with teachers and youth group being rated as most important. Overseas work opportunity and financial support were selected by the majority of the participants as being influential, with financial support and financial costs being of greatest importance. As noted previously, there were no past influences highlighted by any of the participants. The top two influences were both future influences, namely I want to combine family and work and I want
to work overseas. The top two influences receiving the highest ratings of importance were also future influences, namely I want to combine family and work and anticipated lifestyle.

**Figure 30. Summary of major influences: Collective themes.**

As can be seen in Figure 31, the participant assigned ratings of importance to four of the influences, namely beliefs, parents, I want to combine family and work and financial support. The four influences are therefore considered to be of great importance to his career.
development. Several of his selected influences, such as personality, teachers, parents, and financial support, correspond to the collective themes in the summary of major influences (see Figure 30) of the total participants. Other influences, however, such as television, location of university and availability of jobs are in contrast with the overall collective main themes seen in Figure 30. This example of a unique collection of influences highlights the potential for variation and individuality that exists within the dominant patterns of influence outlined above and reveals the flexibility that the STF offers by accommodating for this uniqueness.

*Figure 31. Example of unique system of career influences.*
Qualitative Results of the Reflection Process

As part of the reflection process, the MSCI asks ten open-ended questions based on the participants’ personalised system of influences diagram and encourages them to reflect on and integrate the information pertaining to their unique career development process. This section of the chapter addresses this third aim of the study and investigates the themes that emerged during the reflection processes of the female and male participants in Grades 9, 10 and 11.

The qualitative results were coded and categorised in relation to the three systems of influence (i.e., individual, social and environmental-societal systems), as well as according to past, present and future influences. Since question eight of the reflection process, How do you feel as you look at your System of Career Influences, could not be coded in the same manner as the rest of the questions, a general theme was identified. This identified theme suggests that the majority of participants across the grade levels experienced a general positive feeling towards their personalised diagram of system influences such as “I feel very happy”, “I feel proud” or “I feel great”. A range of further unique individual responses emerged (5% of the participants) which could not be reduced to categories or themed according to systems of influence (for example, “I need to reflect more on my life influence and try to change negatives to positives” and “I feel that there are a lot of things that I need to change”).

The variety and plurality of responses demonstrate the uniqueness of the individuals and their reflection on the systems of influences on their career development. Tables 33 to 38 contain the questions from the guided reflection as well as the themes identified from the remaining nine questions, and the frequency for the emergence of those themes are grouped under the relevant systems of influence categories. Additional themes that emerged during the reflection process are also provided, namely internal state, career certainty, career uncertainty, importance of career counselling, career options, wanting to study further, and
degree and effect of influences. The theme internal state refers to the participants’ responses that included individual system influences and other self-descriptions related to individual qualities and characteristics, such as “my personality”, “my beliefs” and “my confidence”. The theme degree and effect of influences” represents the responses of being surprised by or becoming newly aware of how much the various systems of influence presented in the MSCI have played a role in their career development. For example, “I am surprised that you are influenced by every surrounding thing that you encounter”. The themes of career certainty and career uncertainty refer to whether the participant has decided on a particular career choice or not. For example, one participant said, “I am now certain that I want to become a nurse”, hence her response would be placed in the career certainty theme.
Table 33

*Reflection Process: Grade 9 Females (n=9)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (3)</td>
<td>Family (3)</td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Friends (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td>State (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (4)</td>
<td>Family (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Study Further (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (3)</td>
<td>Friends (2)</td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study Further (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is most important to you?</td>
<td>Internal State (4)</td>
<td>Teacher (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Study Further (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career decisions?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (2)</td>
<td>Teacher (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No response (4)</td>
</tr>
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Table 34

*Reflection Process: Grade 9 Males (n=12)*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (3) Study Further (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Friends (5)</td>
<td>Availability of Jobs (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Finances (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (2) Study Further (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Overseas Work Opportunities (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
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<td>Family (5)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (1) Study Further (2)</td>
</tr>
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<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (2)</td>
<td>Career Certainty (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is most important to you?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (4)</td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td>Don’t want to move (1) Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career decisions?</td>
<td>Internal State (4)</td>
<td>Family (2)</td>
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<td>No response (6)</td>
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Table 35

*Reflection Process: Grade 10 Females (n=8)*

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Overseas Work Opportunities (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Friends (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to work overseas (3) Don’t want to move (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family (3)</td>
<td>Financial cost (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (2) Career Counselling (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (5) Study Further (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everything (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is most important to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family (4)</td>
<td>Friends (1) Teacher (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career decisions?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (5)</td>
<td>Teacher (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 36

*Reflection Process: Grade 10 Males (n=12)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (9)</td>
<td>Family (2) Friends (1)</td>
<td>Overseas Work Opportunities (1)</td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (1) Friends (4)</td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (3) Combine Family and Work (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (2) Teacher (2)</td>
<td>Financial Cost (1)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1) Want to move (1) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (1) Career Options (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td>Internal State (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (3) Career Counselling (3) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (3)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (1) Career Certainty (6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (6)</td>
<td>Friends (1) Local Area (1)</td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (2)</td>
<td>Nothing (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Friends (1) Local Area (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is most important to you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (7) Teacher (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career decisions?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (8) Teacher (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Choice (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 37

Reflection Process: Grade 11 Females (n=15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td>Family (4)</td>
<td>Finances (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Uncertainty (1) Study Further (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (1)</td>
<td>Teacher (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Area (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Local Area (2)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td>Don’t want to move (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal State (4)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (4) Career Options (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family (2)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (6) Career Options (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Certainty (4) No responses (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Local Area (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No response (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Availability of Jobs (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everything (3) No response (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is</td>
<td>Internal State (7)</td>
<td>Family (4)</td>
<td>Finances (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most important to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career</td>
<td>Internal State (5)</td>
<td>Family (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No response (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decisions?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 38

**Reflection Process: Grade 11 Males (n=15)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual System</th>
<th>Social System</th>
<th>Environmental-Societal System</th>
<th>Past, Present, and Future</th>
<th>Other themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What stands out most for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Anticipated Lifestyle (1)</td>
<td>Career Certainty (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Study Further (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finances (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study Further (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td>Internal State (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Options (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nothing (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Uncertainty (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Career Choice (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Study further (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>most important to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career</td>
<td>Internal State (2)</td>
<td>Family (1)</td>
<td>Want to work overseas (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No response (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>decisions?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Looking holistically across the three grade levels, a fairly similar theme can be found with regards to the participants’ responses to the questions in the MSCI’s reflection process. Both the individual system influences and social system influences received considerably more consistent reflection than did themes related to the environmental-societal system influences. Apart from the Grade 10 female and male participants who selected marginally more social system influences than individual system influences, the females and males from Grade 9 and 11 consistently chose more individual system influences than social system influences.

When examining Tables 33 to 38, it can be seen that a prominent theme within the individual system is internal state. Regarding themes within the social system, family, friends and teachers emerged as important areas of reflection. As far as environmental-societal system themes across the three grade levels are concerned, the most prominent themes were finances and local area. Other minor themes that emerged were overseas work opportunities, financial cost and availability of jobs. Regarding themes on past, present and future influences, the more prominent themes across the three grade levels are wanting to work overseas and anticipated lifestyle considerations to future career development, with limited participants indicating not wanting to move and combining family and work as emerging from the reflection process. Other themes emerging from the reflection process included career certainty, career uncertainty, the importance of career counselling, and the need to study further. In conclusion, the responses of the participants within the reflection process suggest that the participants were able to reflect both cognitively and affectively on their personalised diagram in order to consolidate their selected interrelated systems of influences that impact on their unique career development.
In terms of the total chapter, the results have demonstrated that the MSCI workbook assisted the participants in identifying and evaluating significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development to date. Furthermore, participants from both genders and all grade levels were able to successfully complete the MSCI workbook and provide reflective comments on their MSCI personalised diagrams. The following chapter will include a discussion of the study’s results and a general conclusion. The study’s limitations as well as recommendations for future research will also be discussed.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been underscored in preceding chapters that much of the extant career research have predominantly focused on white, middle-class, American individuals resulting in a lack of research focusing on traditionally marginalised groups (Watson & Stead, 2002). Harris-Bowlsbey (2003), in commenting on the societal changes and the population diversity of the twenty-first century, emphasised the essential need for more attention to be directed towards the career development of previously marginalised groups, such as racial/ethnic minorities, disabled people and women. Hence, the motivation for the current research study was to explore and describe the career development of low socioeconomic, black adolescents who have previously been marginalised from career research.

It also needs to be noted that most international and national research on adolescent career development has been based on westernised theoretical assumptions, and has used traditional quantitative research designs that have focused on isolated and clustered career variables. In addition, quantitative research uses instrumentation that has seldom been validated for use with disadvantaged populations. Such research results in a failure to include the dynamic and recursive nature of contextual factors that impact on an individual’s career development. This lack of consideration of the relational contexts of an individual’s career development makes it difficult to understand the complexity and uniqueness of each individual’s career situation. The Systems Theory Framework (STF) of career development incorporates the contextually negotiated systems of influence in all individuals’ career development from a variety of socio-cultural environments (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). Because of its significant contribution to the field of career development and its conceptualisation of career development from a multicultural perspective, the STF was
employed in the present research as a theoretical framework that allows the researcher to holistically explore the career development of each unique individual in the present sample.

This closing chapter offers a brief general conclusion and a discussion based on the preceding chapters as well as considers the implications of the research findings. The applicability of the STF to the career development of adolescents who have been traditionally marginalised from career research will also be discussed under the Research Discussion section of the chapter. Thereafter, the chapter will consider the limitations of the present study, as well as make recommendations for future research.

General Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to explore and describe the systems of influence on the career development of Grade 9, 10 and 11 low socioeconomic, black South African adolescents. A career systems theory perspective was utilised to assist in this exploration and description of the participants’ career development, specifically in terms of three interrelated systems of influence, namely the individual, social, and environmental-societal systems. In addition, the consideration of past, present and future influences on the participants’ career development were investigated.

An initial research step was to consider the theoretical foundation for studying adolescent career development. Chapter 2 introduced a theoretical background that described the dynamic nature of career development theory and the emerging need for an overarching framework to unify existing career theories. The Systems Theory Framework (STF; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006) of career development was introduced as the first attempt to comprehensively present a metatheoretical framework using systems theory.

Following the theoretical foundation provided in Chapter 2, international and national career development research was discussed in Chapter 3 in an attempt to understand different aspects of adolescent career development by studying a range of individual, social and
environmental-societal influences that have been researched. While these research studies make a valuable contribution to the career literature, it was noted that there is a lack of qualitative, personally meaningful studies that incorporate the holistic and unique career development of an adolescent. Two national research studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) were introduced that have acknowledged contextual, holistic and meaning-focused approaches to career development. Based on the STF and its qualitative career measure, the My System of Career Influences (MSCI; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a), these two systemically rich South African studies were discussed. The results from both studies revealed that all theoretically identified influences within the three interrelated systems of the STF had an influence on South African adolescents’ career development. Furthermore, these studies commented on the positive value of the MSCI booklet in assisting South African adolescents to identify and evaluate significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development.

The focus of the present research then shifted to a detailed description of the research methodology used. Specifically, Chapter 4 described the problem formulation and aims of the study, as well as offering a detailed description of the research design, a profile of participants, the MSCI career assessment measure utilised and the means of data analysis. The value of the MSCI research tool lies in its ability to accommodate a broad variety of socio-cultural backgrounds of individuals, as well as to draw on the subjective evaluation of the unique career experiences of an individual. The data gathered for the adolescents in this sample was both verbal and numerical in nature, and therefore this study falls within the broad sphere of both qualitative and quantitative research.

Chapter 5 presented a detailed account of the systemic and interrelated career development trends and themes that emerged from the wealth of data offered by the adolescents in this sample. Conclusions from these research findings relating to the three
interrelated systems of the STF (i.e., the individual, social and environmental-societal systems) will now be discussed. The results and themes from the past, present and future influences will also be acknowledged.

Research Discussion

The Individual System

While all the individual system influences of the STF were selected as having an influence on the present participants’ career development, their degree of influence and importance varied between adolescents. The highest frequency counts for individual system influences across the three grade levels indicated that personality, abilities and values are considered of major influence by the total sample. Apart from disability as the only minor influence, the remaining individual influences were also selected to some degree but the frequency count placed them in the ‘moderate’ category. Although the adolescents were offered the opportunity to modify or add additional influences to each system of the STF, none of them did so in this individual system. Several of the influences represented in the individual system have been acknowledged in existing career theories (see Chapter 2) and have been discussed in relation to research presented in Chapter 3. Further discussion of the major, moderate and minor influences will now follow.

Major influences

To reiterate, the three major individual influences selected as impacting on the total sample’s career development are personality, abilities and values, with personality being the most influential. With regards to ratings of importance, these three major influences all received importance ratings of around 50%. The influence of personality has been emphasised by several theorists in the field of career development (Holland, 1992, 1997; McCrae & John, 1992; Super, 1990) and, specifically relating to the exploration stage of Super’s life-span, life-space theory, the stage of adolescence represents a process of
developing ideas about what work would best suit one’s personality (Super et al., 1996). The prominent influences of personality and abilities as indicated in the findings of this study can be supported by earlier international research that found both influences to be particularly important in the career development of adolescents (Ackerman & Beier, 2003; Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997). Additionally, results from two South African research studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) indicate the strong influential nature of personality and abilities when exploring and describing the career development of adolescents. Kuit’s (2006) study also noted interests and values to be of considerable influence.

To reiterate, values is considered the third highest influence in the present study. Therefore, there is a similarity between Kuit (2006) and the present study’s results regarding the major influence of values. In contrast, a difference in the influence of interests can be seen because the present study considered interests to be only moderately influential and of minor importance to career development, whereas Kuit describes this influence as of considerable influence. Super explains that both abilities and coping strategies are considered to play a role in the development of interests, and the more career mature individuals become, the more they will be influenced by their abilities, coping strategies and interests (Super et al., 1996).

*Moderate influences*

The influence of health was selected by just under half (49%) of the total sample, with the rating of importance being 64%. South Africa is facing numerous challenges relating to health care issues, specifically the AIDS pandemic and other infectious diseases such as cholera and tuberculosis (Leach, Akhurst, & Basson, 2003). The topic of staying healthy and disease-free has been a prevalent message sent out by the South Africa’s Love Life prevention programme for youths (Love Life, 2007). Through media coverage and the educational system, this programme emphasises the seriousness of viruses and diseases,
especially the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), within the South African community. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that the media and educational input may have heightened awareness in the importance of good health for most South African adolescents, including the present participants. While no international career research has previously examined health as a construct in relation to career development, two national studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) found health to be of a similar degree of influence as this study.

Although results indicate that nearly half of the total sample selected what can arguably be viewed as contextually influenced variables, namely beliefs (49%) and culture (41%), these two influences received the second and third highest rating of importance across the three grade levels. In terms of career theory, culture has received less attention than other individual system influences (for example, personality and values). However, several recent reviews have noted a trend towards increased multicultural career development research in the literature (e.g., Arbona, 2000; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002). These reviews have emphasised the significant impact of cultural issues in career development and have called for continued research in this area of study. This need for further research is strengthened by the contrasting results from the following two international studies. When looking at ethnic minority adolescents, Bullington and Arbona (2001) indicated ethnic factors as salient features in these adolescents’ career development. In contrast, Fouad and Byars-Winston (2005) found ethnicity to have little influence on the career aspirations of adolescents.

Regarding South African research on culture, previously marginalised groups have been increasingly included in career studies, although caution is emphasised when interpreting South African research results using assessment instruments based on westernised, middle class principles (Watson, Foxcroft, Horn, & Stead, 1995). While some studies have found the impact of culture to be significant on South African adolescents’ career developmental readiness (Langley, 1990; Watson, Stead, & de Jager, 1995), other studies (Dullabh, 2004;
Kuit, 2006) have indicated that there is a relatively small degree of emphasis placed on culture by South African adolescents. Regarding beliefs, two national studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) have noted that beliefs were slightly more influential than culture, a similar finding to the present study. In contrast to the latter two national studies, the high rating of importance given to beliefs and culture is underscored in the present study.

Concerning age and gender, the present participants infrequently selected age and gender as influential in their career development. These results seem consistent with the results on employment options where the range of careers considered by females and males of this sample did not seem to be bound to traditional career gender-stereotypes. Career theories have illustrated the importance of age (Gottfredson, 1996; Super, 1990) but, from a systems perspective, age does not necessarily reflect a particular stage in development. Therefore, Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) suggest moving beyond viewing age in linear terms to a perspective in which the implications of age vary with other influences. Concerning gender, there is a lack of attention given to this individual influence in career theories, although the importance of understanding how gender differences impact on an individual’s career development has been noted by some authors (Gottfredson, 1996; Patton & McMahon, 2005)

Regarding career research, age is one of the individual system variables that have received comprehensive attention as an influence in adolescent career development and several researchers agree that age in adolescence is clearly an influential factor in any understanding of career development (McCallion & Trew, 2000; Seligman, Weinstock, & Heflin, 1991; Watson, Quatman, & Edler, 2002). Several researchers (e.g., Creed, Patton, & Watson, 2002; Patton & Creed, 2001; Powell & Luzzo, 1998) have studied the relationship between age and other career constructs such as career maturity and career decision-making, with the findings indicating contradictory results. This contrast in results is evident in both international and national studies. Although there is no clear indication that age is an
influence on the participants’ career maturity and decision-making, this present study’s finding is consistent with previous research in acknowledging age, albeit of moderate influence, in the participants’ career development.

As with age, a similar trend of researching gender in relation to other career constructs, rather than being examined as an individual construct, is seen in several studies (Gati & Saka, 2001; Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Paa & Whirter, 2000). The results of these studies reveal that gender plays a role in influencing several areas in the career development of adolescents. Some South African studies have found no significant gender difference in relation to adolescents’ career maturity (Watson, Stead, & de Jager, 1995) and career self-efficacy (Eaton, 1996), while other researchers (Botha & Ackermann, 1997) have reported significant gender differences in relation to career identity development. Similarly to age, gender is only moderately influential in the career development of participants of this study, although the interactive nature of these influences can be acknowledged in relation to the more prominent influences and career constructs. The findings from this study correspond to international studies that reveal gender to play a role in adolescent career development, but the inconsistencies in relation to national research suggests the need for further research in this area.

*Minor influences*

Although the influence of disability was the only minor influence across the overall sample, it was however also the only influence that received ratings of importance as many times as being selected (i.e., 100%). This suggests that the influence disability has on the limited participants in this study is in fact seen as being of great importance for their career development. Although Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) highlight that disability has received little attention in the career literature, the authors comment that this influence should be acknowledged as an influence in an individual’s career development. This lack of focus in
previous career theory and research does not allow for either confirmation or rejection of the present study’s findings. The need for further research in this area is therefore highlighted.

**Reflection process**

The results from the MSCI’s concluding reflection process revealed that the individual system influences (along with the social system influences) received more consistent reflection than did themes related to the environmental-societal system influences. In this regard, the females and males from Grades 9 and 11 were seen to choose more individual system influences than social system influences.

The overall findings within the individual system suggest that the present adolescents could readily identify and evaluate the impact of individual system influences on their career development when given the opportunity to do so. Although results from some individual influences such as personality are supported by international and national career theory and research, results of other influences such as gender cannot be described as consistent or in contrast with previous research due to the inconsistencies found within previous research. This suggests that more research is needed in these areas of influence. According to the STF, individual system influences are embedded and intertwined within a larger system, the social system. Discussion relating to the social system will now be presented.

**The Social System**

As with the results from the individual system, the total sample across all three grade levels considered all the social system influences proposed by the MSCI as influential to some degree on their career development. The highest frequency counts for social system influences across the three grade levels indicated that parents and teachers are considered of major influence by the total sample, with parental influence seeming to be the single most important social systemic influence. The remaining influences, namely television, reading, youth leader and friends were all selected as moderately influential in the participants’ career
development. There were no minor influences. The adolescents were offered the opportunity to modify or add additional influences to each system of the STF. In the social system, a Grade 10 female participant identified one additional influence on her unique career development, namely a pastor. Several of the influences represented in the social system have been acknowledged in existing career theories (see Chapter 2) and have been discussed in relation to research presented in Chapter 3. Further discussion of the major, moderate and minor influences will now follow.

**Major influences**

To reiterate, parents and teachers are considered to be of major influence and importance to the career development of this adolescent sample. Considering the results from Chapter 5 (Tables 27 to 32) regarding adolescents’ career decision-making help, there seems to be a similarity between the theme of family and school-related support, on the one hand, and the high number of selections and importance ratings of parental and teacher influences, on the other hand. With parents and family being selected more often than teachers and school, parental influence seems to be the single most important social systemic influence for this sample of female and male adolescents. Several authors (e.g., Amoateng, 1997; Makosana, 2001) have highlighted the strength and continuing nature of black South African families’ traditional value system that encourages family support and a sense of cohesion within families. The previous statement collaborates international research that, while emphasising the influential role of both teachers and peers (e.g., Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Turner, 2007) in the career development of adolescents, has acknowledged parents (e.g., Bregman & Killen, 1999) as having considerably more influence on their adolescent children.

In fact, career theory (e.g., Ali, McWhirter, & Chronister, 2005) and a considerable number of research studies on the social system influences of adolescents’ career development have focused on the importance of family (e.g., Bullington & Arbona, 2001;
Tang, 2002; Turner, 2007). More specifically, several family variables have been shown to have significant influence on adolescents’ career development, such as parent-child relationship, parental education, and parental support. South African studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) have underscored the considerable influence and importance of parents in adolescents’ career development. Therefore, the attention received by parents and family in career theory and research, as well as the results from the present study, reinforce the significant importance that parents play in their adolescents’ career development.

Previous research also suggests that parents influence their children in various and complex ways, with psychological variables (e.g., parental support and encouragement) having a stronger impact than demographic variables (Young & Friesen, 1992). Concerning this latter finding, the present participants come from a low socioeconomic status environment and, although this environmental-societal influence (to be discussed later) is often seen as a significant influence, parental support, encouragement and other psychological variables of parents may be a stronger influence on their career development than demographic variables such as socioeconomic status. In agreement, Ackermann and Botha’s (1998) study on the role family plays in the career development of black adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment is shown as important.

Concerning previous research regarding teachers, both international (Gushue & Whitson, 2006) and national (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006; Stead & Watson, 1993) research concurs with the present study’s finding of the importance of teachers to adolescents’ career development. Unfortunately, many black schools in low socioeconomic status areas are overcrowded, lacking in financial resources and have a shortage of teachers. Hence, knowing the important role teachers play in adolescents’ career development, the socioeconomic status of adolescents can seriously impact on their career development. Mathabe and Temane (1993) also express their concern by stating that South African schools have a considerably weak
teacher-parent relationship, and that negligible involvement of parents has a severe impact on black adolescents’ career development.

*Moderate influences*

As can be seen in the major social influences, some social influences such as parents have received considerable attention in career theory and research, while other social system influences such as the media have been neglected. The limited research there is on television, a form of media, has shown television to have a positive influence on the occupational aspirations of adolescents (e.g., Hoffner et al., 2006, Signorielli, 1993). Results from the present study indicate that the influence of both television and reading were selected by less than half of all participants, with these influences receiving the lowest and second lowest ratings of importance. Looking at these adolescents’ economic situation, it can be hypothesised that, due to lack of finances and limited resources, books/newspapers and television may not be freely available. Therefore, this could have played a role in the present findings. With regards to a national study on adolescents from a middle socioeconomic status environment (Kuit, 2006), a larger percentage of these adolescents considered reading and television as influential, with reading falling into the highest category of influence. Socioeconomic status could be an explanation, thus, for the differences in results between the two studies.

The social system influence that was least selected to be of influence was friends, which is in accordance with the limited life role theme for friends and the limited support received from friends when adolescents make career decisions, as identified in Chapter 5. Several authors have drawn attention to the social environment of an adolescent as composing peer groups (Kenny & Bledsoe, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006), and career research has acknowledged the positive influence of friends but has also indicated that the degree of influence of friends appears less significant than family influences (Paa & Whirter, 2000;
Turner, 2007). Considering the results regarding help with decision-making (see Chapter 5), the participants from this study indicated that family and school people are considered to be of more help than friends. These latter results, as well as the results from the social system, are in line with previous research studies described earlier.

The influence of youth leader was selected by a third of the total sample, although the rating of importance was considerably higher. Although there is limited previous international research on the influence of youth leaders, two national research studies (Dullabh, 2004; Kuit, 2006) concur that youth leader is considered as being less influential to South African adolescents’ career development.

Reflection process

Regarding the MSCI’s reflection process, the participants’ conclusions revealed that the social system influences (as well as the individual system influences) received considerably greater reflection than did themes related to the environmental-societal system influences. More specifically, the participants from Grade 10 were seen to choose more social system influences than individual system influences.

The overall findings within the social system influences suggest that the present participants could readily identify and evaluate the impact of social system influences on their career development when given the opportunity to do so. These findings regarding the high importance of parents by the black participants are supported by previous research that acknowledges the strong sense of support within black families (Van Vuuren, 1997). Also, the extent of influence of social system influences as subjectively evaluated by these adolescents suggests that the earlier identified intrapersonal influences cannot be disassociated from the social context within which they are expressed and evaluated. In addition to the participants acknowledging their intrapersonal characteristics that impact on their career development, they also recognise that social influences (e.g., parents and
teachers) contribute to their career development as well. Discussion relating to a broader system, identified by the STF as the environmental-societal system, will now be discussed.

The Environmental-Societal System

Although the influences within the environmental-societal system may seem less directly related to the individual, these influences can in fact be profound (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). However, their influence on career development is less clearly understood, mainly because many of the influences identified in the environmental-societal system of the STF have received less attention in career theory and research to date. As with the results from the individual and social system, participants across all three grade levels considered all environmental-societal system influences as influential to some degree on their career development.

The highest frequency counts for environmental-societal system influences across the three grade levels indicated that overseas work opportunities and financial support are considered of major influence by the total sample, with both financial support and financial cost considered to be of greatest importance for these participants. Local area, availability of jobs and location of university were all selected as moderately influential to the participants’ career development. Financial cost was the only minor influence. Further discussion of these influences will now follow.

Major influences

To reiterate, the two environmental-societal system influences that emerged as major influences for the participants are overseas work opportunities and financial support, with both financial support and financial cost considered to be of greatest importance. Although financial cost received the highest rating of importance, it was not considered as influential as the other social system influences. It can be hypothesised that the majority of participants are aware of their lack of financial stability (hence the high influence of financial support) and
perhaps acknowledge the overall need for financial support with regards to their career development. Perhaps the minority of participants have made more conclusive and specific decisions about how they plan to develop their careers thus researching the cost of options and acknowledging this as an importance influence to their career development.

Socioeconomic status is an important environmental-societal influence that has been acknowledged as influential in career theory (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Roberts, 2005). Roberts (2005) comments that socioeconomic status may influence the nature of schooling received, employment opportunities and access to career information, all of which impacts on an individual’s career development. Also, socioeconomic influences have gained the attention of several career researchers (e.g., Blustein et al., 2002; Brown, 2004; Fouad & Brown, 2000; Rojewski & Kim, 2003; Wahl & Blackhurst, 2000). In their review of career research, Wahl and Blackhurst (2000) established that socioeconomic status played a central role in determining educational and occupational aspirations within children and adolescents. In agreement, Schulenberg, Vondracek, and Crouter’s (1984) review on contextual influences revealed that one of the most powerful and consistent environmental predictors of occupational aspirations and attainment is socioeconomic status.

Remembering that the present participants come from a low socioeconomic status environment where financial resources are limited, it is understandable that financial support is seen as a considerable influence on whether they can further their education and fulfil their chosen career path. The unequal distribution of public educational resources, coupled with preexisting economic constraints on black families, has resulted in limited educational opportunities and lower attainment for blacks (Lam, 1999; Thomas, 1996). This can be seen in the country’s low pass rate (65.2%) in the recent matriculation examinations, with the Eastern Cape having the second lowest pass rate in the country (57.1%). Therefore, it can be seen that this influence can have extensive impact on these participants’ overall career
development. This consideration of financial support may be interlinked with and recursively reinforced by other environmental-societal influences. Additionally, it was shown in the earlier section on social influences that adolescents’ socioeconomic status can impact on the school they attend, thereby determining the quality and quantity of the school’s resources, such as teachers and books. Also, because of deprived economic environments, there may be few reading materials available and less opportunity to watch television, hence such variables being less of an influence on their career development.

Although overseas work opportunities is seen as a major influence for the present participants, these participants come from disadvantaged backgrounds and, for the majority of them, their financial restraints will restrict them from furthering their career development aspirations of working overseas. It can be hypothesised that the present participants may have unrealistic expectations regarding their future career goals to work overseas and their current low socioeconomic status. Having said this, these adolescents may view going overseas to work as a way out of their current negative financial situation. It seems to be that the present sample’s general belief is that there are more work opportunities overseas and higher paying salaries than in South Africa where limited employment opportunities is a known reality. This is in line with Rojewski’s study (1994a), which found that adolescents from lower socioeconomic status groups rated the compensations of work as being of great importance. Financial support, or lack thereof, can open or close doors of opportunity for adolescents, thereby influencing their career development substantially.

**Moderate influences**

Regarding local area, less than half of the participants selected local area as being an influence on their career development. Examples of this influence include employment opportunities and available public transport. Therefore, limited employment opportunities in the South African labour market, as well as a potentially limited infrastructure in the low
socioeconomic areas, can have a considerable impact on the future career development of adolescents. Again, the consideration of one environmental-societal influence such as local area may be interlinked with and recursively reinforced by other environmental-societal influences, such as financial support, financial cost and overseas work opportunities. Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) explain political, socioeconomic, historical and geographic influences can have profound effects on individuals. For example, government decisions on funding in a certain area can impact on the quality of infrastructure, education and several other factors, hence being influential to an individual’s career development.

Although local area, availability of jobs and location of university were all selected as moderately influential to the participants’ career development, these influences are interlinked with other environmental-societal influences, especially socioeconomic status. The diverse inequalities of apartheid continue to play a role in adolescents’ career development (Nicholas, Naidoo, & Pretorius, 2006). The geographic location of previously marginalised groups contributes to challenges with regards to limited transportation options and accessibility to educational institutions. Thus, residing far away from a university and having limited public transport options can impact on an individual’s career choice and career development. Location of university is considered influential by only a third of the participants, whereas more middle class participants in Kuit’s (2006) study selected location of university as influential. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that tertiary education options may be more influential to adolescents from middle socioeconomic status, as compared to the present participants from a low socioeconomic status environment. Having said this, some participants not indicating location of university as influential in their career development may in fact be considering tertiary education possibilities but are not affected by the practical restraints of the location of universities.
Regarding the environmental-societal system, it has been highlighted that environmental-societal influences need to be understood holistically by considering all possible historical, economic, and political influences that may be directly or indirectly impacting on an adolescents’ career development. Nicholas, Pretorius, and Naidoo (2006) have suggested that the inequalities of apartheid in South Africa have led to differential access to education and career opportunities for the different cultural groups.

**Minor influences**

To reiterate, financial cost was seen as a minor influence on the overall sample’s career development, but it was rated as having the greatest importance. This influence was discussed under the major influences as it interlinked with some of the other environmental-societal influences. Overall, the environmental-societal system results indicate that the present participants could readily identify and evaluate the impact of environmental-societal system influences on their career development when given the opportunity to do so. Although some influences from this system have received little attention in career research and career theory, the majority of findings within this study are supported by previous theory and research.

**Reflection process**

Out of the three systems, themes related to the *environmental-societal system influences* received the least instances of reflection by the participants. This is consistent with the earlier analysis of the present career situation (the first part of the MSCI workbook), which suggested that participants could readily identify the impact of individual and social influences on their current career situation, but did not consider the significance of environmental-societal influences. Having said this, it could be argued that working through the MSCI workbook has encouraged a greater awareness in participants of the impact of the environmental-societal system of influences on their career development. This proposed effect of the MSCI workbook seems consistent with an additional theme that emerged across
the grade levels called *degree and effect of influences*. This theme relates to participants’ reflections of being surprised by or becoming newly aware of how much the various systems of influence presented in the MSCI have played a role in their career development. The following section will discuss the influences relating to the past, present and future.

*Past, Present and Future Influences*

Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) emphasise the process influences of recursiveness, change over time and chance. These authors acknowledge the potential impact of multidirectional movements, as well as the integral role of past, present and future influences. Results regarding past, present and future influences demonstrated some general themes across the three grade levels. In the first instance, none of the participants across all grade levels selected any past influences as having an impact on their career development. It is noted that the participants rarely modified or added their own influences to any of the three systems throughout the MSCI workbook. This consistent theme of mainly selecting from the proposed influences suggests that, since there were no *past influences* proposed in this particular section, this could have contributed to the adolescents not offering any qualitative information about their influential past influences.

It can be further hypothesised that asking the participants to modify or add their own past influences may have required more thinking from the participants rather than selecting a proposed influence, thereby resulting in no past influences being acknowledged. This finding regarding the lack of identified past influences is also consistent with Kuit’s (2006) study, which highlighted that none of the participants from that particular sample volunteered information about the impact of past influences on their career development. Also, Dullabh’s (2004) study only noted two minor past influences, with 68% of that particular sample suggesting that there were no past influences impacting on their career development.
In contrast to past and present influences, the majority of the adolescents considered the influence of future-orientated factors as more significant than past and present influences. This can also be seen in the two South African studies by Dullabh (2004) and Kuit (2006). The same hypothesis that was offered in regard to the lack of past influences can also be applied to the fact that there were more future than present influences available to be considered by the participants. Since there were three proposed future influences and only one proposed present influence in the MSCI, the adolescents had more opportunity to consider and select from future than present influences.

Regarding future influences, only a small portion of the participants selected that they did not want to move away from where they lived, with a larger majority of the participants focusing on working overseas in their future, which corresponds with the results from the environmental-societal system influences where the participants considered overseas work opportunities as influential. This suggests that some future influences on the career development of this sample of adolescents are recursively supported by some of the environmental-societal influences identified earlier. Dullabh (2004) also indicated that the desire to work overseas was the major theme that was identified by adolescents in her sample. Another major theme in Dullabh’s study was the desire to combine family and work. Similarly, Kuit (2006) indicated that adolescents in his South African research selected this influence, although combining family and work was the lowest of three future influences. The highest was anticipated lifestyle, followed by the desire to work overseas as a future influence. In the present study, the influence of wanting to combine family and work was also selected as a major influence and rated as of greater importance across all grade levels. Although anticipated lifestyle was not selected by the majority of the sample, it was rated as important by those who selected it. Additionally, eight adolescents across the three grade
levels added an influence named *I want to move away from where I live*, as this additional influence was seen to be impacting on their present career decisions and career development.

**Summary**

In relation to the findings of the present study, the participants’ career development status indicates that they are in the process of exploring and crystallising their career choice. This is consistent with Super’s Exploration stage of career development (Super et al., 1996). Exploration and crystallisation are clearly evident in the participants’ responses, with several of them indicating that their present career situation involved making choices regarding school subjects and thinking about career options. Some participants were also thinking about studying further or getting a part-time job to earn money in order to finance tertiary education costs so that they could further their career development. With several influences impacting on their career development, the STF offered the participants the opportunity to explore and understand the complex interrelationship of influences that may impact on their career development.

The MSCI workbook, which is based on the theoretical structure of the STF, was shown to assist the participants in identifying and evaluating significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development to date. Furthermore, a wide range of subjectively evaluated and identified career influences could be identified by the MSCI across the individual, social and environmental-societal contexts of the participants’ lives. The research findings clearly suggest that working through the MSCI workbook encouraged a greater awareness in participants of the impact of their systems of influences on their career development.

Whereas most participants initially located their career development at an intrapersonal and social level, the MSCI ultimately encouraged and stimulated participants to consider variables from the environmental-societal system (a relatively under-represented career
research focus to date). Also, participants reported being surprised by or being made newly aware of how much the systems of influence presented in the MSCI have played a role in their career-related experiences and career development. Regarding the MSCI’s reflection process, the responses of the participants suggested that the MSCI provided them with an opportunity to reflect both cognitively and affectively on their personalised diagram in order to holistically understand their interrelated systems of influences that impact on their unique career development.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that the STF provides the necessary theoretical foundation for attempting to explore and describe the many systemic and interrelated influences on the career development of black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. The usefulness of the STF lies in its emphasis on both content and process. Regarding content, this framework identified a range of significant influences, based on the three interrelated systems (i.e., the individual, social and environmental-societal systems), which were applicable to the participants and to their context. Regarding process, the STF identified the existence of the recursive interaction processes within the adolescent and within the context, as well as between the adolescent and the context.

Regarding the strengths of the present study, this study has resulted in a more holistic understanding of the influences impacting on the career development of black South African adolescents from a low socioeconomic status environment. This study has also highlighted the usefulness of utilising the research tool, the MSCI, to explore and describe the career development of adolescents in a South African context. This study, therefore, contributes towards addressing some of the criticisms of previous research by understanding the complexity and uniqueness of black South African adolescents, a group that has been previously marginalised.
Limitations

In order to critically evaluate the present study’s conclusions and research findings, it is important to examine the limitations of the present study. A major limitation is the generalisability of the results. Such generalisation is limited as all participants were from a similar low socioeconomic status environment and were limited to a restricted geographical area in South Africa.

Another limitation is that the participants for this study were drawn from only one secondary school. It is presumed that every school is a distinct system that has its own unique structure, with a varying range of overt and covert influencing variables. For example, a particular school may be encouraging a certain sport to be played or a certain school subject to be chosen. Some schools in low socioeconomic areas have a shortage of staff and this may result in the lack of a teacher in a particular subject which then influences the students’ subject choice and ultimately their career options. Hence, drawing participants from one school may have impacted on the results of this study, although the extent and range of influences remains unknown to the present researcher. One would therefore need to interpret the results of this study with caution, as the results could possibly be more a reflection of the system and influences of this particular school. Perhaps researching a larger sample of adolescents across a variety of secondary schools within a similar socioeconomic status environment would have minimised the potential overt and covert influences within a particular school.

Generally, there is limited international and national research on adolescents’ career development using the STF that focuses on adolescents from a low socio-economic status environment. Therefore, the findings of this study could largely not be examined against the findings of previous studies. A further limitation to this study’s conclusions is that the
findings are limited to the extent to which the participants provide comprehensive accounts of their unique career experiences and influences.

Regarding the MSCI, the limited (or lack of) proposed past and present influences offered in the *Thinking about my past, present and future* section of the workbook is hypothesised to have contributed to the limited responses given by the present participants. It is suggested that additional past and present options be included in this section of the MSCI in order to gain a richer understanding of the past and present influences on adolescents’ career development. There is a trend for the present participants to respond only within the given structure of the MSCI. Perhaps the MSCI needs to build in a clearer example or exercise that encourages a wider diversity of responses from adolescents.

Further limitations to this present study include extraneous variables such as transport problems and illness. Both of these variables impacted on the consistency at which the adolescents were able to be accessible for the three days required for the completion of the MSCI workbook. The problem of lack of transport and illness resulted in some adolescents not completing their workbook. Not only did this make their workbook unusable for analysis but it also gave them a limited and incomplete introduction into understanding their career development. Other extraneous variables that could have limited the study’s results are the time of day that the fieldwork commenced (i.e., after school each day may have caused decreased energy levels and lower motivation), and the four-day interval between the second and third session of the data collection. All of these factors may have potentially caused limitations to this study, although the extent of their potential influence is unknown to the present researcher.

**Recommendations For Future Research**

Within the South African context, it would be interesting to examine the differences in career development between adolescents from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it
is recommended that cross-cultural studies be conducted that examine similarities and differences in the systemic influences of adolescents coming from a variety of socioeconomic status and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, it would be interesting to conduct international comparison studies between adolescents with a similar profile but residing in different countries. In view of the lack of research on environmental-societal system influences, these studies would also enhance the understanding of how environmental-societal influences impact on the career development of individuals from different countries. Specifically in relation to South Africa, with the impact of environmental-societal influences on the career development of South African adolescents gradually becoming a more prominent focus of recent national career research, future researchers should continue to emphasise critical career issues that are pertinent to South Africa, such as unemployment, economic factors and the role of culture in career choice and development.

This study has reinforced the significant contribution and positive value of both the STF as a theory integrating framework and the MSCI as a qualitative career assessment measure in understanding the complex systems of career influences that contribute to adolescents’ career development. Having said this, continuing research is recommended in order to further explore the systemic influences of career development within diverse social and cultural contexts, and with individuals at different developmental stages, who are positioned in various career situations.

If career development is a continuous process that lasts the length of an individual’s lifetime, a true understanding of this process requires a holistic approach that offers a subjective evaluation of an individual’s career influences and career development within a systemic context. With this in mind, and with valuable resources such as the STF and the MSCI, it is important that South African children and adolescents (particularly disadvantaged
individuals) are given encouragement and the opportunity to continue their career exploration and career development throughout their schooling years and into adulthood.
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Appendix A

Information Letter to Principal

Principal of Loyiso Secondary School

Attention: Principal

My name is Clare Geijsendorpher and I am completing a Masters degree in psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. My research study aims to explore and describe the systems of influence on career development in adolescents from a career systems perspective. I am seeking permission for a group of adolescents (Grade 10, 11 and 12) from your school to participate in this study. Permission to conduct this study has been granted by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

The measure to be used is the “My System of Career Influences” (MSCI) Workbook. The MSCI is a qualitative career assessment measure that draws on the Systems Theory Framework of career development. The MSCI is an eleven-page workbook consisting of a sequence of well-defined sections. The workbook firstly requires the participants to complete a biographical section before commencing to the next section, which offers a range of open-ended questions relating to the participants’ present career situations. The rest of the booklet requires participants to complete diagrams, which specifically relate to several key interrelated systems, including the intrapersonal system of the individual, the social system, and the environmental/societal system.

The participants will be given the opportunity to complete this workbook within a group setting facilitated by trained and experienced bilingual postgraduate facilitators (fluent in English and Xhosa). It is anticipated that the administration of the MSCI will be conducted...
over three sessions (an introductory session, a session in which to complete the MSCI, and a third session for debriefing and reflecting on the experience).

All information obtained will be treated in confidence. Participation in this study is of a voluntary nature. Any participant is free to decline to participate and may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. We would greatly appreciate your involvement in this research study, and we hope you will enjoy the experience with us.

If you have any further enquiries, please feel free to contact me on (041) 504-2330.

Kind regards,

______________________________  ____________________________
Mrs. C. Geijsendorpher          Prof. M. B. Watson
Researcher                     Research Supervisor
Dear Potential Participant

My name is Clare Geijsendorpher and I am completing a Masters degree in psychology at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. My research study aims to explore and describe the systems of influence on career development in adolescents from a career systems perspective. Permission to conduct this study has been granted by the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. All information obtained will be treated in confidence. Participation in this study is of a voluntary nature.

I am interested in the unique account of your career development thus far and I would like to work together with you in further understanding what, and who, have influenced you in your decisions concerning your career. Therefore, I would like to invite you to complete a workbook for me.

The workbook will be completed over three sessions during your normal guidance periods. Your responses in the workbook will be treated in the strictest of confidence. You are thus free to complete all questions as honestly and openly as possible.

If you are willing to complete the workbook, please sign the letter attached.

_____________________________  _______________________
Mrs. C. Geijsendorpher          Prof. M. B. Watson
Researcher                     Research Supervisor
Appendix C

Informed Consent for a Psychological Research Study

I, (Name & Surname of Guardian/parent) _______________________, voluntarily grant my
consent to allow (Name and Surname of Participant)_________________________________
to participate in an exploratory study to be conducted by Clare Geijsendorpher who is
presently completing her treatise at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Department
of Psychology as a requirement for her Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology. I have read
the letter explaining the purpose of the research study and I understand that participation will
involve the completion of the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook.

I understand that (Name & Surname of Participant)_________________________________
is free to decline to participate and may withdraw from the study at any time without
prejudice.

I understand that all the information obtained will be treated in the strictest confidence and
that no names will be used in any reports about the study.

I understand that I can contact Clare Geijsendorpher on (041) 504-2330 for more information
about the study.

_________________________________               __________________________________
Print Name                                      Signature

___________________
Date