THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF SOUTH AFRICAN
GRADE 11 ADOLESCENTS:
A CAREER SYSTEMS AND DISCURSIVE PERSPECTIVE

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In loving memory of Miriam Lithins...

A great storyteller.
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SUMMARY

Career psychology in South Africa has traditionally been constituted by the vocabularies, assessment methods, counselling practices and research objectives of the modernist-positivist paradigm. This paradigm has produced a rich but disparate and fragmented range of career theories, research perspectives and career education practices that have been limited in their consideration and integration of the broad range of contextual factors that influence the career development of South African adolescents in unique ways. This limitation has had, and still has, the potential of promoting prescriptive and disqualifying constructions of career development for South African youth. A search for alternatives to traditional modernist-positivist understandings of career has led, however, to a further fragmentation of the career field into what can broadly be termed qualitative and quantitative approaches. This twofold fragmentation, as well as the dynamic complexity of the world of work in the twenty-first century, has inspired this study’s investigation of an integrating framework that employs a wide range of career theoretical perspectives in the service of constructing experience-near accounts of the complex and fluid interrelationship between individual career makers and their specific social, environmental and societal contexts.

The present study has therefore employed the Systems Theory Framework (STF) in investigating and co-constructing representations of the career development of a group of South African adolescents in a way that acknowledges their unique systems of career influence and discursive contexts. The research adopted an exploratory-descriptive design in collaborating with the participants in this investigation. In the first phase of the study a sample of 70 grade 11 male and female adolescents from middle socio-economic status environments were invited to complete the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook in representing systemic constructions of their career development. Tesch’s model of qualitative content analysis and frequency counts has been used to re-present that process to you in this text.

In the second phase of the study the researcher collaborated with one participant in a systemic narrative career counselling process. During this process an account of the participant’s career narrative was co-constructed in conversations guided by a post-structural narrative approach to career counselling and the MSCI’s structuring of the participant’s complex systems of influence. The co-constructed account was critically examined according to Parker’s approach to discourse analysis. The second phase investigated how the counselling and research processes had positioned the participant in relation to her influential systems and their privileged discourses of career.
development. The study is particularly pertinent to a growing need for the development of respectful, critical and non-discriminatory career assessment, career research and career counselling collaborations between professionals and career makers navigating the unique and diverse South African context.

Key words: Context-sensitive, Systems Theory Framework, Adolescent Career Development, Discourse, Narrative.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

From the outset of this text it is important to achieve a broad consensus of meaning with regards to one of this study’s most central concepts, that of career. Debates within the field of career psychology are expanding and revising what the term career should and does signify. Certain voices in the field have suggested that the construct career has limited utility due to the fact that it has occupational, elitist, or economic connotations that cannot be realized by many people (Young & Valach, 2004). To avoid such elitist connotations and to broaden the range of experiences and relationships that might be included in career-related research, the meaning of the term career has been expanded in this study to include life roles, social interactions and life purposes and values that extend beyond strictly occupational activities and aspirations. This expansion of the meaning of career makes this construct open to negotiation and re-vision within particular and unique semantic contexts. Admittedly, in a colloquial sense the term career has at times been used by participants in this study, as well as by the researcher, to signify particular occupational and professional roles. In spite of this, the study does not limit what it means to have a career to having an occupation. Ultimately the present study proposes that descriptions and constructions of career’s identity are always partial, contextually situated and subject to ambiguity and revision.

Researcher’s Invitation

Before I provide an account of the ideas, hopes and intentions that have guided me in the research endeavour re-presented to you in the following pages, I would like to invite you to consider the following questions: How would you describe your career? If you are still aspiring towards a particular occupation, life role, personal project or life purpose, how would you describe what you aspire to be and do in your career? Maybe you are in the process of making changes in your career. How would you account for that change and describe the place where you stand in relation to your past and future career? Are there certain words, images or gestures that effectively capture and sufficiently represent what you are and do, or want to do in your career? If I were to meet with you today, how would you, in telling me your career story, select from the multitude of events, relationships, influences and personal experiences that have resulted in your answers to the previous questions? You may have found these questions difficult to answer in any conclusive manner. It may have proved challenging to construct a comprehensive and inclusive account of the complex web of relationships and activities that constitute the past, present and possible future of your unfolding
career story. Yet this is the kind of challenge facing individuals (including the adolescent research participants that you will encounter in this study) as they negotiate and construct their careers within a world of work in the twenty-first century, characterized by diversity, plurality and rapid global, socio-economic and technological change (Savickas, 1993). It is also this complex challenge that has spurred on the current study to investigate how individuals can be ethically and respectfully assisted in the selection, shaping and constitution of their preferred careers within the world today.

With this in mind I also extend a further invitation to you as the reader to consider how the findings, discussion and research activities of this investigation relate to your own career experiences within your own present context, your own history and your own possible future. I also invite you to intermittently reflect and evaluate whether the activities, proposals and suggestions of this study are useful to you or not. In doing this you are encouraged to evaluate the merit and usefulness of this study from an experience-near perspective. In the following section I will provide a description of what has motivated, guided and constituted the current study.

From Fragmentation To Critical Collaboration

Researchers and practitioners who position themselves in the field of psychology face the ever evolving and complex challenge of engendering useful theoretical, practical and ethical options for collaborating with society in navigating the fragmentation of once universal values, the plurality of consumable lifestyle options, and the inequitable socio-economic conditions that characterize what has been described as the *postmodern condition* (Jameson, 1985; Lyotard, 1984; Thrift & Amundson, 2005). It is increasingly being proposed that the political, economic and cultural landscape of the twenty-first century is characterized by multiplicity and the *absence* of a metanarrative or an all-encompassing framework that can cohere in providing the universal norms, morals and life principles to which all people can adhere in constructing the so called *good* life. What does all this imply for career psychology researchers and practitioners? What should be the foundation for useful contributions from the career field if it is to respond to the challenges described above? These questions become especially pertinent in light of developments in the social sciences where the absence of a universal *theoretical* framework has also been reflected (Parker, 1989). Researchers and practitioners in the field of psychology have interrogated the grand narrative of objectivist science (Savickas, 1993) and the core assumptions of modernist empiricism for their inability to provide appropriate maps for negotiating and embracing the aforementioned complexity and cultural multiplicity.
In recent years, a number of proponents in the field of career psychology have pursued this critique and developed what can broadly be termed qualitative forms of research, career assessment and career counselling approaches (see the special issue of the Journal of Career Assessment, 2005, Volume 13). A major focus of qualitative approaches has been to provide alternatives to the reductionist effects and apolitical assumptions of traditional quantitative empirical career research, assessment and counselling practices. Qualitative perspectives suggest that traditional trait-factor approaches, as well as normative developmental theories, are limited in their capacity to account for the socio-cultural, political and economic variables that impact on how individuals and communities co-construct and attribute significance to their careers in a postmodern landscape (Palladino Schultheiss, 2005). From the perspective of a qualitative approach to career the quantitative tradition has thus left us with decontextualized descriptions of career identity. Furthermore, as Savickas (1997) argues, “the empirical tradition of rational career counselling does not encompass complex human qualities such as spirit, consciousness and purpose” (p. 9). This critique is not based, however, on theoretical notions of academics alone but located in and supported by the experiences of individuals. As stated by the research participant to be introduced to you later in the current study:

I think the people that set the tests…I don’t know whether they think you already know what you want to do…I don’t know. Like you said I’m very versatile so you have to answer questions and then the highest categories will be your category 1 or category 2. And I’ll have sort of four or five categories and that doesn’t help me. So from that point of view I can’t really narrow it down. So the tests are sort of for people who can go in one direction or already know where they want to go. I find that doesn’t help me. Like for the one um... you’ve got to write down your interests or something and you’ve got to put them in little blocks or categories. And I had like artistic and creative and scientific and you know everything. It doesn’t help!

Various embodiments of the qualitative wave in career psychology, including constructivist (Young & Collin, 2004), social constructionist (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004), post-structuralist (Winslade, 2005), hermeneutic-dialogical (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000), and hermeneutic-narrative (Thrift & Amundson, 2005) approaches have consequently carried with them a focus on the subjective meanings and purposes that
individuals and their communities attribute to their career stories, as well as the impact of the social, relational and systemic contexts on where and how such career stories are constructed and lived. In placing the emphasis on the local and contextual meanings, influences and practices of career, qualitative career assessment, research and counselling approaches have provided useful and creative options for a way forward in a splintered existence. Such contextually located understandings of career tend to reveal and resist western normative career theory’s disqualification of diverse cultural and personal ideas about career, and to facilitate the expression of alternative and shared career practices for individuals and their communities.

Having said this, qualitative career perspectives have for the majority left another form of fragmentation un-addressed and possibly even exacerbated. This other form of fragmentation is that of the vast body of career theory and practice proposals that have been generated in the field over many years (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005). From a qualitative perspective the majority of traditional career psychology theory, practice and research, with its emphasis on quantifiable results and test scores, runs counter to the aims of meaning-focussed and relational-contextual approaches. Qualitative career approaches have thus had the tendency to split off from career psychology’s fragmented history, leaving an already fragmented discipline with even less cohesion. For the purposes of juxtaposition to the dominant career tradition, qualitative perspectives have here been grouped together. However, the extensive variety of qualitative career perspectives and practices emerging in career psychology (see the special issue of the Journal of Career Assessment, 2005, Volume 13) leads to an even further fragmentation of an already segmented field. Some may argue that this is a necessary plurality demanded by a plural postmodern existence. Others have suggested, however, that dichotomously grouping qualitative approaches to career within a postmodern category, and quantitative approaches to career within a traditional-modernist category oversimplifies a far more complex situation (Watson & McMahon, 2005). Ultimately, the field of career psychology is left with fragmentation and, as will be proposed in this study, a need for resources that could offer greater coherence and unity in navigating a complex situation.

What are the consequences for qualitative researchers and practitioners (and their research participants and clients) of positioning the insights from a history of career research and practice into an opposing camp? And if what is potentially useful from that history is not to be discarded altogether, how can the career tradition be transformed and integrated to still provide valuable reference points for career researchers and career
practitioners who collaborate with their participants and clients in negotiating the dynamic and changing world of their careers?

**Purposes and Aims**

The current study’s purposes and aims have considered these questions and have been guided largely by the hope of finding collaborative and mutually enhancing relationships between the prolific history of career psychology, on the one hand, and the critical theoretical and practice-based developments that have emerged from an awareness of the limitations of what was produced in that history, on the other hand. The study has endeavoured therefore to find user-friendly and practically orientated ways of integrating and capitalizing on the professional career theory knowledge generated by the field, while using that knowledge in the service of empowering individuals (i.e. the research participants) within their unique and evolving career contexts. In a sense, the study has attempted to find a space beyond the *binary* between quantitative and qualitative approaches to career research, assessment and counselling practice by showing how a comprehensive qualitative career assessment framework can integrate and accommodate a range of career theoretical perspectives in a way that such perspectives are used in the service of constructing experience-near accounts of career (Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss, & Flum, 2004) within individuals’ intrapersonal, social, and societal/environmental contexts.

**From Integrationist Theory to Critical Practice**

Before a description and outline is provided of how the study organized itself around the abovementioned purposes, it is important to highlight that the study has also been guided by an *ethical* and *political* orientation towards the career assessment and counselling practices that might emanate from the theoretical integration of the qualitative meaning-focused and career theoretical paradigms described above. The integrationist thrust of the current study has not been located therefore at a theoretical level only. The *practice-based* implications for qualitative career assessment that draws from a career tradition have also been critically explored in the current study. What is further presented is a reflexive scrutiny that critically examines the career counselling practices that have here been suggested as necessary in furthering the aims of such forms of career assessment. In other words, throughout the following pages the study has aimed to consider what the real implications were/are of its theoretical claims by investigating how such claims could translate into beneficial/limiting outcomes for the participants in taking part in the research activities. The study thereby aligns itself with
a particular understanding of postmodern career psychology that resists relativistic arguments put forward by certain postmodernists. As Gergen (1992) states:

Postmodern consciousness by demystifying the great narrative of modernism, (it) attempts to bring psychologists and society more closely together. Not only is technology placed more directly and openly in the service of values; more important, the psychologist is encouraged to join in forms of valuational advocacy, and to develop new intelligibilities that present new options to the culture. (p. 28)

An important agenda of valuational advocacy in the current study has been to promote and explore theoretical and practice-based alternatives to those that produce deficit descriptions of individuals who do not conform to normative developmental and cultural constructions of career as these are supported by career theory and society more generally. The broad structure that framed the specific aims and research activities that aligned themselves with this agenda will be briefly outlined in the next section.

Structure of the Study

Figure 1 below offers a diagrammatic representation of the structure of the current study that serves as a guide to the following description of that structure. The present study can be viewed as structured according to two broad interrelated categories of theory and practice. The first theory category consists of two interrelated phases that together explore the conceptual and theoretical collaboration potential between, on the one hand, an integrationist qualitative career assessment framework known as the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999) and, on the other hand, a post-structuralist narrative approach to conceptualizing career and conducting a career counselling process (Winslade, 2005). Chapter Two constitutes the first theory phase of the study and provides a comprehensive explanation and description of the STF. The chapter then opens a preliminary discussion of potentially useful relationships between the systems and the narrative metaphors for career assessment and counselling. Chapter Three immerses the study in the implications and assumptions of a narrative, post-structural approach to career counselling and career construction. This chapter explores the concepts of narrative and career discourse and their shaping effects on how individuals are positioned within systems of career influence.
Figure 1
Structure of Study

INTRODUCTION (CHAPTER 1)

THEORY

PHASE 1 (CHAPTER 2)

PHASE 2 (CHAPTER 3)

RESEARCH REVIEW (CHAPTER 4)

METHODOLOGY (CHAPTER 5)

PRACTICE

PHASE 1 (CHAPTER 6)

PHASE 2 (CHAPTER 7)

CATEGORY

CONCLUSION (CHAPTER 8)
The chapter then further extends the theory and practice implications of a systems and narrative metaphor for career in describing a *systemic narrative career counselling* process.

Before the study investigates and provides an account of the research activities that constituted the second *practice* category of the study, Chapter Four provides an overview or re-view of adolescent career research conducted over the last ten to twenty years, both internationally and nationally. The review has been categorized and structured according to a systemic framework and investigates the dominant trends in research focus (i.e. which career variables/influences have been researched) and methodology (i.e. what methods and methodological assumptions have been adopted). In identifying trends, the review points to gaps in and emerging horizons of career research, which the current study has aimed to address.

In Chapter Five the aims, methodological perspectives and strategies adopted in the current study are explored. This method chapter also shows how the aims and methods of the current study reflect the interrelated two-phase structure according to which the study has been presented.

The conceptual-theoretical collaboration described in Chapters Two and Three is then investigated in terms of how this translates into action in the second of the broad categories of the study, namely *practice*. This practice category is also subdivided into two interrelated phases. The primary emphasis for both phases of the practice category has been on the benefit for participants of taking part in the research activities. Nevertheless, the analyses of these two practice phases have aimed to expand on the theoretical relationships identified in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Six constitutes the first phase of the practice category and explores the use of the Systems Theory Framework (STF) for group-based qualitative career assessment of adolescents in the form of the My Systems of Career Influences workbook (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005a). A themed analysis of this group-based assessment intervention has also been produced and re-presented. Chapter Seven re-presents the second and related phase of the practice category that critically investigates the implications of adopting a post-structural narrative approach to career counselling with a research participant. The aforementioned narrative approach was integrated and preceded by the participant’s engagement with the MSCI and resulted in what has been dubbed a *systemic narrative career counselling process*. A discourse analysis of that process has been constructed in extrapolating a discursive-systemic perspective of adolescent career development.
In conclusion, Chapter Eight presents an evaluative reflection on the extent to which the aims and purpose of the study have been addressed. The extent to which the current study has addressed the emerging trends and gaps in adolescent career research, identified in Chapter Four, will also be broadly outlined. The research participant’s (from phase two of the practice category) own reflections on the usefulness for her of the career assessment and counselling practices promoted by the current study, are also provided. Also in Chapter Eight are presented the limitations of the research study and recommendations for further research projects. What follows is the first phase of the theory category of the study in Chapter Two.
CHAPTER 2
A SYSTEMS THEORY FRAMEWORK
FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

Researchers and practitioners new to the field of career theory and who are eager to equip themselves with the necessary and essential basic skills and knowledge about career psychology may be quite daunted if not disappointed to find that there exists a body of work that, although expansive and varied, remains “disparate and segmented” (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005, p. 2). What to read, how to engage with clients and what is considered worth researching (and how) are consequently difficult questions to answer. This multifaceted status of career theory, research and practice may in itself be a testimony to the complexity of career behaviour, and the meanings attributed to that behaviour, that resist homogenization and reduction to universal principles - a preoccupation of traditional modernist approaches to career development (Glavin, 2004). However, this does not leave emerging career practitioners, researchers and theorists with much of a footing for the way forward, even if their ultimate aim is to accommodate and respect the complexity of their work and the lives of their clients and co-researchers. They are left with a tension between the limitations of human capacity to fathom the complexity of our intrapersonal, social and societal contexts on the one hand, and the variety of knowledges about career (both personal and theoretical) that construct the experience and ideals of career in such a multiplicity of configurations, on the other hand. Some kind of reference points or ‘scaffolding’ may be needed if professionals in the field of career are to respectfully co-construct with individuals accounts of their careers that utilize theoretical contributions, contributions which reflect, constitute and accommodate individuals’ particularity and their embeddedness in varying socio-cultural contexts.

A Complex Enough Integrating Framework for Careers

The need for a complex enough grand theory – one that can acknowledge the complexity of career development\(^1\) processes, while providing a framework that would assist in engaging with the contexts of that complexity - has been proposed over a decade ago (Savickas & Lent, 1994). While this need has been more fully addressed in recent times, the complexity of the field of career has the potential of exacerbating the

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\(^1\) The concept and term ‘career development’ is used throughout this study to refer to the practices, decisions, ideas and ideals associated with the making and forming of a career. The notion of development is therefore not in this study associated with the normative theoretical accounts that propose age-appropriate stages of career, unless such theories are being referred to.
theoretical disparity noted above. Contextually embedded accounts and assessment of career development that celebrate this complexity have recently emerged as a challenge to traditional empiricist-positivist assumptions that underpin much of career theory (McMahon & Patton, 2002a). This challenge is woven into the constructivist worldview reflected in the work of practitioners and theorists such as Savickas (1993), Cochran (1997), Amundson (1998) and Peavy (1997). These authors emphasize the importance of the counselling relationship and the construction of meaning in the conversational space between counsellor and client. More recently approaches to career counselling have been emerging that examine the socio-political power relations that structure career experiences and identities, often according to the dominant cultural assumptions and stories of ‘appropriate’ career development (Coupland, 2004; Moir, 1993; Winslade, 2005).

These contextually embedded accounts can be loosely associated with the emergence of the postmodern ideas/philosophy that have informed more qualitative approaches to career – including constructivist, social constructivist, (social) constructionist and post-structuralist strands (see special issue of Perspectives In Education, 2005, Volume 23; Savickas, 2004). This theoretical migration has the potential to result in a further segregation or polarization of the discipline into quantitative and qualitative or, modernist and postmodernist binary paradigms. This in turn places greater demands on the construction of an overarching theoretical framework of career that might create spaces outside of such binaries. If that wasn’t enough, it might even be argued that the integration of modernist and postmodernist worldviews is entirely paradoxical. Can and should the modernist-positivist worldview be integrated with the very ideas that have aimed to deconstruct modernist assumptions about what career is and should be? Some have even suggested that postmodern approaches to career pose unavoidable ethical/moral questions to practitioners and researchers, but also to those who are responsible for their education and training, that preclude the uncritical reproduction of career practices based on prevailing career theory (Kuit & Watson, 2005). On the other hand, undue polarization might be curbed if we consider Watson and McMahon’s (2005) suggestion that to view modern (quantitative) and postmodern (qualitative)

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2 I have here associated post-structural and social constructionist ideas with qualitative approaches. It could however be argued that the qualitative/quantitative binary would itself be problematized by post-structural and social constructionist theorists as based on the kind of Cartesian dualism that they aim to deconstruct (Gergen, 1999)

3 Deconstruction is a critical philosophical approach to various social and cultural phenomena that has recently been shaping the work of psychotherapists who adopt social constructionist, post-structuralist and narrative approaches to the lives of their clients (Mcleod, 1997)
worldviews as opposites can in itself oversimplify a very complex situation and that it is more likely that career practitioners operate on a continuum of practice between the two. The current study will also later argue that the binary logic of separating the modern from the postmodern, and quantitative from qualitative accounts of career can be subverted by employing and proposing the necessity of both paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought for representing career experiences. More will be said about this in Chapter 3. For the purposes of this discussion it now suffices to say that recent epistemological and ethical migrations in career research and practice makes integration somewhat more difficult. The challenges of this integration are further explored in the next subsection of the chapter.

Why Integration?

Although attempts at weaving together certain distinct theoretical and practice-based contributions from the career field do exist (Bradley & Mims, 1992; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002), the discipline of career psychology has continued to search for an all-encompassing answer to the challenges posed by its own multiplicity. But the question can also be asked: Why integration? Is the quest for an all-encompassing theoretical structure not itself particular to a tradition of thought (i.e. modernist) that is not compatible with the heterogeneity and fluidity of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1984)? This may well be the case, but it is the proposal of the current study that a return to the quest for a complex enough integrating framework is important and necessary if we still want to engage in a meaningful and respectful, but also critical, way with the heterogeneity of both theory and unique expressions of career, without being overwhelmed by such complexity or slipping into theoretical and moral relativism. This framework should thus also provide the guidelines and context for the development of career counselling practices and methods that are suited to the career and life experiences of individuals in the twenty-first century.

An appreciation of the complexity of the career experiences of individuals from vastly different socio-cultural contexts should not be compromised however, or considered to be marginal to the ‘comfort’ of practitioners who find the disparity of approaches in the field quite daunting. It is therefore imperative that the integrative framework we aim for will allow researchers and counselling practitioners to locate and utilize a wide range of career related practices and ideas available to them, while at the same time encouraging them to critically examine the real effects on clients’ and participants’ lives of adopting such integration. Certain critical questions can be posed in examining an integrative framework for career. Does the integration draw our
attention to the unique and the particular in the careers of those we engage with? Does the integration alert us to the socio-political and cultural influences and power relations that impact on their career identities? Does the integration allow us to distance ourselves from our own cultural and professional assumptions and open spaces for innovation in people’s lives and careers? The researcher believes that it is exactly this kind of critical practice that the Systems Theory Framework (STF) developed by Patton and McMahon (1999) can make possible.

As will be shown in the text to follow, the STF is a framework based on the systems metaphor 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. Importantly this macropicture is only considered meaningful in so far as it can provide people (especially career counsellors and their clients) with an opportunity of identifying what they deem to be significant and preferable knowledge about their career stories. The STF, while not disregarding the potential contribution of modernist career theories, provides practitioners and those who consult them with a critical approach to the potential decontextualizing and prescriptive effects of prevailing mechanistic linear models of career decision-making rooted in modernist assumptions. The following subsection explores/describes the broader systemic context within which the STF was developed.

Systemic Context for the Development of the STF

The genealogy of the metaphor on which the STF is based can be traced to von Bertalanffy who in 1968 comprehensively formulated and published the first statement of general systems theory. In contrast to the logical positivist worldview which employs linear, cause-and-effect explanations of life, general systems theory invited an attention to complex patterns of interrelationship between the parts that make up the whole of our lives. Instead of a preoccupation with the causes of human activity, the systems metaphor invited analogous forms of reasoning (Plas, 1986) that creatively aimed to describe and construct a complex, evolving world rather than explaining its workings causally. General systems theory started to redirected the focus of contributors from varying disciplines towards constructions and descriptions that would evoke and constitute human experience of the world as complex and multifacted (Bateson, 1972, 1980; Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Capra, 1975, 1982; Ford & Lerner, 1992). Although these descriptions and constructions of reality can, from a social constructionist perspective, be seen as no more true or real than those described and constructed by modernist-positivist accounts (Gergen, 1999), they alert us to alternative ways of
constructing phenomena like our careers, identities and the self with real effects on how we in turn experience those phenomena and our lives. It is this ethic of respect for complexity and generative constructions of life that the STF has inherited, adapted and deployed in its own construction of an integrative systemic framework of and for career experiences, theory and counselling practice.

Systems theory is not new to the field of careers and has for a number of years influenced the work of career theorists, counsellors and researchers. It has shown to lend itself to a fuller appreciation of the richness of career development. McMahon, Patton and Watson (2005b) have outlined three distinct ways in which systemic thinking has served the field of career. Firstly, “several authors have acknowledged the potential of systems theory in furthering the integration of career theory and practice” (p. 4). Amongst the work listed by the aforementioned authors in support of their first point (Blustein, 1994; Bordin, 1994; Collin, 1985, 1990; Herr, 1996; Osipow, 1983; Young, 1983) is that of Ford (1987) who proposes a Living Systems Framework for integrating the various theorized and experienced determinants of career choice and development. Interestingly Ford acknowledges that the Living Systems Framework does not specify the full complexity of human decision making, but provides a map that refers us to a much larger spectrum of influences than is usually considered by current theories of career behaviour. As will become more apparent later in the study, it is this idea and practice of a broader mapping of the career influences within the unique context of individual’s lives that is extensively utilized by the STF when applied to career counselling and assessment practices.

Secondly, “a number of theoretical formulations have specifically incorporated elements of systems theory” (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b, p. 5). Hershenson (1996), for instance, refers to the various subsystems of a person’s working life to be considered in understanding the complexity of that person’s work adjustment. Hershenson also applies these elements of systems theory to career counselling practice. Finally, “a number of theoretical conceptualizations designed to further understand career development behaviour have drawn on frameworks derived from systems theory” (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b, p. 5). McMahon et al. (2005b) cite Vondracek’s work with various other authors (Vondracek & Fouad, 1994; Vondracek & Kawasaki, 1995; Vondracek, Lerner & Schlenberg, 1986) on a developmental-contextual approach to career as exemplary of career theory informed by the complexity of the systems theory worldview. Whereas the last two points highlight the way in which theorists have been able to construct a career theory based on systemic principles, the STF employs
the systems metaphor in an importantly different way. The following statement explains this difference and it is followed by an account of the development of the STF and a more detailed description of the STF:

The systems theory framework 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 utilized in theory and practice (McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005b, p. 7).

The Systems Theory Framework of Career Development

As a framework shaped by an ethic of respect for complexity, the STF not only integrates the insights from various territories of career theory and practice, but it also provides career counsellors and their clients with the opportunity of identifying the range of contextual influences/systems of influence that have impacted on career development. The framework is inclusive of multiple influences such as abilities, gender, media, family, historical trends and socio-economic position and demonstrates the many complex interrelationships within which career development occurs (Patton & McMahon, 1999). The integration by the STF of theoretical and professional knowledge with a detailed mapping of the situation-specific, contextual knowledge, experience and meanings of individuals within their systems of influence ensures that individuals’ realities are not misconstrued and reduced to westernized universal principles and alienating terminology. Patton and McMahon (1999) describe the STF as “a specific attempt to provide a synthesis of the existing theoretical literature using a metatheoretical structure” (p. 154). They further propose that systems theoretical principles make it possible to view divergent career theories as parts of a grand theoretical whole, which has in itself been constituted and shaped by the complexity of divergent career behaviour. Thus, although the STF was originally driven by the focus of 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 and critically examined. A shift can thus be noticed in the significance of the STF for the field of career, from a theoretical integrative function towards the application and adaptation of such integration within career counselling relationships.
The STF will be presented below as highlighting the significant influences on career development and relationships that have been identified in the varied theoretical accounts of existing literature. Firstly, however, we will track the development and application of the STF itself in examining its relevance and validity for the demands and challenges facing career counselling practitioners and their clients in today’s heterogeneous existence.

Development and Application

The concept of the STF was first proposed as a contextual model for understanding adolescent career decision making (McMahon, 1992) and it emphasized the importance of context as integral to decision making as well as to the development of career. The initial publication of the STF (McMahon & Patton, 1995) has been substantially revised and refined (Patton & McMahon, 1999; Patton & McMahon, 1997a), but it has also been broadly applied to a range of cultural groups and settings in demonstrating its capacity to address the challenges facing career theory and clients today (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005). Patton and McMahon (1997b) have demonstrated how the STF can address career theory’s failure to account for cultural and structural factors (Watson, 2004) as well as the career development of women (Fitzgerald & Harmon, 2001), and have since applied the framework to diverse cultural groups and settings.

The STF has been proved to be useful in better accounting for the career development of women (Patton, 1997c), Australian Aboriginal people (Sarra, 1997), Chinese students (Back, 1997), and South African adolescents living in children’s homes (Dullabh, 2004). It has further been applied in the study of contextual issues such as rural location (Collett, 1997), socio-economic disadvantage (Taylor, 1997), and specific organizational settings (Dunn, 1997). Recently it has become increasingly apparent that, along with its application to diverse cultural groups and settings, the STF’s utility lies especially in the development of qualitative assessment processes (McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005c), career counselling (McMahon, 2005), and multicultural career counselling (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). The value and validity of the STF seems to lie in its ability to serve as a frame of reference to the structuring and stabilizing effect of theoretical constructs, while at the same time serving as a map for negotiating the fluid and particular socio-cultural contexts in which careers are constructed. To understand exactly how the STF achieves this we can now describe it in more detail.

Construction of the Systems Theory Framework

In order to achieve its integrating aims the STF was developed to delineate and apply two broad components of career development which identify the significant influences
outlined by existing career theory. Patton and McMahon (1999) have identified these two broad components as *content* and *process* influences. Within these two categories we are provided with a unification of the multifaceted ideas about influences on career development that have been identified by many researchers, theorists and practitioners in the career field. The first component, that of *content*, identifies variables relevant to the *individual* and to the *context*, and outlines key influences on career development. The *content* influences include *intrapersonal* variables such as personality, gender, abilities, personal values and age as well as *contextual* variables, which comprise social influences such as family and environmental/societal influences such as geographic location, globalization and historical trends (Patton, McMahon & Watson, 2005).

Although not explicitly stated here, the STF allows for the construction of more agentive career identities. As will become clearer later in the study, from a postmodern, social constructionist and post-structural perspective, the language we use does not merely describe the world or reflect it as it is out there, but allows us to co-construct meaningful accounts of the world and ourselves that are open to revision and reconstruction. In Patton and McMahon’s (1999) reason for choosing the word ‘influence’ we are left with a more agentive construction of the individual who can evaluate a systemic influence’s effects for its ‘preferability’. This stands in contrast to the positivist/modernist worldview that locates career identity in the inherent, measurable, categorizable personality structures of individuals.

Patton and McMahon (1999) describe their reason for choosing the word *influence* to construct an account of the content of career development that is consistent with the systems metaphor, and therefore with a worldview/ontology that resists the cause and effect determinism of mechanistic models of career development:

> We deliberately chose the word *influence* to describe the intrapersonal and contextual factors relevant to the career development process, since we believe it is less static than *factors* and is a dynamic term capable of reflecting both content and process. An influence acts as input into an individual’s system and can relate with the system in a number of ways. Within a systems theory perspective, an individual could perceive an influence as a barrier or as a facilitator in relation to career development (p. 155).
The second component or category of influences identified by the STF is that of process. Here the framework allows for the identification of three process influences. The first process influence emphasizes the recursive interaction within the individual, within the context, as well as between the individual and the context. Recursive interactions are the mutually shaping processes that occur between systems. These should not be confused with linear cause and effect relationships or even reciprocal relationships in which every action necessarily has an equal and opposite reaction. The concept of recursiveness was used extensively by Bateson (1972) and Plas (1986) to show how “any event can be viewed as a product of experience and anticipation…any isolated movement or moment can be seen to be influenced by events in the past, present, and future” (Plas, 1986, p. 62). Recursiveness therefore alerts us to the way in which the present is not merely a causal effect of the past, but how the past, present and future are in a constant dynamic interaction where the meaning and shape of career related experiences in all three dimensions of time are constantly changed by feedback and feedforward mechanisms (Patton & McMahon, 1999). Thus, as Patton, McMahon and Watson (2005) state:

Recursiveness does not imply reciprocal interaction; rather the nature of the influence and the degree of the influence change over time. For example, while family is an influence on individuals throughout life, the nature of its influence may be very different during adolescence than it is during adulthood (p. 9).

The second process influence emphasizes how the recursive interaction contributes to both the microprocess of career decision and the macroprocess of change over time. The STF here departs in some ways from developmental theorists such as Super (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) and Gottfredson (1996) who describe career development as a series of successive stages through which every person must pass. Recursive change over time may be abrupt, discontinuous and illogical and not normative and predictable. In important ways the STF interrogates deficiency-based descriptions of career development attributed to those that do not conform to the optimal and normative ideals proposed by some developmental theories. This challenge to dominant expectations of successive career development is also furthered by the third process influence represented in the STF, that of chance. The STF’s acknowledgement of the important
role of chance events that may occur in shaping the story of an individual’s career decisions is particularly revolutionary. It is in contrast to the long-standing empiricist tradition based on a linear stage-based model of cause and effect, which has the potential to foreclose the concept of human agency and purpose and the capacity for creative deliberation (Gergen, 1999).

The STF in this way provides a broad structure within which individuals can at any point in time represent for themselves their constellation of systems of influence, which need not conform to the norms and expectations of any specific cultural story or theory. The STF thereby accounts for the fluid and creative process of interaction that can occur within and between the systems of influence that shape individuals’ career situations (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004b). What follows is a description of how the STF provides a manageable structure within which individuals’ unique experiences and meanings of career, as well as various theoretical contributions, can be located and mapped. To achieve this the STF divides the micro and macro contexts of career development into interrelated, but non-hierarchical, systemic levels, namely the individual system, the social system and the environmental/societal system.

The Individual System

According to systems theoretical principles, the individual or person is a system in itself that is in turn constituted by its own subsystems. These subsystems have been termed in the STF as the intrapersonal influences. Figure 2 provides a diagrammatic representation of the individual system as outlined by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Figure 2
The Individual System
Intrapersonal influences have traditionally formed the boundaries of investigation for approaches to career development based on the modernist/logical positivist worldview (Holland, 1997; Spokane, Luchetta, & Richwine, 2002). Career theory has for a long time been attending to personality, interests, values and self-concept as that which can be categorized, measured and used for the matching of persons with their ‘most suited’ careers (McMahon & Patton, 2002). The STF embraces the idea that such intrapersonal influences have the potential to form part of the content influences that shape a person’s career, but depart from the claim that these are inevitable determinants of career identity. The extent of the expression of, and the meaning attributed to, intrapersonal influences are viewed as shaped by the many other systemic relationships of which the individual forms a part. In this respect it can be argued that the STF shares certain assumptions about the individual or ‘self’ with social constructionism. As McLeod (1997) states, “from a social constructionist perspective, any way of making sense of the self is socially constructed, and can be understood as deriving from a particular set of social, cultural and historical conditions” (p. 90). The individual is therefore not considered an empirically measurable entity, but a constantly shifting set of recursive relations that produce and transform individuals’ experience and descriptions of themselves over time.

The STF also contributes additional influences that can be attributed to individual systems, the significance of which is often shaped by the social environments of which they form a part. Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability have generally received little attention within career theory, but can have significant influence on what individuals consider possible and preferable careers. Importantly the STF, in acknowledging the increasing influence of constructionist and constructivist thought on career theory (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005), encourages the individual to “ascribe their own meaning to scores and test results, and to elaborate on a broad range of intrapersonal variables” (p. 8). It may be important to further consider that the meaning which individuals ascribe to such intrapersonal variables and test scores is not produced in a vacuum, but negotiated and produced within the conversational, relational and cultural landscape that constitutes the larger contextual system. As will become more apparent later in the study, career practitioners working with the STF will therefore also benefit from attending to the cultural stories of career - sustained by their clients’ social contexts - that act as the frames of reference for making meaning of their careers. Within the structure of the STF the contextual system is therefore represented firstly by the social system of which the individual forms a part.
The Social System

The social system is constituted by the “other people systems” (Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005, p. 8) with which individuals interact and negotiate their lives and careers. The STF identifies a number of social systems that are considered influential in shaping individuals’ perceptions of themselves and the meaning they attribute to their lives. Figure 3 below offers a diagrammatic representation of the social system as outlined by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Figure 3
The Social System

Educational institutions, family, peers, workplace and community groups are the systemic relationships in which careers are forged. Later in the current text (see Chapter 7) it will be shown how the identification of influential social systems can allow career counsellors to assist clients in evaluating their influence, which in turn opens relational spaces for reconstructing/re-authoring their career stories according to what they prefer for their lives. According to Patton and McMahon (1999), the media has been neglected in career theory as a shaping influence, with Jepsen (1989) as an exception to this dominant trend. The way in which career information is provided by the media, but also the way in which certain career identities are represented and constructed, has a real
effect on what individuals consider appropriate or desirable forms of career. In recent formulations of career from social constructionist and post-structuralist camps (Savickas (Ed.), 2004; Winslade, 2005) the social system is considered the site where career knowledge and power relations intersect to construct norms around which people are often incited to construct their careers. This political dimension of career identity can be understood as sustained by the dominant cultural discourses about career and will be discussed more fully in the chapter to follow. To appreciate the even broader contexts in which the social and individual systems engage, the STF identifies the environmental/societal system as a further level of influences on people’s careers.

The Environmental/Societal System

One of the effects of western individualist-humanist approaches to career, based on the assumption that human beings have essential characters, qualities or traits that remain fixed regardless of their environment, is the exclusion of a macro-perspective of the societal structures and relations that impact on the way individuals develop accounts of their identities as career makers (McMahon & Patton, 2002b).

Figure 4

The Environmental/Societal System
The number and type of systems identified by the STF in the environmental/societal system resuscitates an awareness of the degree to which elements such as geographic location, globalization, political decisions and historical trends (Patton & McMahon, 1999) impact (even if indirectly) on what individuals consider possible and desirable for their careers. Figure 4 (above) provides a diagrammatic representation of the environmental/societal system as outlined by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

An example of a political system that profoundly affected and hampered the careers of many people in South Africa is that of Apartheid. Racial segregation prevented marginalized groups from pursuing their careers in local training institutions and many had to look abroad in order to further their education. For the majority of communities that suffered the consequences of apartheid, their socio-economic level and geographic location (exclusion) profoundly limited what they considered as possible careers. Informed by this history of racial segregation South African career education policies further failed to conceptualize how cultural beliefs and values specific to black communities influenced career development in unique ways (Stead & Watson, 2001). This failure led to prescriptive understandings of the career development of South African youth. Consequently, a wide range of values, commitments and preferences were disqualified. The STF, by attending to the macro-level of career development, thus allows individuals and communities to identify and take a position in relation to certain prescriptive or oppressive influences within their environmental/societal system. The naming and externalizing of such oppressive influences/discourses will later be shown to form part of a political project available to career counsellors interested in addressing social injustice and the marginalization of alternative forms of life and career. As Patton, McMahon, and Watson (2005) further state:

…practitioners operating from a systems theory perspective may invite dialogue on these influences and thus afford individuals an opportunity at a micro-level to recount their experiences, tell their stories and elaborate meaning around these influences (p. 8).

When clients are invited into such dialogues they are provided with an opportunity to re-evaluate the status quo of their positioning within a system of career influences and can consider new meanings for what had up until then seemed irrevocable. Ultimately
people are given the opportunity of reclaiming some of the *authorship* of their career stories from oppressive influential systems.

**Systems and Stories**

Present in the last line of the preceding quote we encounter the concepts of *story* and *meaning*. These concepts are becoming pivotal in the conceptualizations of career that are emerging in the literature in the career field. Recent more holistic understandings of careers and career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999; Super, 1990; Vondracek, Lerner, & Schulerberg, 1986), and conceptualizations of *career as narrative* (Bujold, 2002; Jepsen, 1992) reflect a broader range of issues being dealt with by career counsellors other than occupational choice. There has been a shift towards more complex and rich descriptions of career development underpinned by the increasing influence of constructivist, constructionist and post-structuralist ideas. This postmodern philosophical stance especially places greater emphasis on *language* in the career counselling relationship and on the co-construction of *meaning* between counsellor and client. In effect there is an impetus towards turning career counselling into a collaborative co-authorship of meaningful and preferred *career stories* (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004b).

Although the STF is primarily associated with a systems theoretical position, it contributes significantly to the construction of meaningful career stories in counselling conversations. The STF locates both the content and process influences that impact on an individual’s career decision within the context of *time*. By incorporating the notion that individuals’ (or career makers’) present experience is situated within a sequence of events (or a process of recursive interactions) in the past, present and possible future, career makers can experience themselves as positioned in an unfolding *story line or narrative*. It can be posited that Patton and McMahon’s STF has broadly outlined and described the elements of this story line or *narrative structure* as “the sequential development of the interconnections between the intrapersonal system, the social system, the environmental/societal system, and the influences of past, present, future and chance” (McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2004b, p.14). It can further be proposed that it is this narrative structure that allows career makers to map across time the unique story of the experiences, relationships, values, preferences, purposes and goals that have been and are influential in shaping their career decisions. With the aid of the STF a richly described account of an individual’s career development story, which acknowledges the specific cultural knowledge and contextual influences that have
contributed to the creation of that story, can be mapped out or co-authored between counsellor and client.

In this respect the STF responds to the suggestion by Savickas (1993) that the field of career needs to become less expert-dominated, less focused on fit, and more interested in the construction of meaningful stories rather than test scores. Savickas (2005), in reflecting on the contribution of the STF to the narrative turn in the career field, has suggested that McMahon, Patton, and Watson have used the theoretical insights of the STF to effectively draw attention to the significance of the connections between career clients and their social worlds. He further states that the STF masterfully integrates constructionist and relational perspectives on how people make meaning in their working lives. Savickas also states that the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI; McMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b) qualitative career assessment process, based on the STF, translates a sophisticated theoretical model into a straightforward counselling method accompanied by coherent counselling materials. It is becoming progressively important to consider in what ways emerging career theory frameworks such as the STF contribute to the ever-increasing demand for coherent counselling practice that limits the imposition of (specifically western) cultural stories and expert-dominated theories of career on clients and research participants. In addressing and aiming to diminish the extent of such imposition the STF attempts to understand and meet human beings in their own particular, and constantly changing, relational and cultural contexts.

Culture and STF

It could be asked why the influence or construct of culture has not been explicitly located as an influence within the systemic map provided by the STF, when it outlines systems of influence where cultural knowledges and practices of career are active in shaping what individuals want for and do in their careers. To understand how the influence of culture is positioned by the STF in the context of individuals’ lives, it may be useful to re-consider the construct of career from a social constructionist perspective (Stead, 2004). Stead proposes that psychology, when rooted only in the modernist-positivist tradition, views culture largely as a nuisance variable that needs to be controlled to make way for the quest for universal laws and theories⁴ that would be applicable for all individuals regardless of their systemic context. Investigating the consequences of this modernist project for cross-cultural career psychology more

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⁴ These theories have traditionally supported the expert-dominated counselling practices to which Savickas (1993) has suggested the field of career psychology needs to find alternatives.
specifically, Stead argues that if the aforementioned discipline is to keep following the positivistic traditions of mainstream psychology, it will continue to argue for cultural homogeneity rather than human diversity (Moghaddam & Studer, 1997). This political impetus towards cultural homogenization (and its effect of exclusion) has earlier been investigated for its disqualifying effects on the careers of those not belonging to the dominant cultural group. Stead therefore proposes that we investigate alternatives to traditional perspectives on culture in career psychology that pay attention to how relationships between people define and shape their culture in local and contextual ways. Stead employs a social constructionist perspective where:

\[\text{culture is viewed as a system of shared meanings and perspectives. Here relationships are emphasized with no mention of cause and effect, discoveries of truths, and essentialism. From a social constructionist perspective culture may be viewed as a social system of shared symbols, meanings, perspectives, and social actions that are mutually negotiated by people in their relationships with others. (Stead, 2004, p. 392)}\]

The parallel of this social constructionist perspective with the STF’s proposal that socially constructed meanings and practices of career are relationally negotiated and renegotiated within systems of influence, brings us closer to an understanding of how culture is conceptualized and plays a role in the STF’s construction of contextual career stories. By not representing ‘culture’ as a specific systemic career influence in the STF, career counsellors and clients are invited to resist assuming and deploying generic notions of culture. The STF allows individuals to research and identify how locally negotiated cultural meanings, and their associated cultural practices, are constructed in and through experiences within particular individual, social and societal/environmental systems without needing to position such systems inside or outside of reified cultural boundaries. In doing this the STF follows Stead’s (2004) critique of traditional career psychology, which has encouraged an oversimplification of culture into broad categories that assumes an unchanging monolithic set of practices, ideals and assumptions belonging to a particular identified culture. This notion of a bound and categorized culture stands in contrast to the constantly shifting process of invention and preservation, continuity and discontinuity that characterizes life in our heterogeneous
existence. The STF can thus be thought of as the broad structural framework within which the content of historical and contextually constructed cultural meanings of career can be negotiated and re-negotiated (in conversation), rather than assuming cultural homogeneity based on influences such as language, geographic locality, religion, and socioeconomic status. This awareness and investigation of constantly shifting negotiations of cultural ideas and practices of career can in turn alert career counsellors and their clients to what Stead (2004) terms acculturation. “Acculturation refers to the extent to which people have interacted with those from different cultures to their own, have absorbed new traditions and discarded old ones, or have adapted to accommodate other ways of, for example, making careers decisions and adjusting to careers” (Stead, 2004, p. 396). Ultimately the STF encourages career counsellors to suspend their own cultural assumptions and ready themselves for discovery (Bird, 2004) and learning about the complexity of experience and meaning that clients bring to their career stories.

The current research has therefore aimed to explore the practices that facilitate a critical examination of the potential of combining the qualitative assessment process based on the STF’s integration of theory with an approach to counselling based on the metaphor of story or narrative. The narrative approach to career counselling will be described in the following chapter and the STF will be shown to support and enhance the complimentary relationship between a narrative metaphor of human experience and a systems theoretical perspective on career development. This complimentary relationship will be shown to support counsellors and their clients in negotiating power relations and meaning around the construction of contextual career narratives.
CHAPTER 3
SYSTEMS AND NARRATIVE METAPHORS
OF CAREER

Introduction

The present chapter investigates and explains the potential benefit of a collaboration between the metaphors of systems and narrative for the practice of counselling, assessment and research in the field of career psychology. The chapter is dedicated to elaborating how the philosophical and ethical assumptions of a post-structural narrative approach to counselling (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Payne, 2000; Winslade & Monk, 1999) is relevant to people’s careers and lives, but also provides descriptions of some of the practices and ideas constituting a systemic narrative career counselling process. In elaborating such a process, it is proposed that the assumptions and practices of a narrative approach to career counselling are supported and furthered in useful ways by the Systems Theory Framework (STF) and the My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook.

The Systems Theory Framework and The Narrative Metaphor of Career

As became more apparent in the previous chapter, the STF provides an integrative theoretical framework on both a macro and micro level within which career counsellors can assist persons to map out the contexts in which they construct and negotiate the shape of their preferred careers. The STF is specifically useful in its positioning of such accounts of career within socio-cultural, gender, political, economic and environmental influences that have functioned to either legitimate, venerate and buttress, or pose real limits and sanctions on, what individuals and communities regard as appropriate, desirable and necessary forms of career. The STF thus provides an alternative to approaches in career psychology that promote mechanistic, linear understandings of career development that often disregard the complexity and uniqueness of contextual career decision-making (Patton & McMahon, 1999; Stead & Watson, 1999). Career counsellors, researchers and practitioners are, within the scaffolding of the STF, beginning to address this complexity by attempting to integrate a range of previously disparate approaches and philosophies in career psychology. In a sense the STF embodies this study’s search for a space beyond the binary between the career theoretical tradition, and the emerging focus on contextual meaning and stories. As Patton, McMahon, and Watson (2005) have proposed, the STF:
accommodates career theories derived out of the logical positivist worldview with their emphasis on objective data and logical, rational process, and also the constructivist worldview with its emphasis on holism, personal meaning, subjectivity, and recursiveness between influences (p. 7).

The growing awareness that diverse individuals’ career behaviour cannot be decontextualized and reduced to universal laws (Watson, 2005) has placed greater emphasis on qualitative forms of career assessment that shift career psychology from formulaic, systematic ‘test-and-tell’ approaches towards the conversational co-production of meaningful, contextual accounts of careers between counsellors and their clients. The present study, and in particular the second phase of the study, arose from an interest in the way meaning is relationally produced and ascribed to people’s experiences of themselves as career makers and members of specific communities. However, it does not support the splitting off of qualitative approaches to career into its own arena. Instead the study has aimed to investigate how a systemic integration of career theoretical perspectives can be embedded and critically evaluated within the relationally produced career stories of individuals. The study has employed the narrative metaphor in further conceptualizing and operationalizing this aim.

The narrative metaphor has been extensively utilized in therapeutic approaches and was originally developed in the field of family therapy, now known as the narrative approach to therapy (Epston & White, 1990, Parry & Doan, 1994; Payne, 2000). A number of practitioners and authors working in and with narrative therapeutic ideas and practices are committed to constantly re-visioning, expanding and adapting their work with persons who consult them in a variety of therapeutic conversations and settings (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Monk et al., 1997; Winslade & Monk, 1999). Michael White, a leading proponent of narrative therapeutic approaches provides a useful account of what the narrative metaphor proposes for the way we make sense of our lives (and careers):

…we are active in the interpretation of our experiences as we live our lives…it’s not possible for us to interpret our experience without access to some frame of intelligibility, one that provides a context for our experience, one that makes the attribution of meaning possible…stories constitute this frame of
intelligibility…the meanings derived in this process of interpretation are not neutral in their effects on our lives, but have real effects on what we do, on the steps that we take in life…it is the story or self-narrative that determines which aspects of our lived experience get expressed…it is the story [or] self narrative that determines the shape of our lived experience…we live by the stories that we have about our lives…these stories actually shape our lives, constitute our lives, and…embrace our lives (White, 1995, p. 13 – 14).

It is the suggestion of this study that the individual, social and environmental/societal systems outlined by the STF provide the context within which individuals encounter the cultural frames of intelligibility or career constituting stories that determine the shape of their career experiences and decisions. In more fully comprehending the workings and complexity of the constitutive effect of stories on the careers and lives of individuals, the present study has utilized Winslade and Monk’s (1999) starting assumptions for a narrative counselling\(^5\) process. These assumptions will first be listed and then weaved into a systemic-narrative explanatory framework throughout the body of the text:

- *Human beings live their lives according to stories.*
- *The stories we live by are not produced within a vacuum.*
- *Embedded within stories lie discourses.*
- *The modern world is characterized by societal norms that are kept in place by surveillance and scrutiny.*
- *There are always contradictory or alternative discourses with which some align themselves.*
- *Dominant cultural stories impose severe limits on people seeking to create change within their lives.*
- *Deconstructing dominant discourses raises new possibilities for living.*
- *There is always lived experience that does not get encapsulated in stories.*
- *The task of the counselor is to help the client construct a more satisfying and appealing story line.*

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\(^5\) In the context of the current study, the prevailing distinction between career counselling and other forms of counselling is not considered useful. The narrative counselling process suggested by Winslade and Monk (1999) also serves the purposes of a career counselling relationship (Winslade, 2005)
From Re-presenting Systems to Re-authoring Career Stories

Drawing on the work of ethnographer, Edward Bruner (1986) Winslade and Monk explain that the (career) stories we tell about ourselves, and that others within our influential (especially social) systems tell about us, don’t just describe reality but form the reference points for living that shape our realities and construct what we see. Hence their first starting assumption is that *human beings live their lives according to stories.* The current study aimed to further expand the potential of this story (or narrative) metaphor of experience for career related research, assessment and counselling conversations. Overarched by the STF framework the study aimed firstly to collaborate with individuals in examining and co-constructing the *systemic contexts* in which they encounter and express their constituting career stories or self-narratives. This encouraged the research participants to *visually represent* and momentarily *distance themselves* from the taken-for-granted intrapersonal, social and societal/environmental contexts of their career decisions.

The My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook facilitated this (see the *Measure* section of Chapter 5). This systemic or contextual re-presentation of participants’ career narratives parallels Winslade and Monk’s *second* starting assumption that, *the stories we live by are not produced in a vacuum.* Their point is that contrary to the claims of individualistic western psychology, the stories that most powerfully shape our (career) experiences are the product of cultural processes and conversations that are not the property and creation of individual minds. The complimentary quality of narrative counselling approaches and the STF, which share the assumption that our career stories are constructed in socio-cultural contexts or systems of career influence, was explored in both the first and second phase of the study. Participants were firstly invited by the MSCI to notice the relational, social and systemic construction of their career stories. It was hoped that by objectifying and evaluating their systemic influences, participants could separate from their prescriptions and inevitability be allowed to consider how their career stories have been constructed and might be otherwise. Secondly, to more fully explore the potential usefulness of these systemic and *constructionist* (McLeod, 1997) ideas, as well as narrative counselling practices in the field of career counselling, the researcher invited one individual to participate in a *systemic-narrative career counselling process.* The conversations that constituted this process were partly facilitated by re-searching the participant’s MSCI workbook to contextualize her current systemic positioning in particular narratives of career identity. These conversations were then further guided by
the starting assumptions and practices of a narrative approach to counselling (Winslade & Monk 1999; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Winslade 2005), and aimed to assist the participant in “re-authoring” (Carey & Russell, 2003) the story of her career identity along the lines of her preferences, goals and purposes for life.

Language, Power and Politics

In commonsense terms it is nothing profound to view a career as a narrative or a story which individuals tell about themselves, and/or which others tell about them. When we describe our careers and our selves we usually do so by telling a story. It is however when the narrative metaphor is associated more explicitly with social constructionist (McLeod, 1997) and post-structural (Besley, 2002; Epston & White, 1990; Payne, 2000) philosophy that underpins some narrative approaches to research and counselling, that we encounter a very particular ethical-political project and lifestyle (Monk et al. 1997). It is this project that the present study aimed to make more explicit in the practice of career counselling and research.

This project is based on the belief that the success of western psychology has become its limitation… we have learnt to focus on personal deficits in ways that speak of failure rather than accomplishment, that produce social hierarchies (experts who often appear to know more about people’s lives than they do themselves), and that erode our sense of communal interdependence and common purpose (Monk et al., 1997, p. 32).

Much of our western language habits that inform modernist career psychology promote deficit descriptions of clients who are often seen to lack the necessary career maturity, decision-making skills or self-knowledge that would supposedly ensure ‘appropriate’ career development. Social hierarchies between expert-professionals and those who consult them are sustained by the way our professional language often positions clients as not-knowing and counsellors as knowing. The individualist and humanist assumptions of western career theory also produce decontextualized accounts of categories such as personality, aptitude and traits that pay little attention to systemic and cultural influences on career decisions. Such identity descriptions reinforce naturalistic accounts of identity (White, 2004) and disconnect individuals from what may be called the relational characteristics of identity - such as purposes,
commitments, values and principles of living, which link individuals in joint action to the vocations of their communities and broader culture. When professional-scientific knowledge about career development – underpinned by the assumption of an independently functioning, rational and autonomous self - is privileged as defining what appropriate or authentic career development should look like, those not conforming to such western ideals may further be positioned in deficit-based descriptions that reproduce the very sense of failure, confusion and uncertainty, which often brings individuals to counselling in the first place. The language used in career counselling conversations can thus be viewed as a site where power operates to constitute career identity, often according to the dominant ideals of western rationality.

The STF’s re-location of individuals within their relational and systemic contexts invites counsellors and their clients into conversations that attend to the potential imposition of such western ideals within the diversity and heterogeneity of cultural expressions of life and career, characteristic of the postmodern condition (Lyotard, 1984; Savickas, 1993). Such contextually located conversations can reveal and resist the taken-for-granted disqualification of non-western cultural ideas about career, and point to alternative and shared career practices and commitments for many individuals and their communities. To participate in such a re-vision, career counsellors are faced with the ethical challenge to suspend their personal, coherent stories and professional statements about what career should be and to view their knowledge about career as the product of one of many discourses of career.

Career Discourse

Winslade and Monk’s (1999) third starting assumption of a narrative counselling process is that, embedded within stories lie discourses. They define discourses as the taken-for-granted assumptions and statements (about career) that define what we regard as normal and conventional. They provide the example of the assumption that teenagers are ‘hard-wired’ to go through a period of rebellion and separation from their parents. This assumption or ‘teenager discourse’ shapes the choices values and actions of families, teachers and teenagers themselves, and becomes the ‘reality’ or shaping story of their lives. Winslade and Monk go on to argue that this is a constructed yet influential story of teenagers that is quite unique to our historical period and western culture, and not the inherent or universal psychological make-up of adolescents across time and culture. Discourses are thus the frameworks of meaning and rules that delineate what is possible to say, know and do in particular contexts and at particular times in history. Discourses therefore determine to some extent what kind of person one is entitled or
obliged to be. Whenever we speak we are speaking as the kind of person who is constituted by one or more discourses.

A discourse is a set of more or less coherent stories or statements about the way the world should be. When we acknowledge that there are many valid ways of seeing the world, what is interesting is which accounts dominate and which are less often heard. Within human communities, what can be said, and who may speak, are issues of power (Monk et al., 1997, p. 35)

This question of which accounts most powerfully constitute our lives and careers points us to the way that discourses are imbricated with the workings of power, responsibilities and entitlements in various systems of influence.

Discourses organize and regulate even interpersonal relationships as power relations. Discourses are social practices; they are organized ways of behaving…they structure our relations with one another. Seen in this context power is not the possession of particular persons…rather power operates at the lowest levels of society; it is at work in everyday interactions in homes, playgrounds, workplaces – wherever there are attempts to make sense of living (Monk et al., 1997, p. 35).

Career related discourses and discursive practices can thus be conceptualized as “the normative (often linguistic) devices that structure and maintain what is prescribed as desirable, optimal and appropriate for individuals’ career development, their relationships and their identities within particular communities and institutions” (Kuit, & Watson, 2005, p. 33). The location of career discourses within systems of career influences where power operates in the capillary fashion described above, is of particular relevance if we want to pay closer attention to the unique and particular way that not only career theory, but also institutions such as families, schools, churches, social groups, racial groupings, political parties, and the economy sustain, produce and legitimate certain career narratives while disqualifying others. These discourses and
discursive practices\textsuperscript{6} are re-produced within systems of influence when they are internalized, by individuals and communities, as speaking the truth about what and who they can and should be in life. Winslade and Monk’s (1999) fourth starting assumption of a narrative approach to counselling is thus that, the modern world is characterized by societal norms that are kept in place by surveillance and scrutiny. The authors draw on Foucault’s (1973) concept of “the gaze” (p. 108), which evokes the way in which we learn to scrutinize and evaluate ourselves according to the norms of the communities and systems of influence we participate with. We internalize such norms when we subject ourselves to society’s privileged systems of evaluation, such as exams and report cards in schools, but also the more hidden evaluations of our worth as career makers, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, wives and husbands according to the socially constructed ideals of our culture. They suggest that the effects of the gaze or cultural assessments are a central focus of the narrative counsellor, “who is mindful of the power of discourse to induce us to believe things about ourselves” (Winslade & Monk 1999, p. 25). The present study therefore explored the value and potential of employing the STF framework in our attempts to locate the sites at which the gaze operates. In many respects a person’s systems of career influence can be regarded as the context for their discursive positioning within a particular career story.

It is helpful to think about discourses as positioning persons in certain career stories, but it may be more important to think about how persons and their counsellors might use discourses to position themselves more agentively in relation to influential systems. This brings us to Winslade and Monk’s (1999) fifth starting assumption: there are always contradictory or alternative discourses with which some align themselves. Following these authors we can argue that despite the enormous influence of dominant discourses of career that invite self-evaluations and self-censorship in keeping with the cultural specifications of our dominant systems of influence, “many people do not adhere to the dominant cultural specifications and develop pride in choosing to live by alternative cultural patterns” (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 25). A primary preoccupation of a systemic narrative approach to career would therefore be to find ways for both counsellors and their clients to reclaim an agentive co-authorship from the dominant

\textsuperscript{6} An example of career discourse and its related discursive practices can be found in the historically sanctioned trajectory of primary, secondary and tertiary stages of education, where going to university and getting qualified as a recognized professional has for decades been considered as the ideal career story. Today still, in many communities and families this career discourse implicitly prescribes how parents and their children should organize their finances, subject choices, living arrangements and lifestyles to ensure that a university education is ensured for school leavers.
and limiting discourses of career supported within and by their social and societal/environmental systems of influence.

Reclaiming Authorship

It can be proposed that the career stories that are told about us, and those we tell about ourselves are the products of a struggle or tension between competing meanings and descriptions that are ascribed to our career related experiences and behaviour in different systemic relationships. What is considered meaningful and worthy of note in certain systems of influence is determined by how discourses are taken up and reproduced in our conversations about career. The metaphor of battle has been used in describing how different discourses intersect and compete in the language we use to position persons in relations of power and responsibility that sustain (career) identity according to the dominant discourses of society (Foucault, 1979; Rabinow, 1984). Winslade and Monk therefore pose a sixth starting assumption that, dominant cultural stories impose severe limits on people seeking to create change within their lives. The point here is that discourses are exclusionary in that “they rule out other ways of thinking, talking and acting” (MacLure, 2003, p. 178). Alternative or preferred ways of living or careers may thus remain hidden. In patriarchal discourses of career, often reproduced in the family relations of individuals’ social systems, males have traditionally been positioned as breadwinners, while women were assigned the domestic and child rearing responsibilities. This in turn sustained women’s identities as nurturers, emotional caregivers and financial dependants, limiting their participation in male dominated workplaces, and often preventing stories of female professional promotion and achievement. Women learnt to tell stories about themselves in the language of wives, mothers and caregivers, while men learnt to tell stories about themselves in the language of achievements, financial success and career goals at the expense of male nurturing stories and male emotional expression. (Beall & Sternberg, 1993; Reischer, 2000; Rodin, 1993). The attention to the constitutive (and exclusionary) function of language in not only shaping our career stories, but also our experience of ourselves and the world, is part of the linguistic turn (MacLure, 2003) that has spread through the disciplines of the social sciences, humanities and health professions. From the view of this turn,

Language is not simply a representation of our thoughts, feelings, and lives. It is part of a multilayered interaction: the words we use influence the ways we think and feel about the
world. In turn the ways we think and feel influence what we speak about. How we speak is an important determinant of how we can be in the world (Monk et al., 1997, p. 34)

The systems and narrative metaphors, when associated with this linguistic turn in post-structural, social constructionist, constructivist and postmodern ideas, but also with the ethical debates surrounding these ideas, invites us to attend to power and the politics of identity (Gergen, 1999) in the talk of both clients and counsellors. We are invited to examine how language and power, or what Michel Foucault (1972) called power/knowledge, converge and operate to position counsellors and their clients in particular career counselling stories where counselors, imbued with the status of expert, superior knowledge, and systems of analysis and categorization, are often charged with the authority of saying what counts as true about their clients’ identities. The counselling relationship is itself a potentially influential system where cultural and professional/theoretical career discourses operate in both the counsellor and the client’s language to sustain certain forms of career identity over others. Importantly, the STF and its associated qualitative career assessment process (i.e. MSCI), aims to deconstruct the authority of career psychology’s theories and systems of analysis, by encouraging career clients and research participants to critically evaluate the relevance and meaning of career theoretical constructs for themselves. For a systemic narrative approach to career counselling to remain a critical and innovative form of socio-political praxis, it must attend – and encourage clients to explore alternatives - to the ways in which clients’ lives are often storied for them by expert career knowledges, and career narratives that reproduce and buttress the ideals and prescriptions of personhood associated with the dominant cultural discourses of influential systems. This process has in narrative counselling been named “deconstruction” (White, 1992). Winslade and Monk (1999) offer a seventh starting assumption that, deconstructing dominant discourses raises new possibilities for living. They describe deconstruction as unpacking or revealing the impact of discourses on a person’s life. They list some questions that invite clients to notice the contexts for, the beliefs that support, the history and the effects of, particular discourses at work in their systems of influence. Ultimately persons notice the cultural contents of what they regarded as inevitable and ‘natural’:
The flip side of such recognition is that possibilities for how life might be otherwise become apparent. As the client considers these possibilities, the counselor can ascertain whether the client would prefer to continue with the status quo or whether he or she wants something different for him or herself (Winslade & Monk 1999, p. 26)

Here we find a particularly helpful collaboration between the STF and the narrative approach to career counselling. A ‘systemic mapping’ of career decisions facilitated by the STF and MSCI allows career counsellors and their clients to locate where deconstruction might be helpful. A systemic mapping can point to the social and cultural sites where societal systems and institutions offer, and often prescribe, the taken-for-granted ideals and career narratives to us. It therefore helps to locate the deconstructive process in the client’s significant and influential relationships. It is when clients and counsellors enter into critical conversations about the culture-specific content of their systemic career narratives that they further notice their socially constructed character. What follows is that ways of life and work, that once seemed inevitable and natural progressions of career development, are thrown into question – raising new possibilities for living. Clients are in this way assisted to reclaim the authorship of their career stories from the dominant systemic career discourses. The stories that are co-constructed in the systemic narrative career counselling conversation are therefore not viewed merely as the linguistic accounts that represent, in a mirror-like fashion, a person’s true career identity (as will be argued later, no story can encompass the full richness of people’s lives). Language is seen as producing or constitutive of certain forms of life and career, rather than merely representing it. From this perspective, language and stories provide the culturally and socially constructed maps or shared narratives that guide and orientate people in their decisions and preferences as they shape their career dreams, goals, and purposes. These maps are not fixed, empirical accounts of who people truly are, but contingent and open to revision.

Winslade and Monk’s (1999) eighth starting assumption thus proposes that, there is always lived experience that does not get encapsulated in stories. Here the authors describe how people often adjust to the growing discomfort of oppressive discourses and problems, failing to notice the subtle changes and trends in the effects of those problems. When their experience is carefully storied, subtle changes or contradictions become more visible. Even noticing small changes tend to inspire a greater willingness
and interest in clients to address the circumstances and systemic influences that support prescriptive career discourses and problems such as indecision, feelings of inadequacy, uncertainty, and lack of confidence associated with not conforming to such prescriptions. An important assumption that loosens the grip of dominant discourses and the career narratives they sustain is explicated by Bruner (1986) when he explains that it is impossible for any narrative or discourse to encompass the entirety of people’s life experiences:

…life experience is richer than discourse. Narrative structures organize and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story (p. 143).

When systemic narrative career counsellors hold firm to this belief they can assist clients to richly describe events that might not have been predicted by the dominant narratives of their influential systems. Should clients evaluate these events as preferable, they can begin to form the building blocks of stories that are more satisfying to them. The ninth and final starting assumption for a narrative approach is that the task of the counselor is to help the client construct a more satisfying and appealing story line (Winslade & Monk 1999). The aforementioned authors draw on the work of systems theorist Gregory Bateson (1972, 1980) and suggest that for clients to experience and position themselves differently they must be able to draw sharper distinctions between an old story and their preferred one. Once clients are able to name the “counterplot” (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 28) of their new story, they can experience themselves, and make decisions, in accordance with that plot. The power of this naming in which language shapes and starts to re-constitute career identity, stands in sharp contrast to the modernist assumption that there are categorized and core structures of career development, that can be empirically tested and shown in all individuals.

It is important for a systemic narrative career counsellor to notice how career identity is located and constructed, not only in the language and descriptions of individual qualities and traits, but constantly negotiated in social and environmental/societal relationships. Individuals’ career stories can thereby be viewed contextually and informed by the particular values, goals, beliefs and ideals of the culture from which those stories gain legitimacy and in which they lie embedded. The STF and MSCI come in handy in researching how career decisions and developments have been socially and
contextually negotiated. The systemic, narrative and discursive construction of career transgresses traditional humanist assumptions and evokes notions of career identity that remain susceptible to change and revision. The systemic narrative approach to careers therefore invites clients, should this be their preference, to align themselves with alternative stories of career identity that have been marginalized from the cultural patterns of work and life in their systems of influence. The systemic narrative career counsellor is therefore instrumental in what Gergen has described as “valuational advocacy” (1992, p. 28). In becoming advocates or activists around the construction of value-resourced careers, career psychologists are invited to join with their clients in developing career stories that present new options to the larger culture. At this point a few considerations associated with the practice and theoretical consistency of systemic narrative career counselling will be explored.

Systemic Narrative Career Counselling

Some may argue that the systems metaphor belongs to a theoretical tradition that is quite incompatible and dissociated from the narrative metaphor. White (1995) has suggested that the systems metaphor evokes static notions of homeostasis and balance, which run counter to the transgressive aims of the post-structural project. This project has also been described as a “discontinuous paradigm” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 14) that is not merely an evolution of the systems theory upon which the STF is grounded, but a new language and worldview. Especially with the current study’s elevation of the importance of language in constructing careers and shaping what we see, it may be argued that the vocabulary and assumptions associated with systemic metaphors on the one hand, and narrative metaphors on the other hand, may result in contradictory and incompatible constructions of career. In the previous chapter, a closer look at the history and influence of the systems metaphor as embodied in general systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) positioned it in contrast to the logical positivist worldview which employs linear, cause-and-effect explanations and descriptions of life. The systems metaphor in its various embodiments since von Bertalanffy has undoubtedly invited an attention to complex patterns of interrelationship between the parts of our lives and careers rather than a search for universal cause-and-effect structures of career development. In that sense it serves the construction of richer and contextually embedded career stories or narratives, rather than contradicting such a process.

But although this ethic of respect for context and complexity, embodied by the STF, invites rich descriptions of career experiences that transcend the western notion of an
autonomous bound self, such descriptions may remain affiliated to what Jerome Bruner (1986) termed “paradigmatic” modes of thought or cognition (Parry & Doan, 1994). Bruner contrasted two modes of ordering experience or constructing reality namely *paradigmatic* and *narrative* modes of thought, which he claimed are both necessary, but irreducible to each other. The paradigmatic mode of thought, “attempts to fulfill the ideal of a formal mathematical system of description and explanation. It employs categorization or conceptualization and the operations by which categories are established, instantiated, idealized and related one to the other to form a system” (Bruner, 1986, p. 12). In contrast the narrative mode of thought seeks to attain *verisimilitude* or *lifelikeness* by constructing accounts of life that accommodate the ambivalence, contradictions and inconsistencies of the intentions and aspirations of individuals as they make meaning of their experiences (Parry & Doan, 1994). If we consider the STF’s construction of interrelated systemic structures and its integration of theoretical conceptualizations from a range of career theories we can notice certain parallels between the STF and what paradigmatic descriptions of career situations might look like. Narrative modes of thought on the other hand seem to parallel the constructivist and social constructionist ideas around the multiplicity of subjective and inter-subjectively negotiated realities and meanings of career. However, careful investigation of the STF has shown that the constructivist and social constructionist worldviews have in fact guided its *application and use*. The STF’s departure from purely paradigmatic modes of constituting reality is especially evident when one considers what Parry and Doan (1994) describe as the aim of paradigmatic modes of constructing reality – that is the establishment of *truth* or the underlying structure of all experience. Systems metaphors and theory can and have been before used to formulate structural (and often deficit-based) descriptions of career like, for example, complimentary recursive circuits in families that reinforce an adolescent’s career indecision, or “collaborative causation of problems” (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 13) that prevent a person from attaining optimal career maturity. Systems metaphors can therefore be used for the purposes of constructing ‘truths’ about people’s lives, relationships and careers. Often such constructions are couched in professional vocabularies and discourses of career that subvert clients’ experience-near (Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss, Flum, 2004) accounts of their lives and careers.

So how does the STF invite experience-near constructions of career, while at the same time utilizing paradigmatic modes of constructing reality? The STF presents a possible paradigmatic framework (based on career theory) in which individuals can
describe the connectedness of their career identities to contextual (systemic) relationships. However, in its application it aligns itself with the constructivist worldview which does not make authoritative claims about the meaning and content of people’s lives. In this sense the ethics of not imposing culturally specific or expert-dominated descriptions of career are shared by the STF and a narrative approach to career counselling supported by post-structural and social constructionist ideas. As proposed in Chapter 2 of the current study, the integration by the STF of theoretical and professional knowledge with a detailed mapping of the situation-specific, contextual knowledge, experience and meanings of individuals within their systems of influence ensures that individuals’ realities are not misconstrued and reduced to westernized universal principles and alienating terminology.

A systemic narrative approach to career counselling, employing the STF, therefore aims for the construction of experience-near accounts of people’s lives and careers within a systemic-contextual framework. This aim incorporates Bruner’s (1986) other mode of constructing reality, that of narrative. In contrast to a search for, or claims about, the truth of people’s career experiences the narrative mode would aim for descriptions that are lifelike and resonant with people’s subjective and relationally produced stories about their lives and careers. Narrative modes of thought provide a web of meaning and of connectedness to events that cannot be provided by paradigmatic modes of structuring reality alone (Parry & Doan, 1994). The paradigmatic mode of representing and conceptualizing the systemic context in which individuals are weaving together their experiences into complex stories, need only be seen as contradicting a narrative metaphor of career experience, when it invites universal claims about what career should be. Such prescriptions are implicit in the abovementioned uses of the systems metaphor that make claims about what is deficient or dysfunctional in individuals’ systems. If we use the systems metaphor in the service of such evaluation we will merely replace stories of individual deficiencies with ‘systemic deficiency and pathology’. Our language will continue to reinforce the counsellor’s position as knowing expert and clients as lacking in the necessary knowledge and wisdom to overcome their difficulties. This will undoubtedly erode the

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7 Although some may argue that constructivism and (social) constructionism are interchangeable concepts, the current research study follows Collin and Young (2002) who locate constructivism in the unfolding trajectory of cognitive psychology, which posits that individuals mentally construct their subjective world of experience. Social constructionism is here viewed as different from constructivism in that it shifts career identity away from a purely internal landscape of the individual mind and into the socio-cultural landscape of multiple relationships and conversations.
communal interdependence and shared sense of purpose and meaning created within the STF and social constructionist accounts of career formation.

To preserve the particularity and lifelikeness of people’s career stories, and the meaning making resources that clients bring to career counselling relationships, the current research has explored the value in using the STF to map the contexts in which individuals and groups can locate, identify and critically evaluate the influence of certain values, practices and beliefs from the larger culture on the existing web of meaning that has been attributed to their career stories. So, far from imposing universal ideas and conceptualizations of what career should look like, a systemic narrative approach to career invites clients and research participants to re-search the contexts that support and limit the expression of their preferred career narratives. For the STF and a systemic narrative approach to ensure this critical stance, while at the same time producing meaningful accounts of career, the concept of discourse can be continually used to objectify and name the processes of narrative formation within the institutions and relationships that make up a person’s system of career influences.

Externalizing Career Discourses

As stated above the narrative metaphor allows us to see how people make sense and meaning of their experiences when they organize and shape their lives according to the shared stories and discourses about career that have been sanctioned by their communities or systems of influence. In career counselling conversations both counsellor and client deploy their meaning making tools to give coherence to the client’s career story. Discourses are the inevitable tools or frameworks of meaning that determine what can be said about the client’s reality, and who has the authority to say what counts as true and meaningful. The career counselling conversation is a site where both the counsellor and client deploy the career discourses made available to them by their cultures in constituting what career can and should be. Clients’ career identities are shaped when they internalize the set of statements, privileged as true within their influential systems, about who they are or should be in their careers. But if we return to the point about knowledge, language and power we are confronted with political and ethical questions regarding the counsellor’s responsibility and function within the counselling conversation’s construction of the client’s identity. How do counsellors ensure that their language and statements don’t reinforce career discourses that clients find limiting and disqualifying? Without an awareness or choice in the discursive internalizing process, clients may often feel that their lives are being storied for them by their systems of influence. It is also often when people feel that the stories and
persons experience problems, for which they frequently seek therapy, when the narratives in which they are “storying” their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience “storied” by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience, and that, in these circumstances, there will be significant aspects of their lived experience that contradict these dominant narratives (p. 15).

In order to reverse or counter the automatic internalization and acceptance of insufficiently representative dominant narratives, a narrative approach to careers employs the rhetorical device of “externalizing conversations” (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. 37) (also used in deconstruction – see above) which objectifies and evaluates oppressive discourses and their problematic effects. Clients are invited into positions from which they can critically evaluate the relative influence of oppressive discourses on their career aspirations, but also identify unique outcomes (Winslade & Monk, 1999) when they have resisted or contradicted the oppressive discourse’s prescriptions and effects on their hopes and dreams as career makers. The STF’s assistance in this process has been discussed above, and will in Chapter 7 be shown to serve as a useful structuring framework for both systemic narrative career counselling conversations and career research (more specifically discourse analysis) within which career discourse can be located and examined.

Epston and White (1990) describe what happens when such externalization renders less fixed the internalized discourses that have constituted a person’s identity as problematic: “…problems that are considered to be inherent, as well as those relatively fixed qualities that are attributed to persons and to relationships, are rendered less fixed and less restricting” (p. 38). Externalizing conversations and externalizing language forms the backbone of a narrative career counselling approach and aids in the deconstructive questioning process of examining the cultural content of the stories that are prominent in shaping clients’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours regarding their careers. The practice of objectifying and externalizing influential career discourse will also form the basis for the discourse analysis of the systemic narrative career
counselling process conducted in the second phase of this study (see Chapter 7). As will be described later, the second phase constructs suggestions for a post-structuralist career psychology as an alternative adjunct to the modernist-positivist tradition of research and practice.

In conclusion it can be suggested that, although in its infancy, the proposed collaboration between the STF and a post-structural narrative approach to career counselling provides potentially useful (critical and innovative) avenues for career psychologists in assisting individuals negotiate their careers. The following chapter provides an overview of international and national adolescent career research with regards to trends in research focus and methodology. This overview will provide a representation of the research context within which the current study has generated its aims and research activities.
CHAPTER 4
ADOLESCENT CAREER RESEARCH REVIEW

Positioning the Review

The following chapter aims to provide a review of a representative sample of international and national research conducted into the career development and experiences of adolescents over an identified period. As far as international career research is concerned, a ten-year period stretching from 1994 to 2003 was identified as a decade of research to be reviewed. In terms of national trends the review stretched over a longer period of approximately twenty years. After establishing the general aims, framework and scope of the review the chapter firstly examines the trends of international career research. As will be explained below, this body of international research has been categorized and structured according to a systemic framework that reveals dominant trends of research focus. Thereafter brief reflections, on the current study’s focus on the empowering of research participants, are provided. A number of international research studies employing the concepts of narrative and discourse are then surveyed for where such studies may be leading career researchers. The same systemic structure described above is then used to re-present the dominant trends in South African adolescent career research. Emerging narratives of career research within the South African context are then also examined for how they orient researchers towards the careers and lives of adolescents. Further comments from previously conducted reviews of the status quo of South African career research over the past two decades are then provided.

The intention of the review is to provide an overview of recent trends in career research in terms of the focus areas and methodology they have employed. From the outset it is acknowledged that the systems, discursive and narrative theoretical framework, and the postmodern and post-structural philosophical underpinnings of this research study, can not be dissociated from and on the contrary support, the perspective that has been constructed here regarding the state of research dealing with adolescent career development over the past ten to twenty years. Furthermore, as with any perspective given from a particular paradigmatic position, the current review brings with it particular implications for this research project as well as possible further studies into the career development of adolescents. These implications have also been put forward.

The review presented here has therefore been guided by a contextual orientation that has resulted in a particular structuring, selecting, grouping and reconstruction of a vast
body of work falling under the proposed review area. In a sense, this chapter requires
the attribution of a particular semantic nuance to the word *review*. This chapter is a re-
view in the sense that the identified area of research (i.e. adolescent career development)
has been viewed again in an attempt to identify the dominant trends in its research focus
and methodology. As will be explained more fully later, of particular interest to the
current study has been the identification of the particular *systems of influence
considered significant* by researchers over the last number of years. By employing the
structuring framework provided by the STF (Patton & McMahon, 1999), the identified
body of research has been sorted and categorized according to the three systems of
influence proposed by the STF (i.e. individual system, the social system and the
environmental/societal system). The aim of this sorting has been to provide a contextual
framework within which to position adolescent career research and to ascertain where
the dominant focus of that research has been and where it may still need to venture.

Of particular interest to the researcher has been the need to determine whether there
has been a shift towards contextual and holistic conceptualizations of adolescent career
research, such as the one presented in the current study. Admittedly this chapter has
been constructed from a certain *re-view-point* (i.e. that of a contextual systemic
paradigm) that supports a holistic and integrationist research approach to adolescent
career development rather than decontextualized investigations into isolated variables
that impact on or constitute the career development of adolescents. The emergence of
the systems, constructivist and social constructionist theoretical perspectives within the
career field invites researchers into an awareness of how the *meaning and expression
of the experiences to which often-researched career-related variables (such as career
maturity, career aspirations, career self-efficacy, gender, and career self-concept,
amongst others) claim to refer to are negotiated within individuals’ local and particular*vocabularies*, socio-cultural relations and societal structures.

This review therefore argues that, without this awareness, research may continue to
investigate isolated variables that support what are believed to be *universal theoretical
constructs* and approaches to adolescent career development, while marginalizing
research participants’ unique way of making meaning of their careers. Career
counselling proposals emanating from such research studies may in practice not be
relevant or appropriate to the negotiation of respectful *situation-specific* career
counselling relationships (i.e. relationships which are themselves embedded within
unique historical, socio-cultural networks of meaning). Although a considerable body of
literature has emerged within the career field that argues for contextual, holistic and
meaning-focused approaches to career development and counselling (see, for example, special issues of the Journal of Vocational Behavior 2003, Volume 64; Perspectives in Education, 2005, Volume 23)), this research review suggests that these proposals have not been substantially taken up into the activities and conceptualization of adolescent career research thus far. While the present review testifies to the emergence of contextual views, qualitative, postmodern, constructivist and systemic conceptualizations of adolescent career development have been overshadowed by traditional quantitative research designs focusing on isolated and clustered variables and career theoretical constructs.

Scope of Review

Admittedly this review is limited in its scope in the sense that it has not exhaustively sampled, summarized and presented the details of all available research conducted in the area of adolescent career development over the identified period. Omissions that stand to contradict the trends identified here are therefore possible and acknowledged. Nevertheless the review presented here aims to provide an overview of the general trends in career research focus and methodology, both nationally and internationally. To ensure that studies reviewed here are sufficiently representative of the dominant trends encountered both nationally and internationally, career research was surveyed and sourced from major career research capturing sources. As far as the international trends are concerned the researcher surveyed ten annual reviews (stretching from 1994 to 2003) of practice and research in career counselling and development from the Career Development Quarterly (Dagley & Salter, 2004; Flores, Scott, Wang, Yakushho, McCloskey, Spencer, & Logan, 2003; Whiston & Brecheisen, 2002; Luzzo & Wright MacGregor, 2001; Arbona, 2000; Young & Chen, 1999; Swanson & Parcover, 1998; Niles, 1997; Stoltz-Loike, 1996; Walsh, & Srsic, 1995). The selection of the Career Development Quarterly was guided by the fact that it is the only journal that has consistently and consecutively produced reviews of practice and research in career counselling and development over the demarcated ten-year period. The upper parameters of the review were also determined by which annual reviews were available. The annual review for 2004 was not yet available and could not be included here.

From the ten available annual reviews, studies that endeavoured to investigate aspects of adolescent career development were identified and reviewed. Employing a systems theory framework structure, the identified studies were categorized and grouped according to the system of influences to which its research focus pertained. In this way the general trends of research focus could be elucidated. Furthermore, the identified
studies were screened for the type of methodology employed to identify whether methods of research are in fact correlating to the recent emergence of a call for qualitative and meaning-focused approaches to research within the field of career research (Savickas & Lent, 1994).

As far as national career research is concerned, the researcher surveyed the major electronic national career research capturing resources, including the National Research Foundation (NRF) online database and other online databases available to the researcher. A number of journals were also sourced including amongst others, *South African Journal of Psychology, Journal of Vocational Behavior, South African Journal of Education*, and *Journal of Counseling and Development*. Again a systems theory framework structure was used to categorize and group studies according to the system of influence to which their aims pertained, and trends in methods of research were again identified.

Although the dominant trends seem to suggest a paucity of research that has been structured around contextual and meaning-focused conceptualizations of career development (as theoretically explored in Chapters 2 and 3), a select number of studies were identified here as illustrations of the type of context-specific and meaning-focused career research available to future researchers. Among these *alternative* research approaches can be grouped a few studies that have been guided by constructivist, social constructionist, narrative and systemic theoretical frameworks. This grouping points to the *horizons of research* aimed for and explored in the current study.

Now that the scope, and the structuring and theoretical framework for this review have been established, the identified research can now be reviewed. The next subsection presents a systemic structuring of international adolescent career research conducted over a period stretching from 1994 to 2003.

**International Adolescent Career Research**

*Individual System*

From the ten annual reviews of practice and research in career counselling and development from the *Career Development Quarterly* a range of studies was identified as focusing on and researching variables and career theoretical constructs related to individual system influences of adolescent samples. Individual system-related studies also constituted the largest portion (in comparison to social system and environmental/societal system related studies) of the reviewed research conducted into adolescent career development over a ten-year period. The majority of these studies investigated the interrelationship between individual system variables, or the relation of
particular theoretical constructs to such variables. The methods used to study these variables were mainly structured around quantitative research designs associated with the modernist-empiricist theoretical tradition still dominating the career field. Examples of research foci that represent the type of investigations conducted into the interrelationship between individual system variables, and between such variables and theoretical constructs (over the span of 1994 to 2003) included the following: academic self-efficacy and adult unemployment and job satisfaction (Pinquart, Juang & Silbereisen, 2003), self-esteem and independence in finding work (Hoi, Keng-Howe & Fie, 2003), career maturity and self-efficacy, age, career decidedness, work commitment and gender (Creed & Patton, 2003), personality and vocational interest (Larson & Borgen, 2002), the correspondence of interests and abilities with occupational choice and the role of gender and ethnicity in this phenomenon (Tracey & Hopkins, 2001), career beliefs and career maturity (Schnorr & Ware, 2001), career knowledge and grade level (Walls, 2000), aspiration-expectation discrepancies (Armstrong & Crombie, 2000), self-estimates of occupational abilities and vocational interests (Prediger, 1999), career interests (Feehan & Johnston, 1999; Reyes, Kobus & Gillock 1999), the construct of career indecision and its antecedents (Osipow, 1999), gender and sex role identity and occupational sex role stereotypes (Cook & Simbayi, 1998), disability and career awareness (Furlonger, 1998), career maturity and career decision-making attributional style (Powell & Luzzo, 1998), occupational aspirations and expectations (Rainey & Borders, 1997; Rojewski & Yang, 1997), generalizability of vocational interests across ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status (Ryan, Tracey & Rounds, 1996), self-efficacy and career decision-making activities (Luzzo, 1995), career indecision types (Rojewski, 1994a), career and educational aspirations and giftedness (Leung, Conoley & Scheel, 1994), and career maturity with regards to self-rating abilities, gender and ethnicity (Westbrook, Buck, Wyne & Sanford, 1994).

Particularly absent in these and other reviewed studies is a consideration of the relational contexts within which the identified and isolated or clustered career related variables are attributed significance. Evident in the majority of the individual system studies reviewed is the traditional thrust of modernist-positivist quantitative approaches to research (Glavin, 2004) with an emphasis on universal theoretical constructs (as listed above) that encourage the construction of individuals’ career experiences within the theories considered valid and significant by the professional research community. This moves our attention further away from the complexity of participants’ lives and towards abstracted, assumed to be universal constituents of career development.
Admittedly, certain studies, in exploring the complexity of their theoretical constructs did aim to locate them in relation to a range of other situation-specific variables. Creed and Patton (2003), for instance, investigated the construct of career maturity in relation to self-efficacy, age, gender, career decidedness and work commitment. The majority of the reviewed studies, however, did not attend to the social and environmental contexts within which their research participants were positioned. The normative and culture-specific nature of theoretical constructs were generally also not considered. Certain studies even attempted to determine the generalizability of dominant theoretical models of vocational interests across ethnicity, gender and socio-economic status (e.g., Ryan, Tracey & Rounds, 1996). The latter authors concluded that Holland’s (1985) RIASEC model is generalizable across influences studied.

Obscured in studies that aim to identify structural similarities in spite of factors such as ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status is the assumption that such social and political influences that shape the way in which internal state descriptions of career identity (such as individual interests) are expressed can or should somehow be surmounted. This is a particularly modernist assumption which has been profoundly challenged by emerging contextual understandings of career within systemic, constructivist, social constructionist and narrative camps. This growing attention to the context in which individuals’ career identities are negotiated, shaped and expressed had already in 1996 been supported by Blustein and Noumair (1996) who proposed that the definition of the self and identity in the career realm should begin to encompass the concept of embeddedness. Embeddedness highlights the reciprocal relationship between contextual factors (e.g., history, family, economics, and culture) and intrapersonal experience and results in context-rich understanding of self and identity.

Despite this proposal many studies have continued to investigate individual system variables in an isolated and rather decontextualized manner, even if the interrelationship between clusters of individual system variables were considered. Modernist claims for generalizability have not been without counter-claims, like those proposed by Watson, Stead, and Schonegevel (1998). The latter authors examined the cross-cultural and gender structural equivalence of Holland’s theory among Black South African adolescents. In contrast to Ryan et al. (1996), these authors found that practitioners should not assume cross-cultural validity for Holland’s theory. Some authors’ findings also suggested that ethnic factors and other systemic influences such as family support, guidance and expectations are pivotal in the career development of adolescents from minority groups (Bullington & Arbona, 2001). The usefulness of studies guided by
modernist assumptions cannot be disqualified, but the abovementioned studies (focusing on decontextualized clusters of intrapersonal variables) are critiqued here for the way in which they produce textual representations of research participants’ careers that fail to adequately account for the complexity of the socially embedded experiences of participants’ lives, career decision-making and career development. When ‘universal’ career theoretical constructs such as career maturity, self-efficacy, decision-making attributional style, and career knowledge are privileged in describing the career development of adolescents from a range of varying contexts, those not conforming to the researcher’s cultural and normative evaluations of ‘effective career decision-making’, ‘age appropriate career maturity’, ‘adequate career knowledge’ and so on are constructed in the deficit. As Bird (2004) states:

the spectre of the professional gaze is discriminatory as it falls on the marginalized, the other/than the dominant cultural group. This categorization as ‘other’ is predominantly expressed as an absence which can be assessed, categorized and evaluated according to normative standards (p. 28).

Arguably it is the growing awareness of the impact of such western cultural and theoretical imperialism within the career field, with its disqualification of diversity and indigenous knowledges of career, which has turned researchers’ attention more and more to the social system of influences within which adolescent career development is negotiated. There has therefore been a gradual but evident de-emphasis on exclusively individual system influence studies over the past eight years as reflected in the annual reviews. What has emerged is an increasing research interest in the social and contextual factors relevant to the situation-specific and relational career development of adolescents. In a limited expression there has also been a migration towards employing qualitative or meaning-focused research methods that privilege the vocabularies and meaning systems of participants and not exclusively professional theoretical constructs.

Social System

From the ten annual reviews in the Career Development Quarterly, a further range of studies was identified as focusing on and researching variables and career theoretical constructs related to social system influences of adolescent samples. The dominant research trend identified in the studies reviewed under the social system relates to a gradual broadening and inclusion of the range and number of influences/variables
considered relevant by researchers in constructing contextually embedded understandings of adolescent career development.

Studies conducted in the earlier stages of the last decade were focused in general on the interrelationship between career theoretical constructs and isolated social system influences. These studies focused mostly on the parent-child relationship (e.g. Blustein, Prezioso & Schultheiss, 1995; Kracke, 1997; O’Brien, 1996; Rainey & Borders, 1997; Solberg & Brown, 1996; Trusty, 1996; Young, 1994) and generally indicated that familial support and encouragement during adolescence is crucial to fostering career development. Blustein, Prezioso and Schultheiss (1995), for instance, found a strong relationship between parent-child attachment and the ability of adolescents to commit to a career choice, while Trusty (1996) found parental involvement in the career development process of their children to be a significant predictor of constructive attitudes and positive perceptions of the future for adolescents. As far as the current review is concerned, more pertinent than the actual findings of these earlier studies is their limited contextual focus when compared to studies that started to emerge during the latter part of the past decade. The latter studies gravitated towards proposals for more holistic and integrationist understandings of career than those proposed by traditional theoretical constructs and conceptualizations.

This gravitation was not pervasive but has marked the beginning of a potentially significant shift. Raskin (1998), for instance, concluded that career maturity is a useful but limited construct for understanding adolescents’ life career transitions and suggested that career practitioners need to integrate personality, decision-making style and contextual issues. Seginer and Halabi-Kheir (1998) investigated Israeli Druze and Jewish adolescent passage to adulthood in the context of culture, age, and gender. Mau and Bikos (2000) investigated the relative importance of school, family, personal/psychological, race and sex variables in predicting the career aspirations of adolescents. Two studies examined the career development of female adolescents in the United States and emphasized the importance of considering career development and relational issues in tandem (Meinster & Rose, 2001; Tang & Cook, 2001). Trusty (2002) also studied the influence of various contextual factors on the goals of high school adolescents. Flores and O’Brien (2002) examined the influence of contextual and social cognitive variables on Mexican American adolescent women’s career goals. All these studies found varying degrees of support for (and promoted) considering the integrative impact of a range of relational and contextual variables. The latter studies are only a few examples of studies that attempted to broaden the scope of investigation.
deemed relevant by social system related career research. As stated by Flores et al. (2002), recent years have shown the emergence of a range of variables being studied such as personality, interests, self-efficacy, social class, family, environmental context, and important life roles. Along with this diversification and broadening of research focus, emphasis for counselling suggestions started to fall more on systemic interventions with parents, teachers and employers rather than on traditional test-and-tell approaches (Flores et al., 2002). In a sense there seems to have been limited but growing correlation between research activities, on the one hand, and the holistic integrationist theoretical shifts supporting frameworks of career development such as the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999), on the other hand.

The contextual landscape of adolescent career research has therefore been broadening since the late nineties and has concurrently begun to incorporate socially embedded, meaning-focused research designs and approaches. Savickas (1993) had already in the early nineties proposed that the field of career psychology needs to become less expert-dominated, less focused on fit, and more interested in the construction of meaningful stories rather than test scores. In line with this sentiment a number of researchers have become interested in the qualitative investigation of individuals’ unique career experiences and contexts. For instance, in a study with work-bound adolescents, Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, and Whote (2002) used qualitative techniques to explore the psychosocial antecedents of adaptive transitions after high school and to characterize the transition from high school to work. The findings from this study challenge traditional models of career counselling that neglect social system influences. In keeping with this contextual-qualitative orientation Young, Valach, Ball, Paseluikho, Wong and DeVries (2001) conducted a study with Canadian adolescents and their families and concluded that the adolescents’ career development was embedded in the larger relational context. According to Young et al. (2001), this context included relationships, parenting, identity, and cultural factors. Similarly, Kenny, Blustein, Chaves, Grossman and Gallagher’s (2003) pioneering study used developmental contextual theory to understand how a person’s behaviour is shaped by a reciprocal and dynamic relationship between the adolescent, the adolescent’s social environment, and the adolescent’s construction of meanings relative to that environment. Their findings indicated that family support and family barriers were significantly related to ninth-grade students’ commitment and career aspirations.

Although important, Kenny et al. (2003), Phillips et al. (2002), and Young et al.’s (2001) findings are less pertinent here than the paradigmatic and conceptual migrations
underpinning their research focus and method. It is proposed here that the implications of these migrations translate into the construction of research studies and career counselling practices that orientate themselves towards the socially and relationally constructed meanings of career supported within social systems. This in turn requires deliberation on the way in which such meaning is constructed within career counselling conversations and research activities themselves and what the real effects of this may be on the lives of research participants and career clients. It is argued here that the shift towards the contextual and local meanings of career requires a further re-evaluation of the overall aims and methods of career research. This study has explored therefore the possibility of researching the recursive movement between theoretical career constructs and the contextually embedded vocabularies and career stories of individuals. This has pointed the researcher towards an integrationist theoretical framework such as the STF and qualitative research methods such the MSCI, interviews⁸ and discourse analysis (Parker, 1992). The study follows the ethic of integration that has emerged in trying to find useful relationships between existing career theory and the changing landscape of career narratives. An example of such a relationship was also reviewed where Chen (2003) presented an integration of constructivist and positivist theories which included career as context conceptualization.

It has been argued here that recent trends in adolescent career development research have gradually emphasized the qualitative study of the contextually embedded nature of career development. This stands next to a tradition of modernist-positivist research, which has admittedly still dominated the field. Along with the inclusion of a greater diversity of contextual research variables has come the focus on socially negotiated meanings of career researched through qualitative methods. It is this meaning-focused approach that has been more fully taken up in the studies reviewed below (see the section of Emerging Narratives of Career Research) and which guides the current study. At this point, however, the review will briefly show how the last decade of adolescent career development research has positioned itself in terms of the environmental/societal system of influences.

Environmental/Societal System

Reflected in the selected studies from the Career Development Quarterly is the fact that environmental and societal influences on adolescent career development have not been extensively researched over the last decade. From the annual reviews in the Career

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⁸ The systemic narrative career counselling conversations conducted in this study are a form of interview that has as its primary focus the empowerment of the research participant and not the collection of data (as with traditional information-gathering research interviews).
only a few studies were identified as focusing on and researching variables and career theoretical constructs related to the environmental/societal system as constructed within the STF.

Implicit in certain studies not explicitly researching environmental or societal influences, was the investigation of the impact on adolescent career development of factors such as geographical location (Christmas-Best & Schmitt-Rodermund, 2001; Lebo, Harrington, Tillman, 1995; Silbereisen, Vondracek & Berg, 1997), exposure to previous employment (Hansen & Jarvis, 2000; Singh & Oztruk, 2000; Stone & Mortimer, 1998), and the impact of community economic problems (Chisholm & Edmunds, 2001, Rojewski, 1994b). Other studies have more explicitly examined the influence of environmental/societal variables such as: the importance of understanding the social, political, and economic conditions constraining the career development of African American females (Simpson, 1996), the impact of a multicultural context and an industrial relations climate on the career decision-making of grade 12 Australians from indigenous cultures (Hesketh, 1998), and the impact of the labour market and economic conditions on personal aspirations and later occupational achievement (Schoon & Parsons, 2002). However, in trying to group environmental/societal related studies it was discovered that numerous overlaps exist between such studies and studies that prioritize social system influences. This was also evident in integrationist recommendations of multifaceted career interventions (Stead, 1996) including economic interventions, organizational interventions, and individual interventions. Further studies included environmental/societal variables but concurrently aimed to traverse the three systemic levels, making it difficult to locate them exclusively in one system of influence only. Blustein, Philips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, and Roarke (1997), for instance, used both qualitative and quantitative analyses to identify a variety of individual, familial, and institutional factors that characterize adaptive transitions from school to work. As with the trends identified in the individual and social systems, the environmental/societal focus of research has begun to extend its scope but it has also begun to include the recursive interrelationship between systemic variables from all three systemic levels outlined within the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999).

Empowering Participants

A systems theory framework has been used up to this point in locating studies within the system of influence to which their research foci pertain. The aims and methodological assumptions, and purposes of the studies reviewed thus far can,
however also be considered from a further critical perspective. Important questions to be answered by researchers relate to the implications for participants of participating in research studies. Although a number of studies have been reviewed and identified as representative of emerging holistic and integrationist conceptualizations of career research and adolescent career development, the majority of available research within the field remains bound to traditional modernist-positivist quantitative designs that remain dispassionate to the value and effects of the research experience for the participants themselves. The following section departs from the systemic structuring framework and reviews certain studies and conceptualizations of career research that address the implications of their research activities for the lives of participants. These studies introduce the concepts of narrative and discourse in conceptualizing not only the career stories of their participants, but also the effects and implications of their studies for participants.

The accountability structures that position researchers within academic and professional systemic influences may need critical investigation and adaptation in order to start privileging not only a contextually and socially constructed view of career development but also the benefit for research participants of taking part in research studies. Forms of career research that orient themselves towards the aims of collaborative enquiry and action research (Gergen, 1999) need to emerge within the career field if the aforementioned issues are to be more fully addressed. While the quest for a complex enough integrating framework for adolescent career development (as described in Chapter 2 of the current study) seems to have inspired emerging career researchers, this quest remains in its infancy and requires further experimentation. It is with this notion that the current research project has aligned itself. The STF has provided a framework for the contextual construction of adolescent career development, while the MSCI workbook and the systemic narrative career counselling process have aligned themselves with the aims of action research that aims to empower and improve the conditions of research participants’ lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gergen, 1999). The narrative metaphor employed in the systemic narrative approach to career has also filtered its way into the conceptualizations of career emerging from recent postmodern literature and research in the career field (Journal of Vocational Behavior, 2003, Volume 64). A brief overview of this emergence will now be provided.

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9 The term ‘postmodern’ is used here to refer to the range of constructivist, social constructionist, post-structuralist and context-sensitive perspectives of career currently emerging in the career development research and theory literature.
Emerging Narratives of Career Research

Internationally the expanding interest in using narrative approaches and systems models in career development is reflected in the emergence of recent articles, books and research studies dealing with these approaches (Journal of Vocational Behavior, 2003, Volume 64; Sharf, 2006; Patton & McMahon, 1999; Perspectives in Education, 2005, Volume 23). The narrative and systems metaphors have also been investigated for their collaborative potential in developing contextual, meaning-focused approaches to career assessment and counselling. An example of such pioneering work is the research conducted by the career counselling team at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia (McIlveen, Ford & Dun, 2004; McIlveen, McGregor-Bayne, Alcock & Hjertum, 2003). McIlveen et al. (2004) have conducted research into the development of a career counselling assessment process that is based on notions derived from constructivism, narrative, and systems theory. The aforementioned authors utilized a sentence-completion method to facilitate clients’ exploration of personal career systems and their career stories more generally. McIlveen et al. (2003) investigated the practical efficacy of a semi-structured interview derived from the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999), which was developed in a career counselling service. Tentative support for the STF as a career assessment method was found. It is also the aim of the present study to investigate the potential of collaborating the STF with a narrative approach to career decision-making and counselling.

Although unique in its aims, this study draws on already identified relationships between the narrative metaphor of career development and the influence of variables in the social context. Chen (1997), for example, reviewed a number of studies from previous decades that use narrative models in exploring life career themes (Cochran, 1990; MacGregor & Cochran, 1988; Miller-Tiedeman, 1988; Savickas, 1989; Young, 1988; Young & Collin, 1988). These studies suggest that individual’s subjective experience within their life narratives, and the understanding and meaning derived from these narratives, are pivotal in the formation of their career decisions and planning. Chen’s review further employs a constructivist theoretical frame for career counselling and a conception of the self in interaction with the social context. Chen discusses the counselling implications for the way in which people construct narratives around present and future career themes by interpreting their experience within their current social context (or what might be called systems of influence). Chen offers an example of how the narrative metaphor becomes meaningful only in relation to the context or systems of influence within which individuals attribute meaning to their life
experiences. He also positions the career counsellor as supporting the client in writing a fruitful and personal life story. Over the past five years professionals in the career field have also utilized the narrative metaphor more extensively. Authors such as Chen (1997, 1998, 2002), Cochran (1997), Gibson (2004), Peavy (2000, 2001) and Brott (2001, 2004) have promoted narrative approaches within the field of career research and practice. Narrative-based research, although expanding, leaves many avenues for researchers to explore. One such avenue considered by the current study has been the relationship between post-structural philosophical perspectives, the systems theory framework and the narrative metaphor. This relationship has been investigated, as explained in Chapter 3 around the concept of discourse and its constituting effect on the career narratives available to research participants within their systems of influence. Of particular relevance then to the current study are the proposals and implications for adolescent career research of the post-structuralist concept of discourse and associated discourse analytic research approaches.

Career Discourse Analysis

International career research utilizing discourse analysis as a research methodology has been minimal and has been identified here in only two studies. No studies were identified however that used a discourse analytic approach in the context of adolescent career development more specifically. Broadly speaking, career discourse analysis would engage with the normative (often linguistic) devices that structure and maintain what is prescribed as desirable, optimal and appropriate for individuals’ career development, their relationships and their identities within particular communities and institutions. As outlined in Chapter 3, discourses and discursive practices are reproduced within systems of influence when they are internalized by individuals and communities as speaking the truth about what and who they can and should be in life. This discourse perspective of career points researchers to the socially constructed definitions and practices of negotiating what a career is and should be.

One particular study that adopted a discourse analytic perspective was that of Coupland (2003) who proposed that career is a social construction that is constantly up for re-negotiation. Hence, as demonstrated by Coupland, career’s status as a relation between people may be challenged. Coupland’s study attempted to explore these negotiations and challenges by means of investigating talk about career. She examined how university graduates deploy and resist taken-for-granted notions about career, and considered how such notions or career discourses function as a resource in participants’ talk about their lives. Ultimately, in opening up or deconstructing common sense
practices and ways of speaking, which construct and shape what systems of career influence support as acceptable or desirable forms of career, Coupland demonstrated how alternative career stories can be encouraged to emerge. As Coupland (2003) states:

In the articulation of alternatives to dominant ideologies in careers, gaps in hegemonic arguments are located and widened, what appear to be taken-for-granted understandings are opened to scrutiny. For future research, our focus should now turn to the discursively negotiated order, brought about through interactants bestowing social concepts, such as career, with structural properties (p. 530).

As is evident from the studies reviewed above there has been a gradual shift from determining the underlying structural components of career (components that are believed to universally underpin social and context-specific experiences of career) towards investigating how the meaning bestowed upon the concept of career is socially and contextually bound. This shift also has significant implications for how we view traditional career theory. Within professional psychological systems of influence certain theories and psychological approaches have been utilized as defining the universal components of career choice. However, such seemingly self-evident truths can be understood as expressions of discursive constructions particular to a western psychological tradition. It is this perspective that was adopted by Moir (1992) when he applied discourse analysis to the study of career choice accounts. Moir examined vocational undergraduates’ responses when interviewed about their course and related career choices, and constructed a critique of traditional psychological approaches to the study of career choice. In contrast to traditional modernist-positivist research that aims to reveal underlying psychological structures or processes which govern career choice, Moir was concerned with the social context in which participants’ responses were generated and, in the case of interviews, the interactive functions they may serve (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Moir’s (1992) alternative approach to the study of career choice accounts examined the influence of the interactive context on the way respondents constructed their answers, which enabled an examination of the functions that respondents’ answers serve. In this way Moir could examine the conversational pattern of the interview transcript and not just excerpts that are categorized according to a particular theoretical framework. Moir concluded that difficulties encountered, when attempting to frame the
complexity of the conversational context within universal structures/categories, calls into question the psychological reality which traditional psychological theories purport to describe. This perspective that discourses – that position individuals and which individuals use to position themselves in certain accounts/narratives of career - perform certain functions (rather than expressing underlying universal structures) has been adopted in the current study. More specifically, it will be shown how certain career discourses have positioned a research participant in relation to the dominant career narratives available to her in her system of career influences, rather than (those discourses) being expressions of her underlying personality or authentic self. Having surveyed and identified the dominant trends and emerging horizons of international adolescent career research, attention will now be given to the same in relation to South African career research.

South African Adolescent Career Research

In establishing what the dominant national trends have been over the past two decades of research into adolescent career development the researcher sourced a list of studies from national research capturing resources (e.g., the National Research Foundation and Ebscohost data bases) and journals (see above). Again the Systems Theory Framework provided a structuring frame in sorting and establishing what South African researchers have considered as important influences to investigate. As will be demonstrated there exists a correspondence between the dominance of individual system-related studies internationally and the national foci of research outlined here. Nevertheless to some degree there has been an emergence of research that considers the importance of conceptualizing adolescent career development in terms of the changing nature of social and environmental/societal influences in South Africa. Furthermore, to some degree South African career researchers have also begun to align themselves with the thrust of postmodern, systemic, social constructionist and constructivist career perspectives towards contextual meaning-focused career research methods, career counselling and career theory. This alignment exists, however, as a narrow minority in comparison to the tradition of positivist-empiricist (i.e., quantitative) career research that populates the shelves of our South African university libraries.

Individual System

A number of South African studies were identified as focusing on and researching variables and career theoretical constructs related to individual system influences of adolescent samples. Individual system-related studies also constituted the largest portion (in comparison to social system and environmental/societal system-related
studies) of the reviewed national research conducted into adolescent career development over the past ten to twenty years. The majority of this larger portion of studies investigated the interrelationship between individual system variables, or the relation of particular theoretical constructs to such variables. The methods used to study these variables were for the majority structured around empirical quantitative research designs. From these studies can be identified a number of individual system influences considered relevant as well as the selection of samples from a range of racial and cultural groups previously marginalized from South African research studies.

Sibilanga (2003), for instance, investigated the career maturity and career aspirations of black adolescents in a rural community, while Setshedhi (2003) conducted an investigative study of the influence of gender and grade in the career indecision of semi-rural, Zulu-speaking black South African learners in Grades 10 to 12. Similarly, Williams (2002) researched the career decision-making self-efficacy and career identity amongst black senior high school learners while, in an earlier study, Botha (1996) studied the development of career identity among Xhosa-speaking adolescents. Although South African individual system research seems to have ventured into socio-economic and cultural strata previously neglected from academic studies, the question remains whether the predominant western-empiricist methods of research supporting professional psychological vocabularies, are appropriate to the task. Botha (1996), for instance, suggested that in the light of the changing socio-political situation in South Africa, career choice has become a far more complex task for the black adolescent than in the past. The same author links career identity development to areas of career development such as self-information, decision-making, vocational and career planning. Questions that remain, however, relate to an earlier critique of researchers’ cultural and normative evaluations of what might constitute ‘appropriate levels of self-information’ ‘effective career decision-making’, ‘age appropriate career maturity’, ‘adequate career knowledge’ and so on. Although this is not the place for a critique of the abovementioned studies, the dominant focus in South African research on empirically and quantitatively measuring a diversity of individuals and groups according to frequently used career theoretical constructs such as career decision-making self-efficacy (Eaton, 2001; Kemp, Ndabeni, 2004; 2005; Williams, 2002), career maturity (Herr, 2003; Kolbe, 1997; Sibilanga, 2003), and career indecision (Gordon, 2000) may continue obscuring the contexts and frames of meaning within which the experiences, to which such constructs claim to refer, are negotiated and narrated.
In contrast to international trends, national individual system-related studies have not significantly expanded their scope to include interrelationships between a range of variables or to locate such variables within the influence of context. Isolated studies have investigated the impact of certain career related interventions on variables such as career maturity (Herr, 2003; Kolbe, 1997), but such studies remain bound to the culturally normative evaluations implicit in career theoretical vocabularies. It is therefore necessary to turn towards the context and socially negotiated meanings of career-related variables and influences that has remained under-researched on a national level.

**Social System**

The past two decades have revealed a paucity of career development research, which explores the range of social systemic influences that contribute to the unique career experiences, and knowledge of individuals within their specific contexts. However a number of studies have recently begun to investigate more explicitly the impact of a greater range of social systemic variables (Müller, 2005; Sher, 2000; Sifunda, 2001). For the majority, national research investigating social system variables have revealed a focus on the role of family, teachers and the media. These variables have also been investigated with regards to the occupational knowledge and occupational aspirations of cultural and ethnic groupings that have traditionally been under-represented in South African studies. A number of studies have thus begun to investigate the particular social and cultural embeddedness of South African adolescents’ career development. Botha and Ackerman (1997), for instance, examined the relation between parents’ career status and career identity development among Xhosa-speaking adolescents. Maesela (1994) incorporated social systemic influences, such as family background and cultural traditions, with individual system influences such as personality traits and vocational needs, in investigating black grade 12 pupils’ career development. This growing social systemic focus was already evident in earlier research with disadvantaged cultural groups in South Africa, which examined career maturity in relation to social system variables such as parental occupational level (Thom, 1988; White, 1986). Another study from the early nineties had already focused on the influence of guidance teachers and parents with regards to occupational information and aspirations of black South African adolescents (Watson & Stead, 1993). Although not all these studies produced results that describe a significant correlation between individual system (or individual career theoretical constructs) and social system influences, they point to a slowly emerging trend of focus in South African research on contextual adolescent career development.
From the examples mentioned here could be gleaned a greater awareness of the value of considering the relational, cultural and social embeddedness of adolescent career development. The majority of the reviewed studies, however, still focused on isolated relationships or correlations between a limited number of social system influences and adolescent career development. The methodological frameworks of such correlation studies remained bound to quantitative paradigms, which tend to reduce the richness and complexity of relational and socially negotiated experiences of career development. A comprehensive and systemically rich research study was, however, recently conducted by Dullabh (2004) with a group of adolescents from a children’s home. This allowed her to pioneer the implementation and adaptation of the STF as an inclusive framework in a specified South African context. As explained in Chapters 1 and 2, the STF provides an integrative contextual framework that situates adolescent career development within a wide range of individual, social and environmental/societal influences. Dullabh’s study is an example of research that marks the emergence of qualitatively oriented career research in South Africa that has the potential to examine the impact of various recursively interacting systems (including social system variables) on career development at various developmental stages, with different cultures and gender, and within a variety of contexts. Dullabh’s study also expanded upon the number of limited research studies that have investigated societal/environmental influences on adolescent career development. As will be demonstrated, limited but growing attention has been given to this dimension of influence on adolescent career development in South Africa.

Environmental/Societal System

There exists a substantial amount of career theory that supports the role of environmental/societal influences such as historical trends, globalization, the employment market, socioeconomic status and geographical location in career development (Gottfredson, 1996; Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996; Patton & McMahon, 1999). However, both internationally and nationally there exists a paucity of research investigating such influences in relation to adolescent career development. Certain themes of research focus not necessarily bound to adolescent career development can however be identified at a national level. It is first of all worth noting that politics, social conditions and economic conditions have been considered most relevant in shaping how researchers and practitioners have defined career psychology in South Africa (Nicholas, Pretorius, & Naidoo, 1999). Various studies and articles have also considered the relationship between environmental/societal influences such as economic
conditions and the levels of technological advancement/training, which impact significantly on the employability of disadvantaged social groupings (Maree, 1989; Watson, Foxcroft, Horn, & Stead, 1997; Watson & Stead, 2002; Webb, 1990). The impact of socioeconomic influences, and their interrelationship with other variables such as occupational aspirations and career values have also been considered as a relevant research focus area (Alexander, 1990; Cherian, 1991; Horn, 1995; Maesela, 1994). South Africa’s unique legacy of racial and socioeconomic apartheid has also been considered relevant in conceptualizing and researching the challenges facing black students when entering occupations and career development trajectories that they have previously been denied (Leach, 1994; Naicker, 1994). Dullabh (2004) has suggested that the present socio-political and socio-economic changes in South Africa produce a much wider spectrum of career opportunities for black adolescents, which has the potential to complicate career choice significantly. A consideration of the impact of environmental/societal system influences on the career development of adolescents (of all races, cultures and ethnic groups) in South Africa seems to have become gradually more prominent in the foci of national research studies. This consideration has been limited to quantitative methodological frameworks that may not always account for the local and context specific meanings attributed to societal and environmental changes within communities and social groupings (marginal or not). A more comprehensive and inclusive framework is therefore required to guide South African career researchers, participants and practitioners in conceptualizing the recursive and complex relationship between macro environmental/societal system influences, meso social system influences, and micro individual system influences. As already stated, the Systems Theory Framework provides one such framework for emerging researchers in understanding and co-constructing the career narratives of adolescents.

Emerging Narratives of National Career Research

As mentioned earlier, the narrative and systems metaphors have been investigated for their collaborative potential in developing contextual, meaning-focused approaches to career assessment and counselling. As explained in Chapter 3, individuals’ career narratives can be understood as emerging from socially constructed norms that are supported and mediated within their systems of influence. In South Africa particularly the narrative metaphor has made an isolated but thorough emergence in research, theory and career counselling practice proposals (Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000). This section surveys a few such local investigations of the potential of a narrative approach for career interventions and career counselling with adolescents.
Joffe (2000), for instance, proposed a postmodern, narrative approach to career planning with adolescents. Joffe firstly narrated her own experience of alienation and marginalization in participating in a modernist adolescent career planning process which established the inspiration for her research study. She then defined an alternative postmodern, narrative approach to career planning and demonstrated how it can assist highly verbal, creative and intelligent, but emotionally conflicted adolescents to define a future career path. Joffe conducted unstructured interviews with three research participants in constructing their career narratives. Both her data collection and analysis procedures were an extension of the postmodern qualitative paradigm. Each narrative was analyzed thematically and the individual utility of a narrative approach to career counselling reviewed. Joffe illustrates the theoretical tenets and perceived utility of the postmodern narrative approach to career planning, while providing critical thoughts pertaining to this alternative career counselling method.

In another pioneering study, Marsay (2000) explored ways of answering the career-related challenges facing South African adolescents in a changing social and political environment. Amongst these challenges Marsay identifies the rapid rise in technological development, today's world of work demanding adjustment to change, the lack of stability of meta-career narratives, and a sense of hopelessness in the older generation resulting in a lack of guidance both from parents and educators in terms of career choice. In developing a career counselling process which suits the spirit of the age and which is discourse sensitive, Marsay turned to narrative ways of working. Questions asked by Marsay include: How can the career seeking adolescent be assisted to search for his/her own identity and recover his/her own voice? How can the adolescent be empowered to challenge and overcome the disempowering discourses which invite career "indecision"? Which way of working could assist the career seeking adolescent to position him/herself and enable him/her to exercise personal agency with regard to the dynamic world of work in the South African context, so that s/he can make a meaningful career decision?

These questions have also guided the current study to some extent. Marsay’s study describes and embodies the use of narrative ways of working to facilitate career decision-making. Resulting from a process of reflexive conversations, tellings and retellings of the participants’ stories and their own written reflection on the narrative conversation process, a recursively produced research report was constructed. Marsay (2000) and Joffe’s (2000) studies are particularly relevant to this study in terms of their aims of empowering adolescent participants, their qualitative methodological
assumptions, and their exploration of a narrative metaphor in terms of practical application to a career counselling process with adolescents. Other studies that support narrative ways of researching and conceptualizing career with other sample groups have also been conducted at a national level. These include: an investigation of the career narratives of first year university students (Hart, 2003), a narrative and hermeneutic approach to the career development of professional Black South African women (Frizelle, 2001), the development of a post-modern model for career guidance (Bester, 2000), a pastoral narrative approach to career (Wessels, 2000), a narrative study of teachers' life stories and their work identity (Heaton, 2000), and the career narratives of South African women professors (De la Rey, 1999). It is worth noting that the aforementioned studies have all focused on adult rather than adolescent groups, leaving a gap in narrative-based research with adolescents.

From the preceding review there can be identified the emergence of significant support for narrative, systemic and contextual approaches to career research in South Africa as well as internationally. This fairly recent development carries in its wake a range of possibilities and unanswered questions with regards to methodological issues and research focus. These possibilities and questions have propelled the current study towards an experimental and improvising approach to what might be considered fairly uncharted research waters. Table 1 below provides a brief summary of the national and international research trends identified in this chapter thus far. What follows is a brief investigation of previous reviews conducted of South African career research.

Previous Reviews

The current review finds many resonances with, but should here be augmented by, earlier reviews of the state and trends of research in South Africa over past two decades. Stead and Watson (1998a) critically examined career research in South Africa from 1980 to 1997 focusing on adolescent and young adult career issues. The latter authors argue that it is increasingly important for career research and counselling to undergo an indigenization appropriate to a South African context. They describe how South African career research over the review period stretching from 1980 to 1997 has been largely dependant on theories (Holland, 1985, Super, 1990) and research from the United States. Western approaches have mostly been extended to career research with a range of ethnic groups in South Africa, based on the structuralist-modernist assumption that career theoretical constructs have universal and uncontested meaning and relevance.
Table 1
Summative Re-view of International and National Research Trends

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>International Trends In Adolescent Career Development Research</th>
<th>National Trends In Adolescent Career Development Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Individual System           | • Mostly quantitative research designs  
• Lack of consideration of the relational contexts within which isolated or clustered career related variables are attributed significance  
• Gradual but evident de-emphasis on exclusively individual system influences | • Constituted the largest portion reviewed national research  
• Investigated the interrelationship between individual system variables, or the relation of particular theoretical constructs to such variables  
• Mostly empirical quantitative research designs  
• Selection of samples from racial and cultural groups previously marginalized from South African research |
| Social System               | • Earlier stages of the last decade focused on the interrelationship between career theoretical constructs and isolated social system influences  
• Latter part of the past decade gravitated towards proposals for more holistic and integrationist understandings of career  
• Focus on socially negotiated meanings of career researched through qualitative methods | • General paucity of career development research exploring social systemic influences  
• Isolated recent investigations of social systemic influences (family, teachers and the media)  
• Quantitative paradigms with limited consideration of relational and socially negotiated experiences of career development  
• Example of research that marks the emergence of qualitative career research examining various recursively interacting systems (Dullabh, 2004) |
| Environmental/Societal System | • Environmental and societal influences on adolescent career development not extensively researched over the last decade  
• Environmental/societal influences | • Paucity of research investigating environmental/societal influences in relation to adolescent career development |
System research has begun to extend its scope to investigate the recursive interrelationships between systemic variables using qualitative and quantitative methods.

- Gradually increasing consideration of the impact of environmental/societal system influences on the career development of adolescents
- Quantitative methodological frameworks not accounting for the context-specific meanings attributed to societal and environmental changes within communities and social groupings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative</th>
<th>Narrative and systems metaphors investigated for their collaborative potential in developing contextual, meaning-focused approaches to career assessment and counselling. Subjective and socially constructed life narratives, and the meaning derived from such narratives considered pivotal in the formation of career decisions and planning.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Discourse Analysis</td>
<td>No studies using a discourse analytic approach in the context of adolescent career development. Investigating how the meaning bestowed upon the concept of career is socially and contextually bound. Calls into question the psychological reality which traditional psychological theories purport to describe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Although narrative research employed discursive perspectives, no research was identified that explicitly conducted discourse analysis in the study of adolescent career development.</td>
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</table>

However, as Stead and Watson explain, the 1990s have witnessed a questioning of the aforementioned universality, where researchers have begun emphasizing the importance of contextual factors in the career experiences of South Africans (Naicker,
A growing emphasis on context has also been joined by a re-conceptualization of the meaning ascribed to career theoretical constructs. So not only have South African career researchers shifted towards the inclusion of social system and environmental/societal system variables (as demonstrated earlier in this chapter), but the meanings attributed to theoretical vocabularies (e.g. career maturity) have been more contextually embedded (Hickson & White, 1989; Watson & Van Aarde, 1986; Watson, Stead & De Jager, 1995). As far as research into career counselling is concerned Stead and Watson (1998a) describe South African research as limited in scope with an emphasis on diagnosis rather than process and outcomes. Furthermore a limited inclusion of black adolescent samples in career counselling research has resulted in a lack of information on the career counselling requirements and experiences of black adolescents (de Bruin & Nel, 1996). The late nineties and early part of this century have however since witnessed the emergence of a greater inclusion of previously marginalized ethnic and racial samples in career research (as described earlier in this chapter).

Stead and Watson also suggest that there has been a paucity of research that has assessed the relevance and validity of internationally developed career measures for South African contexts. The latter authors do however describe a number of studies that were produced during the 1990s that examined the construct validity of the test scores of international and national career instruments (e.g. Watson, Stead, & Schonegeval, 1997; Wheeler, 1992). Stead and Watson also emphasize the limited research focus on developing original instrumentation appropriate to a South African context. It is especially this limitation that is hoped to be addressed, in utilizing qualitative, context-sensitive career counselling and assessment measures such as the MSCI in the current research. In conclusion, Stead and Watson call for the development of a new identity for South African career psychology: “Such an identity need not be divorced from Western psychology but should be intimately linked to the sociocultural milieu in South Africa” (Stead & Watson, 1998, p. 297).

Watson and Stead (2002), in examining trends in South African career research and practice through the lens of a moral-philosophical framework, suggest that researchers have been largely engaged in short-term ameliorative work that focuses on the status quo of the micro level of career (i.e. the individual), rather than transforming the societal values, assumptions and practices that promote injustice, oppression and marginalization. Using Prilleltensky (1997) moral values framework for psychologists Watson and Stead propose that trends in South African career research and practice
have been guided by western theoretical constructs and measures that emphasize what Prilleltensky terms *traditional approaches* to (in this case career) psychology. Traditional approaches emphasize individualism and personal advancement and largely minimize the impact of the context of people’s experiences. Watson and Stead further state that the dynamic interaction of socio-historical, political and economic factors that significantly impacts on career development have not been sufficiently examined in South African empirically based career research. The *individual system focus* cast within the mould of western career theoretical constructs has been clearly demonstrated in the trends of research identified earlier in the current chapter. However, as this chapter has further shown, a growing number of South African career researchers have started migrating towards context-sensitive research approaches. This migration may in part be spurred on by what Watson and Stead (2002) have called the *crossroads* facing South African career research, theory and practice. This crossroads confronts career researchers with the ethical and moral implications of indiscriminately using westernized career theories and methodological frameworks, theories and methods which don’t always account for the unpredictable cultural and socio-political influences in South Africa that often negate linear individual career development. As Stead and Watson (1998a) state:

> The status quo of career theory and practice in South Africa requires career psychologists to heed the call to develop, implement, and evaluate theory and practice that will attempt to transform educational and work arenas so that they are characterized by equality and justice for all people (p. 29).

In conclusion, it can be proposed that researchers are left with the challenge of re-inventing and transforming what career research in South Africa is. Answering to this challenge requires a leap from theory into practice and action. What might indigenous, transformative career research look like in action? It is an answer to this question to which the current study is hoping to add. In the following chapter the methodological and conceptual framework of the research activities have been outlined. The chapter expands the conversation about what contextually embedded adolescent career research in South Africa could and possibly should be aiming to *do*.
CHAPTER 5
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Looking back and reflecting on the chapters that precede this account of the methods employed to structure the research activities, we can note the emergence in Chapters 2 and 3 of re-conceptualizations of career development theory and counselling, and the construct of career itself, towards socially embedded, integrationist and contextual constructions of career (and career stories) rather than grand universal theories and truth claims. It is here proposed that the emergence of constructivist (Watson, 2005), social constructionist (Young & Collin, 2004) and post-structuralist (Winslade, 2005) philosophical assumptions within career theory and practice have begun and will progressively challenge the conceptualization of what constitutes relevant, useful and ethical research practice in the career field. Without here re-constructing the theoretical underpinnings that would support such forms of research (see Chapters 2 and 3), it can be proposed that the current study aims to align itself with explorations into the career experiences of adolescents that address aspects of those career experiences that have been traditionally marginalized from research. As was argued and reviewed in Chapter 4, the majority of international and national studies conducted into adolescent career development over the last ten to twenty years have been based on modernist-empiricist, positivist, and therefore often western individualist, methodological assumptions that fail to pay attention to contextual factors, environmental factors and very importantly individuals’ dynamic, recursive interaction with such factors (Watson, 2005).

Consequently such research projects have tended to focus on extrapolating their socio-culturally, historically and contextually bound findings into claims about typical or appropriate career development of adolescents that may not always be helpful or relevant for all cultures, historical periods and contexts (Stead, 2004). Little attention has also been paid to the value and consequences of the actual research experience for the research participants themselves. The dominant methodological approaches of such studies have been quantitative in nature, which generates an interest in generalizable or universal theoretical claims, rather than the particular contexts of people’s lives as well as that of the research project itself.

This stands in contrast to emerging postmodern approaches to career (Watson & McMahon, 2005), in which the meaning and shape of career experiences and activities are viewed as historically and contextually negotiated and co-constructed between individuals and their specific socio-cultural environments or systems of influence.
Watson and McMahon (2005) propose that global and technological changes characterizing the postmodern condition have transformed the world of work, where continuous learning is demanded and career is increasingly understood as a dynamic process of personal and social construction (and continuous re-construction) within diverse contexts. This study proposes that such *relational politics of career identity* is critical to the researching and assessment of career experiences and development in the twenty-first century (Kuit & Watson, 2005; McMahon, 2002). As Watson and McMahon (2005) point out, prominent and emerging voices in the career field are suggesting, “we need to culturally and contextually locate our practice and develop greater awareness of inequities and social justice issues that may be perpetuated through our work” (p. 2). According to the present researcher this kind of critical and contextually located practice should include the domain of career research methods. In embracing this view, career research becomes emblematic of the political and moral critique that has been posed to traditional scientific inquiry which had, and in many camps still has, as its objective a form of value-neutrality that overlooks the cultural embeddedness and real consequences of its research methods and assumptions (Gergen, 1999). In light of this line of critique within the field of career psychology, and the marked paucity of contextually and politically orientated approaches to the study of the career development of adolescents in the South African context, this study aims to explore and describe the experiences of a particular group of South African adolescents from a collaborative, meaning-focused, context-bound and critical stance. At the same time the study employed data collection and representation strategies that would potentially limit the theoretical and methodological fragmentation described in Chapter 1, and prevent a further splitting off of qualitative approaches to career from the theoretical and quantitative career tradition.

With this rather ambitious aim in mind, the current research’s practice category (see Chapter 1) has been structured into two *phases* that approached and invited participants to constitute their career stories in a contextual-systemic (and hopefully empowering and useful) way. The first of the two phases employed a research methodology that produced *quantitative representations* of qualitatively described and selected themes and trends in the career stories of a sample of adolescent participants. The second phase utilized *qualitative-discursive* methods of gathering and making meaning of one

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10 Politically orientated research is here defined as research that pursues an awareness of the real effects (be they desirable or not) of the research process on the lives of research participants. It is an awareness, which in turn raises ethical questions about how research activities should be structured and whose interests such activities should serve. For further discussion of new debates around these questions see Gubrium and Holstein (2003).
participant’s career experiences. This combination of representations and data collection methods provided the opportunity of identifying similar or contrasting patterns between different sets of analyses, such as is facilitated in triangulation approaches (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The first phase’s aims, methodology and assumptions will firstly be outlined after which a substantial section will be dedicated to grappling with and formulating the aims, assumptions and procedures of the second phase of the study.

**Phase One: Representing the Qualitative Quantitatively**

*Starting Assumptions*

For this study to explore the implications of the emerging focus on the socio-political and systemic contexts of career development, and the meanings of career experiences produced by and within those contexts, it has employed a qualitative career assessment framework, called the My Systems of Career Influence Workbook (MSCI; McMahon, Patton & Watson, 2005a), as a research tool. The MSCI was developed and based on the STF’s context-sensitive understandings of career (McMahon, & Patton, 2002b; Patton, McMahon, & Watson, 2005) that accommodate a range of career theoretical perspectives in a way that such perspectives are used in the service of unique career development stories. Although the MSCI allowed the study to gather data regarding the participants’ career development, the notion of data gathering belongs to a tradition of dispassionate approaches to the world of research participants and, in a certain sense, fits uncomfortably with this study’s aims to engage with the subjective and socially negotiated career experiences of the research participants (Kvale, 1996). So, rather than viewing its purpose as collecting sufficient empirical data or establishing generalizable principles regarding adolescent career development, the current study sees itself as having produced a context-sensitive overview of a particular group of South African adolescents’ career experiences. The data of which the overview is presented can be considered qualitative in the sense that it draws on the subjective evaluations of research participants. Importantly, due to the fact that the MSCI contributed, and made available for evaluation, a range of theoretical constructs (drawn from research in the career field) to the way in which the adolescent participants subjectively described their career development trends, the data intimately connects this qualitative information with career theory. It could, however, further be argued that the current study’s analysis and representation of those subjective experiences strongly resembles the reductionistic tendencies of quantitative methodologies (Struwig & Stead, 2001). How is this the case? And how does this fit with a collaborative, meaning-focused, context-bound and critical stance that aims to find spaces beyond the qualitative/quantitative binary?
The MSCI engages the participants’ *subjective evaluation* of what has been significantly influential to them in their careers within the systemic context as this is outlined by the STF. However, the MSCI assembles and provides this information in a way that can and has been re-presented numerically and thus *quantitatively* in this study. In a sense the results from the first phase, and the re-presentation of those results, can therefore be considered both quantitative and qualitative. Having said this, the researcher proposes that more important than defining and classifying the results according to certain methodological categories, is establishing what the significance and utility is of this *numerically* presented data, and of the data collection procedures that produced it.

Firstly, this study acknowledges that the paradoxical *quantitative* analysis and representation of a qualitative, socially negotiated research process will not serve as the basis for *generalization* to any other population. Nor will the data be used in confirming and refuting hypotheses and theoretical claims, as might be the case in traditional scientific research. Instead, the re-presentation of the identified adolescent career development trends will be offered as a useful research strategy for structuring, exploring and describing such career development across both the micro and macro contexts of participants’ lives. This first phase (and the second phase) of the study thus answers to the critique outlined in Chapter 4 where career research to date was shown to require a further *broadening* of its view with regards to the recursive interrelationship between variables from all three systemic contexts outlined by the STF (i.e. individual, social and environmental/societal systems).

This *broadening of the view* of adolescent career experiences in South Africa, is consistent with the exploratory and descriptive nature of the study. Importantly, by not making substantive theoretical claims about adolescent career development in South Africa, this exploration and description does not claim to have been neutral or inconsequential in the lives of the research participants. As stated in Chapter 3, the very process of ‘data collection’ aims to provide participants with an opportunity to re-examine and re-construct their subjective experiences within the *systemic contexts* that have informed their career decisions. Thus the research process contributes in some way to the expression and constituting of the participants’ career stories and self-narratives. This process encourages research participants to *visually represent* and momentarily *distance themselves* from the taken-for-granted intrapersonal, social and societal/environmental contexts of their career decisions. In *wearing its values on its sleeve* and carrying out research that “celebrates its political agenda” (Gergen, 1999, p.
100), the first part of the research process invites participants to notice the relational, social and systemic construction of their career stories. It was hoped that by objectifying and evaluating their systemic influences, participants were able to separate from their prescriptions and inevitability, to consider how their career stories have been constructed, and how they might be otherwise. In a very limited sense the research orientates itself towards the aims of action research, which aims to empower and improve the conditions of research participants’ lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Gergen, 1999).

In short, the findings from the first aim must be viewed in the context of this interventionist program that makes data collection, analysis and representation a socio-political act orientated towards the benefit of the participants. What is presented as findings therefore embodies a very singular and condensed re-presentation of, but hopefully a broadening contribution to, the ongoing conversations that have constituted the career narratives of this particular group of South African adolescents.

Primary Aims

The purpose of the first phase of the present research is to explore and describe the career development of a group of Grade 11 female and male South African adolescents from middle socio-economic status environments. A career systems theory perspective of career development is employed in the first phase of this study in order to collaborate with the participants in co-constructing re-presentations of their career development as it is situated in three interrelated systems, namely: the individual, social and environmental/societal systems. Furthermore, the first phase situated such systemic re-presentations of the participants’ career development within the context of time and investigated the influence of past, present and future considerations. To achieve this the following specific aims and sub-aims have been formulated:

1. To explore and describe the career situation of a group of Grade 11 female and male South African adolescents from a middle socio-economic status environment.
2. To explore and describe the influence of the three interrelated systems of the Systems Theory Framework on the career development of a group of Grade 11 female and male South African adolescents.
   2.1 To explore and describe the influence of individual system influences on the career development of a group of Grade 11 female and male South African adolescents.
2.2 To explore and describe the influence of social system influences on the career development of a group of Grade 11 female and male South African adolescents.

2.3 To explore and describe the influence of environmental/societal system influences on the career development of a group of Grade 11 female and male 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 11 female and male South African adolescents.

3. To explore and describe the Grade 11 female and male adolescents’ reflections on their personal diagram of systemic influences.

Research Design

The primary aims of the first phase of this research adopted an exploratory descriptive design (De Vos, 1998; Hakim, 1987; Silverman, 1997). Cozby (1993) proposes that exploratory descriptive research should always aim to develop scientific knowledge. Although this is not the place for extending a critique of scientific knowledge claims, it should be noted that there has been an emergence of constructionist perspectives that emphasize the social determination of scientific facts and the relational emergence of scientific knowledge (Gergen, 1999). The aim of such perspectives is to encourage democratic participation from those traditionally excluded from scientific endeavours. The current study is thus exploratory in that its purpose was to gain familiarity with a relatively unknown phenomenon in a way that benefits participants. Although the participants may have already been familiar with their own career-related experiences, such experiences were explored within a framework that orientated the participants towards the relational and contextual influences that they may have been less conscious of and in a sense less familiar with. For the researcher the exploratory aspect of the study relates further to explicating and bringing the central constructs and concepts of the Systems Theory Framework into the service of the career experiences of the participants. Consequent to the construction of the participants’ career experiences within a systemic framework, the researcher (and hopefully the participants) could also formulate questions with regard to career-related experiences that point to further avenues and areas of investigation.

The study is descriptive in nature, as it aimed to provide a collaborative description and co-construction of the career experiences of a particular sample of adolescents within their unique context. The chief source of data took the form of written responses
and selections of *presented possible influences* within the MSCI workbook. The collection of data for the first phase of the study was therefore a qualitative career assessment measure (i.e. the MSCI) that invited systemically structured descriptions of career and career decisions. These descriptions were not neutral representations of participants’ career experiences, but productive and constitutive of life. As Anderson and Levin (1996) state,

> For modernists, language (spoken and unspoken, verbal and nonverbal) is representational; it reflects reality, given facts, and the natural order of things…Postmodernism radically questions what modernism stands for: legitimizing authoritative and universal social and cultural narratives (p. 48)

The methodological stance of the first (and second) phase of this research draws from the postmodern perspective that views reality as dynamic and continuously created, and language as creative and generative of ways in which we experience and make sense of our life events. The MSCI, consistent with this assumption, invites participants to complete diagrams and written responses to open-ended questions by drawing on their own experiences as career makers in particular contexts. It is however productive of certain (systemic-theoretical) descriptions and representations of careers to the exclusion of others. Questions that still remain relate to whether such systemic descriptions are in fact productive of the kind of career narratives that are useful, preferable and beneficial to participants. These questions are more closely addressed in the second phase of the present study and further answered in Chapter 8.

Although the data constructed within the MSCI can be considered qualitative\(^{11}\) in nature, the large sample size for the primary aim (70 participants) places the study outside the specifications of qualitative case study research (Silverman, 1997; Yin, 1994). The study is, however, still generative of qualitative information from which the main themes were drawn. The advantage of this research method is that it provides an opportunity to privilege and engage with the experiences of the participants, while facilitating the identification of more general trends and themes specific to the context in which this group of participants is negotiating their careers. Potential disadvantages of

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\(^{11}\) This study aims to deconstruct the quantitative/qualitative binary, but at times found it necessary to distinguish these two categories in describing the methodological procedures. It is suggested by the researcher that transforming a tradition of research does not necessarily imply breaking from its vocabulary completely.
this exploratory descriptive method included the time-consuming processes of data collection and analysis (Silverman, 1997; Struwig & Stead, 2001).

Participants

A non-probability purposive sampling procedure was followed in inviting participants for the first phase of the study. This method reduced aspects of time and costs and was appropriate in light of the adequate accessibility of the relevant population. The sample for the primary aim of this phase of the study comprised of 35 female and 35 male Grade 11 scholars from middle socio-economic status levels in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. Two middle class, single sex schools - one a girls-only and the other a boys-only school - were identified from which the participants were invited to take part in the study. The entire grade 11 group from each school was invited to participate in the process from which the MSCI’s of 35 girls and 35 boys were randomly selected. The rest of the data will be used in other studies utilizing the MSCI.

For the purpose of this study middle socio-economic status level has been defined according to the schools’ fee-paying structure and the geographic location from which the students were drawn. Even though the sample was characterized by some cultural diversity, career research in South Africa generally indicates that homogeneity in socio-economic level is a critical factor in selecting appropriate samples. The participants of this study fell within a 16 to 17 year age range. The language of instruction at both schools is English with all students taking English as a first language on the higher grade. The specified characteristics of the sample, particularly in terms of socio-economic, educational level and language, have been determined by the fact that the study forms part of an international collaboration with Australia around the MSCI. This requires that the South African sample would be of a comparable educational, developmental and socio-economic level to that of the Australian sample.

Measure

Drawing on the possibilities engendered by the Systems Theory Framework of career development as a qualitative assessment process, McMahon, Patton and Watson developed and tested the My System of Career Influences (MSCI) reflection process (McMahon, Patton, & Watson 2005a). The testing of the MSCI instrument was conducted in a two stage cross-national pilot study on Australian and South African samples in 2001 and 2002. The pilot study was conducted with the first pilot version of the instrument (McMahon, Patton, & Watson 2000) in university settings in Australia and South Africa. After comparing analyses across nations the instrument was further refined. After that refining process an adolescent version (McMahon, Patton, & Watson
2004a) was introduced and tested individually with adolescents in South Africa. The final printed version is now available (McMahon, Patton, & Watson 2005a). The MSCI has not been standardized in South Africa since it does not align itself with the assumption that universal structural psychometric properties need to be identified for all contexts. On the contrary the MSCI’s strength lies in its adaptability to diverse cultures and individuals.

The MSCI booklet consists of a structured format that provides participants with an opportunity to represent and reflect on potentially pertinent information about their career decision-making and how this process is situated within unique contexts and systems of influence. The advantage of this structure is that it provided the participants with an opportunity of re-searching how their careers are situated and influenced by their intrapersonal, relational and societal/environmental contexts. The MSCI structure also makes available a substantial amount of qualitative and contextual information about a fairly large group of individuals and this minimizes the reductionistic effect of quantitative measures that often focus on singular variables. More importantly, however, the structure and process of the MSCI encouraged the participants to “draw the constellation of influences in their system, leaving them with a tangible representation of the influences identified by them as significant. Furthermore, the reflective process section of the MSCI described below provides a stimulus for potential further conversations and discoveries regarding participants’ career development.

The STF’s adaptability and elasticity is well illustrated by the MSCI workbook. The MSCI allows individuals to map and visually represent their career stories within important systems of influence that have impacted on their career development. As stated earlier, the measure has formed part of a study with adolescents in South Africa within the specific context of a children’s home (Dullabh, 2004) and the MSCI was found to elicit useful and significant information not usually available in quantitative measures.

The MSCI is a nine-page workbook consisting of a sequence of three well-defined sections. The first section of the workbook, named My Present Career Situation, provides the participants with a range of open-ended questions relating to their present career position. This section provides the structure for the first aim of this first phase of the study. Respondents are encouraged, in this first section, to provide information about amongst other things life-roles, career-related experiences, strategies of career decision-making and career options considered to date. The questions in this section are open-ended and are useful for both researcher and participant in exploring not only the
information about career experiences considered relevant by the participant, but also the possible categories or areas of life from which career-related information can be sourced (Bailey, 1994; De Vos, 1998). With regards to the administration and facilitation of this section during the actual field work process, administrators (fourth year B.Psych registered counsellors who had been trained in the administration of the MSCI) were present to provide standardized clarification and guidance with regards to queries posed about open-ended questions by the participants.

The second section of the measure provides visual representations of the three interrelated systemic levels identified by the STF: individual, social and environmental/societal. Participants are invited to identify which of the influences proposed by the MSCI as relevant for each of the interrelated systemic levels, have been of significance in their own career decision-making processes. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to add influences, respective to each of the interrelated systems, which have not been included by the measure itself. After identifying significant influences, participants are further invited to indicate the level of importance of each respective influential variable. Participants could, for instance, use asterisks to indicate a greater level of influence for a particular variable. Processes between these systems are also investigated via the recursive nature of interaction within and between the systems, change over time, chance, and looking at the individual’s past, present and future career influences. The further sub-aims (within the second aim) outlined above drew from this second section in exploring and describing identified influential variables within the interrelated systems.

The third and final section of the workbook invites participants to integrate all the information from the previous diagrams into a step-by-step guided diagram on a chart provided. This diagram is then a representation of a personalized account of the participants’ own unique system of career influences. In addition a series of questions is provided that facilitates a reflective processing of the integrated and summarized information presented in this third and final section. This series of questions is called Reflecting on My System of Career Influences and is particularly useful within career counselling settings where clients can answer carefully thought out questions that invite a reflection on their experience of working through the sections of the measure and exploring the three interrelated systems. The participants’ reflections will form the data for the third aim of the first phase. Although the measure is self-explanatory or self-guided, McMahon, Patton and Watson (2005) suggest that teachers or counsellors involved in a MSCI career assessment/counselling process provide clarification and
support around this reflecting process. It is also during such a conversational process that the career stories or narratives of individuals can be ‘thickened-out’, told and re-told in order to construct an emerging career identity for the respondent. This career narrating process, as it is supported by the MSCI, has been more fully explored in the second phase of the study and will not be fully addressed here.

McMahon, Patton and Watson (2005b) have developed a user’s manual that can guide counsellors and teachers as they work through the workbook with both individuals and groups. This manual provides facilitators of the MSCI process with the necessary theoretical background to the MSCI and qualitative career assessment, which is essential to effectively locating and understanding the career development experiences of clients/pupils within the systems theory framework. Furthermore, teachers and counsellors are provided with step-by-step administrative guidelines for each section of the workbook, as well as a range of preliminary, supplementary and follow-up activities that can contribute to a meaningful process of systemically mapping individuals’ career development stories. This manual proved very helpful in the group facilitation of the MSCI in the present research. Apart from ensuring that there was consistent and uniform input from different facilitators, the manual ensured that each section of the MSCI was explained in a way that was user-friendly and concise.

Procedure

Formal contact was made with the relevant education authorities, the principals of the two schools, and the teacher-counsellors of both schools to obtain their permission for conducting the study. Before fieldwork commenced, consent was obtained from the legal guardians of all participants for participation in both the first and second phase of the study (see Appendices A and C). Participants and their guardians were informed of the nature and purpose of the study and offered a clear description of the anonymous, confidential and voluntary nature of the research. Participants were informed that they would be free to withdraw at any point from the research if so desired. Group facilitators were trained in the administration procedures and use of the MSCI, which was conducted in a group context. Four fourth year B.Psych registered counsellors were chosen as facilitators and trained in accordance with the MSCI step-by-step users’ manual that has been developed (MacMahon, Patton, & Watson, 2005b). This manual assisted the trained facilitators in following the correct procedures for appropriately facilitating the individual use of the MSCI in a group context. The administration of the MSCI was conducted over three 40 to 45 minute sessions: an introductory session in which the MSCI process was initiated, a session in which to further complete the MSCI,
and a third session for debriefing and reflecting on the experience. The final session also included an evaluation exercise in which the participants were asked to evaluate the measure and indicate whether they had found the experience and measure useful. The three sessions took place during the participants’ regular guidance periods in accordance with their school timetable. The participants’ booklets were returned to them for their further use after completion of the data analysis procedure. The researcher also ensured that the study met the ethical standards of the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Port Elizabeth (recently named Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University).

Data Analysis

For the first aim of this first phase of the study a qualitative content analysis was used to identify themes from the participants’ answers to the open-ended questions regarding their Present Career Situation. Content analysis has been defined as a method of analyzing written or oral communications in a systematic manner to assess certain psychological variables (Aiken, 2000). Although the method of analysis adopted for the first aim of part one is systematic in its rigorous identification of themes across the participant’s responses, the intention is not to objectively assess psychological variables. The assessment of psychological variables is particular to a tradition of research that often assumes a representational view of language and objectivity on behalf of the assessor. Furthermore, psychological variables such as thoughts and emotions are within this tradition assumed to exist ‘out there’ to be discovered and categorized, with the result that the way in which the researcher’s theoretical and cultural frame of reference shapes what is being described, is disregarded (Gergen, 1999). The current study’s constructionist/constructivist/post-structuralist focus, thus invites the reader to view the analysis in the light of the researcher’s and co-researchers’ positioning within an academic, psychological institution, where predominantly western cultural assumptions have shaped the interpretation of people’s experiences. Such assumptions and a myriad of other contextual factors will therefore inform the analysis.

To ensure systematic methods of analysis Tesch’s (1990) model for qualitative content analysis was used as a framework for analyzing the first aim’s data. The two earlier mentioned fourth year B.Psych registered counsellors, who had been trained in the MSCI facilitation process as well as the theory of the STF, conducted the content analysis procedure. Firstly a sense of the general themes was gained by reading through the responses carefully. The themes surrounding each question were written down and thereafter coded according to similar responses found across the sample. Finally, the responses were grouped into categories of dominant and less dominant themes. The
analyses produced a description of general trends of significant influence pertaining to the participants’ particular contexts. Two sets of analyzed data were produced (i.e. one of the female sample and one of the male sample). The researcher then conducted a cross-check between the two sets of data, as content themed by the two registered counsellors respectively, to ensure that inter-rater reliability (Struwig, 2001) was achieved.

With regards to the second aim of phase one of the research, a quantitative analysis or rather a numerical representation of added responses (ticks and asterisks used by participants to specify their influential systems) to the MSCI’s diagrams was produced. The ticks represent the influences across the three interrelated systems constructed within the STF/MSCI that participants consider to be of significance to their career experiences, while asterisks represent a greater degree of importance of a particular influence that had already been ticked. The data has been presented as frequency counts in the format of doughnut pie charts. The fourth sub-aim of the second aim of phase one was again content themed to identify trends related to past, present and future influences.

A third aim of this first phase of the study presents a qualitative content analysis of the 35 female and 35 male participants’ reflections on their personalized diagram as constructed by drawing from the first two parts of the MSCI workbook. Again, the two fourth year B.Psych registered counsellors, conducted the analysis procedure, and again the researcher ensured that inter-rater reliability was achieved. The reflection process that was content themed in this aim of the first phase was facilitated by a series of questions in the third section of the MSCI workbook itself. Table 2 below describes the various data analysis techniques employed in relation to the specific aims of phase one of the research. The following subsection describes the research methodology employed for the second phase of the present research.
Table 2
Data Analysis Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Aims of Phase One</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
<th>Representation of Results</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. To explore and describe the present career situation of a specific group of Grade 11</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis to interpret and identify themes.</td>
<td>Significant themes presented in table format. Examples of verbatim responses are given.</td>
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<td>male and female South African adolescents from a particular middle socio-economic status</td>
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<td>environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. To explore and describe the influence of the three interrelated systems of the systems</td>
<td>Quantitative methods of data analysis by means of frequency counts.</td>
<td>Results presented by means of doughnut pie charts for the first three sub-aims.</td>
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<td>theory framework on the career development of Grade 11 female and male South African</td>
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<td>Frequency counts provided.</td>
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<td>adolescents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>More specifically to explore and describe:</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1 Individual system influences.</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis to identify themes.</td>
<td>Significant themes presented in table format.</td>
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<td>2.2 Social system influences.</td>
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<td>2.3 Environmental/societal system influences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.4 The influence of past, present and future influences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. To explore and describe the adolescents’ reflections on their personal diagram of</td>
<td>Qualitative content analysis to interpret and identify themes.</td>
<td>Significant themes presented in table format. Examples of verbatim responses are given.</td>
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<td>systemic influences.</td>
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<td>Phase 2: Career Discourse Analysis</td>
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<td>As stated earlier, the second part of the current chapter is dedicated to grappling with</td>
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<td>and formulating the aims, assumptions and procedures of the second phase of the study.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The word grappling is defined as both the seizing of and the struggling with an opponent,</td>
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<td>as well as working hard to overcome a difficulty (Crowther, 2000). This meaning is</td>
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<td>particularly fitting since it was discovered by the researcher that arguing for</td>
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<td>approaches to career-related research that are collaborative, meaning-focused, context-</td>
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<td>bound and adopting of a critical qualitative stance on the one hand, and actually</td>
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<td>producing such research on the other hand are two very different processes. The latter</td>
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<td>has required experimentation and improvisation since it is a domain of inquiry with few</td>
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<td>pre-established guidelines and failsafe strategies for useful investigation. Nevertheless,</td>
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the researcher was guided by a primary concern regarding the value and consequences of the actual research experience for the research participants themselves.

In line with the interventionist aims of action research described above, the second phase of the study produced and investigated a collaboration between the researcher and one female research participant in an individual systemic narrative career counselling process. The researcher invited the participant to explore, re-search and re-construct her career story and career identity within a conversational process guided by the starting assumptions for a narrative approach to counselling outlined in Chapter 3 (Winslade & Monk, 1999). It was the intention and hope of the researcher that the constructions of career identity produced by the systemic narrative career counselling conversations were constitutive of the participant’s preferences and hopes for her career and life. At the same time the researcher hoped to invite the participant into a critical reflection on some of the taken-for-granted assumptions and career discourses that have been and are being privileged by her systems of influence (as identified in the MSCI during the first part of the research). As described in Chapter 3, a systemic narrative career counselling process aims to construct individuals’ career experiences and activities as historically and contextually negotiated and co-constructed between individuals and their specific socio-cultural environments or systems of influence. The counselling conversations were therefore productive of a contextually located career narrative, aided by reflections on the participants’ MSCI workbook.

The career narratives, career identities or career subjectivities constructed in the language of both the researcher and the participant during the conversational process were then investigated and analyzed according to a discourse analytic strategy that was constructed by the researcher and based on Parker’s (1992) approach to discourse analysis. The nature, aims, procedures and assumptions of this discourse analytic approach are outlined below.

Positioning the discourse analysis

According to Mcleod (2002), discourse analysis is becoming a popular qualitative research methodology in psychology in South Africa. However, as reviewed in Chapter 4 very little research exists that introduces this emergent approach to the field of career psychology. It could be argued that this reflects the continuing dominance of a well-established positivist-empiricist epistemology and methods of research in the aforementioned field. In contrast, amongst emerging research studies in social and individual psychology both locally and abroad, there exists a diversity of studies and methodological approaches to discourse analysis that draw on the discourse analytic
work of an array of authors (Burman, 1991; Fairclough, 1992; Hollway, 1989; Levett, Kottler, Burman, & Parker, 1997, Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell 1987). Closer inspection of the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of the work of these different authors indicates that discourse analysis is, unlike methods within positivist empiricism, everything but an uncontested and unitary methodological approach. Mcleod (2002) contends that since there is no one definitive method of conducting discourse analysis, any methodological discussion and practice only adds to the “constant construction and re-production of intellectual and research activity called discourse analysis” (p. 17). Broadly speaking discourse analysis is concerned with the ways in which language constructs objects, subjects and experiences, including subjectivity and a sense of self. Discourse analysis conceptualizes language as constitutive of experience rather than representational or reflective (Willig, 1999)

The absence of a definitive method of discourse analysis can in part be attributed to the difficulty in defining what *discourse* actually is. There are a variety of conceptualizations of the nature and function of discourse that inform how, why and where it should be studied. Mcleod (2002) has identified common features among the variety of discourse analytic frameworks mentioned above, which include:

1) The underlying regularity of discourse where statements in a discourse cluster around culturally available understandings as to what constitutes a topic (e. g., a career discourse that regulates what is said about appropriate adolescent career development within a western psychological academic context).

2) The constructive effects of discourse that produces and constrains what can be known, said or experienced at any socio-historical moment (e. g., a career discourse that constitutes what appropriate adolescent career development can and should look like when informed by current western psychological ideas).

3) The implications of discourse for the meanings and practices in social relations where such discourse operates (e. g., the forms of living praxes or career praxes that are produced and promoted within and by particular western psychological systems of meaning such as career counselling conversations).

Although there are common features around the aforementioned areas amongst the various discourse analytic frameworks, the remaining divergences and practical demands of research require exclusion and choice. In the context of the present study, career-related discourse and discursive practices have been conceptualized as “the normative (often linguistic) devices that structure and maintain what is prescribed as desirable, optimal and appropriate for individuals’ career development, their
relationships and their identities within particular communities and institutions” (Kuit & Watson, 2005, p.33). The present study thereby draws more specifically on the Foucauldian, post-structural notions of discourse as it is utilized in politically orientated work in psychology. Parker’s (1992) approach to discourse analysis has this political edge and has been utilized as the structuring framework for the present study. Discourse according to Parker (1992) is a “coherent system of statements that constructs an object” (p. 5). According to Mcleod (2002), Parker identifies two levels of objectification. Firstly, where objects are constituted through the use of a noun, which gives the object reality (i.e. career – delimiting a range of ideas, relationships and practices about working life), and, secondly, where the discourse refers to itself or other discourses as if they were objects (i.e. discourse of adolescent career development – where developmental theories and understandings about what adolescents’ experiences are or should be, are invoked to constitute what an adolescent form of career is).

In the present study career discourses have been conceptualized as the systems of meanings, supported in and by the systemic influences as represented in the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999). In other words the discursive objects of the research participants’ careers were investigated as constructed within the participants’ individual, social and environmental/societal systems of influence. So, not only did the STF serve as the structuring framework for the discourse analysis procedures, but it was also proposed as the framework, within which the real effects of career discourse could be located and experienced by the participant and the researcher. Furthermore, the kind of subject or perception of self (i.e. personal and career identity), constructed for the research participant within the systemic narrative career conversations was investigated. Although the participant has strictly speaking not yet entered a career - as this object is traditionally constructed within career psychology and popular culture (i.e. professional work following school or some kind of qualification process) - descriptions of the participant’s hopes, goals, values, opinions, preferences and desires regarding her career were considered as sites for the emergence of career-related discourses. The participant’s career can therefore be considered to already be under construction. As stated in Chapter 1, descriptions and constructions of career are always partial, contextually situated and subject to ambiguity and revision. Career discourses could therefore be identified as emerging and constituted in the language of the participant.

Since the researcher and research process has formed part of the participant’s systems of career influences, and since an account of the participant’s career was co-
constructed within the therapeutic system, the language of the researcher is also considered a sight for the emergence and embodiment of career discourse. Discourses that emerged to construct the career of the participant cannot be viewed as simply describing the reality of her world. The accounts of her career that were negotiated during the conversations are viewed as constitutive of reality insofar as they are shaped by the relevant historical, social and cultural (i.e. systemic) career-related discourses that constrain and produce forms of career in the conversations. The question that was asked in guiding the analysis is: Which career discourses – supported and introduced by the researcher and participant’s individual, social and environmental systemic influences - have been active in the counselling conversations and how have they constituted the participant’s career identity?

Parker’s approach to analyzing conversations is of particular relevance here insofar as it demonstrates the way in which “discourses function to legitimate and buttress existing institutions, reproduce power relations and inequities in societies and have certain ideological effects” (Crossley 2000, p. 28). This political edge ensures a critical angle on the research process itself. The discourse analysis was therefore a critical investigation of the way in which the systemic narrative career counselling conversations (Winslade, 2005) - drawing from the MSCI workbook experience - have functioned to either legitimate and buttress or to challenge the participant’s influential systems/institutions’ privileged career discourses. Ultimately the analysis describes the way in which the process of systemic narrative career counseling process has positioned the participant in a particular career story.

Distinguishing Discourse

Parker’s (1992) seven criteria and their related analytic steps for distinguishing discourses are described below. Within the limitations of the present study and considering the aims of the current discourse analysis, the analytic steps of criteria 1 to 4 have formed the basis for analysis of the verbal accounts recorded and transcribed during the systemic narrative career counselling conversations. Criteria 5, 6 and 7 have been considered relevant to the understanding of what discourse is and does, but their analytic steps have been adapted to serve the purposes of the analysis. Parker’s (1992) three auxiliary criteria will also be highlighted here and employed when appropriate in Chapter 7. Importantly, although the analytic steps are here presented in what seems to be a chronological sequence, the actual discourse analysis and discussion process conducted here has been far less linear and step-based.
1) A Discourse Is Realized In Texts

Parker (1992) defines texts as “tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given an interpretative gloss” (p. 6). He suggests as a first step in discourse analysis to identify which texts will be studied (in this study the verbal, recorded, transcribed constructions of career produced in the language of both the researcher and the participant), and to realize that if we, for research purposes, describe what texts mean we are elaborating meanings that go beyond individual intentions. Such meaning construction or discourse identification is therefore transindividual. The second step then is to explore the connotations, allusions and implications evoked by the text through some sort of free association.

2) A Discourse Is About Objects

As already alluded to above, the simple use of a noun in referring to an object gives it reality. We know the world through our representations of it, but the representations are discursive in so far as they are constituted from within a particular worldview or system of meanings that exclude other representations of the world. Parker (1992) proposes that “discourse constructs ‘representations’ of the world which have reality almost as coercive as gravity, and, like gravity, we know the objects through their effects” (p.8). In the context of this study Parker’s first level of objectification and representation would be that of career where the actual noun and related descriptions of career are located and ‘objectified’ in the verbal accounts that are recorded. The second layer of objectification for Parker is where the discourse or system of meanings that have constituted the object (in this case career) is referred to as some ‘thing’. So whereas career is the first object, a career discourse of personal success or independence and autonomy might be identified (objectified) as having constituted what a desirable career should look like. Consequently Parker’s third and fourth step in a discourse analysis are: asking what objects are referred to and describing them (career), and talking about talk as if it were an object, a discourse (the career discourse of personal success or independence).

3) A Discourse Contains Subjects

By ‘subject’ Parker means a type of self or person that is constituted by the discourse. What kinds of perceptions of ourselves and others do particular discourses invite? In this respect the current study will employ Parker’s (1992) first level of subjectification to identify the kind of subject or perception of self (i.e. personal and career identity) that will be invited for the research participants by the researcher/systemic narrative career counsellor’s questions and statements, statements
that introduced certain discourses of career and self. Parker’s second level of subjectification refers to what can be said or done from the position or self that has been constituted by the first level of subjectification. In the current study this refers to the statements that can be made by the participant about herself and her career identity when she identifies with the subject position offered to her by the researcher’s questions and statements (i.e. career and personal identity discourses). To summarize, Parker’s fifth and sixth analysis steps are: specifying what types of person are talked about in this discourse, and speculating about what they can say (or do) in the discourse, what you could say (or do) if you identified with them.

4) A Discourse is a Coherent System of Meanings

In drawing on Michel Foucault’s work Parker (1992) proposes that “there are different competing cultures which will give different slants on the discourse, ranging from those whom the discourse benefits (and who may not even recognize it as a discourse) to those whom it oppresses (who are already angry about that way of talking about things and categorizing people in that way).” (p. 11). Therefore as seventh and eighth discourse analytic steps he suggests: mapping the picture of the world the discourse represents and working out how a text using this discourse would deal with objections to the terminology. In the context of the current study, the overall picture of one participant’s career world, as the researcher and the participant have constructed it, will be described. The participant’s reflections and ascribed meanings resulting from her investigation of the narrating conversation (see criteria 6 below) will however be privileged above the researcher’s descriptions.

5) A Discourse Refers To Other Discourses

It is the case that critical reflection on a discourse will involve the use of other discourses. As Parker states, “metaphors and analogies are always available from other discourses, and the space this gives the speaker to find a voice from another discourse, and even within a discourse they oppose, is theoretically limitless” (p. 16). Discourses are therefore not discrete wholes that package reality in an internally consistent manner. In discussing the career discourses identified in the speech of the participant, for instance, the researcher will be constantly drawing on systems of meaning that are not located within the speech of the participant alone. A meta-analysis of Chapter 7, which will not be conducted here, could therefore employ Parker’s ninth and tenth analytic steps which are: setting contrasting ways of speaking, discourses, against each other and looking at the different objects they constitute, and identifying points where they overlap.
6) A Discourse Reflects On Its Own Way of Speaking

Here Parker suggests that a discourse can fold around and reflect on itself as one particular way of representing an object over another. This moment of reflexivity is when the discourse analyst notices that a discourse always produces a partial way of describing the world and that it has moral/political implications and choices attached to it. In the context of the current study a particular career discourse may thus have been identified in the talk of the participants. However, the consequences of constructing the participants’ career identity using the researcher’s discursive descriptions needs to be moderated and critiqued. Considering the power relation produced between researcher and participant the discursive re-presentation has the potential to result in an imposition of meanings and descriptions chosen by the researcher. This was minimized and contrasted by asking the participant to provide her own reflections on the transcribed conversations. The participant was firstly provided with a copy of the transcribed conversations for her to study and investigate. Questions were then provided by the researcher (see Appendix D) as a guideline that invited the participant to comment on what stands out as significant and helpful to her from the conversations. The participant’s reflections and meanings will be presented in Chapter 7 and offered as an experience-near reading of the transcriptions.

7) A Discourse Is Historically Located

Parker (1992) states that “discourses are located in time, in history, for the objects they refer to are objects constituted in the past by the discourse or related discourses. A discourse refers to past references to those objects” (p. 16). Discourse analysts can therefore only show the significance and force of a discourse by referring to other instances in the past where it arose to legitimate certain forms of life and identity for those implicated by the discourse. Within the context of the current study the historical emergence of career-related discourses identified in the text will therefore be investigated. Furthermore it becomes important to see how those career discourses attained significance and are used within a present and potential future context of the participants’ lives.

Three Auxiliary Criteria

Parker (1992) proposes three further aspects of discourse which research should focus on. They are the following:

1) Discourses Support Institutions

According to Parker (1992), the employment of a discourse is also often a practice which reproduces the material basis of an institution. In the context of the current study,
for instance, the researcher is partaking in certain linguistic styles of writing that sustain and are sustained by the academic institution where this study will be evaluated and molded according to standards and criteria of scientific research. The academic and scientific discourses are actualized in both the writing style the researcher adopts as well as the practical and expressive order that structures his relationship to a university, supervisors and a system of evaluation. Note that in this previous sentence I have used “the researcher” as a detached description of myself. This makes it seem as though I am orientated towards the study in an “objective” way, which is a value believed to be of utmost importance in the tradition of scientific psychological research. Where the conversations between the researcher and the participants are concerned, the analyses will investigate and identify the institutional structures that are supported and buttressed by the career discourses found to be operational in those conversations.

2) Discourses Reproduce Power Relations

Parker (1992) states that although the institutions supported by discourses are structured around and reproduce power relations, discourse must be distinguished from power. As he writes,

discourses often do reproduce power relations, but this is a different claim from one which proposes that a criterion for recognizing a discourse is that there is power...we could fall into the trap of saying that ‘power is everywhere’ and that, if power is everywhere, it would be both pointless to refer to it and politically fruitless to attack it (p. 18)

This study has adapted and applied Parker’s three reasons for not speaking of discourse and power as necessarily entailing one another in the following way:

i) The study aims to retain the distinction between power as prescribing what the career development of adolescents should look like on the one hand, and resistance that can be supported by discourses that oppose and contradict the dominant meanings of what adolescent career development is or should be on the other hand.

ii) The study acknowledges that the discourses that challenge power are often tangled in oppressive discourses, but can still be valuably used to promote movement towards empowering descriptions of career (subjectivities) that open alternatives to the dominant meanings and practices of adolescent career development.
iii) The researcher’s aim was to support the participant should she find herself at the disadvantaged side of the dominant discourses of career that have been promoted by her systems of influence or institutions of education, family, government and gender.

Parker’s analytic steps for this auxiliary criteria are; looking at which categories of person gain and lose from the employment of the discourse, and looking at who would want to promote and who would want to dissolve the discourse.

3) Discourses Have Ideological Effects

Parker (1992) here proposes that the notion of ideology can be used for progressive political purposes if we don’t fall into a relativistic view that all value positions or discourses are equally ideological (i.e. that even those positions or discourses that resist existing power relations are as ideological as those sustained by the prevailing power relations), and if we don’t aim to distinguish between ideology as falsehood and another position of ‘the truth’. The term ideology can rather be seen as a description of relationships and effects, where any discourse can be evaluated for its effects when used in a particular way. In the context of the current study, for instance, the discourse of intra-individual qualities or internal states (such as being rationally minded or good at organizing people) can be used in the service of opposing some of the dominant gender discourses of career where women are considered less suitable for management jobs due to their supposed ‘emotional nature’. The same discourse of internal states (such as being submissive) can however be used to reinforce the dominant and often oppressing notion that women’s careers should be that of homemakers where the discourse of women’s ‘nurturing nature’ reproduces certain familial power relations. Parker (1992) therefore proposes that discourse analysis: show how discourse connects with other discourses which sanction oppression, and show how discourses allow dominant groups to tell their narratives about the past in order to justify the present, and prevent those who use subjugated discourses from making history.

Table 3 below describes a summary of the discourse analysis steps as adapted from Parker (1992) for the purposes of phase two of the research.
**Table 3**

**Discourse Analysis Steps**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse distinguishing criteria</th>
<th>Analytic steps</th>
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</table>
| A discourse is realized in texts   | 1) *Identify which texts will be studied* - the verbal, recorded, transcribed constructions of career produced in the language of both the researcher and the participant.  
2) *Explore the connotations, allusions and implications* evoked by the text through some sort of free association. |
| A discourse is about objects       | 3) *Ask what objects are referred to and describe them* – the first level of objectification and representation would be that of career where the actual noun and related descriptions of career are located and ‘objectified’ in the verbal accounts that have been recorded.  
4) *Talking about talk as if it were an object, a discourse* - the talk, discourse or system of meanings that has constituted the object (in this case career) is referred to as some ‘thing’. So whereas career is the first object, a career discourse of personal success or independence and autonomy might be identified (objectified) as having constituted what a desirable career should look like in the participant’s systems of career influence. |
| A discourse contains subjects      | 5) *Specifying what types of person are talked about in this career discourse* – on the first level of subjectification: What kind of subject or perception of self (i.e., personal and career identity) is invited for the research participant by the systemic narrative career counsellor’s questions and statements, statements that introduced certain discourses of career and self?  
6) *Speculating about what the participant could or can say (or do) in the discourse, what she could say (or do) if she identified with them* - What statements can be made by participant about herself and her career identity when she identified with the subject position offered to her by the researcher’s questions and statements? |
| A discourse is a coherent system of meanings | 7) *Map the picture of the world the discourse represents* – describe the overall picture of the participant’s career world, as constructed by her and the researcher.  
8) *Contrast and compare* - the overall picture produced by the researcher, with the participant’s |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A discourse refers to other discourses</th>
<th>reflections and ascribed meanings resulting from her investigation of the narrating conversation (see analytic step 9).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A discourse reflects on its own way of speaking</td>
<td>9) Re-present the transcript of the conversations back to the participant- Invite participant to comment on what stands out as significant and helpful to her from the conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A discourse is historically located</td>
<td>10) Investigate the historical emergence of career-related discourses identified in the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11) Explore how the identified career discourses attained significance and are used within a present and potential future context of the participant’s life.</td>
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### Auxiliary Criteria

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Discourses support institutions</th>
<th>Analytic Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12) Investigate and identify the institutional structures that are supported and buttressed by the career discourses found to be operational in the systemic narrative career counselling conversations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourses reproduce power relations</td>
<td>No corresponding analytic work will be conducted in the present study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourses have ideological effects</td>
<td>13) Show how career discourses identified connect with other discourses and if those sanction oppression of (possibly in this case) women in their career development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Does Career Discourse Analysis Aim To Do?

Parker (1992) addresses the question: “If it is true that discourses frame the way we think about the objects they construct, and the way we are positioned as subjects, is there any way out?” (p. 20). Parker proposes that we not answer this question since its assumption would return us to individual culpability for social practices. The aim of discourse analysis is not to escape discourse but to draw attention to the effects of certain ways of speaking and acting as though they were truth. This is not a relativistic argument that claims since there is no one truth anything will go. On the contrary, discourse analysis invites a rigorous and ongoing reflexivity about injustice, the politics of identity and the oppression of those not conforming to the dominant systems of meaning. The theoretical goal of analysis therefore shifts from ensuring methodological conditions that ensure the discovery of the ‘truth’ about the participant’s career, to one
of understanding the discursive conditions in which certain accounts of career identity are produced and viewed as true and significant. Furthermore the institutions that support and are supported by those accounts of identity, the power relations they reproduce and the ideological effects of the discourses which constitute them, must be critically investigated.

The methodological underpinnings of this study are therefore based on poststructural notions of discourse that came into prominence in the social sciences and humanities as a challenge to the positivist, science-driven approaches to sociology and psychology (MacLure, 2003). In following Foucault, this study presents a poststructuralist career psychology that rejects the idea of universal truth and objective knowledge, and proposes that ‘truths’ about an individual’s career identity are partial, situated and produced by and for particular interests, circumstances and times. Importantly, the study itself as a body of knowledge, or rather a reading of the ‘text’ that comprises a series of counselling conversations, is also partial, situated and produced by and for particular interests and political purposes. This non-neutral, postobjectivist stance is taken deliberately in deconstructing traditional structuralist methodological imperative to conduct rigorous studies that produce the ‘real’ or ‘objectively valid’ readings of texts.

I agree with Burman and Parker (1992) that by closing texts to alternative readings we do violence to the variety of alternative interpretations that can be given to texts. This position does however beg the question of relativism and the power of imposing readings ‘willy-nilly’ on the experiences and narrative of the participant. What interpretations should the researcher privilege when: 1) his own discursive contributions form part of the text, and 2) each reading has different effects on the way the career identity of the participant is constructed? What are the criteria to be considered for selection of particular analytic constructions over others and what are the forms of life that are encouraged and legitimized by such constructions? These are questions that require rigorous practices of accountability, reflexivity and transparency on behalf of the researcher. In answering these questions the research follows Burman and Parker (1992) when they say “we also have to be aware of the way in which analysts are not only readers, but also producers of discourse…they are implicated in the production of the forms of knowledge they describe. To offer a reading of a text (here a series of counselling conversations) is, in some manner or another, to reproduce or transform it” (p. 159).
Systemic-Discursive Constructions

The discursive ‘object’ under analysis here is the participant’s career, and the discursive subject positions investigated are those invited for the participant by the researcher’s questions/comments. However in creating a sense of continuity with the first phase of the current study, the second phase aims to investigate how influential discourses of career (legitimized and buttressed by the conversations) are systemically situated and supported. This study aligns itself with both the systems theoretical and the post-structural project of linking discourses (in this case career discourses) to the power/knowledge relations that often support and are supported by the taken-for-granted notions of personhood produced in institutions and systems of influence such as the family, education, the economy, psychotherapy and gender roles (amongst many others). As MacLure (2003) adeptly states:

…discourses are inextricably linked to institutions…and to the disciplines that regularize and normalize the conduct of those who are brought within the ambit of those institutions…discourses not only circumscribe what it is possible to say, know and do, but also establish what kind of person one is entitled/obliged to ‘be’. It is impossible, in other words, to speak without speaking as the kind of person who is invoked by one discourse or another (p. 176).

Career discourses that have circumscribed what the participant felt entitled/obliged to be have therefore been located at the levels of systemic influence identified in the Systems Theory Framework of career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999). In other words, the analysis investigated and aimed to identify individual, social and environmental/societal career discourses that have been influential in the participant’s career development. It may be argued that separation and categorization of the dynamic and recursive interrelationship between discourses that operate across levels of systemic influence leads to reification and artificial misrepresentation. Potter et al. (1990), for instance, lay a criticism against Parker’s approach to discourse analysis, claiming that when discourses are treated as coherent and carefully systematized wholes, this leads to the reification and the misrepresentation of discourses as abstract causal entities that recursively act against and on each other. Potter and Wetherell (1987) propose the alternative term of ‘interpretive repertoire’ to avoid the artificial stabilizing of fluid and
constantly re-negotiated relational patterns of meaning and behaviour. Burman and Parker (1993) acknowledge that “depicting discourses as abstract and autonomous meaning systems that float above social practice, or that constitute social practice in mysterious ways, can remove discourse analysis from the realms of everyday life” (p. 162). However, Parker (1992) maintains that we need to hold on to some conception of the difference between discourses and to show how contests between different ‘structures of meaning’ constitute our societies. Within the context of this study the conception of difference being held on to is achieved by combining a systemic structuring of career development with discursive constructions of the influences operating at each of the systemic levels (individual, social and environmental/societal).

Text collection

According to Mcleod (2002), the notions of statistical sampling and generalization, essential to positivist research methods for collecting data, are abandoned in discourse analysis in favour of addressing the complex conditions of people and their unique experiences. The particularity and complexity of people’s lives are attended to rather than the universal and general principles of human behaviour. Mcleod proposes that in discourse analysis, the study’s theoretical principles, purpose and relevance guide which texts should be selected as material for analysis. Guided by these elements, but also by the pragmatic considerations of space and time, the researcher limited the text collection to transcriptions of two 45 minute tape-recorded systemic narrative career counselling conversations with one participant. The transcription method of these conversations stresses readability and does not feature detailed levels of transcription such as intonation, pause lengths and descriptions of nonverbal information. The reason for this is that the analytic focus was directed at the content of the discursive career constructions that were deployed by the participant and the researcher (Moir, 1993).

The relevance of these conversations is evident within the context of the first aim of the study, where the participant completed her My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook in the first phase of the research. All participants from the first phase of the research were invited to place their names on a list provided, should they require further conversations regarding their system of career influences. Emphasis was placed on the exploratory nature of the systemic narrative career counselling process proposed and participants were encouraged to participate if they felt that this type of unpacking and evaluating of the MSCI process was relevant and necessary to their current career related experiences. With the assistance of the relevant teacher counsellor from the participants’ school, a final and appropriate selection of one participant was made. The
appropriateness of the selection was determined by whether the participant was indeed interested in and required the exploratory and co-constructing conversations process proposed by the researcher.

The participant was encouraged to re-construct a representation of her career decision-making story within a systemic framework and to identify influential systems. The selected texts were relevant in so far as they were further re-presentations of the participant’s career identity that were contextualized by the MSCI experience. The purpose of the discourse analysis research is to investigate the discursive construction of career identity within the systems identified in the MSCI workbook. Post-structural and social constructionist theoretical principles form the backdrop to the study, which conceptualizes the interconnectedness between individual stories and the social, cultural, and historical discourses from which those stories emanate. A further theoretical influence positioning the researcher is that of the systems theory on which the STF (McMahon, & Patton, 1999) is based and a narrative approach to career construction (Monk, & Winslade, 1999; Winslade, 2005) which conceptualizes the formations of a career identity as the construction of a culturally embedded narrative. Furthermore the discursive analysis itself cannot be separated from the researcher’s immersion in the language of a narrative approach to counselling and the knowledge of the Systems Theory Framework (STF).

The transcribed career counselling conversations have therefore been selected to investigate the discursive constructions arrived at within the systemic narrative career counselling process itself. The importance of considering the way in which the MSCI experience, the researcher’s theoretical position, as well as the context of the conversations contributed to the discursive positioning of the participant becomes particularly relevant when one considers the warning sounded by Widdicombe (1995) in terms of text collection. As Mcleod (2002) explains, Widdicombe “cautions against treating texts as though they are produced in a social vacuum. Accounts are produced to address the interactional business deemed relevant to the particular circumstances” (p. 21). The interactional business from the perspective of the researcher, or rather the systemic narrative career counsellor, was to provide the participant with an opportunity to re-author (Payne, 2000) her career story in a manner that allowed her to evaluate her preferences for her career. Thus, in a deconstructive questioning process (Freedman & Combs, 1996) the counsellor aimed to invite the participant into an evaluating position with regards to the dominant discourses associated with her most influential systems. The premise from which the narrative approach to career counselling was conducted was
that of social-constructionism, which views career identity as a ‘product’ negotiated and constructed in and by the socio-cultural discourses that inform dominant narratives of career within a particular system or systems.

The discourse analysis to be conducted in part two of the study will itself be a product negotiated and constructed from within the researcher’s system of influences where certain academic scientific research stories (and other potential alternative stories) have shaped what can be considered valid, useful and desirable research activities. The reading presented is therefore a contextually bound attempt to make meaning of a participant’s career development story and how it was constructed and re-constructed, authored and re-authored within the research process. In the next chapter the findings of the first phase of the research will firstly be presented and discussed. These findings will further construct an account of the systemic context within which the participant from phase two is negotiating her career narrative. Chapter 6 provides thereby also a re-presentation of the participant’s broader context within which the discourse analysis was conducted.
CHAPTER 6
RE-PRESENTING
ADOLESCENT SYSTEMS OF CAREER INFLUENCE

Introduction

As proposed in Chapters 2 and 3, the STF can be thought of as a broad structural framework that allows individuals to diagrammatically re-present for themselves the systemic context in which they negotiate the unique and personal meaning and content of their career narratives. The MSCI workbook described in Chapter 5 is the career assessment tool that translates the STF’s conceptual and theoretical framework into a practical user-friendly exercise that produces these diagrammatic re-presentations and invites reflections on those diagrams. As described in Chapter 5, the participants that took part in this study were invited to complete the MSCI workbook during a group intervention process. Thus within the three phase structure of the MSCI workbook, the participants developed personalized re-presentations of their present career situations, their career shaping influences as these were situated in three interrelated systems (i.e. the individual, social and environmental/societal systems), and the recursive processes between these systems in the context of past, present and future influences. A reflection process in the MSCI then invites the participants into further deliberation about their systemic career re-presentations.

As stated earlier, the research activities of both phase one and phase two must be viewed in the context of an interventionist program that makes data collection, analysis and representation a socio-political act orientated towards the benefit of the participants. The research activities and data analysis procedures of this first phase of the study have resulted in a particular form of re-presentation of the participants’ systems of career influences that will be presented in this chapter. This re-presentation identifies the dominant trends with regards to: 1) how the participants describe their present career situation, 2) what the participants subjectively evaluate as their most important systemic influences, 3) how the participants evaluate the impact of past, present and future influences, and 4) the participants’ reflections on the MSCI process. These dominant trends are explored, presented and described according to the research aims outlined in Chapter 5. In attempting to remain consistent with this study’s socio-political orientation this chapter recognizes that descriptions of reality are never neutral in their effects, but constitutive of identities and forms of life. The findings presented here therefore do not make an appeal to traditional modernist scientific values such as objectivity and researcher neutrality. This chapter is presented as the researcher’s broad
overview of the systemically structured career experiences of a particular group of South African adolescents as these experiences have been described in the MSCI process. To limit the reductionist tendency of such an overview, it includes unique instances of participants whose personal re-presentations provide idiosyncratic expressions that both align and contrast with the dominant group themes of influence and reflection identified.

Importantly, although the overview has clustered individuals’ experiences according to themes and frequency counts, the limitations and aims of this re-presentation must be clearly put forward. Paralleling the STF, the following analysis does not provide comprehensive theoretical accounts regarding what the *meaning and significance* of influences and constructs is for the participants of this study. Although the STF accommodates and has been shaped by career theories that expand on the significance of various systemic influences identified by the adolescents across the three systemic levels, it largely locates itself in the constructivist worldview that privileges the *personal theories* or meanings of individuals. As Patton and McMahon (1999) state:

> The proposal of a systems theory perspective and a STF is not designed to compete with or devalue existing career theories. Rather, its significance lies in its capacity to place the emphasis back on the individual and to unite the various theories under one framework (p. 168).

During the MSCI workbook experience individuals are therefore placed at the center of their own career development process and can explore and identify their own meaning for the influences which are usually defined in terms of professional theory. The significance of the career influences and constructs for each participant is therefore not accounted for by the following themed representations. In line with this constructivist/constructionist ethic, the following analysis and discussion will aim to limit the imposition of meaning with regards to what the significance is for the participants of the identified dominant trends in influence. At the same time it is acknowledged that the current chapter will inevitably produce some form of meaning, as is the case with any form of representation or description. Furthermore, the identification of trends of influence *across* all three systemic levels of career influence outlined by the STF, can be viewed as an attempt to address the critique of the dominant research focus themes and decontextualizing methodological approaches identified in
Chapter 4. As proposed in Chapter 4, adolescent research to date has been limited in its investigation of the recursive interrelationship between a wide range of variables identified in all three systems of influence, as outlined by the STF. With regards to the earlier critique of methodological trends, the current chapter is attempting to address the split between qualitative and quantitative paradigms by: 1) employing a qualitative career assessment measure (as data collection tool) that incorporates and introduces constructs/influences from a broad spectrum of career theory and research, in a way that the value and significance of those constructs/influences are contextually negotiated and evaluated, and 2) re-presenting a large amount of qualitative information in a quantified (numerically presented) way that allows the researcher and readers of the study to get a sense of the overall career developmental trends that characterize the systemic context in which the participant from phase two finds herself positioned and negotiating her career story.

Structure of Chapter

The first part of this chapter illustrates the first aim of this phase of this study and provides a description of the trends in the present career situation of the Grade 11 adolescents who were from a middle socio-economic status level environment. As explained in Chapter 5, the data can be considered qualitative in nature, since it constitutes a themed content analysis of the participants’ personal/subjective descriptions and responses to questions posed by the MSCI. The MSCI’s structuring and contribution (of researched and theorized career variables) to the participants’ career descriptions is therefore considered integral to the results re-presented here. Verbatim quotes that represent and provide variations of the identified dominant themes and trends are also provided.

The second part of the chapter illustrates the second aim of phase one of the study. This aim has been subdivided into four sub-aims. These subdivisions represent the dominant trends of influence as presented in frequency counts of influences identified by the participants as significant in their career-related experiences. As indicated in Chapter 5, the frequency counts presented here may resemble quantitative methodologies, but are distinct from the assumptions and aims of traditional quantitative research. The first three subdivisions delineate the influences deemed significant within the three distinct systems of the STF, i.e. the individual system, the social system and the environmental/societal system. The fourth subdivision re-presents the identified trends with regards to the past influences, present influences and future influences evaluated and described by the participants in the MSCI process. A
participant’s unique influence constellation is also presented to show how it aligns and contrasts with the dominant themes of influence identified.

The third part of the chapter illustrates the third aim of the first phase of the study and presents a qualitative content analysis of participants’ reflections on their personalized diagrams as constructed by drawing from the first two parts of the MSCI workbook.

Before the results are re-presented it may be important to consider how these results can be positioned within and related to the second phase, and the overall purpose of the study. It can firstly be proposed that the results in this chapter provide useful information regarding the trends in systems of career influence that characterize the context where the participant from the second phase (to be introduced in Chapter 7) finds herself positioned. Results presented here thus provide a richer description of the systemic context that frames the findings and activities of phase two. Phase one and two are not considered mutually exclusive, but intimately bound in their exploration of a systemic narrative career counselling process that includes both measure-based and conversation-based collaborations with clients. However, the theoretical and practical connectedness of the first phase’s systemically orientated research activities and results, with the second phase’s narrative-discursively orientated research activities and results, will be more fully explicated and discussed in Chapter 8. Finally, as stated in Chapter 5, this second phase of the study is a response to the critique outlined in Chapter 4, where career research to date was shown to require a further broadening of its view with regards to the recursive interrelationships between diverse variables from all three systemic contexts outlined by the STF (i.e. individual, social and environmental/societal systems).

Present Career Development Trends

This section addresses the first aim of this phase of the study. As stated in Chapter 5, the first section of the MSCI workbook, namely My Present Career Situation, provides participants with a range of open-ended questions relating to their present career position. In this first section participants provide information about, amongst other topics, life-roles, career-related experiences, strategies of career decision-making and career options considered to date. Table 4 provides a summary of the topics covered by the seven questions presented in this section of the MSCI.
Table 4
Topics Related to Present Career Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Description of present career situation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Part-time or voluntary work considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Life roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Previous career decisions encountered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Strategies or approaches in decision-making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Help with decision-making</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Certain dominant and less dominant themes could be identified from the participants’ responses to questions relating to these seven topics. The frequency of themes mentioned determined whether a theme was considered as dominant or less dominant. A frequency of between 15 and 35 responses for both the female and male samples respectively (i.e. a minimum of 40% or more of each respective sample) was considered dominant, while a frequency between 0 and 14 was considered as less dominant. These frequency parameters were guided by an initial investigation of the distribution of frequencies across the identified themes and influences. The proposed parameters have been judged to effectively separate dominant themes from less dominant themes throughout the sets of data related to the various sub-aims. The first topic will now be discussed in relation to the identified themes. Tables 5 and 6 represent the results obtained from the content analysis of the participants’ present career situation. As stated in Chapter 5, the qualitative content analyses for this aim of the study, as well as for the third aim of phase one, were conducted by two fourth year B.Psych registered counsellors who were educated/trained in the STF and MSCI process. All tables contain randomly selected verbatim responses from participants that demonstrate variations of the dominant themes and less dominant themes identified.
Table 5
Present Career Situation: Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“... doing either law or psychology.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Dominant Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chosen school subjects</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“I chose my subjects.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about study options</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“I’m thinking of studying after school.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“I’ve been working part-time...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel after school</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“I want to travel after school.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Present Career Situation: Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant Themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chosen school subjects</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“I’ve chosen the subjects.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about career options</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“Thinking about accounting as a job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Dominant Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about study options</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“I certainly want to attend university.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time jobs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“I am looking for a part-time job.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel after school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Take a gap year, work overseas...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the above tables, a dominant trend for both female and male adolescents is thinking about career options. Interestingly, however, the frequency of this trend does not necessarily find a correspondence with thinking about study options. Less dominant themes such as being engaged in part-time work and considering travel after school might be providing alternatives to studying after school. Another prominent theme for both samples is that of having chosen subjects at school.

Tables 7 and 8 follow and represent the results obtained from the content analysis of the participants’ experience of part-time or voluntary work. There were no dominant themes for males. It can be seen from Tables 7 and 8 that there is a trend for both female and male adolescents to engage more in paid part-time work rather than volunteering. A greater number of females reported having done volunteer work than did males. Females also displayed a greater theme range of types of part-time work including family business, baby sitting and tutoring or coaching.
Table 7
Part-time or Voluntary Work: Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>“I work weekends in a toy store...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Dominant themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and beverage industry</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“Waitressing over weekends.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“I’ve done volunteer work in a law firm.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family business</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“I helped Dad with statistics.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby sitting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Waitressing and babysitting.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutor/coach</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“I was a holiday club leader.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8
Part-time or Voluntary Work: Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food &amp; beverage industry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Worked at a steakhouse as a barman.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“I’ve done promotional work...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer work</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“... collecting money for tsiu tsi.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 9 and 10 represent the trends identified with regards to the participants’ life-roles. There were no less dominant themes for females. From these tables (see below) it can be noted that females generally seem to place a greater emphasis on life roles that involve friends and family. Whereas only 8 males considered friendship a prominent life role, 27 females considered friendship (or being a girlfriend) as an important life role. Although 17 males considered family to be an important role, this is considerably less than the 26 females who considered this to be important. All 35 males considered their role as sportsperson to be of importance, while a smaller number (n=26) of females noted this as an important life role. What seems worth noting, however, is that a higher number of females consistently attributed importance to a more diverse range of life roles. This is in contrast to the male sample where only nine males considered their role in activities related to performing arts and culture as important, and only eight males considered the friendship role as important.
Table 9
Life Roles: Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friend/Girlfriend</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>“I am friends with people.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>“Long-distance runner.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>“I want to be a mother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>“I am choir member.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“I am class captain.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10
Life Roles: Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sports &amp; Recreation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>“Sportsperson (basketball and rowing).”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“Being a big brother.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less dominant themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Squash captain.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing Arts &amp; Culture</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Senior drill-troupe and choir member.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Group member</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“I’m on the dance club committee.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“A huge friend.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next two tables represent the trends identified with regards to the adolescents’ employment options considered.

Table 11
Employment Options: Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative Arts &amp; Design</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“Interior designer or air hostess”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Profession</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Politician, psychologist or pharmacist.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less dominant themes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Profession</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“I wanna be a lawyer.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“...work for a major company.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports related professions</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Fitness trainer...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality Industry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Hotel manager or entertainer.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the above tables, females in this sample are substantially more often drawn to professions in creative arts and design, while males display a higher frequency of interest in sports-related professions. More than double the number of female participants shows an interest in the medical profession (n=18), when compared to the eight males who displayed this interest. Excluding the absence of interest in engineering professions in the female sample, and the absence of interest in creative arts and design in the male sample, both male and female participants display a similar broad range of professional career interest fields. Also, apart from the trend for males to be substantially more drawn to sporting professions and females to be drawn to creative arts and design, the interest range does not seem to be limited by gender. This interest pattern corresponds to a greater equivalence of gender representation in what arguably used to be male-dominated professions (such as the legal profession and commerce).

Tables 13 and 14 represent the dominant trends for the sample with regards to the three questions in the MSCI related to decision-making activities, i.e. previous career decisions made, strategies or approaches in decision-making and help regarding career-decisions. From the information regarding the participants’ career decisions (see below) it can be seen that decisions regarding school-related activities (such as participating in clubs and youth groups, and choosing school subjects) and decisions regarding sport-related activities are the most frequently focused on decisions for both male and female adolescents. Of interest is the more frequent emphasis in the female sample on individual strategies (n=27), when compared to the male sample (n=10). Male participants therefore tend to describe a more frequent reliance on career-decision strategies that involve their social system than do females.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School related activities</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>“I decided to do history as a subject.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of sport/activity</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>“Decided to stop rowing and diving.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies/approaches</td>
<td>Individual strategy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>“I saw what I wanted to become.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systemic/relational</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Asking my parents’.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>“Teachers, family and TV stars.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School related</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>“Mrs. B (teacher counsellor) helped...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“With the help of a good friend of mine.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nevertheless, both samples acknowledge a considerable influence and support from their social system (i.e. families and school-related persons such as guidance counsellors) in the deployment of those strategies. Females of this sample also indicate a more frequent reliance on friends in their career decisions than do males. This peer influence variable also seems consistent with the female sample’s more prominent emphasis on friendship life roles noted earlier.
Table 14
Decision-Making: Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Dominant themes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Verbatim responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous career decisions made</td>
<td>School related activities</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>“I chose my subjects.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of sport/activity</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>“I discontinued swimming.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision-making strategies/approaches</td>
<td>Systemic/relational strategy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>“I was influenced by my parents.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual strategy</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Made it by myself so far.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help regarding career decisions</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>“My cousin and my parents helped me.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>School related</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>“Teachers, as well as friends &amp; family.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“My good friend and student teacher.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary of Qualitative Re-presentation

The first part of this chapter has addressed the first aim of the first phase of the study in which the present career situations of 70 Grade 11 adolescent participants was explored and described. Dominant and less dominant themes were identified within seven topics or areas of interest as outlined in Table 4. Contrasts and similarities between the general trends were identified for male and female participants. Of particular interest has been the implication that career decision-making for some adolescents seems to not necessarily imply immediate decisions about study or tertiary education. Less dominant themes such as being engaged in part-time work and considering travel after school emerged as alternatives. Furthermore, females displayed a greater theme range of types of part-time work, including family business, baby sitting and tutoring or coaching, than did males.

What also emerged is that a higher number of females consistently attributed importance to a more diverse range of life roles when compared to males. Trends for employment options considered in both males and females indicate a correspondence between patterns of career interests and a greater equivalence of gender representation in what arguably used to be male-dominated professions. Both samples acknowledged
the influence of social system variables (i.e. families and school-related persons such as guidance counsellors) in the deployment of career decision-making strategies. Nevertheless, a number of participants (especially females) perceived their career decisions as expressions of independent action. The way in which certain career discourses, located in the systems of influence of one female research participant, construct career as an expression of independence and personal control will be investigated in Chapter 7. This summary suggests that, when prompted, the adolescents from this sample could readily identify the influence of individual and social systemic variables on their current career situation, but considered to a more limited degree societal/environmental influences as important.

The second part of this chapter re-presents diagrammatically and by means of discussion the influences within the systemic context outlined by the MSCI that were considered by the participants as significantly shaping their career development. What follows thus is the product of the activities related to the second aim of the study.

Re-presenting the Qualitative Quantitatively

As stated in Chapter 5, the second part of the MSCI workbook provides the framework within which research participants’ subjective evaluation of the significance of, and the meaning attributed to, proposed systemic career influences can be represented and discussed in further career counselling processes. Such a subsequent process that recognizes and explores the uniqueness of an individual’s system of career influence has been conducted and investigated in the second phase of the study (see Chapter 7 to follow). However, for the purposes of this second aim of the first phase of the study, the participants’ individual and unique representations of their systems of influences have been compounded. This compounding represents the dominant trends of influences considered significant by both female and male adolescents within the middle socio-economic status level from which the participants were selected. In this section of the chapter this information can and has been represented numerically and graphically in the form of doughnut pie charts. These numerical and visual representations of influences from each of the three systems outlined by the MSCI have been represented separately and further subdivided according to gender.

The following numerical results are therefore based on frequency counts of influences identified by the participants. Within each of the three systems (i.e. the individual, social and environmental/societal) two doughnut pie charts will be presented for both the male and the female samples respectively. One doughnut pie chart will represent the frequency at which the systemic variables (as proposed by the MSCI) were
considered influential across the sample, while the second doughnut pie chart will indicate which of those influential variables were given an additional importance rating by the same sample.

The Individual System

In encouraging participants to explore the influences related to the individual system, the MSCI proposes a range of twelve intrapersonal influences to be considered for their possible role in the participants’ career development.

Figure 5
Frequency Counts for Individual System Influences: Females

Participants were asked to indicate which of the twelve variables they considered influential and to further indicate which of those selected influences were of greater significance to their career experiences. Above and below are the female (Figure 5) and male (Figure 6) individual system doughnut pie charts. The pie charts\textsuperscript{12} entitled Individual System Influences provide frequency counts for each influence selected by the participants as having an influence on their career development. The pie charts entitled Importance Rating provide frequency counts for the influences considered to be of greater importance to the participants. In examining both the male and female individual system influences it can be noted that all the influences proposed by the MSCI were considered to some degree influential in this sample’s career experiences.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} To enhance the readability of the text, ‘doughnut pie charts’ are sometimes referred to just as ‘pie charts’.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{doughnut_charts.png}
\caption{Frequency Counts for Individual System Influences: Females}
\end{figure}
In describing the frequencies at which individual system influences were selected by the respective samples, they have been clustered into three categories namely; most often selected (selected by 50% or more of the sample), somewhat less often selected (selected by between 20% and 50% of the sample), and least often selected (selected by less than 20% of the sample). As far as the female sample is concerned the influences that were most often selected included: personality selected by 26 participants (74%), abilities selected by 22 participants (63%), interests selected by 21 participants (60%), values selected by 21 participants (60%), and coping strategy selected by 18 participants (51%). Influences that were selected somewhat less often included: beliefs selected by 10 participants (29%), health selected by 10 participants (29%), age selected by 10 participants (29%), and gender selected by 8 participants (22%). Influences most seldom selected by the female sample included culture (14%), physical attributes (8%), and disability (5%).

As far as the female sample’s importance ratings of the influences are concerned a fairly consistent pattern can be found between the frequency at which an influence was selected, and the frequency at which it was given an importance rating. Influences such as coping strategy, age, culture and values, however, were given an importance rating considerably less often than they were selected.

As far as the male sample is concerned, the influences that were most often selected included: personality selected by 32 participants (91%), interests selected by 31 participants (89%), abilities selected by 26 participants (74%), values selected by 24 participants (69%), health selected by 21 participants (60%), and physical attributes
selected by 21 participants (60%). Influences that were selected somewhat less often by the male sample included: coping strategy selected by 16 participants (46%), beliefs selected by 14 participants (40%), and gender selected by 10 participants (29%). The influences most seldom selected by the male sample included: age (20%), culture (17%), and disability (8%).

In terms of importance ratings a less consistent pattern could be found than with the female sample between the frequency at which an influence was selected and the frequency at which it was given an importance rating. For example, influences such as personality, values, health, physical attributes, beliefs and culture received importance ratings from only half of the participants who selected them as influential. Gender influences only received two importance ratings from the ten participants who selected them as influential, while only two of the seven age influence selections received importance ratings.

Summary

In comparing the top six frequency counts for males and females it can be noted that personality, interests, abilities and values are considered influential and important most often by both samples. A difference can be noted where a considerably greater number of males consider physical attributes and health as relevant and important to their career development than do females. This result could be argued to be consistent with earlier results for males of employment options considered and life roles, where the majority of male participants of this sample tend to consider sports-related professions and roles, as more important than do females of this sample. Physical attributes and physical health would be pivotal to such careers and life-roles. A further similarity between the male and female samples relates to the infrequent selection of gender influences. Earlier results (Tables 11 and 12) seem consistent with these results where the range of careers considered by males and females of this sample did not seem to be bound to traditional and cultural career gender-stereotypes. A relatively smaller degree of emphasis was placed by both samples on what can arguably be viewed as contextually influenced variables such as culture and beliefs, while a larger emphasis was placed on intrapersonal influences that are generally considered to be part of an individual’s internal composition. In the following chapter (Chapter 7) a discursive perspective of what are generally considered to be internal state influences (such as personality and abilities) will attempt to demonstrate how such influences are intimately intertwined with the socio-cultural context in which they find expression and meaning. This also points to the larger social system in which individual system influences are embedded.
and where they are attributed significance. The following subsection thus investigates the social system influences of the 70 adolescent participants.

The Social System

The broader context for the expression of individual system influences is also introduced by the STF. Accordingly, the MSCI invites participants to investigate the social relationships and relationship variables that potentially impact on their career development by proposing six social system influences. Figures 7 and 8 offer visual representations of the frequency counts and importance ratings of each of the six influences selected across the male and female samples respectively. The doughnut pie charts entitled Social System Influences provide frequency counts for each social system influence selected by the participants as having an influence on their career development. The pie charts entitled Importance Rating provide frequency counts for the social system influences considered to be of greater importance to the participants. One additional social system influence identified by participants in the female sample is also presented.

Figure 7
Frequency Counts for Social System Influences: Females

![Social System Influences: Females](image)

The frequency counts above and below indicate that both females and males considered all the social system influences proposed by the MSCI as influential in their career development and career decision-making to some degree. The following description of the social system influence frequencies utilizes the same clustering categories as used with the individual system (i.e. most often selected, less often selected and least often selected). The parameters for the social system clusters are more or less consistent with the individual system description above.
As far as the females are concerned the most often selected social system influences included: parents selected by 23 participants (66%), teachers selected by 22 participants (63%), and reading selected by 20 participants (57%). Marginally less often-selected social system influences were friends (51%) and television (49%). Youth group influences were only selected by 8% of the sample.

In terms of importance ratings of influences, parental influences were most often considered more influential, while less than half of the selections of teacher influences received importance ratings. Similarly, although reading, friends and television influences were selected by more than half of the female sample, they did not receive corresponding importance ratings. An additional influence added by four of the female participants is that of professionals in that career. This is the only additional influence identified throughout the sample.

The male sample frequency counts reveal similar trends of social system influence as identified in the female sample. However, whereas more females indicated the impact of teacher influences than they did reading influences, males more often considered reading influences as playing a role in their career development than they did teachers. As far as the males are concerned the most often selected social system influences included: parents selected by 32 participants (91%), reading selected by 26 participants (74%), and teachers selected by 18 participants (51%). Marginally less often-selected social system influences were television (49%), friends (43%), and youth group (20%).

In terms of importance ratings, parental influence was again given a correspondingly high number of importance ratings, while less than half of the selections of reading and
teacher influences selected importance ratings. Television, friends and youth group influences were also relatively less often given importance ratings.

Summary

In both the female and male samples the influence of parents, reading and teachers was most often selected as influential. Both samples ascribed a correspondingly high number of importance ratings to parental influences, while in both samples less than half the selections of reading and teacher influences received importance ratings. Considering the results from Tables 13 and 14 regarding career decision-making strategies and help, a correspondence can be identified between the trend of systemic/relational strategies and family assistance in career decision-making, on the one hand, and the high number of selections and importance ratings of parental influences, on the other hand. Parental influence seems to be the single most important social systemic influence for both male and female adolescents.

The more frequent selection and importance ratings attributed to the friends social system influence in the female sample is also consistent with the dominance of the friend life-role theme identified in Table 9. Interestingly, however, despite the dominance of this life-role theme, the social system influence of parents is nevertheless considered important more often than the friends social system influence with regards to career development and decision-making. The present findings also suggest that adolescent participants could readily identify and evaluate the impact of social system variables on their career experiences when invited to do so. The fact that the female sample identified an additional influence of professionals in that field beyond the influences proposed by the MSCI suggests that certain adolescents could, of their own accord, locate their career development across further relational contexts. It could be argued that the limited extent of this independent expansion is also due to the comprehensiveness of the MSCI’s list of social system influences.

Furthermore, the subjective evaluation of the extent of influence on career of the social system suggests that the earlier identified individual system influences, often thought of (particularly within trait-factor conceptualizations of career development) as determining what individuals consider as desirable and satisfying careers, cannot be dissociated from the social context within which those intrapersonal variables and their associated careers are evaluated and expressed. The specific implications of this argument will be expanded further within the context of phase two of this study where career discourses and socially constructed career narratives will be investigated for how they constitute career identities across the three systemic levels of the STF. The
participants’ social system influences can, however, be further contextualized within a broader system identified by the STF as the *environmental/societal system of influence*. The following section will present the trends of influence related to the latter and thus addresses the third aim of this first phase of the study.

The Environmental/Societal System

As the social system forms the broader context for the individual system, so the environmental/societal system forms the broader context for both the individual and social systems. The MSCI proposes six influences from which participants could choose to construct the broader context of their career experiences. Figures 9 and 10 below offer visual representations of the frequency counts and importance ratings for each of the six proposed influences selected across both the female and male participants of the sample. The doughnut pie charts entitled *Environmental/Societal System Influences* provide frequency counts for each environmental societal system influence selected by the participants as having an influence on their career development. The pie charts entitled *Importance Rating* provide frequency counts for the environmental/societal system influences considered to be of greater importance to the participants.

Figure 9

Frequency Counts of Environmental/Societal System Influences: Females

Environmental/Societal System Influences

- Work Overseas: 26
- Availability of Jobs: 23
- Location of University: 18
- Financial Support: 17
- Financial Cost: 11
- Local Area: 11

As with the individual and social system influences, all the proposed influences in the environmental/societal system outlined by the MSCI were considered by the participants to be influential to some degree. The representation of the results above indicate that in the female sample the most often selected influences included: work overseas selected by 26 participants (74%), the availability of jobs selected by 23 participants (66%), and location of university selected by 18 participants (51%).
Closely following these influences was financial support, which was selected by 17 participants (49%), and financial cost selected by 14 participants (40%). The influence selected as impacting least often on the female participants’ career experiences was that of local area (23%). As far as importance ratings are concerned, work overseas received the highest number of importance ratings, but this was considerably lower than the number of selections of the same influence. A similar picture emerged with the availability of jobs, location of universities and financial support, which all received 11 importance ratings (fewer than the number of selections of those influences). Financial cost and local area received relatively few ratings of importance.

Male participants display a similar pattern of influence selection to the female participants but attributed fewer importance ratings throughout the range of influences. The environmental/societal influences selected most often by the male sample included: work overseas selected by 26 participants (74%), availability of jobs selected by 23 participants (66%), and location of university selected by 20 participants (57%). Following these three influences were financial support (43%) and financial cost (32%), with local area again receiving minimal selection (14%). Although work overseas received the highest number of importance ratings these were less than half the amount of selections received by the same influence. This pattern of limited ratings of importance was consistently found throughout the six influences, with local area receiving none whatsoever.

Summary

Work overseas and the availability of jobs have emerged as the two environmental/societal influences that are most often considered as impacting on this sample’s career-
related experiences. Earlier results suggested that some adolescents were considering travel and work overseas as an alternative to tertiary education/studying. This initial trend seems to be further supported by the results from the environmental/societal system frequency counts. In Chapter 7 a university career discourse, structuring career around practices of institutionally supported forms of tertiary education and study, will be contrasted to alternative career stories of discovery and exposure to foreign contexts emerging in an adolescent participant’s system of career influences. The consideration of working overseas may be recursively reinforced by further environmental/societal influences. It could be argued, for instance, that the South African labour market, where a growing awareness of limited employment possibilities for school leavers and university graduates has developed, could have lead to the samples’ consideration of the availability of jobs as a significant influence on the career possibilities available to them. In turn, working overseas, where there may still be promise of job opportunities, could be an even more appealing and important influence in middle-class South African adolescents’ career decisions.

In spite of this trend, the location of university is still considered influential by more than 50% of both the female and male adolescents in this sample. Tertiary education options therefore seem to remain a considerable influence on career experiences for at least half of the current sample. Furthermore, some participants not indicating that the location of university is influential in their career development may in fact be considering tertiary education possibilities. These participants may merely not be affected by the practical and financial constraints of universities being far from available resources such as accommodation and social support. The fact that only 30 to 50% of participants considered financial cost and support as influential may be related to the fact that participants were selected from a middle socio-economic environment where financial resources may be less limited (and less of a limiting factor on where the participants can enroll for university) than in lower socio-economic level communities. The limited selection of local area influences could point to the fact that the city from which the participants were selected is a geographical location that provides a relatively developed infrastructure to sustain further education and training.

The results indicate that, when invited to do so, the participants of this sample could identify and evaluate the environmental/societal system influences that impact on their career development. The limited number of importance ratings points to a trend in this sample to consider these influences as influential, but not importantly influential (as was the case with influences such as personality and parental influence). It must at all times
be emphasized that this discussion, and those related to the previous systems, are focusing on and identifying trends. These trends may be both confirmed or contradicted by the unique and particular experiences of the individuals that constituted this sample. Before such a unique and particular constellation of systemic influences is presented, the trends of influence of past, present and future considerations will be presented.

Past, Present and Future Influences

The following section addresses the fourth sub-aim of this first phase of the study and explores the subjectively evaluated impact of past, present, and future influences on the career-related experiences and development of the adolescent sample. The MSCI invites participants to select from four proposed influences that incorporate the impact of past, present, and future considerations. Although the MSCI invites participants to expand on these proposed influences the current sample did not elaborate any further possible influences. The results have therefore been presented as frequency counts and importance ratings of the proposed past, present, and future influences in Table 15.

From the results below, as with all the numerical re-presentations outlined in this chapter, it is difficult to make conclusive statements about the particular meanings attributed to the proposed influences by the various participants. What emerged from this section is that no adolescents volunteered information about the impact of past influences on their career experiences. It is doubtful that the participants were completely unaware of the impact of their past experiences on their current and future career development. What is more likely is that those influences proposed by the MSCI, such as seeing a movie, having a TV hero/heroine as a child, admiring a person in a particular field, remembering an experience e.g., seeing a military parade and wanting to be a tank driver or going to hospital and wanting to be a nurse and so on, were not selected, resulting in limited qualitative information about what the participants do in fact consider to be influential past influences.

Only a small portion of participants considered it important for their careers to allow them to continue living where they are currently residing. When this is contrasted with the widely held desire to work overseas described above, this is not surprising. In the second phase of this study a particular example of a participant who considered it important to explore the world beyond her current environment is investigated. Again certain career discourses are put forward there as contributing this trend of wanting to be exposed to foreign and exotic environments.
Table 15
Past, Present, and Future Influences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Frequency (Females)</th>
<th>Importance Rating (Females)</th>
<th>Frequency (Males)</th>
<th>Importance Rating (Males)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Past (None identified)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present (I don’t want to move away from where I live)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The lifestyle I anticipate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to combine family and work</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to work overseas</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 15 it can be noted further that both female and male participants consider the influence of future-orientated factors as more significant than past and present influences. Twenty-two females (63%) and 28 males (80%) consider their career development to be influenced by the lifestyle they anticipate. However, not all of these participants attributed considerable importance to this future influence. More male participants wanted to combine work with family than did female participants. However, almost all females that hoped to combine such roles considered this to be of considerable importance to them. With the financial demands placed on families in the twenty-first century more women are finding themselves in the workplace where they are combining family and career roles. Women such as the female participants in this study may therefore be encouraged to a greater extent to pursue careers that allow them to fulfill both family and occupational/professional responsibilities.

From the above results it can also be noted that 23 females (66%) and 20 males (57%) indicated that they want to work overseas. This stated desire held by a considerable proportion of the sample is consistent with results from the environmental/societal system influences where both males and females most often considered work overseas as influential and important. In phase two of the current study the implications of this career trend, as well as the greater representation of women in a diverse range of career narratives (as suggested earlier) where they can combine work
and family, will be further investigated as it relates to the career decision-making experiences of a particular female participant. In concluding this section it can be argued that the emphasis of future influences on the subjectively perceived career development of this sample of adolescents is recursively supported by a number of environmental/societal influences identified earlier.

Summary of Quantitative Re-presentation

As part of the third section of the MSCI workbook participants are provided with an opportunity to re-examine and integrate what they consider to be the most significant information from all three systems of influence and the influence of past, present, and future, and to create their own personalized systemic diagram. This personalized diagram serves as a condensed snapshot of the broad range of influences that significantly impact on a participant’s career experiences and development. The summary of the trends identified in this chapter thus far will now be presented in a similar fashion. What will be presented is a diagram based on the frequency counts of the four most often selected influences from every system of influence for both the female and male samples discussed above. Figure 11 therefore offers a visual representation of what can be thought of as a collective personalized diagram of the entire sample of participants’ dominant trends of influence as these have been identified and discussed throughout the chapter. The three interrelated systems have been colour coded in order to differentiate them more easily. Red represents the four most often selected individual system influences. Yellow represents the four most often selected social system influences. Orange represents the four most often selected environmental/societal system influences. Blue represents the influences of past, present and future. Furthermore, the frequencies of the four most often selected influences within each system have been further graded according to size (i.e. the larger the bubble the more often was that influence selected). This size differentiation applies within each particular set of four influences and not across the systemic levels.

Following this constellation of the collective trends is a further representation of one particular male participant’s constellation of most prominent influences (see Figure 12). The participant was randomly selected from the male sample. It was decided to select a male participant since a female participant’s unique career story is presented in phase two. This constellation is presented in the same format as the collective constellation. However, in Figure 12, importance of influences is not indicated by creating hierarchically sized bubbles, but by the addition of asterisks inside the bubbles that contain influences that received importance ratings from the participant. Figure 12 is
being offered as an example of a unique system of influences that both corresponds to and contrasts with the dominant trends.

Figure 11
Constellation of Most Often Selected Influences: Collective Trends

As can be noted from Figure 12, the participant added two personalized individual system influences not outlined by the MSCI workbook, namely *being passionate* about his career and having *good insight*. The participant also assigned to these two influences, along with gender and abilities an importance rating and considers them to be importantly defining of his career development.
The participant also included *how I cope* as influential in contrast to the more dominant trends in the male sample where this was seldom considered of importance. As far as social system influences are concerned, the participant included *youth group* influences and another personalized social system influence, namely *speaking to someone in the field*. Reading was given an importance rating in line with dominant trends, while the participant’s inclusion of television as an influence corresponds to the dominant trends. In contrast to the collective constellation, the influence of *local area* was included by the participant in his environmental/societal system, while the inclusion of *financial support* and *availability of jobs* aligns with dominant trends. None of these influences were, however, assigned importance ratings. Finally, in terms of past,
present and future influences the participant differed from dominant trends by omitting I don’t want to move from where I live.

This example of a unique constellation of influences, as well as a large number of other examples not presented here, points to the variation and individuality that exists within the dominant patterns of influence outlined above. It is this kind of uniqueness that can be accommodated within the structure of the STF.

Re-presenting the Reflections Process

The MSCI invited participants into a reflection on their personalized diagram that allowed the participants to integrate what they consider to be the most significant information from the various systems of influence. The MSCI facilitates this reflection process by presenting ten open-ended questions regarding the personalized diagram. This section of the chapter addresses the third aim of this first phase of the study and investigates the themes that emerged during the reflection processes of the female and male participants respectively. The MSCI’s reflection process can easily and effectively form part of a career counselling process where the significance and meaning attributed to the MSCI’s systemic representations can be explored between career counsellors and their clients. A further systemic narrative career counselling process aided by the MSCI has also been conducted in the second phase of this study. Re-examining the participant’s MSCI to stimulate further reflective conversation supported that process.

For the purposes of this section, however, nine of the ten questions were coded and categorized in relation to the three systems of influence (i.e. individual system influences, social system influences, and environmental/societal system influences), as well as the influences of past, present, and future. The analysis has allowed certain themes of reflection to emerge. The themes presented do not constitute, however, a detailed and comprehensive qualitative analysis of each participant’s personal meanings and reflections related to a particular theme. Furthermore, question eight of the reflection process, How do you feel as you look at your System of Career Influences, was not coded due to the fact that a great variety of unique responses emerged from this question. Although the majority of the participants (19 females and 18 males) expressed positive descriptions of their feelings such as “I feel happy”, “I’m pretty confident” or “This was good”, a range of further unique individual responses did emerge, which could not be reduced to categories or themed according to systems of influence.
<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 Descriptions (18)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finances (1) Working and Travelling Overseas (1)</td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (10) Career choice uncertainty (8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What stands out least for you?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographical Locations (1) Finances (7) Job availability (1) Location of University (1)</td>
<td>Lifestyle I anticipate (1)</td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (8) Career choice certainty (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has surprised you about your system of career influences?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working and Travelling Overseas (3)</td>
<td>Wanting to combine family and work (1)</td>
<td>Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (14) Career choice certainty (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you noticed that you were not previously aware of?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Working and Travelling Overseas (3) Finances (2) Job availability (1)</td>
<td>Nothing (9) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (9) Career choice certainty (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What has been confirmed for you?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographical location (2) Working and Travelling Overseas (1) Finances (1)</td>
<td>Career choice certainty (13) Nothing (5) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to change?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finances (3) Geographical location (2)</td>
<td>Lifestyle I anticipate (1)</td>
<td>Nothing (18) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would you like to remain the same?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Everything (3) Degree &amp; Effect of Influences (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of those influences you located closest to you, which do you think is most nb?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Individual System</td>
<td>Social System</td>
<td>Environmental/Societal System</td>
<td>Past, Present, and Future</td>
<td>Other themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which of these influences have you encountered in previous career decisions?</td>
<td>Internal State Descriptions (12)</td>
<td>Family influence (8)</td>
<td>Finances (11)</td>
<td>Geographical location (1)</td>
<td>Job availability (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 17</td>
<td>Male Participants’ Reflections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variety and plurality of responses demonstrate not only the uniqueness of individuals, but also alerts researchers and career practitioners to the affective or subjective emotional aspect of career development that has been largely overlooked by the career field. In Tables 16 and 17 the identified themes from the remaining nine questions, and the frequency for the emergence of those themes, within the female and male sample respectively, are grouped under the relevant system of influence categories. Additional themes that emerged during the reflection and their frequency counts are also provided.

Summary

A general comment regarding the results from the thematic re-presentation of the female and male participants’ responses to the questions in the MSCI’s reflection process is that themes related to the individual system influences and environmental/societal system influences received considerably more consistent instances of reflection than did themes related to the social system influences. Nevertheless, family influences and (with certain female participants) friendship influences did emerge in responses to the last three questions which encourage reflection on what participants want unchanged, what they regard as most important, and what they had encountered in previous career decisions. The importance and awareness of the influence of the social system is therefore not necessarily discounted by the above results. The notable emphasis on environmental/societal influences is significant, however, in the light of an earlier analysis of the present career situation (the first part of the MSCI workbook) which suggested that the adolescents from this sample could at first readily identify the influence of individual and social systemic variables on their current career situation, but could only to a limited degree consider the significance of societal/environmental influences. It could be argued therefore that working through the MSCI workbook 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 in both samples entitled degree and effect of influence. 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-related experiences. This theme points to the possibility that participants could, as hoped by the researcher, separate from the prescriptions and inevitability of the influences within their systems and be allowed to consider how their career stories have been shaped and
constructed and might be otherwise. This theme emerged more prominently in the female sample.

A prominent theme throughout that has here been termed *internal state descriptions* refers to the responses of participants that included individual system influences and other self-descriptions related to individual qualities and characteristics. As far as environmental/societal system themes are concerned, finances and job availability emerged in both samples as important areas of reflection. However, in the female sample other themes emerged including working and travelling overseas and geographical location. As far as past, present and future influences are concerned, only the influence of future considerations (i.e. the lifestyle I anticipate and wanting to combine work and family) emerged in both samples. Further themes emerging from the reflection process included career choice certainty, career choice uncertainty, job satisfaction and the importance of academic effort.

In conclusion, it must be stated that, although themes and trends have been identified here, the reflection process of the MSCI aims to elaborate on the uniqueness and personal meanings attributed to the personal diagrams of individuals. This is best achieved in a collaborative conversation that co-constructs the unfolding career stories of participants of an MSCI workbook experience. The next chapter therefore provides an account and analysis of one such collaborative conversation or rather a systemic narrative career counselling process between the researcher and one female participant selected from the sample. As explained in Chapter 5, the MSCI workbook aided this systemic narrative career counselling process.
CHAPTER 7
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF A SYSTEMIC NARRATIVE CAREER COUNSELLING PROCESS

Introduction

As stated in chapter 2 the individual, social and environmental/societal systems outlined by the STF provide a representation of the context within which individuals encounter the cultural frames of intelligibility or career constituting stories that determine the shape of their career experiences and decisions. The implication of this is that the career stories or systems of meaning supported within systems of career influence (as outlined by the STF) that most powerfully shape individuals’ understandings of what constitutes a desirable and appropriate career, are the product of cultural processes and normative judgments that are not the property and creation of individual minds alone. Career stories that shape careers can be viewed as constructed within socio-cultural contexts or systems of career influence that support and are supported by certain career-related discourses. Discourses functioning in the context of career development are the sets of statements and assumptions about what career is and should be, as well as the socio-historical practices and organized ways of behaving that structure individuals’ career relations with one another and the world of work.

The second phase of this study has been guided by this discursive systemic framework and has investigated the way in which certain career-related discourses or systems of meaning, operational at the individual, social and environmental/societal systemic levels of a research participant, were constitutive of what the participant considered a desirable career. The conversations in which these discourses were evident in shaping how the participant constructed her career were partly facilitated by jointly re-searching the participant’s MSCI to contextualize her current systemic positioning in particular narratives of career identity. These conversations were mainly guided however by the starting assumptions and practices of a narrative approach to counselling (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Winslade, 2005; Winslade & Monk 1999) outlined in Chapter 3. As these discourses were investigated in the analysis that follows, an attempt was made to determine how and if the discourses are imbricated with the workings of particular power relations and their associated normative constructions of career as these are sustained by systems of influence in the participant’s life. Thus it became important to consider how the participant positioned herself and how she had been positioned by others within and by certain discursive understandings/ideas and practices of career. It is hoped to ultimately show how certain career discourses have
positioned the research participant in relation to the dominant career narratives available to her in her system of career influences, rather than such discourses being expressions of her underlying personality or authentic self. Furthermore, institutional and societal structures that are supported by the career discourses found to be operational in the systemic narrative career counselling conversations were investigated.

As stated in Chapter 3 it is useful to initially think about how discourses position persons in certain career stories or descriptions of what a desirable career story should be. In this way, taken for granted notions and prescriptions can be objectified and historically located, thus losing their absolute authority and truth status and opening space for alternative forms of life and career. However, the current study also employs the position that it may be even more important to investigate how persons and especially career counsellors might and do use discourses to position clients in relation to the dominant career narratives privileged within their influential systems. By investigating this discursive positioning, counsellors can be made more aware of the potential implications of their questions (whether these reproduce or challenge dominant career and identity narratives) and critically examine the potential imposition of systems of meaning or discourses implicit in such questions. The questions that can be asked are: What kinds of person or subjectivity are constructed and invited by the counsellor’s questions? What kind of person is the client entitled to speak as and be when they respond to the counsellor’s statements and questions?

Firstly then the study will provide an account of the career-related discourses that were identified in the speech of the participant. These discourses will be shown to be operational within constructions of career that have been categorized or grouped according to the system of influence to which particular constructions relate or in which they are embedded. Following this, the analysis will investigate the discursive positioning of – or rather the subjectivity/identity invited for the participant - by the researcher/counsellor’s questions and statements during the systemic narrative career counselling conversations.

As stated earlier the analytic steps and discussion process conducted, although outlined in what seemed to be a chronological sequence, has been non-linear and recursive. In the section below entitled Joan’s Discursive Constructions of Career, mainly steps one to four and seven from Chapter 5 have been applied, while steps five and six form the basis of the section entitled The Researcher’s Invitations of Subjectivity. During both these subsections analytic steps ten through to thirteen have been woven in and applied where relevant. The researcher’s reflections on being a
participant in the conversations and the constructor of the discourse analysis are then also provided. Analytic steps eight and nine then form the basis for the further and very significant subsection of the chapter entitled *Joan’s Reflections*. This very important section of the chapter is dedicated to the participant’s own reflections on her career story and the systemic narrative career counselling process.

**Introducing Joan**

Joan is a young adolescent Caucasian female from a middle socio-economic status school environment in Port Elizabeth. She agreed to participate in the systemic narrative career counselling conversation after describing an experience of uncertainty in relation to her career decision. As she reported in the beginning of the first counselling conversation:

\[ J: \text{Um…well basically I don’t know what I want to do. Like we’re doing tests in guidance, but it’s not really helping. I know already I don’t feel I’m getting anywhere with that. Then Mrs. B (the teacher counsellor) recommended that I come and speak to you.} \]

It was explained to Joan that the conversation would invite her to explore the context and history of her current career development. The aim of the conversations was therefore not to provide Joan with an answer to the question “what career should I pursue?” She agreed that this would be preferable to her since the career assessments that had been administered at her school had not assisted her to her liking. She felt that her versatility and broad range of interests were not sufficiently addressed and negotiated within the assessment processes she had partaken in. Joan’s dissatisfaction seemed especially relevant in light of an earlier statement from Chapter 3 that it is often when people feel that the stories and discourses in which they are being positioned do not fit with or disqualified important aspects of their preferred experiences, goals and values, that they seek counselling.

Prior to the conversations Joan had also completed the MSCI workbook, which allowed her and the researcher to visually represent the system of career influences that had positioned her in the place where she was experiencing the uncertainty in relation to the range of career narratives available to a young woman. As stated earlier in the current study, a ‘systemic mapping’ of career-related decisions facilitated by the STF and MSCI allows career counsellors and their clients to *locate* where deconstruction might be useful. A systemic mapping points to the social and cultural sites where societal systems and institutions offer, and often prescribe, the taken-for-granted ideals
and career narratives to us. It therefore helps to locate the deconstructive process in the client’s significant and influential relationships. Although Joan reported that the MSCI had not really revealed anything new to her, and that further conversations about it was needed, the workbook was incorporated in the conversation to aid an exploratory discussion. With the aid of the MSCI the researcher therefore facilitated a systemic narrative career counselling process based on the starting assumptions and guidelines for counselling practice outlined in Chapter 3.

The following analysis has extracted constructions of career put forward by Joan during the systemic narrative career counselling conversations. Although these are abstracted and presented in a decontextualized manner, it has allowed the researcher to construct a discursive representation of Joan’s career development. More specifically, it provides a conceptualization of ‘career-indecision’ that can be located in a complex discursive network, rather than located in a deficit description of an individual’s make-up. The fact that the researcher has constructed the analysis independent of Joan’s input lends itself to the imposition of meaning with regards to her career experiences. The researcher therefore acknowledges the non-neutral agenda of his analysis. The aim of the analysis is to promote an alternative to modernist career psychology’s deficit descriptions of clients who are often seen to lack the necessary career maturity, decision-making skills or self-knowledge that would supposedly ensure ‘appropriate’ career development. The analysis aims thus to explore and propose a career perspective that situates the particular experiences of an individual’s career development within a systems, narrative and discursive framework. As stated in Chapter 5 the analysis presents a post-structuralist career psychology that rejects the idea of universal truth and objective knowledge, and proposes that ‘truths’ about an individual’s career identity are partial, situated and produced by and for particular interests, circumstances and times. This analysis is itself partial, situated and produced for particular interests.

Joan’s Discursive Constructions of Career

The discourse analysis that follows has been structured according to the framework provided by the STF (i.e. the individual, social and environmental/societal systems of influence). Career discourses identified in Joan’s linguistic constructions of career have been located at the systemic level to which the practices, vocabularies and norms of the career discourses pertain. Within each of the systemic levels, outlined by the STF, further subheadings are provided that cluster Joan’s constructions of career according to the particular career discourses identified in her speech.
Individual System

Amongst others, Joan put forward constructions of career that relate to her personal or individual struggles, realizations, preferences and desires. These constructions have therefore been identified and located at the level of the individual system. Although these constructions relate to individual system influences (in terms of the STF’s structure), the following excerpts/constructions from the conversations can be read as informed by certain social and cultural discourses that have shaped Joan’s career experiences and ideals at the level of the individual system. A range of Joan’s statements and answers to the researcher’s questions throughout the interview have been clustered according to the discourses found to be operational in Joan’s constructions of what career is and should be, and how she is positioned and positions herself within the power relations supported by such constructions. Societal and institutional structures supported by, and which support, the identified career discourses have also been investigated and explored when relevant.

*Early Glimpses of Refusal*

Cluster 1

J: I know I don’t want to sit in an office from nine to five or do something like an accountant. I don’t want that. If…what I do want to go into has to be different…um and sort of not just…I want to get somewhere with what I do. I can’t be doing the same thing everyday in my little office you know…

J: It can, ja, it can be a routine, but it mustn’t be the same thing…like exactly the same thing every day.

J: I think its like I said the whole control freak thing…that I know I won’t be able to be told what to do all the time. And also I don’t want to be inside the whole time…I don’t enjoy that.

J: Ja I’m quite an outdoor kind of person and I just don’t enjoy the idea of being stuck inside all day.

In these early excerpts from the conversations, Joan constructs her career preferences in *opposition* to what she views as conventional and prescribed forms of career that require steady working hours, an enclosed workspace, submission to authority and lack of variety. Joan emphasizes that her career “has to be different” and that she wants to “get somewhere” with what she does. In this cluster of statements Joan constructs career as an *unconventional achievement*. The construction of career as unconventional achievement allows Joan to separate from what she and her system of career influence might consider to be the accepted and normative career stories available to her such as being an accountant and working indoors from nine to five. Joan positions herself and is positioned by this construction of career in a career narrative that can potentially
distinguish her from convention and its associated ideals. More will be said later regarding Joan’s refusal to subject her career and identity to certain of the socially constructed norms available to her in her system of career influences. Firstly, however, a number of further constructions of career guided by discursive influences will be outlined.

**Career Discourse of Internal States**

What can be identified in Joan’s further constructions is that career must allow her to define herself according to inherent needs and characteristics of personhood, such as being an outdoor kind of person or being a control freak, and needing variety. The incitement to make career and one’s life an expression of inherent and unique needs and of individuality is arguably a product of what White (2004) describes as the revival of internal-state ‘pop psychologies’ during the 1960’s and 1970’s supported by humanist personal liberation philosophies, elements of the new consumerist culture and structuralist thought in developmental psychology. Within these developments emerged a notion that career can and should be an expression of unique individuality when appropriately matched to the right profession. Career development is consequently described according to decontextualised internal states that are believed to determine a person’s authentic career attributes in accordance with the essences of character or human nature. This discourse of inherent characteristics, or what will here be collectively called the career discourse of internal states, forms the basis for much of modernist career theory such as traditional trait-factor conceptualizations of career, but it is also in turn supported by political and socio-cultural systems of meaning such as glossy magazines, self-help books, and liberal democracy with their emphasis on individual autonomy, individual rights and personal needs. The pervasiveness of this discourse was well reflected in Chapter 6 where personality, interests, abilities were considered influential and important most often by both male and female participants. In accordance with this discourse, career is constructed as an extension or expression of unique internal characteristics and qualities to be liberated from any possible constraints and prescriptions placed upon individuals by external, societal or institutional power and authority.

A further analysis of the forms of power that constitute and constrain career identity follows below; however, it suffices here to notice the paradox in the way that such liberationist western career ideals are in themselves prescriptive and normative. The prescription implicit in the construction of career as the expression of unique individuality comes in the form of the dictum: “know thy true self”. This discourse and
prescription need not be viewed as oppressive, and on the contrary is productive of certain forms of career identity. However, individualist and internal state constructions of career tend to obscure the degree to which internal states/individual system influences are only expressed and accorded value, meaning and status within socially constructed (and, in Joan’s situation, particularly western) normative evaluations of career supported by particular social and environmental/societal systems.

It could therefore be argued that a career counselling process that uncritically overlooks the contextual embeddedness of Joan’s search for a ‘true self’ may ignore the degree to which a career choice is the product of a complex recursive interaction or battle between a number of individually, socially and environmentally/societally constructed discourses. This position poses, of course, many challenges to the idea that effective career decision-making entails the matching of individual essences/traits/characteristics with corresponding careers. The further implications and support of this discursive perspective in relation to Joan’s career story will hopefully become more apparent as the analysis proceeds.

**Career as Independent Ambition**

In the next excerpts (Cluster 2) Joan constructs career as something to be assertively reclaimed from the suggestions and opinions of others. Career choice is to be narrowed down and aligned with her internal wants and desires and she must no longer ‘sit on the fence’. In this construction of career as a personal desire to be reclaimed from the influence of others around her Joan employs construction of career as independent ambition, leaving her with the task of learning to disagree with people should their views not align with hers.

**Cluster 2**

J: Mm…and also I think I’ve realized…like my career is ‘my’ career. It’s what I want to do. Like I’ll only be happy in it if it’s something I want to do. And like even if someone says to me ‘oh, why do you want to do that type of thing?’…you know its what I enjoy and what I want to do.

J: I’ve probably realized I’ve been sitting on the fence too long. I don’t like um…sort of disagreeing with people. I’d rather…I can’t say no to people. I’d rather just say okay maybe and then sort of step away from it. And then I just realized it won’t work if I just keep on saying okay maybe. And also to narrow it down I’ve got to say ‘no I don’t want to do that’.

Once again choosing an appropriate career is conceptualized as a liberation of internal states (for example, ambition and desires) from the external influence of others. This humanist appeal to independent and personal ambition is arguably consistent with the abovementioned internal-state popular psychological career narratives that generally
pervade a middle socio-economic social environment (such as the school where Joan finds herself negotiating a career identity). Such independent decision-making stories were reflected in Chapter 6, where a frequent emphasis in the female sample on individual strategies of career decision-making was identified.

Alternatively Joan’s statements in the above excerpt can be read as a further resistance of the normative prescriptions, both explicit and implicit, in statements such as “why don’t you do that type of thing”. From a discursive perspective, however, it can be asked what the foundation or basis is for such a resistance. Is this resistance not itself the product of certain discourses, making it impossible to escape the grip of power? This question need only be problematic when we employ an understanding of power as oppressive and/or repressive. Joan may view her career choice as a resistance to the imposition of suggestions from those within her system of influence. And, at first glance, career counsellors may be tempted to join with Joan in resisting any form of power that may be potentially prohibitive of authenticity. However, such acts of resistance are structured according to an understanding of power that White (2004) calls traditional forms of power. Traditional forms of power are seen as operating through institutionalized structures and judgments that repress, prohibit or oppress the authentic ‘selves’ of individuals. According to a construction of career as independent ambition, therefore, in saying ‘no’ to people Joan is invited to see herself as liberating her true ‘self’ from a prescriptive power relation.

However, from a discursive viewpoint power can be conceptualized somewhat differently. What White (2004) calls modern forms of power are often the most insidious and could be more difficult to identify in their operation. Modern power encourages people to “actively participate in the judgement of their own and each other’s lives according to socially constructed norms…modern power acts through normalizing judgment to constitute life – that is to form lives, to fashion lives, to shape lives, or to manufacture lives that reproduce the constructed norms of contemporary culture” (White, 2004, p. 169). Although Joan perceives her potential career decision as an independent liberation of her internal ambition and desires from the normative influence of others, the socially constructed norms of Joan’s contemporary culture are nevertheless evidenced in her later judgments regarding the state of her career and the fashioning of that career she believes to be necessary. The point here is that there is no position beyond or outside of the discursive power relations that are productive of certain socially sanctioned career narratives. Thus, although an internal state career discourse of unique individuality appears to construct a position for Joan beyond the
external influence of others, the expression, evaluation and validation of internal-state constructions of career always occur contextually and are thus socially constructed. This is arguably why both samples from phase one (see Chapter 6) acknowledged a considerable influence and support from their social system (i.e. families and school-related persons such as guidance counsellors) in the deployment of their career decision-making strategies. It will be shown in this chapter how internal-state constructions of career are recursively sustained by and sustaining of institutions and social and environmental/societal systems of influence within Joan’s context.

**Career Discourse of Independent Ambition**

In the following excerpts (Cluster 3) Joan constructs career as an exercise in displaying effective decision-making where undesired options must be eliminated within certain time limits and according to a plan (hence, “maybe time is running out…maybe its part of trying to narrow it down”). Joan alludes to a ‘realization within’ about having to start making a decision. Implicit in this description of a realization within may be the prescriptions of the abovementioned internal state discourse of independent ambition to align decisions with personal desires ‘within’.

**Cluster 3**

J: Um… I think I just realized within myself that I’ve got to start making a decision. And I don’t know maybe because time is running out…maybe its part of trying to narrow it down. Um I’ve realized that I’ve got to…if I don’t have to make a decision I’ve got to get partly there and say what I don’t want to do. So I’ve got to make a decision about a few things. So, like, even if I can’t narrow it down and say ‘Okay this is what I want to do, I can at least sort of move away from what I don’t want to do.

J: Um… it’s probably in just like talking to people and being able to make plans really. For further on planning. Like at the moment I don’t even know which university I’m going to and that type of thing..cause I don’t even know what I’m going to do. And um… ja its basically planning. Cause I’m very…I like to plan ahead. I like to know what is happening. So that part of it probably.

Furthermore Joan’s stated desire to want to plan ahead also positions her within a career narrative of personal control where an implicit expectation is for autonomous decision-making practices that produce predictable results. This career narrative of personal control invites constructions of career as a thought out plan to be independently managed by a self-regulating rational human being. It can once again be argued that constructions of career informed by this and other individualist discourses identified thus far obscure the extent to which the very notions of personal ambition and independent desire are particular to a western cultural frame of reference, while their expression is at the same time the product of socio-cultural patterns of relationship
shaped by what particular communities consider valued forms of career and personhood. The mention of time limits within Joan’s career planning construction and the statement “I don’t even know which university I’m going to” may also then provide our first clue as to what her community considers to be valued forms of career. Joan here alludes to the dominant narratives of career available within her systems of influence where effective and rational career-decision-making ‘should’ include tertiary education (see ‘Social System’ below) and is expected to happen within certain time frames. As will be shown later these dominant narratives support and are supported by certain institutional, economic, educational and training practices.

*Career Discourse of Mastery*

Cluster 4

J: I don’t want to go into something that I know I’m not good at. I get very frustrated if I can’t do well…type thing. So if I won’t do well and I can’t then I won’t go into it. So also keeping my options open, but ja if I know I’m not going to be good at it I don’t want to do it. And if I’m not going to enjoy doing it I don’t wanna do it.

J: No. Probably being good at it! No I get really frustrated. Like I enjoy my music a lot but I’m not a natural musician, and it really frustrates me. Like I’d rather just play for fun instead of taking it seriously, because I can’t do well at it. I think that comes in with the whole control aspect of my personality.

J: Um… they’re basically just things that I enjoy doing. They’re not really things that I’ll be able to carry on with I don’t think…as I say I won’t be able to carry on with my riding as a full time job. And I don’t want to carry on with music. I’m not a performer. So that type of stuff doesn’t really help me in choosing a career.

In the above excerpts Joan constructs career and the enjoyment thereof as requiring high levels of competency and mastery. This discourse of mastery invites a construction of career as something to be taken seriously and be good at in contrast to something that can be done just for fun (for Joan this is something like music or horse riding). A discourse of mastery thus evokes ideals and prescriptions of career as an expression of non-frivolous competency, which Joan also links to the internal state discourses mentioned above when she appeals to the “control aspect of my personality” and not being “a natural musician” or “a performer”. Career once again is implicitly constructed as the expression of natural and intrinsic ability or internal characteristics. Joan also states that she won’t be able to carry on with her (horse) riding as a full-time job. In the conversation Joan alluded to the fact that this hobby will not produce a sufficient income. This financial consideration in selecting a career may seem self-evident and not necessarily a product of a system of meaning. Nonetheless, it positions Joan firmly within the career narratives of a capitalist consumerist society where career is orientated
towards a consumer market and must yield sufficient income for it to be considered viable and/or valuable. The *discourse of mastery* as Joan employs it here is therefore linked to economic influences that will in turn shape what Joan considers a desirable career and worthy expression of self. As will be shown below, this economic influence and discourse of mastery in a recursive manner support the dominant career narratives in Joan’s *social system* of influence. Joan’s internal-state constructions of career can therefore be seen to slowly weave themselves into the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts in which she finds herself.

*Career Discourse of Discovery*

Cluster 5

J: Um…not really difficult I don’t think. Because what’s good about my situation is that I don’t have a fixed idea, I don’t have sort of my heart set on something, so I can look around and then say no…no…maybe…and go from there.

J: Like if you had a really stubborn person and you said ‘how about this’ and he said ‘no this is what I want to do’ it would probably be also difficult. So like I’m open to sort of suggestions and to sort of have a look around.

J: I don’t actually…ja basically before I narrow it down I wanna do that. I want to see what else there is. I think that’s probably the main idea.

J: Um…and I think people do like the idea of where they are going. So like that’s probably…like I like to plan ahead, but I realize that I’ve got to sort of keep my mind open. Some people… because they don’t like being uncertain, they probably sort of cling to one idea.

J: No. It’s basically…ja I’m scared that…I’m basically scared I choose the wrong thing, because I don’t know what else I can do… I think put it that way.

Interestingly Joan in the above excerpt constructs her career situation as one of exploration and discovery. This stands in contrast to the career narratives alluded to in the previous excerpts and discourses where planning, narrowing down and independent, time-bound decision-making practices were prescribed as optimal career practices. Joan describes this contrast when she says, “I think people do like the idea of where they are going…like I like to plan ahead, but I realize that I’ve got to sort of keep my mind open”. This points to the possible tension that exists between the *career narratives of personal control* and *independent ambition*, on the one hand, and an emerging alternative discourse and its associated career narratives within Joan’s system of influence. As will be shown later in the current chapter, career as a process of exploration and discovery as an alternative to the narrowing down of options was co-constructed between the researcher and Joan during the systemic narrative career counselling conversations. What guides Joan (and guided the conversations) in this
construction of career is thus a *discourse of discovery* where being open to possibilities and suggestions from one’s system of influence is regarded as the optimal state and practice of appropriate career development. Within this discourse there is a turn “outward” rather than “inward” in forming a career decision. It can be argued that the *discourse of discovery* is further introduced by the MSCI where career decision-making becomes contextually located and constructed rather than the matching up of internal states, abilities and interests with certain jobs. The prescriptions around time and tertiary education ideals are also to a degree marginalized by the *discovery discourse* and its associated practices of not clinging to one idea and ensuring that a full appreciation of “what is out there” is first obtained.

**Summary**

As can be expected, Joan’s constructions of career related to individual system influences were informed and supported by the internal state discourses that pervade an individualist western culture. These discourses have, however, been obliquely linked to certain social, societal and economic discourses and influences. Evidenced in Joan’s further unfolding career story we will begin to identify more clearly the recursive interaction and *tension* between conflicting career discourses. We have already identified how a discourse of discovery orientates Joan towards a contextual exploration, while internal-state discourses orientate her towards a decontextualized discovery of internal essences. It is this tension that is now further explored within Joan’s constructions of career as they relate to the social system of influence.

**Social System**

During the systemic narrative career counselling conversations, Joan further introduced constructions or narratives of career that were supported by the social, family and community interactions/conversations she participated in. Joan described how social relations and conversations were structured around the question ‘what are you going to do now’. These conversations and question can be read as supporting implicit assumptions about what might be regarded as an appropriate and expected career narrative for her stage of educational and personal development. It is also here where the *modern forms of power* described earlier are shown to act through internalized normalizing judgment (supported by Joan’s social system) in constituting what Joan considers as an appropriate or desirable career. Certain of the dominant discourses identified and located here at the social system level of influence are shown to support the abovementioned western individualist or internal-state discourses. At the same time, however, a tension exists where certain alternatives to the dominant career
narratives promoted by Joan’s community (and internal-state discourses) do emerge from the social system.

*University Discourse*

In the excerpts below (Cluster 6) Joan introduces a particular construction of career that has been structured around practices of institutionally supported forms of tertiary education and study. When people in Joan’s social system introduce the question of ‘what are you going to do?’ there is an implicit prescription and normative judgment that invites Joan to locate herself within particular culturally sanctioned narratives of career supported by a *university discourse*.

**Cluster 6**

J: Ja, I think lots of people just say ‘okay now what are you going to do?’ Like I know I’m going to take a gap year after school, but then still people say ‘then what are you going to do?’ Ja, they want to know what you are going to study and where you’re gonna go.

J: Ja because then I’ve gotta sort of start applying to varsities and…cause I don’t know how long I’m going to be overseas for, but my parents have said…like my aunt’s got a um…she owns hotels and things overseas, so I’m definitely going there for a while. But after that I’ve got to apply to a university to go study. So there I’m going to have to sort of…

Although Joan clearly states ‘after that I’ve got to apply to a university to go study’, the *university discourse* is here used more broadly to denote a range of practices and ideas that construct an ideal of career as something to be qualified for by means of recognized institutional structures (whether they be universities, colleges or technikons), resulting in the organization of persons into recognized categories of professions (where such professionals are often regulated by professional boards and societies). The *university discourse* is in turn sanctioned by broader structures of a market and capitalist economy where “legitimately qualified” individuals can access the consumer market and are entitled to be remunerated for their services.

Questions posed to Joan about what she’ll be doing now (Joan is near the end of her high school career) also evoke the expectation that there needs to be some sort of time-frame and *plan*. Here it can be argued that the career narrative of *personal control* (i.e., constructing career as a thought out plan to be independently managed by a self-regulating rational human being) and the *discourse of mastery* (where high levels of expertise and competence are required for a career to be worthwhile) recursively interact with a *university discourse* to constitute the more dominant career narratives available in Joan’s system of influence. Especially in middle to upper socio-economic systemic environments such as Joan’s the narratives shaped by the university discourse
are often considered necessary and ideal. Modern power thus functions in a capillary fashion at the local level of conversations where Joan encounters these ideals and normative judgments (such as classroom discussions and family interactions). So, although the university discourse is sanctioned by broader societal structures of a market and capitalist economy, it is reproduced at a more local and social level, which in turn sustains broader institutions such as tertiary institutions, professional bodies and the economy in a recursive manner. But even these dominant discourses are not without their counter-discourses. If the reproduction and power of societal structures depend on what Foucault (1973) called the subjectification of individuals (i.e. the internalization of certain dominant discourses and normalizing judgments of self and career), then there is the possibility of resistance to such power. This is not, however, the liberation of internal states from the imposition of external or oppressive power, but rather positioning of the self in career narratives supported by alternative discourses. Take for instance the following excerpts from the conversation:

A Practical-Contextual Career Narrative

Cluster 7

J: Ja. Its just basically talking to other people. They ask you what standard you in and then okay now what are you going to do? That’s where it features I think. Like where was it last weekend? We had supper with friends…family friends…they said ‘O ja what you doing? What you going to do?’ Oh, yes my cousin’s girlfriend…I spoke to her and I also said I don’t really know what I’m doing. And she said…what did she say? Um…she said its not a problem. So that’s someone who is not pressuring me. Also she said that varsity and stuff…you don’t have to go to it! Cause she studied, I don’t know, some science degree or something and she says she’s not using it at all. So I also find that quite interesting.

J: So her…she is also very clever, She did some science…I don’t know chemistry or something. But she’s basically not using it now. Even though you’ve got the degree behind your name you still need like practical work. So she said just be careful what you do and what you study. You might not need it.

In conversation with some members from her social system Joan once again encounters the university discourse’s prescriptions expressed in questions posed to her regarding her plans, but also potential alternatives to the taken-for-granted importance of institutionally structured education and training. Joan’s cousin’s girlfriend introduces a counter-discourse that is expressed in her own career narrative where studying is not necessarily inevitably linked to the practical expression of a career. Once again Joan finds herself at the intersection of competing discourses of career that create a tension between normative career narratives structured around and by a university discourse, and an alternative of remaining open to the possibility that ‘you might not need it’.
Although this *practical-contextual narrative of career* introduced by Joan’s social system influence (i.e. her cousin’s girlfriend) is in all likelihood linked to certain market and economic influences particular to a South African context, it invites Joan into a position where she experiences less influence from the dominant normative evaluations surrounding her. If we consider the positioning of a practical career narrative within the environmental/societal system influences to be discussed below, as an alternative career narrative it may also be more useful in the South African labour context where unemployment, affirmative action policies and market saturation are factors that require innovative, *practical* and adaptable career practices that are not necessarily always within the ambit of a tradition of university/tertiary qualification. All this provides an entry point into alternative considerations of career for Joan where taken-for-granted practices of qualification and a consequent immersion in a particular profession are questioned.

The recursive-discursive interaction that stretches across the three systems of influence is also well demonstrated by the tension between a university discourse, on the one hand, and alternative career stories, as these are respectively supported or undermined by family/social relationships and the South African context described above. As mentioned above, certain of the *internal state discourses* (more specifically the associated career narratives of personal control and mastery) may support the practices of career development associated with the university discourse that requires time-bound commitment and the mastery of certain tasks according to standards of institutional measurement and evaluation. However, other internal state constructions of career such as that of *personal ambition* and *unconventional achievement* could easily support career development practices that do not align themselves with a university discourse’s dominant ideals. These internal state constructions invite and point to practices of a practical and contextually sensitive career narrative. Joan’s experience of a desire to do something different or unconventional may therefore position her favorably within her socio-political working context that requires innovative and unconventional approaches. All this results in a tension between Joan’s social system’s dominant (i.e. university) career narratives supported by certain internal state/individualist discourses, on the one hand, and alternative (i.e. practical) career narratives supported by other internal-state/individualist discourses and the South African environmental/societal context. Joan finds herself having to negotiate this tension and not surprisingly experiences *uncertainty* regarding the ‘correct’ career choice.
Discourse of Gender Equality

In the following excerpts (Cluster 8) Joan constructs career as the emancipation of women into the same variety of careers as is available to men. What Joan introduces in describing the equal availability and pursuit of careers for women and men in the social environment around her, is the discourse of gender equality. The effects of this discourse has been evidenced in the results from Chapter 6 where the female and male sample displayed a range of career interests that are not necessarily bound to traditional gendered career narratives. It was proposed in Chapter 6 that the non-gender-specific career interest pattern in Joan’s social system corresponds to a greater equivalence of gender representation in what arguably used to be male-dominated professions. The discourse of gender equality acquires its further significance in contrast to previous career stories accounted for by Joan’s mother (as part of her social system) where certain prescriptions and limitations existed regarding women’s careers.

Cluster 8

J: Mm. Cause she (Joan’s mother) says then you could be like a nurse, a teacher or like only five occupations for women basically. And she says now there’s so much.

J: Well there’s so much more out there first of all. I mean we can do basically anything a guy can do now. Um… and apart from that there are more jobs available…with technology and stuff.

J: Ja, cause I mean instead of being just a doctor or a nurse, you can be a gynie (gynecologist) or a physiotherapist… you can go into anything.

Joan positions herself in opposition to patriarchal discourses of career that were dominant in her mother’s historical and social systems. As stated in Chapter 3, patriarchal discourses position males as breadwinners in families, while women are assigned the domestic and child-rearing responsibilities. Women’s identities as nurturers and emotional caregivers limited their participation in the variety of professions available to men and their financial independence. The degree to which the discourse of gender equality is in fact shaping the career narratives of women and men in Joan’s social system and the actual workplace is debatable. What is significant, however, is that Joan has positioned herself in a woman’s career narrative that does not preclude any expression of career. The conversation with her mother that Joan describes above could therefore be considered a site at which the subjectification of women according to the normalizing judgment of patriarchal career discourses was resisted with a counter-discourse of gender equality.
In the excerpts that follow (Cluster 9) Joan describes her career decision and situation, as well as that of some of her peers, as structured and shaped in relation to the expectations and pressures from family influence and, more specifically, parental influence. Parental influence has been identified in Chapter 6 as the most prominent social systemic influence in Joan’s peers’ systems of influence. Career is constructed by Joan as something to be negotiated according to (and potentially in resistance to) the hopes and ideals put forward by parents.

Cluster 9

J: Ja, I think so. Like I’ve spoken to my mom about it. Like she’s not really stressed about it, but she’ll say to me every now and again ‘ooh what about that job? How about doing that?’ or ‘Have you thought about that?’ But she’s not like pressurizing me to say ‘ooh, you must decide or tell me what you are going to do’ She knows that I’m uncertain and…so its Ja…my parents actually aren’t stressed about it either. My dad will say think about this, think about that…but its not something like ‘you must decide!’

J: Um…ja, basically I was just saying that my parents are there for me but they aren’t forcing me to do something. They don’t have like a fixed idea of what they want me to do.

J: Um…ja, I think so. Also because people are pressuring them to say…to narrow it down. Like I think a few people have got pressure from their parents. Like ‘ooh, you know my dad was a doctor and my grandfather was a doctor so I must be a doctor’ type thing.

As stated earlier, the normative judgements that reproduce the socially constructed career ideals of contemporary culture are found at the level of family interactions. It may even be argued that these family interactions, amongst other social influences, determine if and how internal-state discourses are reproduced and given status as defining valid career narratives. Examples of narratives of career sustained by family tradition are shown to inform Joan’s peers’ careers. As Joan states, “I think a few people have got pressure from their parents. Like ‘ooh you know my dad was a doctor and my grandfather was a doctor so I must be a doctor’ type thing”. Within such a family tradition the discourses of discovery, and narratives of unique individuality, unconventional achievement and personal ambition, could easily be marginalized in favour of reproducing the tradition and dominant forms of career.

In turn it can be proposed that marginalized discourses can serve as counter-discourses to certain dominant discourses that position individuals in prescribed forms of career. Joan, for instance, alludes to the traces of normative patriarchal discourses that often sustain the family career tradition stories encountered in her peers’ social system.
(i.e. father and grandfather being doctors without a mention of women). In contrast, Joan constructs her career as a story in which she is allowed the freedom to explore and not conform to a family career tradition. As she states, “it’s not something like ‘you must decide!” and “They don’t have like a fixed idea of what they want me to do.” Joan’s relationship with her parents (a prominent social system influence) therefore further sustains the discourse of discovery and is expressed in parenting practices, which include encouragement to think about potential careers without an explicit expectation to narrow such career options down.

Summary

Once again we encounter with Joan’s various constructions of career the workings of career discourses that intersect and recursively either support or resist each other in constituting certain norms around which Joan is encouraged to shape her life and identity. Of particular interest in Joan’s social system influences is the presence of counter-discourses that oppose the dominant gender and university discourses that have shaped the dominant career stories of her cultural context. Furthermore, it could be argued that the recursive interaction and tension between certain internal state discourses (as identified in the individual system) and discourses identified in Joan’s social system may be strongly related to the sense of uncertainty that Joan experiences regarding her career decision. Later it will be investigated whether the systemic narrative career counselling conversation provided a position for Joan from which she could evaluate and take a different or useful position in relation to the array of discourses encountered in her individual and social systems.

Environmental/Societal System

Career Discourse of Exotic Exposure

In the excerpts below, Joan produces a description of her past (and present) career development environment as a limitation on the extent of her career knowledge regarding what is ‘out there’. Implicit in this description, as well as her description of herself as ‘ignorant’ and needing to be ‘woken up’, lies the construction and prescription of an appropriately selected career as the attainment of extensive life experience and worldly knowledge beyond her protected environment. Career is constructed as something to be decided upon after foreign and exotic (as opposed to domestic) knowledges and experiences have been acquired. This career discourse of exotic exposure produces the idea that Joan will make an uninformed and therefore limited career choice without moving out of her safe and familiar environment.
Cluster 10

J: Um...maybe it sounds exciting and like I said I haven't been out of South Africa. So I feel really sort of...ja, like ignorant. I don't really know what's out there and stuff. So from that point of view it sounds like fun!

J: Ja, because like at home I'm in a very safe environment. I mean our front door doesn't lock! (laughter). Ja like I've never been to Jo’burg, I've never been to a big city. Um...so I definitely need that type of 'wake me up'. Probably.

J: Um...probably...I think I do need to realize what else is there. And like I came to P. E. (Port Elizabeth) and that was like...different. And then I told people, you know, ja we don't lock our front door...it doesn't lock. And they were like 'HA...oh my gosh!' And its like... (laughter).

J: Ja, basically just experience. And then I don't know, maybe if I'm over there I'll do something and say 'ooh, my gosh, that's really what I want to do!'

This construction of ‘well informed’ career development is, in turn, supported by the discourse of discovery that emerged in the above transcripts. Joan wonders if she might encounter something ‘over there’ that will produce a realization about what she wants to do. The discourse of exotic exposure therefore produces a sense of possibility that there may be alternatives (maybe even something unconventional) to Joan’s own culturally and socially constructed maps or shared narratives that have guided (or rather not effectively guided) her in her career decision thus far. It therefore positions Joan in a potential career story that is guided by elements of chance rather than prediction and control (as associated with the discourse of personal control identified above). The element of chance has also been regarded as a significant career influence in the STF as described in Chapter 2. As stated there, this inclusion stands in contrast to long-standing linear stage-based career-models of cause and effect, which have the potential to foreclose the concept of human agency and the capacity for creative deliberation (Gergen, 1999). It is debatable whether chance can be conceptualized as the result of discursive-systemic tensions, however, the meaning of such events are inevitably socially constructed by drawing on available narratives of career. Such career narratives may in themselves embrace unpredictability and fortuitous events.

In Chapter 6 work overseas and the availability of jobs emerged as two environmental/societal influences that are most often considered as impacting on the participants’ career-related experiences. These results support the suggestion that a trend exists amongst school leavers from middle socio-economic environments in South Africa in which foreign economic, travel and part-time work opportunities provide the economic, environmental and societal incentives to spend time working and living overseas. Amongst Joan’s peers, career-decision making after school does not
necessarily imply immediate decisions about study or tertiary education. Stories of adventure and discovery may therefore be circulating amongst Joan’s peers and reproducing the career-decision related ideals supported by a discourse of exotic exposure reinforced by a discovery discourse.

_A Farm Girl Narrative_

Interestingly, however, Joan describes herself as a farm girl and somebody who does not want to live in the big city. Although this was not unpacked further in the conversations between Joan and the researcher, it points to another potential tension that exists, this time between Joan’s stated preferences regarding her lifestyle and living environment, on the one hand, and what might be required from constructions of career based on a discourse of exotic exposure.

Cluster 11

J: Um…and I’m a farm girl. I live on a farm just outside Plet and I don’t want to move to the big city or something like that. I won’t live in Jo’burg or Cape Town.

J: Ja, its just like my background basically. I don’t like being couped up.

This need not be an insurmountable tension. Joan could easily experience life in foreign contexts and still pursue an outdoor, non-city lifestyle there or back home, but it nevertheless situates Joan at the intersection of different discourses competing in the language she uses to position herself in relations of power and responsibility that sustain her (career) identity according to what is considered normal, appropriate and successful career development. In the previous excerpts statements such as “I feel so ignorant and I need a wake me up” have constructed Joan’s identity. She is positioned in descriptions of a deficit self when she measures herself according to the norms produced within the career discourse of exotic exposure supported by her current and potential environmental/societal system (i.e., an urban middle socio-economic environment). However, when Joan speaks about her background (having grown up on a farm) and not liking to be couped up, she alludes to the influence of another environmental/societal system of influence that supports a different set of normative judgments regarding a desirable and fulfilling career and lifestyle.

Within this environmental system a personal narrative of unique individuality (in the form of Joan’s description of her internal state as an outdoor kind of person) is supported by living practices, cultural values and norms that might construct Joan’s identity very differently and not within a deficit (i.e. as a farm girl). Within such an environmental system, Joan’s farm girl narrative might construct her identity as knowledged and
experienced in what it means to live an outdoor kind of lifestyle on a farm. The point here is not to privilege one construction of Joan’s identity over another, or to make an appeal to what her true/authentic identity might be. What does emerge, however, from the analysis of Joan’s environmental/societal systemic career constructions, as well as from the individual and social systemic career constructions above, is that the deployment of one discourse (and its associated normative judgements, practices and prescriptions regarding ideal career development) over another is not neutral in its effect on how Joan might relate to and construct a sense of self and identity.

Summary

Once again Joan can be seen as positioned in a tension between competing discourses (this time related to the meaning attributed to certain environmental/societal systemic influences) that prescribe certain kinds of knowledge and experiences as pivotal to a worthwhile career. The implications for Joan’s sense of self and career ideals of privileging certain environmental/societal systemic career constructions over others have been investigated. As with previous systems of influence a recursive interaction across the three systemic levels has been identified. It can therefore be argued that Joan’s career and personal identity is the product of a number of competing discourses, each with very specific implications for how Joan describes, experiences and positions herself in relations of power and knowledge within her systemic framework of career of influences.

The Researcher’s Invitations Of Subjectivity

So What Now?

The above analysis has considered how Joan has positioned herself and has been positioned by others within and according to certain discursive understandings/ideas and practices of career development. The taken-for-granted notions and career prescriptions in Joan’s system of influence were objectified and historically, socially and contextually located. From the analysis Joan’s career identity can be seen to be a product of systemic influences that support certain socially constructed career norms. The recursive tension that exists between competing career discourses and narratives was investigated and linked to the sense of uncertainty that Joan experiences with regards to her career decision-making process. It is this uncertainty that propelled Joan to participate in career counselling conversations. The discursive, relational and contextual perspective of Joan’s career experiences constructed in the above analysis objectifies and externalizes the normative standards of career development supported by her culture. This provides an alternative conceptualization of ‘career-indecision’, which is usually constructed
according to the theoretical/professional normative evaluations and standards of what ‘effective career decision-making’, ‘age appropriate career maturity’ and ‘adequate career knowledge’ should be. From such evaluations Joan would have surfaced with a deficit description of self that required intervention and guidance from an expert-career counsellor. The analysis aimed thus to resist and provide alternatives to modernist-positivist constructions of effective career decision-making and their associated classification of individuals according to culture-specific norms As stated by Kuit and Watson (2005),

Although the ordering and classification of individuals into deficiency-based categories is less pervasive in career psychology than in disciplines such as clinical psychology and psychiatry, a modernist support of independent rationality in career decision-making, as well as western discourses of ‘successful’ career development trajectories, creates margins of deficiency for those who do not fit with the dominant culture’s prevailing notions of appropriate and preferred career paths… deficiency-based notions promoted by not conforming to a western humanist-modernist tradition can be critically evaluated for the way in which they ignore the social, political, racial, ethnic and gender relations – often fraught with inequality and oppression - which constitute positions for people from which to construct career decisions. (p. 34)

The question remains: What then is the role of the systemic narrative career counsellor if he/she is not to reproduce deficit descriptions of career identity from an expert-interventionist position? If there is no space outside of the discursive network of influences, then what can be offered in terms of useful and empowering career counselling conversations? From a contextually embedded reading of Joan’s statements it can be proposed that her constructions of career, and their associated subject positions, were produced within a system of career influences supporting certain socially constructed norms. Joan’s statements about her career were, however, made in response to questions and statements put forward by the researcher (as career counsellor). The researcher thus became part of Joan’s system of career influence and her discursive network. In exploring answers to the above questions, the researcher investigated the
potential implications of his questions and statements when adopting a systemic narrative approach to career counselling.

Constructing A Discursive Career Identity

The following section presents eight excerpts of dialogue that took place between the researcher (as career counsellor) and Joan during the systemic narrative career counselling process. The dialogues are presented chronologically, as they appeared in the transcripts and as they took place over the span of two separate conversations. Discussions are interspersed between the dialogue extracts to provide an analysis of how the conversation positioned Joan in relation to her career and career identity. The analysis ultimately asks whether the researcher’s contributions to the conducted conversations reproduced, challenged or ignored Joan’s dominant career narratives and discourses. The guiding questions that were asked by the researcher in the following analysis were: What kind of subjectivity was constructed and invited for Joan by the researcher’s questions? What kind of person was Joan entitled to speak as and be in response to the counsellor’s statements and questions?

Dialogue Excerpt 1

In the following dialogue Joan has introduced the earlier described university discourse supported by her social system of influence (and recursively buttressed by certain internal state discourses) that prescribes certain ‘developmentally appropriate’ career practices. The counsellor’s questions here invite Joan into a position of evaluating and objectifying the necessity to narrow it down or the narrowing down idea which has, in line with narrative practice, been externalized and located within a socio-historical context. The narrowing down idea was the name negotiated between the counsellor and the client to refer to the university discourse’s narrative of career that prescribes to adolescent school leavers a qualification in recognized institutional structures (whether they be universities, colleges or technikons). Joan was invited to evaluate the relative influence of the narrowing down idea and its effects on her life. Joan was also invited to speak against the prescriptions of the university discourse and together the counsellor and Joan began co-constructing an alternative strategy that potentially provides time for exploration.

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13 The letter ‘W’ indicates the researcher/counsellor’s contributions to the dialogue throughout the analysis.
W: Where does that come from? That necessity to narrow it down? Why are people talking about that?

J: I don’t know just…like if I meet someone and they say like ‘how old are you?’ and ‘what standard are you in?’ And I say standard nine…then they say ‘okay, so what are you going to do?’ That’s always what they are going to ask. Lots of people ask that.

W: Ja I’m quite curious to know where you think that comes from…that people believe that because you are in standard nine that you should be narrowing down.

J: I don’t know, I think its cause you’re in standard nine and next year it’s the end and then you’ve got to go into a job…

W: Okay, so then you’ve got to go into a job?

J: Ja, I think lots of people just say ‘okay, now what are you going to do?’ Like I know I’m going to take a gap year after school, but then still people say ‘then what are you going to do?’ Ja, they want to know what you are going to study and where you’re gonna go.

W: So, what effect does it have on you when you encounter this narrowing down idea?

J: Its ja…its scary. Its like ‘don’t talk about it! Not yet!’ (laughter)

W: Okay, is that the kind of thought that comes into your mind? Sort of ‘don’t talk about it yet…just you know’…

J: Ja! Just sort of relax. I’ve still got a bit of time to think about it.

W: So, is that something that helps you? That you’ve still got time to think about it?

J: Mm.

W: Or do you find the narrowing down idea is quite strong? Does it kind of stir you?

J: No, I don’t feel that I have to say what I want to do now. I just… I’d like to know what I want to go into, but its not sort of stressing me out that I don’t know what I want to do. Um…like lots of people have said to me that its fine, there is still time. Ja, that part of it…it doesn’t really worry me. I’d like to know. I’d like a fixed idea, but its not something that’s really stressing me out.

W: Okay, so what about the interim? Are you able to carry on without having that? Without having a narrowing down? I mean if you encounter people and they say to you well…they bring this idea into the conversation of ‘what are you going to do?’ How are you going to respond to that?

J: At the moment I’m just saying I don’t really know. Like I said it doesn’t really bother me. I don’t think its…ja. Like sort of ‘I don’t know yet…leave me alone’ (laughter).

Dialogue Excerpt 2

Again, the dominant career narratives supported by the university discourse and internal state discourses (constructing career as independent ambition and an expression of personal control) are objectified and critically examined in the following excerpt. The
researcher invites Joan to question the benefit of these career narratives and their assumptions and expectations, thereby undermining their taken-for-granted and normative status. The researcher also introduces the *discourse of discovery* as an alternative to the narrowing down narrative, which entitles Joan to position herself in a career story of exploration and seeing what is out there first.

**W:** You know I’m still very curious about this idea. Cause you know some people might think…some people might think for a career to be…for you to be a person of integrity and stability, that you would have to almost like by the end of your school career, or even earlier than that, that you should kind of know who you are and want to have a career. Now I’m wondering where that idea comes from.

**J:** Mm!

**W:** I really don’t have an answer. But I wonder if we can think about where that idea comes from? That it is so important to have to start closing down on a career when you get to the end of school.

**J:** Ja, just like I’ll speak…every Friday night we’ll like go to a place called The Club. Its like real family place. And then someone new will come and say ‘oh, you know so what are you going to do?’ And its just sort of you know, whenever you are speaking to adults, especially I find. Like a lot of my friends also have no clue, and like speaking to adults who say like ‘okay, so now what are you going to do?’

**W:** And I’m wondering who are the ones who benefit from that kind of question. You know is it something that is useful for the adults to think about or for you to think about?

**J:** No-one really! (laughter). Ja, it makes me think, but apart from that. I’ve got a very big family. My mom’s got five brothers and like my aunt was down the last holidays, and she was also saying you know ‘what are you gonna do?’. So from that point of view it benefits them…you know family…out of interest.

**W:** Okay, so it can be out of interest as well. And at times when its not out of interest? Are there times when it is like an expectation?

**J:** Ya probably. Um…

**W:** Can you think of a time when it was like an expectation?

**J:** Ja speaking to different people. I can’t think now, but it is sometimes.

**W:** And I’m just wondering…this might not be a question that’s easy to answer, but if your situation and the kind of thing that you want from work is…if this kind of expectation doesn’t really assist you where that’s concerned. Where you’re expected to narrow down and close down early without really seeing what is out there.

**J:** Mm…I want to have a look what is out there first before sort of narrowing down. That’s also why my mom said to me I must chat to you because she says they are old and expired! They don’t really know what’s out there!
**Dialogue Excerpt 3**

As stated earlier, Joan’s social system is a site where the *subjectification* (Foucault, 1973) of women according to the normalizing judgment of patriarchal career discourses was resisted with a counter-discourse of gender equality. Here the researcher invites Joan to take a position in relation to gender discourses around career within her social system of influence. The researcher makes reference to emerging career narratives of women and contrasts these to historically sanctioned careers traditionally associated with women. In response to Joan’s description of her situation the researcher locates the *career discourse of gender equality* as a value supported by Joan’s family and further links this with the *discourse of discovery* that opens more career options for Joan. This dialogue thus supports career narratives for Joan that might not have been as available to her had she aligned herself with a patriarchal career discourse.

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**J:** Mm. Cause she (Joan’s mother) says then you could be like a nurse, a teacher or like only five occupations for women basically. And she says now there’s so much.

**W:** Do you think that kind of background might be informing some of these people about…especially for a woman. They may be thinking ‘nurse or teacher, narrow it down girl’!

**J:** Or librarian! (laughter)

**W:** So what do you think has changed. Let’s think about women, for instance. I mean if you look around you and you see women in work and some of the younger women you’ve encountered…what do you think might’ve been some of the changes that you are confronting that those people might not be?

**J:** Well, there’s so much more out there first of all. I mean we can do basically anything a guy can do now. Um… and apart from that there are more jobs available…with technology and stuff.

**W:** Yes, its almost like the range is bigger and more specialized and so on…

**J:** Ja, cause I mean instead of being just a doctor or a nurse, you can be a gynie (gynecologist) or a physiotherapist… you can go into anything.

**W:** How do you feel about that…being a woman one day in the work situation? Are there any ideas in your family or friendships that you find that you disagree with where women’s work is concerned?

**J:** Not really. Like there’s nothing really limiting me. I won’t look at something and say “oh no that’s a guys job. Um… like my dad’s a farmer. If I wanted to go into farming then he’d say cool. Its not sexist at all. Its fine. And everyone feels like that. I can do engineering or anything it doesn’t really matter.

**W:** Okay, so even that kind of value in your family of ‘everyone is equal’ it almost opens up even more options for you doesn’t it?

**J:** Ja.
In the light of Joan’s experience of uncertainty regarding career choice, the above excerpts have revealed how the researcher has invited Joan to not so much remedy the causes of the uncertainty, but rather to critically examine the assumption that there should be certainty and defined choice at this stage of Joan’s career development. This challenge to normative career developmental narratives is consistent with what was described in earlier chapters as the STF’s interrogation of deficiency-based descriptions of career development attributed to those that do not conform to the optimal and normative ideals proposed by some developmental theories. Joan is thereby positioned outside of the university and patriarchal discourses’ career narratives, but nevertheless remains discursively positioned. Certain career-related practices are therefore inevitable once Joan leaves school. The uncertainty is therefore not necessarily the effect of the prescriptions of the dominant career narratives in Joan’s system of career influences, but also relates to the tension between the dominant career ideals for adolescents of Joan’s culture and the multitude of possibilities ushered in by a practical narrative of career (see above) and a career discourse of discovery supported by Joan’s social system. Joan also holds a range of abilities that make a range of potential careers possible. How to negotiate this tension and multiplicity? In the following excerpt the researcher introduces questions and statements that invite Joan to position herself strategically in relation to the socially constructed norms encountered in her context. The researcher encourages Joan to investigate what has and does contribute to a movement towards and away from the narrowing down idea or the ‘putting your foot down approach’. In Joan’s last statement she says: “I’m scared of saying this is what I do want to do when I don’t know what else there is.” The discourse of exotic exposure also makes its appearance there. The conversation ultimately invites Joan into a position of agency where her identity is constructed as active in negotiating the complex tension and ambiguity inherent to the discursive network of a variety of career narratives where Joan finds herself positioned.

W: And related to that you mentioned something about um…sitting on the fence. And I think we called it your ‘Okay maybe approach’. And this approach often ended up putting you on the fence and making you unsure. And then the other side we spoke about was the ‘Putting your foot down approach’ where you were saying more…’okay these are the things I’m excluding’. Where are you in relation to those two strategies at the moment? Those two ways of approaching your career?
J: I think now I know what I don’t want to do. Um…I’ve got quite a clear picture of what I don’t want to do. If someone will say ‘this’ I can say ‘no’. Um…like my mom would suggest something and then I’ll say no.

W: Is that a new development for you? Or is it something that has been coming for quite a while?

J: Um…relatively new. I think like from the beginning of the year. Because she used to say something like ‘what about this?’ and I was like ‘okay, I don’t know, maybe’. But now I’ve sort of decided, no, I’m not going to do that. I think that’s my problem. I can say what I don’t want to do, I can’t say what I do want to do. Um…I can say I don’t want to be an accountant, I don’t want to be a teacher. But from there it is a problem.

W: And where do you think this comes from? This extent of your ability to start saying this is not it. In other words its moving away from the ‘okay maybe approach’ and sitting on the fence. What I’m trying to get an idea of is what is allowing you to start feeling a little bit more certain about what you don’t want to do.

J: Um… I think I just realized within myself that I’ve got to start making a decision. And I don’t know maybe because time is running out…maybe its part of trying to narrow it down. Um I’ve realized that I’ve got to…if I don’t have to make a decision I’ve got to get partly there and say what I don’t want to do. So I’ve got to make a decision about a few things. So like, even if I can’t narrow it down and say ‘Okay this is what I want to do’, I can at least sort of move away from what I don’t want to do.

W: Okay, right. And what effect is that having on your outlook on your career? On how you think about your career. Is it assisting you?

J: It’s definitely making it slightly more easier, but only to a certain point. Um, like I can now say I don’t want to do that…that doesn’t interest me. But from there its like…

W: Okay. And then what is preventing you from putting your foot further down? Saying…going from a position of ‘this is what I don’t want to do’ to ‘this is it’?

J: Um…I don’t know. Maybe fear. Partly because I don’t know what I want to do and also because I think I’m scared of saying this is what I do want to do when I don’t know what else there is. Um, sort of…I told you I was looking into journalism. But I think to myself ‘if I do go into journalism what if I’m not good at it? What if I don’t enjoy it?’ And that sort of makes me hesitate.

**Dialogue Excerpt 5**

In the next dialogue, Joan is invited to consider herself as holding certain abilities and personal attributes that allow her to separate from the dominant career narratives available to her and her peers. The counsellor thus employs an internal state discourse to again create a position from which Joan can speak of preferences regarding her career development that are not necessarily consistent with the expectations pervading her social system of influences. As argued earlier, such internal state constructions cannot be separated from the context in which they find expression and meaning. An internal state discourse is here used to open a space for exploring alternative career stories, rather than
making a claim on Joan’s authentic career identity. In turn Joan aligns herself with the *discourse of discovery* that affirms her for achieving a level of comfort with the uncertainty of not clinging to one idea.

W: Do you think that young people in your position are often encouraged to not allow themselves to be like that? Do you think it is something that some of your friends are struggling with maybe? Where they feel they don’t have the guts to say ‘well I’m going to still explore’.

J: Um...Ja, I think so. Also because people are pressuring them to say...to narrow it down. Like I think a few people have got pressure from their parents. Like ‘ooh you know my dad was a doctor and my grandfather was a doctor so I must be a doctor’ type thing. Um...and I think people do like the idea of where they are going. So like that’s probably...like I like to plan ahead, but I realize that I’ve got to sort of keep my mind open. Some people, because they don’t like being uncertain, they probably sort of cling to one idea.

W: So I’m wondering what has allowed you to make that shift from saying ‘some people are telling me I must narrow it down’ and ‘I like to plan things’. Is there a personal quality or something that you rely on in allowing yourself to be in that place that can be quite uncertain hey? What are you relying on there?

J: Um... I think it’s the knowledge that I don’t know what is out there. I don’t know enough to make a decision. Maybe its probably that.

W: And you are comfortable with that?

J: Ja. I think I don’t want to make the wrong decision. Basically that’s it. I don’t want to make the wrong decision so I don’t mind keeping my mind open for now if it will assist me later on.

**Dialogue Excerpt 6**

In the dialogue below the researcher invites Joan to consider the context that supported and developed the taken-for-granted internal state constructions of identity she holds (such as personality) and the historical and relational embeddedness of what Joan prefers for her career. Joan, instead of locating her career and personal preferences within an internal make up, is encouraged to consider her career development historically and systemically. Further discussion introduces the discourse of exotic exposure, which is contrasted to the *farm girl narrative* described above. Joan is again invited into a position to evaluate the role she wants certain values and constructions of self to play in her imagined career.

W: You said your personality. Do you want to tell me a bit more about that?

J: I think its like I said the whole control freak thing...that I know I won’t be able to be told what to do all the time. And also I don’t want to be inside the whole time...I don’t enjoy that.
W: Where did you develop this? Was it just being on the farm? The environment?

J: Ja, its just like my background basically. I don’t like being couped up!

W: Okay, so that’s something you definitely want to hold on to even though you want exposure to the big city?

J: I do understand that I do need exposure but like…I think I said before that lots of cars and people scare me. And also I think its because I’m independent. Also lots of people get on my nerves.

W: Independence? How does that play a role in your life?

J: I don’t know, I just always have been. My two little sisters they play together and I sort of do my own thing. Um… like I said the hostel. But most of the time I like being on my own and in my own room. I don’t need people around me like some people do. I’m okay on my own and I can get on with my own things.

W: Would that be an important part of a career that you imagine for yourself?

J: Mm. I think so. Especially like I said I might be looking at journalism. I think that would be something good for me to go into because of that.

Dialogue Excerpt 7

Once again Joan is invited to consider her active and agentive participation in preserving what is here described as her diverse and versatile internal state and preferences. Joan is constructed as versatile and located in a narrative of unique individuality. The researcher, however, persists with an inquiry regarding the environmental influences that have recursively shaped Joan’s career constructions and career decision-making. By positioning Joan as active in a choice of school that wouldn’t close her down too soon, she is encouraged to associate a sense of self-empowerment with preserving the ideals of a discourse of discovery. From the subject positions invited by the researcher thus far, it becomes difficult for a university discourse or a decontextualized internal state discourse to remain taken-for-granted as ideal, dominant and un-systemically -embedded in the co-constructed career narrative emerging within the conversation. In effect Joan is left with a contextually embedded construction of career identity. The researcher’s questions have also privileged a discourse of discovery, which entitles Joan to remain open to a range of career options, rather than assuming that one choice should have been decided upon at this stage.
W: It sounds to me like you are a versatile person if I can put it that way?

J: Mm, ja.

W: That must be tricky at times.

J: Ja. Yes it is! (laughter)

W: How have you made space for all your different elements? Of who you are? What have you done to ensure that they aren’t neglected?

J: Um…like I chose this school basically cause of what it offered. So that I could do a lot. My horse riding is neglected, cause my horses are at home. So that’s one aspect of my life that I really miss. That’s probably like my main sort of enjoyment and relaxing stuff. Um…but I don’t know how I sort of… My subjects…my subjects sort of cater for everything. Like I’ve got the math. I like numbers and scientific things. And I’ve also got music, which is my creative side.

W: Interesting that your first decision was to go to a school where you wouldn’t be closed down immediately.

J: Ja, cause there’s one school in Plet. Quite an Afrikaans farm school. And they offer like two sports. And they don’t offer music as a subject. So that’s the main reason I came here, because it offers so much.

W: If we look a bit later on here at the environment (referring to the MSCI workbook)...the location of this school even in the end had an influence on how you were managing your career choices.

J: And also I don’t know…the way I looked at that. It didn’t really have much of an influence, because there’s nothing at home sort of I can go anywhere. Like girls living here they sort of have to go to UPE (the local university), but whether I go to Cape Town or Grahamstown doesn’t really make a difference type of thing.

W: Okay so it sort of opens up options in terms of your studies as well.

Dialogue Excerpt 8

Joan, in the following dialogue, introduces the *discourse of mastery* that precludes a career choice based on enjoyment alone, and which requires an alignment of internal states or natural abilities with a career to be taken seriously. The researcher invites Joan to evaluate the usefulness of the mastery discourse and proceeds with an inquiry regarding further career influences. In response to the researcher’s inquiry Joan describes the experience of not knowing what is out there. The researcher then externalizes the *lack of knowledge* and invites Joan into an agentive position in relation to it. Joan is thereby not constructed in the deficit, but positioned in a way that allows her to consider her next steps in negotiating this limited knowledge. The researcher also invites Joan to think of herself as deciding when and if she will allow the *discovery discourse’s* ideals and possibly the *discourse of exotic exposure* to inform her regarding further steps in her
career development. An allusion to the role of chance (i.e. when the opportunity arises) also invites Joan into an alternative to the personal control narratives prescribed and supported by her system of career influences.

J: No. Probably being good at it! No, I get really frustrated. Like I enjoy my music a lot but I’m not a natural musician, and it really frustrates me. Like I’d rather just play for fun instead of taking it seriously, because I can’t do well at it. I think that comes in with the whole control aspect of my personality.

W: Okay, so would you say that will assist you in narrowing down? When you say okay fine I can do these things, but I’ll be involved in a career that I’m actually good at and I enjoy?

J: It’s a bit of a problem, cause like you said I’m very versatile. So it sort of doesn’t really narrow it down. Um… but I’m thinking of an example of like in choosing my subjects, I got 96% for accounting for my entrance exam, but I didn’t enjoy it so I didn’t choose it. So there my interests went above my abilities. So it depends…

W: Yes, maybe there is no one answer but still interesting to think about maybe? So could it be that there are maybe other factors at play in what would maybe make your career worthwhile other than just your abilities?

J: Mm.

W: Cause based on those tests you should do everything. My mind is starting to wonder what are the things that are important to you apart from just being able to do something? You may not have an immediate answer. It sounds like the tests assume that by choosing something you would know at the end. Whereas you are saying there may be other things at play here.

J: Ja. I think there are other things. One of them is definitely what I enjoy and what I can do. And then also not knowing what there is.

W: And would you say…if we think about that lack of knowledge and that…in some way that it is hampering you at the moment? To some degree? Are you comfortable with the lack of knowledge there?

J: I don’t actually know. I think eventually to come to a decision I’m going to have to know more.

W: I think the reason why I said that is because I’m wondering what your next step might be in…addressing the lack of knowledge…almost taking it on and saying ‘okay well you are there now so what do I do with you?’

J: Ja

W: Have you thought about that? I hear what you say, the GAP year is going to be a great year for you to explore, but I was wondering if there is anything else you have been doing or wanted to do…?

J: Basically talking to people is one of the main things. Ja, like I said I can push it to the back of my mind and not really worry about it.

W: Ja. So maybe you can choose when you want to allow this lack of knowledge to start maybe being part of your life.
J: Ja, like I said when we went to supper with my cousin I would speak to her and get her opinion on it.

W: So when the opportunity arises you’ll take it.

Researcher/Systemic Narrative Career Counsellor’s Reflections

As stated earlier in Chapter 5 the researcher’s aim with the conversations from which the above dialogues have been extracted was to support the participant, should she find herself at the disadvantaged side of the dominant discourses of career that have been promoted by her systems of influence or institutions of education, family, socio-political environment, and gender. As shown in the above analyses, the aim of the systemic narrative career counsellor is not to provide a way out or a position for the client beyond the influence of all career discourses and the career identity constructions those discourses privilege. On the contrary I was found to be introducing certain career discourses, with real effects on how Joan’s career identity was constructed. I do, however, hope that to some degree Winslade and Monk (1999) seventh starting assumption (see Chapter 3) that, deconstructing dominant discourses raises new possibilities for living was expressed in some way during the conversation. I believe that Joan and I unpacked, revealed and challenged the impact of certain systemic discourses on her career and life. The analysis conducted also aimed to further reveal, not Joan’s true career identity, but the way in which her identity can be viewed as discursively constructed and systemically influenced.

A level of discomfort arose in me when I considered that in the analysis I was describing and elaborating meanings that go beyond individual intentions and ideas introduced by Joan. My meaning construction or discourse identification has therefore been transindividual. I was thus constantly drawing on systems of meaning that are not located within the speech of the participant and the dialogues alone. This discomfort encouraged a return to the ethical questions that arise from the social constructionist and post-structuralist perspective that language (whether in the form of academic writing or conversational dialogue) is constitutive of reality, and that all reality constructions are not equal in their effects on participants’ lives. As Kuit and Watson (2005) ask:

What are the forms of work, life and relationship that are legitimized and produced by the discourses of the dominant culture? How can we create new positions for both career
counsellors and their clients to critically evaluate the influence and contribution of discursively constituted ideals and notions of optimal career development? And if we find those positions, what will be their alternatives? (p. 36)

In participating in the conversations with Joan, and in then constructing an analysis to make further meaning of what took place in the conversational space, one central question remained with me and still remains (and hopefully always will be) only partially addressed. What is the foundation for or the criteria to be considered for selection of particular questions, statements or analytic constructions over others and what are the forms of life that are encouraged and legitimized by such constructions? What the researcher has hoped for is that an agentive identity was promoted for Joan throughout (both the conversations and the analysis) in relation to the influences that were identified to be discursively operational across her three systemic levels (i.e. individual, social and environmental/societal). Ultimately the researcher hoped to open conversational and linguistically constituted spaces of resistance to the dominant meanings of what adolescent career development is or should be.

Furthermore the analysis hopefully shows how career discourses (such as the discourse of discovery) that challenge the normative judgements and ideals of Joan’s dominant career narratives can be valuably used to promote movement towards empowering descriptions of career (subjectivities) that open alternatives to the practices of adolescent career development. A discursive systemic framework has also been presented as an alternative to modernist career psychology’s deficit descriptions of clients who experience career-indecision and are often seen to lack the necessary career maturity, decision-making skills or self-knowledge that would supposedly ensure ‘appropriate’ career development. The STF has proved to be particularly helpful as a structuring framework within which to locate and describe the recursive-discursive formation of an individual’s career and career identity. The discourse analysis could thus critically examine this complex formation within a user-friendly framework. Both the analysis of Joan’s constructions of career, and the researcher’s invitations of subjectivity find resonance with an earlier mentioned statement by Coupland (2002) where she proposes that with the articulation of alternatives to dominant ideologies in careers, gaps in hegemonic arguments are located and widened, what appear to be taken-for-granted understandings are opened to scrutiny. The last word about the effects and usefulness of
this aspect of the systemic narrative career counselling process, however, belongs to Joan.

**Joan’s Reflections**

Joan was provided with a transcript of the conversations that took place and invited to reflect on what stood out for her as important topics or themes with regards to her career. She was asked to report on what had caught her attention as she read through the transcripts. The following verbatim quote is Joan’s answer to the aforementioned invitation:

> J: One of the most important things that I think we discussed is the influence of pressure. Other people pressuring me to make a decision; the pressure of time running out and the fact that I have to choose now what I want for the rest of my life. Luckily for me, my parents aren’t an added pressure but in other families doing what your parents did/ the family tradition/business is often a problem. The realization that I can choose my career for ‘me’ is important. It helped me a lot to eliminate career options and definitely makes the choice easier.

Joan was also asked what had been helpful or potentially useful about the conversations. I asked Joan if there were any questions asked, ideas introduced or discussions that stood out for her as particularly useful. Joan highlighted certain questions from the transcript (which have here been indicated in italics) and reflected on certain aspects of the discussion:

> J: Although talking to you didn’t help me ‘pin down’ on a career, it was useful exploring myself and how I’m influenced:

- *Why do I want to narrow down?* – I don’t have to give in to the pressure and decide just yet. That was an important thought and realization.

- *Where does the idea come from?* – Where does the pressure come from? I saw that it was from others, not only me.

- *Asking and exploring about fear.* I realize I mustn’t doubt myself. That was useful and I got thinking – I mustn’t doubt because that might stop me from experiencing something I will enjoy
From Joan’s reflection statements it could be concluded that an *agentive identity* was promoted for Joan in relation to the influences/discourses/stories that were identified during the systemic narrative career counselling process. Joan’s realizations that she doesn’t have to give in to the pressure just yet, and her questioning of her choice in the face of the normative evaluations of others, also seem to indicate that a conversational and linguistically constituted space of *resistance* to the dominant meanings (within her systems of influence) of what adolescent career development is or should be, was co-created in the process.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Further Invitation

At the outset of your engagement with this text I invited you (as reader) to consider a few questions relating to your own career situation/development. The questions posed encouraged you to produce an account of your own career and career identity. You have since engaged with the current study’s theoretical and practice-based attempts to investigate and re-present ethical and useful ways of assisting individuals, navigating the complexity of a postmodern landscape, in the selection, shaping and constitution of their preferred careers. Before I continue with summative reflections on the preceding chapters, I would like to invite you into a further reflection process. What has been the effect of reading this study on the way you would account for your career? How, if at all, might your earlier answers to questions from Chapter 1 be different after having read this study? You were also encouraged to evaluate the merit and usefulness of this study from an experience-near perspective. What in this study has been useful to you and your career? What has not been useful? As you now reflect on the research activities, dialogues, analyses, findings and theoretical perspectives delineated here, what has struck you as significant? How might that relate or contribute to the unfolding of your own further hopes, aspirations, purposes, intentions and actions in your career? I ask these questions in the hope that the entire study, including what I will describe below in terms of the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the study, will remain answerable to their potential and real consequences for the lives of career makers such as yourself.

What follows in the next section of this chapter is a brief summation of the theoretical and practice-based relationships and collaborations that were explored and embodied in the preceding text. This is presented as a question to which I hope you will be able to respond with your own further conclusions. Following this section will be a consideration of the limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for further horizons of research.

From Fragmentation To Critical Collaboration

Was there a practical and theoretical movement from fragmentation towards critical collaboration? The broader professional context that has shaped the current study’s aims was that of the theoretical fragmentation of the career field, both within the theoretical and empirical modernist tradition, and in the further splitting off of qualitative approaches to career into their own multifaceted repertoire. The current study therefore
primarily set out to theoretically conceptualize and implement practices that would carry career psychology into spaces beyond the binary between quantitative and qualitative approaches to career research, assessment and counselling. A search for those spaces was endeavoured in a two-phase structure, the activities of which produced two distinct, but interrelated re-presentations of adolescents’ career development experiences. In attempting to explicate further how the activities and re-presentations from the two phases are connected, and how they have provided options for merging qualitative and quantitative career knowledges on both a theoretical and practice-based level, I will also again consider briefly what each phase attempted to do. This chapter also presents Joan’s further verbatim reflections on her experience of participating in the two phases of the study. From Joan’s account further conclusions can be drawn about the interconnectedness between, benefit of, and limitations of participating in the two phases of the study.

Phase 1: Re-presenting the Qualitative Quantitatively

The first phase of the study theoretically outlined and practically employed a career assessment framework/measure that was investigated for how it could provide an integrative structure for the researcher to contribute a wide range of career shaping influences, as identified by numerous career theoretical perspectives and career research studies (Patton & McMahon, 1999), to the personalized/subjective career constructions co-constructed with research participants. Chapter 2 argued that the quest for a complex enough integrating framework is important and necessary if we still want to engage in a meaningful but critical way with the heterogeneity of both career theory and unique expressions of career, without being overwhelmed by their complexity.

In Chapter 6 the My Systems of Career Influences workbook, based on the career theoretical integrative structure of the Systems Theory Framework (Patton & McMahon, 1999), was shown to assist adolescent participants in identifying and evaluating the significant systemic influences that have contributed to their career development thus far. The systems metaphor ushered in by the STF and MSCI was shown to be particularly useful in providing the scaffolding within which participants could position the complex systems of both macro and micro career influences that contribute to their career development. Furthermore, the trends in 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’

14 Theoretical perspectives from both the modernist-empiricist career tradition and meaning-focused career approaches are incorporated into the STF’s integrative structure.
lives. 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).

Returning to the overview in Chapter 4 of the identified foci of that ongoing research conversation, it can be suggested that the MSCI comprehensively furthers emerging research trends identified in that chapter, where studies have begun to include a focus on the recursive *interrelationship* between systemic variables from all three systemic levels outlined within the STF. The MSCI, as a practical operationalization of the STF, has allowed the participants and the researcher of this study to explore the recursive interrelationships between an extensive and wide range of variables within an inclusive user-friendly assessment measure. Although this exploration has produced quantitative representations of such interrelationships, the way in which this study’s use of the MSCI has positioned participants is of particular importance, since it separates the use of the STF/MSCI from traditional quantitative data collection and analysis approaches to the career experiences of adolescents. As stated in Chapter 6, although the STF accommodates and has been shaped by the history of career theories (i.e. professional knowledges) that expand on the significance of the various systemic influences for adolescents, it largely locates itself in the constructivist worldview that privileges the personal theories or meanings of individuals.

The STF/MSCI’s departure from researcher-driven definitions and generalizations about career development is particularly relevant in the light of Chapter 4’s conclusion that there has been a shift towards contextual meaning-focused research approaches, which critically examine what were believed to be *universal theoretical constructs* and standardized approaches to adolescent career development that often marginalize research participants’ unique way of making meaning of their careers. As was suggested in Chapter 4, career counselling proposals emanating from decontextualized research studies that position researchers as authoritative experts who make claims regarding the universality of their findings, may in practice not be appropriate to *situation-specific* career counselling relationships which are embedded within unique historical, socio-cultural networks of meaning. This study thus proposes that the STF and MSCI can provide a space beyond the binaries between theory/subjective meanings, professional career knowledges/personal career knowledges, and ultimately qualitative/quantitative approaches to career. They achieve this by providing useful integrating frameworks for
responding to the need, put forward in Chapter 4, for transformative, context-sensitive research that integrates a wide range of theorized and quantitatively researched intrapersonal, social and environmental/societal variables in a way that the meaning of such an integration remains embedded in the life experiences of research participants.

It remains to be asked what the effect was of introducing the STF’s systemic structure in assisting the participants to account for their career decisions and ideals within their dynamic life-world? Findings from Chapter 6 clearly suggested that working through the MSCI workbook encouraged a greater awareness in a number of 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 allowed both the participants and the researcher to construct contextually richer representations of their adolescent career development stories. The MSCI allowed the study to venture into considering variables from the environmental/societal system, which is a research focus area that, as revealed in the research overview chapter, has been relatively under-represented in studies to date. Also, participants reported 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-related experiences.

Was It Helpful (Enough)?

What was the value of constructing contextually richer representations of career for the participants? Why should this contextual re-construction of career development be considered preferable? An answer to these questions could lie in the way that the MSCI workbook, in allowing the participants to separate from, and re-present to themselves that which had remained uncritically overlooked in the shaping of their careers, allows participants to consider how and by what their career stories have been shaped. Participants were thus invited into a different position in relation to their careers from where a fuller range of variables could be evaluated and considered in accounting for past, present and possible future career experiences. The STF is utilized, not as a career theory that makes universal claims regarding the meaning and content of research participants’ systemically situated career experiences, but rather puts career theoretical constructs/theorized influences up for negotiation and evaluation within the specific socio-cultural frameworks of individuals. This de-privileging of theory limits the imposition of (particularly western) cultural-theoretical ideals for career onto the plurality of expressions and meanings of career within the postmodern landscape.
The MSCI thus contributed to the researcher’s *interventionist agenda* of exploring critical perspectives (and the alternative forms of career they generate) of the normative developmental and cultural constructions of career supported by career theory and within the participants’ systems of influence outlined by the STF. However, the mere objectifying and ‘becoming aware of’ the influences that contribute to career ideals, decisions and difficulties associated with them may not be enough in empowering participants and career clients to pursue and live out their preferred career stories. This was in fact Joan’s experience. She indicated from the beginning of the conversations that just working through the MSCI in a group context alone, hadn’t really been particularly useful. From a researcher’s perspective the MSCI may have provided useful spaces for engaging with Joan’s career development beyond the qualitative/quantitative binary but, as is reflected in Joan’s statement regarding the value and use of the MSCI experience for her, its critical contribution to the career stories of individuals is more fully actualized and enhanced when it is incorporated as part of a career counselling process.

J: I’ll admit, when we first did the booklet in class with you guys…I didn’t really enjoy it! But (there is good news!)…going through it with you was a lot more interesting. I think we just thought about it more. Like I said before, I realized I don’t have to give in to the pressure. It was interesting to see how my interests affect me. The questions about what influences you are important – you have to enjoy what you do.

Joan refers in the above verbatim quote to the importance of questions about what influences her (as this was identified in the MSCI), but she also refers to realizations about not having to give in to *pressure* to have to narrow down and decide. This pressure has been associated, in Chapter 7, with Joan’s resistance to the normative career narratives that are sustained in her social system. In her statement it is apparent that the contribution from the booklet was indeed helpful, but that this contribution acquired its deconstructive impact within the counselling conversations. So, although the MSCI process was effectively used in support of an ethical and political agenda of valuational advocacy (Gergen, 1992) where the dominant adolescent career narratives were deconstructed, it was necessary for such an agenda to be founded on a conversational, *critical engagement* with the dominant career stories and normative career influences identified by the MSCI workbook process.
Phase 2: Discursive Systemic Career Narratives

Thus in the second phase of the study a collaboration of the STF, the MSCI, and a narrative approach to career construction (Winslade, 2005) was explored for what an alliance of these career perspectives imply for a career counselling process. This alliance was investigated for how it could provide empowering alternatives for individuals, such as Joan, who experience career-related dissatisfaction with the dominant ideals of their culture and career uncertainty in the face of a complex world of work. It was proposed by this study that such individuals are often vulnerable to deficit-descriptions of their identities when they are evaluated, and evaluate themselves, according to the normative constructions of career and personhood (often implicit in modernist career theory) within their systems of influence.

According to Chapter 4 very few career research studies have adopted discursive approaches that critically examine seemingly self-evident truths regarding adolescent career development, supported within western cultural traditions of theory and research. Chapter 4 outlined two studies that open avenues for considering both career theory and the career talk of individuals as discursive constructions particular to either a western psychological tradition or the socially negotiated ideals of local communities. To further explore the value and implications of discursive approaches to career, on both a practical and conceptual level, the researcher thus discursively described and participated with Joan in a systemic narrative career counselling process that invited Joan to re-tell her career story. This re-telling took place within the context of conversations supported by the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of a post-structuralist and social constructionist view of career development and construction and a narrative approach to counselling (Stead, 2004; Winslade, 2005). Narrative approaches to career research and counselling were reviewed in Chapter 4 to be emerging as useful resources in confronting the career-related challenges facing South African adolescents in a changing social and political environment. As pointed out in Chapter 4, the lack of stability of meta-career narratives and guidance both from parents and educators in terms of career choice requires the development and researching of career counselling processes which suit the spirit of the age and which are discourse sensitive (Marsay, 2000). The researcher’s primary aim with the systemic narrative career counselling conversations was thus to explore discourse sensitive ways of supporting Joan in her experience of uncertainty and to invite a sense of agency for her in relation to that experience. To evaluate the conversational process it was then critically analyzed according to Parker’s
(1992) discourse analytic approach. The analysis process further expanded the reflexive evaluation of the conversations according to the aims outlined below.

What Were the Consequences of the Discursive-Systemic-Narrative Alliance?

The aim of the analysis was twofold. Firstly the researcher developed an account of Joan’s career that proposed a discursive systemic framework as an alternative to modernist career psychology’s deficit descriptions of clients who experience career indecision and who are often seen to lack the necessary career maturity, decision-making skills or self-knowledge that would supposedly ensure ‘appropriate’ career development. The STF has proved to be particularly helpful as a structuring framework within which to locate and describe the recursive-discursive formation of an individual’s career and career identity. The MSCI was also shown to translate into a pragmatic way of visually representing the system of career influences that had positioned Joan in the place where she was experiencing uncertainty in relation to the range of career narratives available to a young woman. Thus on both a theoretical and practical level the STF was shown to help clients and counsellors locate where deconstruction might be useful. As stated in Chapter 7, a systemic mapping points to the social and cultural sites where career discourses often prescribe the taken-for-granted ideals and career narratives of individuals. The STF/MSCI/narrative career counselling approach alliance was therefore revealed, in the analysis, to be useful in locating and conducting the deconstructive process in the career client’s significant and influential relationships.

The second part of the analysis investigated the forms of subjectivity/identity invited for Joan by the researcher’s questions, statements and contributions to the systemic narrative career counselling conversation. The analysis suggested that the conversations invited an agentive identity for Joan in relation to the influences that were identified by the MSCI and the dialogues as discursively operational across her three systemic levels. What was further revealed in the analysis is that the systemic narrative career counsellor does not provide a way out or a position for the client beyond the influence of all career discourses or systems of influence, but that the researcher employs certain discourses to open conversational and linguistically constituted spaces of resistance to the dominant meanings of what adolescent career development is or should be. As Joan stated in Chapter 7, “I don’t have to give in to the pressure and decide just yet. That was an important thought and realization.”

From a theoretical and pragmatic viewpoint the two-phase process described above seems to have put forward useful ways of critically engaging with the career development of adolescent participants in a way that subverted, to some extent, the
qualitative/quantitative polarization and fragmentation of career theory and practice. However, in the following section the limitations of this process will be explored and described.

Textual Limitations

The limitations of the study have firstly been considered as they relate to the experiences and benefit of the study for the participants. A conceptualization of the knowledges presented in this text is then proposed as a way of transcending the textual limitations identified.

The first phase of the study invited a large number of adolescents to participate in the research procedures and activities. Although the measure (i.e. the MSCI) that facilitated this first phase lends itself to group-based administration, the more fully actualized deconstructive value of this measure has been suggested to lie in further critical conversations about the influences identified. Systemic narrative career counselling conversations could not be conducted, however, with participants other than Joan. This was due to the limitations of time that were introduced by the researcher’s positioning in an education and training system that required deadlines and other training requirements to be met. This significantly impacts on the extent to which the first phase and its aims can be considered interventionist and action research-orientated. Ideally all participants should have had the opportunity of further exploring their career system stories. Consequently the findings from Chapter 6 are limited to the extent to which they provide comprehensive accounts of the unique career experiences of participants.

An important limitation of phase 2 and the discourse analysis conducted in Chapter 7 relates to the imposition of discursive and researcher-informed meaning on Joan’s career identity and development. An academic discourse and vocabulary, and its way of *languaging* and ascribing meaning to Joan’s career narrative, has shaped the account of Joan’s career and career identity constructed by the researcher. In limiting the unquestioned imposition of meaning by the researcher, Joan’s own reflections of what had been significant to *her* from the conversations were presented. The dialogues and systemic narrative career counselling conversations were also primarily focused on constructing a career identity for Joan in the vocabularies and meanings of her experience-near accounts. Joan’s experience of the research process was therefore not characterized by the imposition of alienating terminology.

In constructing a discursive perspective of Joan’s career the researcher’s analysis is therefore not being privileged as defining her ‘true’ or ‘authentic’ career identity. The analysis has merely allowed the study to advocate for career perspectives that have the
potential to provide career researchers and career counsellors (and their clients) with alternatives to decontextualized, linear and deficiency-based models of career development that unquestioningly reproduce normative career ideals. Despite this agenda, a privileging of the researcher’s voice and expert-position is very likely in the context of an academic system of influence that requires and sanctions the display of certain knowledges and insights by the researcher in satisfying training and evaluation standards. This potential privileging of the knowing on behalf of the researcher is also possible with regards to the findings in Chapter 6. However, the participants’ meanings and views are not considered marginal to the researcher’s interpretations. The researcher has throughout acknowledged the role of the researcher-participant power relation that has mostly left the former with the power to define and re-present the latter in the current text. Attempts to deconstruct this power relation were embodied in the actual research conversations themselves where Joan was invited to re-tell her career story from an agentive subjectivity.

Although the researcher’s agenda in choosing a particular textual definition and diagrammatic re-presentation of the participants’ career experiences has been explained and critically examined, I would want to further alert you to be cognizant of the research discourses and academic and professional systems of influence that have shaped the theoretical and personal constructions of the participants’ careers put forward by me in this study. Such discourses are not necessarily limitations but are productive of certain career knowledges and identities at the exclusion of others. Some may even argue that a limitation of the discourse analysis is that it presents my subjective view of the process and Joan’s story. I would, however, like to invite you to consider the study’s findings as framed by a conceptualization of knowing, which transcends the legacy of the subject/object consciousness that has been left to the career field by the grand narrative of objectivist science. As Lous Heshusius writes from a keynote address delivered at, York University in 1992\textsuperscript{15},

\begin{quotation}
The idea of subjectivity and bias makes sense only against the backdrop of the possibility of objectivity which is to say of knowing as an act of distancing…Knowing as an act of participatory consciousness points to the knower as an integral part of that which he or she wants to understand, not as separate from it.
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{15} This keynote address was sourced from Bird (2004) who had discovered it at: http://kerlins.net/bobbi/research/qualresearch.
It points to knowing as enchantment…enchantment as awareness of
the unity of self and other, which involves the morality of
relatedness and care. Knowing as enchantment, as participation,
involves merging or identification with the other, or with ones

I have perceived myself in this study as an integral part of what the study has tried to
understand. This has required drawing from personal career experiences, my own
history as an adolescent, and my own knowledges of the South African, social and
environmental context in which this study was conducted. My hope is, however, that in
reading this study you will neither see it as either mine or Joan’s subjective reflections
and constructions, nor that you will be limited to the textual re-presentations of the lives
that this study has engaged with. My hope is that the admittedly limited accounts and
constructions I have included in this study will have encouraged you to become
enchanted, in a participatory sense, with the career experiences of the participants of
this study. Your own reading of this study will hopefully, if we follow Burman and
Parker (1992), reproduce and transform it. In a sense this text remains incomplete and
fragmentary, and with your reading of it forms part of the “unceasing fabrication of the
world, which involves both making and unmaking” (Maclure, 2003, p. 128).

What follows in the next section are recommendations for further career research
that point to new horizons of researcher-participant relationships.

Further Research Horizons

This study has only touched the surface of the potential collaborative relationships
between the STF as a theory integrating framework, the MSCI as a qualitative career
assessment measure, and a post-structural narrative approach to career counselling. The
alliance between these resources should now be further explored in a greater diversity of
social and cultural contexts, and with individuals of varying ages positioned in various
career situations. Further studies could introduce further collaborative enquiries between
researchers and participants (Gergen, 1999) that position the research participants’
experiences and evaluation of the research process as the center of focus. In doing this
career research will more fully embrace the reflexive position of turning on itself and
critically examining its real effects for participants. The field of career is progressively
producing more investigations and theoretical conceptualizations that confront the
political and ethical challenge involved in engaging with people’s careers and lives. In
following this re-politicization of research, traditional scientific vocabularies, and
concepts such as data analysis, data collection, results and findings can be re-evaluated for how they orientate career researchers towards the lives and careers of their participants. Such metaphors might be substituted or at least be revised in order to re-language and reconstitute the researcher-participant relationship in a way that could subvert taken-for-granted binaries, such as qualitative/quantitative, researcher/participant, research/practice, subject/object, data collection/intervention, neutral/biased, and analysis/construction, that often sustain positions for researchers as psychological truth-holders. If researchers are to remain the primary producers of the texts that account for the experiences of research participants, new horizons of career research should consider how its language and research knowledges are shaped by the systems of influence in which the researchers themselves are embedded, and how that in turn constructs both researcher and participant subjectivities. As Bird (2004) states:

> Every psychological, social, anthropological and political text concerned with identity and human meaning-making systems which uses language conventionally generates, regardless of intentions, binaries and thus absolutes. These absolutes create polarities that obscure the intimate, contradictory and fragmented nature of the lives we lead. The dynamic, experiential and often contradictory nature of our lives is also lost in written texts which create the detached, depersonalized and authoritative expert author (p. 28).

What then would the purpose be of career research that does not occupy truth-holder status or produce detached researcher positions? What might prevent career research from sliding towards the other end of the binary where its contents are viewed as a collection of purely subjective stories that makes participants and researchers vulnerable to moral, theoretical and conceptual relativism? The answer to this question may, at least in part, lie in the morality of relatedness and care described above where a participatory consciousness is fostered between researcher and participant. Research guided by this participatory ethic need not split off from traditional modernist technologies of career psychology, nor succumb to the overwhelming complexity of multiple and fragmented postmodern subjectivities of career. With the aid of integrating frameworks such as the STF, pragmatic career assessment measures such as the MSCI, and critical-political career counselling approaches such as a post-structural narrative
In closing I would like to quote Joan’s last verbatim contribution to the research process. Although this will be the last word in this research conversation, in many ways it is only the beginning:

I might be looking at doing a BSc in agriculture at Stellenbosch and going into genetics or something and be a consultant to other farms. I think I’ll enjoy it and it will suit my personality and…this is just coincidence, it’s the same course my dad did!
REFERENCES


Setshedhi, L. (2003). *Gender and grade in career indecision of semi-rural, Zulu-speaking black South African learners in Grades 10 to 12: An investigative*
study. Unpublished masters treatise, University of Natal, Durban, South Africa.


Informed Consent for a Psychological Research Study

I, (Name & Surname of Guardian) _________________________, voluntarily grant my consent to allow (Name and Surname of Participant) _________________________ to participate in an exploratory study to be conducted by Wim Kuit who is presently completing his treatise at the University of Port Elizabeth Department of Psychology as a requirement for his 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 and possibly the participation in an interviewing process with the researcher.

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 Wim Kuit on (041) 504 2330 for more information about the study.

________________________________________________________________________
Print Name (Participant)  Signature (Participant)

________________________________________________________________________
Print Name (Witness)  Signature (Witness)

________________________________________________________________________
Date
Appendix B
Researcher’s Invitation: Phase 2 (Career Counselling)

Dear Grade 11’s

Hi there! As you may remember my colleagues and I came to Collegiate last year and assisted you in completing your My Systems of Career Influences (MSCI) workbook. I want to thank you again for participating in that process. We will soon be returning your workbooks to you for your further use.

My hope is that some of you might have thought about your careers in new and helpful ways after having completed the workbook. Guided by that hope, I want to invite one interested person to join me in further conversations about her career story. Below I have listed a few questions for you to consider in deciding whether such conversations would be convenient and helpful to you. If you can answer “yes” to all the questions, please add your details to the list provided by Mrs. Balshaw. I will then randomly select one name from the list of names that she compiles.

The Questions:

- Would it be helpful to you to have a few conversations (3-6 depending on your preferences) about the experiences and relationships that have shaped your dreams (and/or difficulties) concerning your career?
- Would you be able and willing to set aside approximately 3-6 hours during the months of April 2005 and early May 2005 to meet with me to have such conversations?
- Would you be comfortable if I recorded the conversations, transcribed them and included them as part of my research study? (Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured).
- Would you be willing to read the relevant parts of the research document to ensure that your career story is represented in a way that fits with your own experience and thoughts?
- Do you think your parents/guardians would agree to your participation in the suggested process?

Regrettably, due to limitations of time, I can only have conversations with one person. Should you not be selected, but still want to talk about your career, I will
provide the contact information of very competent professionals who can be of assistance to you.

Thank you for taking time to read this.

Kind Regards,

________________

Wim Kuit
Appendix C
Parents’ Consent Form: Phase 2 (Career Counselling)

Dear Mrs. and Mr. ______________

My name is Wim Kuit. I am an intern psychologist currently completing a masters degree in clinical psychology. As part of my degree I am working on a research study. This study focuses on the career stories of young people between the ages of 16 and 18. Last year I joined with your daughter and other students at Collegiate Girls’ High School to look at how their career dreams and hopes have been shaped by their many qualities, relationships and experiences. The students completed a document called the My Systems of Career Influence (MSCI) workbook. This workbook helps persons reflect on who and what has been influential in their career decisions and dreams.

This year the second part of the research study invites one student to have 3-6 one-hour long conversations with me about their careers as they have been mapped out in the MSCI workbook. Your daughter has indicated that such conversations will be helpful to her. She was randomly selected from a list of students who volunteered for this process. We will together talk about your daughter’s preferences for her career and how she arrived at her present ideals and dreams. Should she still be unsure, this uncertainty’s history and influence will also be discussed. The conversations will be recorded and transcribed. With consent from your daughter, the transcriptions will be included as part of the research document. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured.

As legal guardians your consent is required for this process to go ahead. If you have no objections to the proposed conversations please complete the section below. Please feel free to direct any further questions and concerns to me at any time (Cell: 084 941 3161)

Letter of Consent

I, ________________________, hereby consent to my daughter’s participation in a career counselling process with Wim Kuit (Intern Clinical Psychologist) that will form part of a masters research study in psychology.

Signed at ______________________ on ______________________ 20 ___________
Appendix D
Inviting Joan’s Reflections

Hi there Joan!

It’s been some time since you completed the *My Systems of Career Influences* (MSCI) workbook after which we explored (in conversations) all those interesting influences around you with regards to your unfolding career story.

As you may remember I recorded our conversations and transcribed them for the purposes of the research study that I am currently completing. After I had transcribed the conversations I spent some time looking at how we collaborated in making sense of the career influences and stories that you encounter in your day-to-day life.

To ensure that you are accurately represented in the research document I felt that it is important for you to have the last word about *what stood out for you from our conversations* and *what was most helpful about the process*.

I was also wondering if having our conversations *after* you had been through the MSCI workbook *assisted you in the discussion in any way*.

I was therefore wondering if you could write a few sentences (or as much as you like) about the following questions:

1. What stands out for you as the most important *topics or themes* discussed with regards to your *career*? In other words, what parts of the conversations really caught your attention as you read through the transcripts? (Maybe certain career influences, thoughts about your career, words or realizations).

2. What if anything was *helpful or potentially useful* about the conversations? (Here you might want to tell me if there were certain questions asked, ideas introduced or discussions that stood out for you as useful). And what was useful about it/them?

3. What could we have *done differently* or spent more time on exploring?

4. Did looking at the *MSCI* workbook before and during the conversation contribute to the exploration of your career story in some way? (What I’m wondering is whether the MSCI affected or contributed usefully to the way you saw, thought and spoke about your career decisions in our conversation).

5. Further comments?