

Exploring career choice negotiation among Psychology Honours Students

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I declare that this research project is my own work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university. Contributions used from any other works have been referenced and acknowledged as such.

Signature:..... Date:.....

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The primary aim of the research is to examine the ways in which Psychology Honours students interactionally make sense of their career choices. In addition, the research will examine how these students interactionally make sense of psychology as a discipline and field of study, particularly in the context of discussions of career choices.

Career choice is an important concept for educational psychologists, given its implications for the practice of career counselling. Many quantitative studies have focussed their research on certain variables (such as career indecision or career aspiration) that surround the career choice concept (Jordaan, Smithard, & Burger, 2009; Metz, Fouad, & Ihle-Helledy, 2009; Thompson & Subich, 2011). The use of variables implies an essentialist approach to career psychology in which the social world is seen as a fixed entity, external to individuals, and in which the 'external variables' can impact on them deterministically (Cohen, Duberley, & Mallon, 2004). This research takes an alternative approach as it looks at the social world as a fluid entity which is influenced through the interactions between individuals. A qualitative approach would provide greater insight into understanding these concepts from the perspectives of the people who are living them out, rather than imposing externally-determined meanings on these people. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) explain that qualitative research allows for the more abstract constructs (that cannot be measured by quantitative research) to be analysed. Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) then give the example of how meanings and interpretations need the more flexible, fluid (but not less rigorous) methods used in qualitative research.

There seems to be a lack of research based on tertiary students' meanings of their career choice, or on how tertiary students construct meanings with respect to their career choice and also with respect to their fields of study. Understanding how students view their career choice during their studies and how they engage with their fields of study, will not only inform the career counselling field, but provide insights into the meaning-making processes through which students engage with the current discipline and future career aspirations. Qualitative research would also provide an in-depth understanding of some constructs that have not been considered yet, with regards to career choice (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002).

In Chapter 2 I review the relevant literature and research on the topic. In Chapter 3 I describe the methodology for the study. I provide an analysis of some of the extracts that were derived

from the data (that I transcribed from the focus groups) in Chapter 4. The extracts were chosen for their relevance in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 concludes the research. It contextualises the research findings in relation to the literature from the literature review.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

Career psychology in South Africa

Stead and Watson (1999) have made various useful recommendations for career development research in South Africa. They discuss these recommendations as (a) the need to understand career development in various socio-historical and cultural contexts, (b) the use of diverse research methods, and (c) as Stead and Watson (1998) explain (from their own research) the movement toward indigenisation of career research and counselling in South Africa.

Mkhize and Frizelle (2000) take more of an indigenous approach to looking at career development in South Africa. Their research focuses on understanding the complex process of career development in its socio-cultural context and the way its social actors define this process. Mkhize (2005) does acknowledge the importance of meaning in career counselling but does not seem to focus on the interactional process of negotiation of the meanings (with respect to career constructs). Mkhize (2005, p. 98) explains that some meanings (as examined in this research) or 'some voices are more powerful than others'. However, the analysis of the interactional processes involved in the construction of meanings has not been closely examined. The understanding of these interactional processes should allow greater insight into how some meanings may be more powerful than others, and allow for an understanding of what happens if some meanings are equally prevalent and equally consensual in the process of negotiations.

This research will contribute to these recommendations by providing an in-depth understanding of the meaning-making process found in the interactions of South African individuals, in order to comprehend how individuals make career choices based on these constructed meanings. This will allow me to see which aspects of career development may be prevalent in these individuals' lives and gain an understanding of how the process (in which the individual negotiates his/her career choices) may work.

Vocational constructs

'Career choice' is a complex term as there appears to be many societal and contextual systems involved in the construction of this term (Coupland, 2004). 'Career choice' is difficult to define, as the definition of the word and its meaning which the individual gives to it depends on how they engage with various fields of knowledge, including both professional

or disciplinary knowledge, and common-sense or lay knowledge (Coupland, 2004). Joubert (2005) explains that the word 'career' can have many definitions, depending on the paradigm that the individual understands 'career' from. Career psychology encompasses many theories and perspectives that discuss careers from different paradigms (Leong & Gupta, 2008). The numerous approaches used have caused researchers to focus on specific aspects of careers, depending on the chosen approach for that research (Leong & Gupta, 2008).

Fuller and Loogma (2009) view the formation of knowledge neither within individual minds nor outside them but between people. Fuller and Loogma (2009) view the interactional process between people as forming certain social constructs. Fuller and Loogma (2009) go on to explain that any action an individual undertakes is formed from different types of knowledge. The term 'knowledge' in this respect includes not only scientific knowledge but experiential and quotidian knowledge (that is used in an individual's everyday activities) (Fuller & Loogma, 2009). It is important to understand the cultural loadings implicit in some of the vocational career field constructs and in the quotidian language of individuals, in order to understand how they are negotiated when the individuals talk about their career choice. This will also allow me to gain an understanding of which ideologies are important or prevalent when they discuss their career choices specifically.

Durey, McNamara and Coffin (2001) discussed this in their research on how the meanings behind rural 'cultural' constructions challenged male students from choosing health professions as careers. Kim (1993) emphasises that cultural values seem to be entrenched in Korean-American students that influence their career choice during university. Career choice for the Korean-American students appears to be largely influenced by a need to succeed in order to achieve economic success. Thus the construct 'culture' in Kim's article (1993) seems to be based more on shared demographic issues rather than ethnic differences such as in the Durey et al. (2001) article. Edet and Ekpok (2011), on the other hand, found that exposure to entrepreneurship education influenced the career plans of university students. As can be seen from the three research articles, different types of contextual discourses have interacted with the university students and their contextual understandings. In other words different language registers (as seen in conversations) allow the construction of different universes of meaning (William & Irving, 2002). This research thus aims to see what types of meanings are constructed in career choice conversations in South Africa today, with regards to the discipline of psychology. This research will observe how Honours Psychology students engage with the construct of 'career choice'. By having used no a priori theories to define the

construct 'career choice' it allowed me to view how the participants engaged with and constructed meanings, in an open manner, with respect to the construct.

Career Psychologies and Career Theories

Most current research focuses on understanding the predictable or causal relationships between variables in career psychology. Feldt, Ferry, Bullock, Camarotti-Carvalho, Collingwood, Eiler, Meyer & Nurre's (2011) research, for example, analysed different clusters of people (based on measures of career indecision and personality) to determine differences in college adjustment, campus integration, self-efficacy and perceived stress. Sandier (2000) on the other hand, used survey questionnaires and institutional records to examine the persistence of students by using certain variables. While this research offers an important understanding of the relationships between variables in career psychology, it offers more of a static view of constructs and lacks an understanding of the fluid meanings that individuals construct with respect to career choices. Career psychology has many theories, each offering their own contributions to understanding the many complexities of career behaviour.

Niles and Bowsbey (2009) acknowledge that the career theories complement each other in addressing numerous facets of the complexity of career behaviour. Work Adjustment Theory and Trait Factor (or person-environment fit) career models emphasise the relatively stable characteristics of person's and environments that if suitably matched are likely to lead to the person perceiving the choice as satisfactory and to a suitable placement of the person in his/her environment (Lent, 2005). John Holland's theory of 'Types and Person Environment Interactions' is used to describe individual differences in personality types (Niles & Bowsbey, 2009). The Trait-factor and Work Adjustment theories thus focus more on the stable and constant qualities of career choice. Developmental theorists on the other hand focus more on the contextual challenges that people may face.

The following theorists support a developmental approach to career theory that emphasises approximate predictable challenges that people confront on their way to and through adulthood (Niles & Bowsbey, 2009). Super's 'Life-Span', 'Life-Space Theory' (Niles & Bowsbey, 2009) looks at how work and life roles seem to be more prevalent for certain people at particular phases in their lives (Lent, 2005). Gottfredson's theory of

‘Circumscription, Compromise and Self-creation’ explains the process that leads to the formulation of career aspirations in childhood and adolescence (Niles & Bowlsbey, 2009), such as how people’s career choices become circumscribed (in other words restricted) (Lent, 2005). Savickas’s theory focuses on how people are able to uphold agency in their own developmental process by constructing their own career/life stories and experiences (Lent, 2005).

People and environments do change and Lent, Brown and Hackett’s ‘Social Cognitive Career Theory’ (SCCT) accounts for that. Lent, Brown and Hackett’s SCCT is based on cognitive perspectives of career behaviour which are dynamic in nature (Watson & Stead, 1999).

Lent (2005) explains that at a basic level, these three perspectives (trait-factor, developmental and social cognitive) focus on the prediction, understanding, and optimisation of career development. The three perspectives do not account for the meanings of career choice that are constructed in certain interactions and through certain experiences.

Leong and Gupta (2008) explain that career psychology has been criticised for its Western based career theories. The above theories discussed by Leong and Gupta (2008) have not seemed appropriate for diverse populations. The above western career theories (although useful for providing different ways to view career development) are not always appropriate to apply directly to a different context. However it is important to acknowledge their contribution to the field of career psychology.

The above theories seem to assume a linear progression of career development. This research does not look for variables or causal deterministic explanations as it believes that interactionist dynamic approaches are more appropriate. An interactionist dynamic approach offers a flexible way to view career development and the nuances that surround it. This interactionist approach will allow for a more contextual, holistic analysis of the individual, where the individual discusses how he/she experiences ‘career choice’ instead of forcing the individual’s experiences of career choice into certain ‘theoretical boxes’.

Career psychology today appears to focus rather on how tertiary students are able to complete their studies (depending on certain variables), and less on understanding the meaning that individuals construct with respect to career choices. Stead (2004) and Brems (2001) argue that it is not the variables themselves that affect the individual, but rather how the individual acts according to the meaning that the individual has assigned to that particular circumstance.

Stead (2004) acknowledges that individuals will experience supports and barriers during their career development. Stead (2004) explains that various contextual and identity aspects are related to vocational constructs. Individuals are influenced by the interactions they have between the environment and themselves. Brems (2001) discusses how some motivations may play a positive or negative role in career choice, depending on how they are acted upon or understood by the individual. The various supports or barriers that individuals may encounter are neither positive nor negative in and of themselves, but that they have the potential to be. Mkhize (2000) explains that career development should be reconceptualised to consider an individual's attempts to navigate his/her life in an ever changing world.

Individuals, agency and career choices

Stead & Bakker (2010), following Foucault (1994), express the concern of how some individuals assume that career research will find the crux of the self, rather than knowing how the individuals are made describable (constructed) by various knowledges. Career psychology along with Western psychology followed this assumption of the self as a unitary agent in the world that could be viewed as the source of individuals' actions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Howard (2000), on the other hand, suggests that this is not the case as postmodernist conceptions of identities are different to that of Western psychology's conceptions as they are considered as fluid, personalised social constructions that echo socio-historical contexts. This idea of identity as a fluid construct shows one that the construct of agency (the sensed ability to enact a desired role) should rather be considered in relation to individual choices. The reason for this is that from a social constructionist approach, career and counselling psychologies construct certain selves (Stead & Bakker, 2010). In other words identity is produced, through agency being performed in a temporal, socio-historical context and thus identity cannot be used as a generalisable source due to its fluid nature (Stead & Bakker, 2010).

There are career theories that are from a postmodern background yet are constructivist in nature (Fritz & Beekman, 2007). The theories based from a postmodern background are based around a constructionist and constructivist paradigm. The theories are transformed into therapies which accommodate this constructivist approach. This differs from modernist career development theories in which an overall concept guides career choice. The 'therapies' allow the individual along with the counsellor to construct the individual's career choice,

allowing room for any approach which is most appropriate to present itself through the interaction. Therapies such as Narrative therapy and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy are both constructivist in nature. The therapies focus on how the person engages to deconstruct, construct and co-construct the meanings he/she assigns to certain words. The therapies do not focus on the interactional process of meaning making but the personal process. Corey (2009) believes that the sociocultural system that surrounds people is created through social interaction and not the other way around. This research however looks at how the context of the interactions also influences the interactions and not just on how the interactions create a meaningful system (even though this has merit in itself).

In other words the specificity of the individual acting in a particular temporal, socio-historical context presents the individual with certain choices in which the individual can apply his/her agency, according to the meanings that are constructed with regards to that choice. Thus the constructs 'agency' and 'choice' appear to be applicable to the study of the meaning-making process with respect to the construct 'career choice'.

Butler (2002) explains that agency (in the sense of being able to make a choice) is not expressive but performative in the sense that when an individual is confronted with two choices the individual needs to make a choice based on his/her contextual experiences. The choice will be influenced by the social conventions interacting with the individual at the time. The individual will need to act out his/her choice in his/her context so that the individual enacted his/her agency. As can be seen there is no real binary between agency and society as the one cannot exist without the other (Butler, 2002). Individuals can thus be seen to have an interactional relationship with their environments. This approach differs to other research in which certain factors seem to have a causal relationship on the person or the person on her environment.

Williams and Irving (2002) explain that meanings are context bound in that different meanings (that influence values) are present in different situations. Williams and Irving (2002) explain that some research supposes that individuals have a set of core values that are 'adjusted' at times to meet the needs and meanings of particular circumstances. This research follows Williams and Irving's (2002) explanation that there is no core value system (as people are constantly changing their understandings of their environment), in that research should not be for an 'ultimate' meaning but for 'a' meaning (that is context bound). Gergen (1999) (as cited in Fuller Loogma, 2009) mentions that meanings rely on local practices, as

the connection between the object and its linguistic signifier (symbol) is random. Gergen (1999; as cited in Fuller & Loogma, 2009) goes on further to explain that it is not the aim of social constructionism to explain the correspondence of signifiers or knowledge to the real, but the appropriateness of the concept or theory (based from a certain constructed knowledge) to provide a contextual explanation to the observed world.

Career counselling currently is situated in a post-modern context which has progressed from a positivistic paradigm to a perspective paradigm. Modernist era principles and their focus have moved on to a post-modern era with a new focus. Maree and Beck (2004) explain that post-modernists consider the cultural, contextual and social diversities of knowledge along with its various interpretations of language. They further describe how culture and language form the symbolic world of the individual in which meaning and understandings are constructed. The post-modern era theories focus on the contextual and interactional constructions made in the meaning-making process of individuals. Savickas (1993) explained that post modernism favours particulars over principles and contextualised knowledge over decontextualised abstracts. Career counselling thus involves the co-construction or social construction of meaning. The counselling process is one of making meaning. Savickas (2012) created the career construction theory that adhered to the post-modernist ideologies as it emphasizes contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, nonlinear progression, multiple perspectives and personal patterns.

This research thus emphasises how the interactional process creates certain contexts for the meaning-making process to take place. It is not my aim to find an underlying characteristic (or universal Truth) to explain the meaning-making process (with respect to career choice) but rather my aim is to gain an understanding of this process.

The meanings (which follow) seem to differ according to each person's negotiated account and experiences thus offering personal and situationally specific truths. The truths being produced are dependent both on personal factors and on the interactional situation (the focus group) in which they were produced. I gained an understanding of the meaning making process through the interactional devices the participants employed in their responses.

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Research Questions

How do psychology students produce and interactionally negotiate meanings with respect to their career choices in interactions with their peers and the researcher?

How do psychology students produce and interactionally negotiate meanings of the discipline of psychology in these interactions with their peers and the researcher?

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach based on recorded focus group data. Qualitative research is valuable as it can access certain information that other types of research cannot (Rowan & Huston, 1997). It is able to access the meaning-making processes behind conversations, which quantitative research cannot. Stewart and Shamdasani (1998) describe a 'focus group' as a group discussion of a topic that is the centre of the discussion. The focus groups allowed me to examine the interactions between the psychology honours students and herself.

Fossey et al. (2002) state that the quality of qualitative research can be examined in relation to a number of key issues. The main issues are congruence, transparency, appropriateness and adequacy. Congruence relates to how the methods, research aims and paradigm of the research fit together. Transparency is linked to the data collection and analysis process. Appropriateness and adequacy relates to what types of participants I want to use and the strategies I use to get the sample (Fossey et al., 2002).

Frith and Kitzinger (1998) on the other hand explain that an acceptable analysis cannot simply involve presenting data extracts and expecting them to answer what is being analysed. Transparency only offers content for research; it does not address the underlying meanings and assumption that the participants interactionally produce (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998). Thus congruency, appropriateness and adequacy are adhered to in this research except for transparency.

Participants and Sampling

The participants were selected for inclusion into the study if they were currently in their psychology honours year at the University of the Witwatersrand. The exclusion criterion was

applied to any student that was not currently in his/her honours year of psychology. These criteria have been chosen by applying a purposive sampling strategy, as the psychology honours students have certain characteristics that are suitable for me to study (Greenstein, 2006). That is, some of the psychology honours students, by the time of data collection for the research, would have dealt with career choice with regards to their masters applications and some psychology honours students may have had other career choice alternatives in mind (during this period of planning for the following year). This was probably not the first time that these specific students have had to think of career choice.

It is vital for the context to be given so as to give a bit more of a background as to the interaction that took place. The same moderator was used for each of the focus groups. The moderator was currently studying her Master's in Educational Psychology and thus was familiar with what was currently happening in the psychology field at the University of the Witwatersrand (such as the removal of the neuro psychology masters program). The participants were not questioned about their demographic details. I did not want to impose identity categories as they might not have been consequential in the interactions. If their demographic details were mentioned or made relevant in the focus groups I would have examined that further in my analysis. This allowed the participants to co-construct what identities or demographic categories they felt were important rather than me deciding what I thought was important.

Myers (1998) discusses that one of the pros of focus groups is that they allow for the participants to provide their understandings of the topics, but more importantly they allow the structures (such as interactions) used to accomplish such claims to be examined. This allows me to understand how the meanings behind the topics are interactionally negotiated which is the purpose of this research.

In qualitative research sample size is not as strict a matter as in quantitative research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Qualitative research aims to gain insight (from a specific group, context, or characteristic etc.) by extracting meaning from the data (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The small sample size was thus acceptable as qualitative research does not intend to make generalisations from its sample but make inferences (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Two to four participants were included in each focus group. The number of focus groups was determined by sampling to redundancy which Akerstrom, Jacobsson and Wasterfors (2004) describe as the saturation point of research. That is when new information

can no longer be produced (Akerstrom et al., 2004). However, it is expected that a sufficient degree of saturation will be attained following approximately three focus groups. Saturation point was reached with nine participants.

Research Instrument

A focus group interview schedule was compiled (Appendix C). Open ended questions were used to gain as much information as possible. Bowleg (2008) explains that if a researcher is able to ask a question well (that is by structuring the question broadly and implicitly which will allow for the participants to add any other aspects that are significant to them) then the participant can add in other aspects that the researcher might have not considered. Morgan and Kreuger (1993) state the importance of selecting and organizing questions to see beyond the narrow set of concerns that may govern a certain set of individuals. The questions were centred on the topics 'career choice' and 'psychology'.

Procedure

Once Ethics clearance had been received I approached the Head of the School for of Human and Community Development to gain permission to conduct the research. I also sought permission from the Honours in Psychology Course Co-ordinator. I found out what lecture all the psychology honours students attended and then approached that lecturer to gain permission to speak to the students before or after the lecture. I attended the time assigned to me to speak to the students and told the students about the research and what would be required from them. I told the students that if they are interested in participating that they would need to sign the consent form and write their cell number and email address at the bottom of the page (in order to find a time that they were available to participate in) and that the forms would be collected the following week at the lecture. After approaching the students the participant information forms and consent forms were handed out to the students that were interested in participating. The following week the forms were collected and I organised a time and place to conduct the focus groups. The focus groups took place at the University of the Witwatersrand. The focus groups took place at a time that suited both the participants and me. The focus groups were approximately forty-five minutes long, as the length varied depending on the amount and types of discussion that occurred.

Data Analysis

This research used a flexible qualitative approach grounded in the data as the research is inductive in nature. When the data had been gathered and transcribed, it was ready to analyse. I went through the data several times with the research questions in mind in order to identify potential answers to the questions in the data. This process involved analysing the data for both the meanings that were produced in it, and the interactional processes through which they were produced. I thus focused on the meaning-making, interactional process of the research as well as other nuances that had presented themselves in the data. I looked at what the data had brought to attention in order to have seen which method of analysis was appropriate when analysing the data.

Frith and Kitzinger (1998) explain that the researcher should include an understanding of the assumptions underlying the analysis. Thus while I was analysing the data I tried to consider the interests and concerns of the research participants in conversing in certain ways about their experience. I viewed in her analysis the talk about 'career choice' as: 'a participant resource which is constructed in interaction with others' (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998, p. 307). Smithson (2000) expands on explaining the interactions in the focus groups as performances in which participants construct their views about proposed topics in a socially organized event. The term 'performance' in this respect refers to the different ways that individuals may behave (or 'act out') based on the various interactions they may encounter due to the meanings that are constructed during those interactions. Myers (1998) explains that the differences and similarities between the patterns in focus groups and those in everyday conversation are understandable, if it is assumed that participants act as if the main point of the happening is to present opinions for the moderator.

Reflexivity

Gadamer (as cited by Mkhize, 2005) explains that in attempting to understand the students' meanings, the researcher needs to be aware and critical of her own pre-understandings and prejudices and how they may influence her understanding, when interpreting and analysing the data. Kreuger (1998) explains the importance of the researcher keeping an open mind when listening in order to depict reality as understood and experienced by others. In this

research I not only needed to be aware of my own understandings when I interpreted the transcripts but also during my role as a moderator in the focus groups.

One of the advantages of this research is my ability to examine the meanings with respect to my own discipline of study; and it allows me to examine how psychology is constructed in the spoken interactions of some of its Honours students. Having been an Psychology Honours student, I had gone through a similar process with respect to career choice, thus I needed to be careful not to interpret what the participants were saying solely through the lenses of my own experiences as an Psychology Honours student. I am currently a psychology student, and thus still share some things in common with the participants in terms of the understandings of the discipline of psychology. I am aware of the great responsibility (of examining the meanings behind my field of study) this research encompasses, which in turn emphasises the importance of reflexivity in this research. I constantly monitored my own feelings, interpretations and interactions, trying to ensure that all the analytic claims made were adequately grounded in the data.

Ethics

The participants may have felt that they needed to filter what they said in the focus groups (in case they are identifiable) if they wished to apply for masters in psychology. I used pseudonyms when I started to transcribe and analyze the focus group sessions, and I removed any identifying factors that may have caused people to recognize who participated in the study. However, even with these precautions, I and my supervisor do have access to the recordings. I will not play the recordings of the focus group sessions in public. I was the only person (other than the other participants) who knew who participated in the study. I was not a psychology staff member and was not involved with the psychology master's selection process so I held no threat to the participants who planned to continue their studies in psychology.

Every effort was made by me to ensure confidentiality by the use of pseudonyms in the research report and by having the participants sign a non-disclosure section (part of the informed consent form) (Appendix B).

Once ethics clearance and approval had been received from the Human Research ethics Committee (HREC), the Head of the School of Human and Community Development was

approached to gain permission to include the honours psychology students into the research. The Honours Course Co-ordinator was then approached to gain permission to approach the honours psychology students at a lecture that they would have all be present. The lecturer's permission was also received.

The participants consent form explains that participation in the study is voluntary (Appendix A). Participants were allowed to leave the study if need be. Permission for recording the focus group sessions was also requested, along with consent to use direct quotes in the research. The participants were informed that the recordings would not be destroyed as they would remain potentially useful for an indefinite period of time, but they would be securely stored in locked cabinets and password protected computers. In addition, participants were told that they are permitted to request that the recordings in which they appear be removed from the data set even after the focus groups have been completed.

CHAPTER 4: Analysis and Discussion

Negotiating Meanings of Career Choice

It was evident in the data that various meanings of career choice were produced and negotiated by the focus group participants. A number of these meanings, and some ways in which they are interactionally negotiated by the participants, are shown in Extract 1 below.

Extract 1:

- 1 Mod: Okay great and then what do the words career choice mean to you?
- 2 G: The words career choice, **I don't know. My dad** always said that a career choice is **something that**
- 3 **you want to do for the rest of your life.** So make sure that you are **passionate** about it. So ya
- 4 psychology is something, I do see myself doing for the rest of my life. So good career choice.
- 5 (group laughs).
- 6 Mod: **Okay.**
- 7 M: **Ya I suppose** there's **something quite final** about it. I don't know, **I always thought** you know you
- 8 settle on a career, you choose your career and you **stick to it and you don't change** so for me I
- 9 suppose career choice is just **very daunting.** Cause I like, I don't know, I want to be happy where I
- 10 am, and successful where I am but **you don't want to change around too much** so. Mm.
- 11 Mod: ya.
- 12 M: I don't know, **I still don't necessarily know where I want to be** umm more and more I'm
- 13 inclined to be like maybe I want to be in forensic psych and not law and on the whole I thought I
- 14 wanted to do law so, I don't know. Ya.
- 15 Mod: Mm. With all your degrees though, you're safe/ you have a choice. (group laughs).
- 16 M: **Let's hope,** I don't know **there's master's selections.**
- 17 F: **And now** with my **history I think,** I see career choice as **flexible.** I come from a recruitment
- 18 background. I did a lot of recruitment so I know umm how flexible careers can be.
- 19 Mod: mm.
- 20 F: **If** you study a lot I know how flexible **it can be.**

- 21 Mod: It's just interesting ya because I haven't got that response so far which is. And that you have
 22 more knowledge because you have been in the field. It's also quite interesting.
- 23 F: **Ya, and I've changed** so I found it flexible. As long as **you passionate** of about what you eventually
 24 settle on, definitely.
- 25 Mod: ya.
- 26 C: **I just find** it's like what you really, really, **really want to do**.

Wilkinson (2006) discusses the asymmetry between the first person to offer their opinion that usually gives the second person an opportunity for agreement or a potential challenge. G stating that 'I don't know' (line 2), as Wilkinson (2006) suggests, does not mean that she doesn't really know but looking at it from an interactional perspective seems to indicate that she may not want to put her own opinion in the line of fire so to speak. She uses 'my dad' (line 2) as an interactional device to protect her opinion from challenge. In other words G is attributing the opinion to her dad, so anyone who disagrees would be disagreeing with her dad rather than with her. This is responded to first with a marker of acceptance ('okay') from the moderator (line 6), and then with the next participant, M aligning with it ('ya') (line 7). M also said 'I suppose' (line 7) which also allows for a degree of uncertainty/indefiniteness in what she is saying. So does the 'I think' (line 17) stated by participant F. The 'I suppose' and 'I think' can therefore serve as another device to protect one from potential challenges or being in the firing line.

Career choice is seen as something that one needs to 'really want to do' (line 27) and be 'passionate' (lines 3-24) about. Career Choice is felt to be 'very daunting' (line 9) as it is viewed as 'something that you want to do for the rest of your life' (lines 2-3). The 'want to' (lines 3, 12, 26) implies that it is something that is not able to be planned yet it still is an interest of ones that is not definite due to certain influencing factors. In this case the participants have to get through 'masters selections' (line 16) in order to be able to do what they want to do. This explains M's response: 'let's hope' (line 16), to the moderator, when she refers to getting a chance to choose her career choice. Participant M seems to acknowledge G's suggestion of career choice as seen in the 'Ya' (line 7) yet she seems to have something more or a bit different to add which is implied in her comment 'I suppose' (line 8).

Participant M shares that she ‘always thought’ that ‘you choose a career and you stick to it and you don’t change’ so M claims that ‘there is something quite final’ about career choice (lines 7-8). M stating that ‘I thought’ (line 7) shows that she used to view career choice as quite final yet she appears to understand now that it is changeable when she said that ‘you don’t want to change around too much’ (line 10). M is still not sure ‘where [she] want[s] to be’ (line 12) with regards to choosing a career but M seems to have a preference to stay in the field she chooses as moving around does not seem to be preferable. This was when M said that: ‘you don’t want to move around too much’ (line 10). The ‘you’ (line 10) in her statement seems to refer to the general public as if most people would prefer not to move around with their career choice. F also continued M’s suggestion, seen by ‘And now...’ (line 18). Participant F claims career choice is ‘flexible’ which she is ‘now’ able to see ‘now with [her] history’ (line 18). The ‘now’ shows that participant F may have seen career choice in a different way before. This point along with participant M’s previous comments seem to show that M’s and F’s thoughts of career choice have been changed through experience. Participant F emphasizes this with her statement: ‘Ya, and I’ve changed so I found it flexible.’ F then says how flexible career choice ‘can be’ (line 20). The ‘If’ and ‘can be’ (line 20) suggests that that it is not always flexible but that F has had an experience where ‘it can be’ flexible ‘If’ it is dealt with in a certain way.

There appeared to be some disagreements with what career choice means to the participants. Personal accounts were given if there was a different response as seen by participant G when she said ‘I just find’ (line 26) and participants F and M seemed to have a shared understanding with what was said before yet they added on from the previous views. So rather than directly disagreeing, the participants carefully managed their disagreements by describing it in terms of how their personal experiences differ with what the previous participant had said. F and M considered the previous responses by acknowledging them and starting their accounts with a ‘Ya’ and or ‘And’. The ‘Ya’ and or ‘And’ are another device that the participants use to show disagreement or produce different views. First it is agreed with what the previous person has said which is then followed by adding something that is different or new.

Thus this extract shows the production of meanings of careers choice such as something that: is done if you are ‘passionate’ (line 3) about it; you ‘want to do for the rest of your life’ (line 3); is ‘quite final’ (line 7); is ‘very daunting’ (line 9) but that can be also ‘flexible’ (line 17). The extract also shows how the participants produce various patterns of alignment and

disalignment with those meanings by adding on, agreeing with or challenging each other's responses.

Extract 2 shows a number of similar meanings to those that were produced in Extract 1.

Extract 2:

- 1 B2: **You can go first** (laughs).
- 2 A2: What do the words career choice mean **to me**? Ummm it means finding the field of occupation
- 3 that **you most interested in... ya...** determining what career path **you want to do for the rest of**
- 4 **your life.**

B2 deflecting her chance of going first may be because she either has nothing to say at that point or she does not feel like putting her perception up for discussion. Thus it is as if she is protecting herself with her saying that: 'you can go first' (line 1) to A2 as a protective interactional device (like G appeared to use in extract 1). A2 rephrased the question by adding 'to me' (line 2) to perhaps give a sense that it is her personal view which may differ to B2's later response. This is similar to the speaker (participant M) in Extract 1 who said 'I suppose'. A2 therefore seems to also be protecting her opinion in a sense. A2 appears to perceive career choice in a similar way to G in extract 1 when she stated that it is what 'you most interested in' (line 3) and something 'that you want to do for the rest of your life' (line 3-4). The 'want to' (line 3) again shows that it is something that one may not be given the chance to choose. The '...ya...' (line 3) said by A2 appears to show that she was creating her meaning as she was talking as there was a pause and then the 'ya' which she seemed to say as if she agreed with what she was saying. This shows how A2's meaning was not preconceived before the focus group but was actively constructed in the focus group (Wilkinson, 2006).

Extract 3 also presents with similar meanings to extract 1 and extract 2.

Extract 3:

- 1 A1: Ya I agree with her, **and also** umm I mean your career choice umm **defines who you are for the**
- 2 **rest of your life.**
- 3 Mod: Mm.

- 4 Mod: Cool. And... Sorry I just lose where I am so many times (laughs). Umm, and what do you
- 5 think of when you hear the term career choice? Anything that pops to mind.
- 6 K: **You feel anxious** (group laughs). Because like, like, like let's say it, it, it **determines your**
- 7 **future.** [...]
- 8 Mod: Mm, Cause there's a lot of conflict around it. (group laughs)
- 9 K: ya!
- 10 B1: **I also think** it's, it's **daunting** because it's a **choice for life time!** You always think : 'aah!! I
- 11 got to choose this because I got to do it for the rest of my life.' **You can change but it's very hard**
- 12 **to change once you in that rhythm.** So right now we at the **point of our life where it's you**
- 13 **know, very defining what you chose to do.** And then also if you want to, **it's very hard to just do**
- 14 **something broad and general.** Most **if you want to be fine,** you want to be higher, **you've got to**
- 15 **go to that next specialty. You know** and go up. And then **it's very hard to move anywhere else.** So
- 16 ah, it's very scary point I think now, in our lives, where you are making those choices to, define you
- 17 really, for the rest of your life.

Participant A1 adds on from a previous comment (as seen from the words 'and also' (line 1)) and says career choice: 'defines who you are for the rest of your life' (lines 1-2). Career choice was also stated in extract 1 and 2 as something that will be 'for the rest of your life.'

K states that career choice makes one 'feel anxious' (line 6) as it 'determines your future' (lines 6-7). B1 agrees that career choice is 'daunting' (line 10) as she 'also thinks' (line 10) that it is a big choice to make as seen by her comment that it is 'a choice for life time' (line 10). This was also expressed in extract 1 (line 9).

B1 seems to give career choice a time characteristic, 'point of our life' (line 12) 'where it's you know, very defining what you chose to do' (lines 12-13). The 'you know' (in lines 12-13 and 15) gives one a sense that it is a shared group understanding of career choice. This is reinforced by the 'general you' in saying things like 'defining what you choose to do' (line 13) and 'You can change but it's very hard to change once you in that rhythm' (lines: 16-17). B1 explains that it is difficult to change ones career choice as she suggests that 'if you want to be fine' in your career you need to 'go to that next speciality [...]' And then it's very hard

to move anywhere else' (line 20). B1 explains that 'it's very hard to just do something broad and general' (line 19) in which one is able to change more easily. B1 assumes that being able to change one's choice is extremely difficult to do once one has begun a specific career but she does claim it can be done. B1 thus appears to think of career choice as a strong impacting factor which seems final yet it is changeable. This claim is similar to M and F's suggestions in extract 1. Career choice thus is a concept that was produced from shared suggestions in this extract as well.

Extract 4 offers some new suggestions on career choice if compared to the previous extracts.

Extract 4:

- 1 A1: **You not going to get this time again. You getting older! You know** you need to and you
 2 can't ah rely on your parents forever. I mean we should all be now twenty two, twenty three
 3 (group agrees). I mean you can't, **you know. I mean till when are we going to rely on them for**
 4 **everything?**
- 5 B1: **And you know** masters is three years! I mean everything else like honours has been one
 6 year, you know. Now suddenly where you like **committing** to something that is three years of
 7 your life. Yes okay you may be paid for two of them but it's still that three. It's another three
 8 years. That means at twenty five I'll still be just finishing. **That's quite a lot to you know, ask**
 9 **from your parents or whatever.** Because twenty five is quite old. You **should be** doing your
 10 own thing by then you know. **But if you want a career like this unfortunately you have to go**
 11 **through that and you have to do it. So.**

There seems to be opportune times to make one's career choice an easier process. Participant A1 expresses that she and the participants are now getting older and can't rely on their parents for support much longer. This was also noticed in extract 3 (line 12) Participant A1: 'You not going to get this time again. You getting older! You know' (line 1) 'You know. I mean till when are we going to rely on them for everything?' (lines 3-4). The 'you know' seems to mean that it is a general understanding between the participants of what they are going through which was also seen in extract 3 (lines 12-13 and 15). Participant B1 shares A1's suggestion and adds to it which is seen by her stating 'And you know' (line 5). B1 goes on to express how the participants' career choice is a big commitment as they would be 'Committing' (line 6) to masters which is three years of their lives. B1 reinforces A1's claim

that: ‘That’s quite a lot to you know, ask from your parents or whatever.’ (lines 8-9). B1 states that the participants ‘Should be’ (line 9) independent of their parents by then and thus feels it’s a lot to ask of them for their support. B1 claims that: ‘if you want a career like this unfortunately you have to go through that and you have to do it. So’ (lines 10-11). The ‘so’ in B1’s statement implies that with the participants’ specific career choice, relying on their parents is something that has to be done even though they feel it to be a burden on them.

The participants agreed, disagreed, added on to previous accounts or offered their personal experiences and suggestions. Career choice has been interactionally produced to be time specific. There seems to be a majority consensus that there are opportune times in people’s lives to make a career choice. Career choice was suggested by the participants to be a commitment to something that you are interested in doing. The participants have interactionally come to describe career choice as something that is able to be changed after experiencing it.

Negotiating Meanings of Psychology

The focus groups offered various perspectives of what psychology means to the participants and how they had come to choose their particular meaning of psychology.

There appeared to be various interactional devices used to create the various meanings of psychology. A number of these meanings, and some ways in which they are interactionally negotiated by the participants, are shown in Extract 5 below.

Extract 5 shows how the participants’ perceive other people’s views of psychology and how it seems to differ to how the participants understand psychology.

Extract 5:

- 1 K: **I think** that is why psychology is such a special, **such a special field** to go into is
- 2 because it’s largely umm if you think about being a psychologist you doing it for a **very**
- 3 **personal reason. Whereas** with other professions **there might** be personal reasons, yes
- 4 sure **but a lot** of it is like this big dream of like I am going to be a doctor, and I’m gonna
- 5 wear a lab coat and I’m gonna wear a doctor’s coat and I’m gonna operate on people. Or

6 there's like this, I mean like for you and me, I'm not sure about you, but I know for you
 7 and me there's the whole **medicine is a highly regarded field. I mean my mom is**
 8 **horribly disappointed with the fact that I'm not in medicine!** And she's pushing my
 9 brother to go into medicine! Umm and I forgot the point that I was making.

10 M: It's the influencing thing.

11 K: Oh ya, it's a very, very special field! And I think for everyone who's in honours, umm
 12 some part of their influencing thing will be very personal. very, very personal.

13 A1: **It's actually interesting for your friend that didn't go through anything why she**
 14 **is in this field.**

15 B1: **But ya**, her main goal is law. So I don't really understand why she is doing psychology.

16 A1: Oh I know who you talking about, I know who you talking about.

17 B1: Mm, so she, you know that, that to me she's got nothing to base. Ya she's got issues
 18 and everything but I **think psychology is uh completely different, like you said it's**, it's
 19 **individualistic, you know**, you have a certain reason and that drives you and you just stick
 20 to that and yes you may be messed up and that's why **they say psychologists are**, but
 21 think that's, that's what I think makes us so special is because you do have that side to
 22 you, that yes other people may see as being a **little different and messed up** and
 23 whatever but that's the reason why we doing what we doing and that's why we can **help**
 24 **other people**, hopefully one day.

K explains that '[she] thinks' psychology is 'such a special field' (line 1) as people choose to do it because of a 'very personal reason' (lines 2-3) whereas other professions such as a 'doctor' is chosen as a career rather because 'medicine is a highly regarded field' (line 7). K shows by starting the sentence with 'whereas' (line 3) shows that the other professions are different and she goes on to express that 'there might' (line 3) be some personal reason for choosing the other subjects but she believes that is usually not the case as seen by the words 'but a lot' (line 3). A1 seems to have considered K's account with regards to people usually choosing psychology more out of personal reasons and thus that B1's friend is different to

what she considers the norm, as seen by her saying to B1 ‘It’s actually interesting for your friend that didn’t go through anything why she is in this field’ (lines 13-14). B1 replying ‘ya’ (line 15) is a sign that she agrees and the ‘but’ (line 15) is to show that might be another reason for taking psychology. B1 agrees with K as seen by her comment: ‘like you said’ (line 18). B thinks: ‘psychology is uh completely different’ (line 18) because it is ‘individualistic’ (line 19). Both K and B1 appear to think that psychology is unique when compared to the other fields because of the experience that people have gone through, influencing them choosing psychology; rather than like other fields where the career may be chosen just because the field is regarded more highly. K then gives her thoughts of how she feels her mother feels about psychology. K feels that her mother doesn’t hold psychology in high esteem as K said that her mother was ‘horribly disappointed’ (line 8) that she didn’t go into another career like medicine. B1 appears to also think that other people (as evident from ‘they say’ (line 20) do not think so highly of psychology as shown from her statement ‘they say psychologists are’ (line 20) a ‘little different and messed up’ (line 22). The words ‘you know’ (line 19) refers to B1 assuming that the group has a similar understanding of what she is saying because they are in a similar field.

In other words K suggests that people do not choose psychology for the status it brings but rather for a ‘very personal reason’ (lines 2-3). B1 builds on this suggestion (lines 17-24) when she unpacks what she takes K to have meant by ‘very personal reasons’ – i.e., ‘being a little different and messed up’ (line 22) and wanting to ‘help other people’ (lines 23-24)... This assumes that psychology is fundamentally about psychopathology (‘being...messed up’) and about helping people who are afflicted by it. This implies quite a narrow field of what psychology represents, and excludes a lot of other potential meanings. It is reinforced when the participants express confusion about why someone (the student who is interested in law) who is described as ‘your friend that didn’t go through anything’ (line 13) would be in the field of psychology in the first place. This assumes that someone who is not ‘messed up’ (line 22) doesn’t really ‘belong’ in psychology as they are describing it.

Extract 6 is evident of how the participants construct psychology as a contradictory field in which the participants have some differing and similar meanings.

Extract 6:

1 G: Freud negative. (group laughs) **I hate Freud with a passion. Like social psych I don’t**

2 **get it**, I don't like it at all. But otherwise it's very good. I loved abnormal psych. Ya that
3 subject is amazing it blew my mind.

4 M: I think that is the only reason I stayed with psychology is abnormal psych. **And**

5 **actually I quite like Freud** so (group laughs) I think he is quite cool umm ya social psych
6 I hate.

7 C: **I also hate social.**

8 M: **I can't deal with social psych.** I think it's stupid. **It's like airy fairy sort of.** I like

9 **neuro and abnormal** because it's sort of this is, **these are the symptoms, this is what**
10 **is going wrong, this is XYZ and this is how you fix it.**

11 Mod: It's interesting then that you like Freud though.

12 M: okay ya, but Freud I think he is just misunderstood. (group laughs)

13 C: **I also like Freud.** Because once you get his theory it **actually makes sense.**

14 M: ya. Ya like I'd tweek it a bit but I think it's got quite a lot of

15 C: Founding.

16 G: I just, **I just don't agree with penis envy** I don't think any girl...

17 M: **Okay** yes (group laughs) that part I might have overlooked but umm. **Okay** I do

18 **chose the parts that suit me**, so. (group laughs).

19 F: **I don't know if this is off the topic but** umm when I worked at head way last year the

20 positives umm, because I did an internship there, and umm the positives, we got to do

21 neuro psych testing and **I think the positives** were actually seeing how the tests

22 actually really do help to in a way diagnose the person or and how it helps

23 **therapy move forward** but I think what I disliked about it was. The psychologists, the

24 in house psychologists were very quick to put a label on a person. And so yes they

25 had a severe head injury but they probably depressed, they probably bi-polar as well,

26 which we don't know because we don't know the function previous to the head

27 injury. So **that was my dislike of psych**, I think that's very quick to put labels to people

28 and they **judge very quickly**.

29 Mod: And when it is so complex like you say.

30 F: Ya. Especially the neuro psyc side ya.

31 G: I don't, **I don't agree with the DSM at all**. I just think it tries **to put people in a**

32 **box** and you can't. I think **it's ironic**. Neuro psyc **claims that everyone's brain is**

33 **different** but **at the same time they are trying to put everyone in the same**

34 **category** kind of. It's just weird.

35 F: And I also find that once they did that, they, they diagnosed you were obviously [...]

Participant G says that she 'hates Freud with a passion' (line 1) as well as 'social psyc [as she doesn't] get it' (line 1-2). Participant C 'also' seems to 'hate social psyc' (line 7) and participant M 'can't deal with social psyc' (line 8) either. Social psychology is stated as too 'airy fairy' (line 8) whereas abnormal psychology is claimed to be more straight forward as seen from M's response: 'these are the symptoms, this is what is going wrong, this is XYZ and this is how you fix it' (lines 9-10). M adds on to the previous comments of psychology as seen from the 'And' (line 4) yet she says that she 'actually quite likes Freud' (line 5). Participant C agrees with M as she 'also like[s] Freud' (line 13) as she says he 'actually makes sense' (line 13). The 'actually' (line 13) is used as if it is a convincing device that one might think that Freud does not makes sense but he 'actually makes sense' (line 13). G emphasizes her different point of view with an example of Freud's theory she does not understand as seen from 'I just don't agree with penis envy' (line 16). The 'just' (line 16) shows that G has certain parts of Freud that she cannot agree with. Participant M then acknowledges G's statements as seen from the 'Okay' and then admits to choosing the parts of Freud's theory that 'suit' her (line 18). Participant F starts off ' I don't know if this is off the topic but' (line 19) which is indicative of F wanting to add in something that she thinks may be different to what the other participants were saying. F goes on to state what she thinks the positives of neuro psychology are, are that the tests help the therapy process to 'move forward' (line 21) yet she also states her 'dislikes of psyc' because it 'judges [people] very quickly' (line 28). G agrees with F's statement saying that she doesn't agree with the labelling side of psychology such as the 'DSM' (line 31) as it overs simplifies people's issues by putting 'people in a box' (lines 31-32). G gives her view that psychology is ironic as it claims and does different things: 'claims that everyone's brain is different but at the same

time they are trying to put everyone in the same category (lines 32-34). Certain omissions such as ‘psychology’ at the end of ‘neuro and abnormal’ (line 9) and abbreviation of psychology as ‘psyc’ (line 27) show the specific words that are constructed for specific interactions as it is taken that those words are understood by all. This was also evident in extract 6.

This extract offers a wider range of sub disciplines falling under psychology. Psychoanalysis, social psychology, neuro and abnormal psychology were at least some of the sub disciplines mentioned. Extract 5 assumed a much narrower range of disciplines falling under psychology. Extract 5 seemed to revolve around abnormal psychology as seen in the statements of psychologists being ‘messed up’ and that psychology is about ‘helping others’. The participants provide critiques of the various disciplines of psychology. Social psychology is claimed to be ‘airy fairy’ (line 8) which implies that psychology should be concrete or ‘scientific’. Psychoanalysis (discussion of Freud) is seen as something that can be understood yet has concepts that may seem outdated such as ‘penis envy’ (line 16) which causes some of the participants to ‘chose the parts that suit’ them (line 18). There appears to be disapproval in the way the DSM is stated to categorize people and to force people into a ‘box’ (line 32). That statement implies that psychology should have a greater appreciation of each individual’s uniqueness.

Extract 7 deals with more of some of the positives aspects of psychology.

Extract 7:

- 1 A2: Specially now... ummm... the positive is knowing at the end of the day that you
- 2 going to be **helping people**. I think. That’s **what keeps you going, also the income** (laughs)
- 3 B2: **and it is also...** no it’s **very interesting as well**
- 4 A2: Yes
- 5 B2: **like it’s not like any**, like going from a BCOM and like working with a BCOM and
- 6 psychology. Like **psychology actually is more stimulating** I would say because you
- 7 **learning about real life you know situations**, whereas like BCOM is **mathematical** and
- 8 that. So I would say that’s a big positive. And **you know** even, even if you go into like both
- 9 my subjects, **wherever you go into the workplace its working with people**, even if it is

10 in marketing or psychology, and I find **that psychology actually enhanced** all my other
 11 subjects cos it like, ya, they all overlap.
 12 Mod:Ya

Participant A2 claims, that it is ‘the income’ (line 2) and the fact that you are ‘helping people’ (line 2) as psychology’s influential factors. A2’s comment on psychologists’ income contrasts in some ways with Extract 5 where participant K suggests that psychology is not a very high status profession. A2’s statement of psychology helping people, on the other hand, is similar in meaning to the one in Extract 5 (which implies a similar set of assumptions about psychology). A2’s comment that suggests the income is good tends towards an implication that the profession is relatively high-status. B2 agrees (as seen from ‘and it is also’ [line 3]) and adds on that psychology is ‘interesting as well’ (line 3). B2 expresses that psychology is not like the other career fields as seen by the words: ‘like it’s not like any’ (line 5) because psychology is ‘more stimulating’ (line 6) as you are ‘learning about real life situations’ (line 7) which you deal with ‘wherever you go into the workplace’ (line 9). B2 thus claims psychology as ‘enhancing’ (line 10) one’s work experience. The ‘you know’ (line 8) was also evident in extracts 5 (line 19) which assumes a similar understanding of what is being said.

Psychology is claimed to be interesting because it enhances and is relatable (to life situations) because it deals with more practical things that can be applied to a person’s other fields of work. This extract also assumes the types of things that psychologists do such as ‘learning about real life situations’ (line 7) compared to doing something ‘mathematical’ (line 7) (which is therefore implied to not be about ‘real life situations’).

Extract 8 shows how some of the participants claim as to what some of the positive aspects of psychology are.

Extract 8:

1 A1: I think everyone goes through their own **personal journeys** that make up their life and
 2 where they are going in the future so and I think that for us it **has fortunately given us**
 3 **the tools**
 4 K: **yes that’s it exactly**
 5 A1: **To equip us, to deal better with our field.** Like lawyers and accountants and

- 6 whatever, what experience, what, what has equipped them to do well in their jobs?
- 7 What... **an inborn ability to balance a ledger**. You know what I mean. I mean what has
- 8 given them that rich, **you know that depth**. You know.
- 9 Mod: There's definitely a depth.
- 10 A1: A depth! But not that everyone gets from just having a smooth climb.

A1 feels that it is their 'personal journeys' (line 1) that have given her and the other participants 'the tools' (line 3) 'to equip [them], to deal better with in [their] field' (line 5). There appears to be similarity to extract 5 where it is suggested that people enter psychology for 'personal reasons' (line 3). This implies in both extracts that there is something very personal and meaningful about psychologists' engagement with their discipline and which is assumed not to be present in the other professions ('it's not like any...', extract 7 line 5). In this sense, psychology is produced as something more connected with the demands of everyday life than other professions are assumed to be as it is suggested that, for psychologists, 'the professional is personal' and/or 'the personal is professional'. This is similar to feminist psychology in which it is argued 'the personal is political'. This refers to the claim that woman's personal hardships are related to the social, economic, and political context in which they exist (Szymanski, 2005, p.76). These participants are suggesting that psychologists are people who are in touch with the everyday hardships of those they may be studying or working with as a result of living through similar hardships themselves. K agrees with A1 as seen from her comment 'yes that's it exactly' (line 4). A1 claims that psychology is more practical as everyday experiences contribute towards equipping a psychologist to gain a greater understanding of the field which offers one 'that depth' (line 8). A1's claim involves a similar assumption of what psychology offered, to the one expressed in extract 7 ('real life situations' (line 7)), so in both cases it implies that psychology is something that people can use in their everyday lives as well as in their professional activities. A1's sarcastic comment of 'an inborn ability to balance a ledger' (line 7) emphasises her point of the practical nature of psychology versus that of other professions.

Extract 9:

- 1 Mod: And then umm ya, being an honours psychology student what do you think are the main purposes of
- 2 the discipline of psychology are?

3 C: What do you mean by main purposes?

4 Mod: well the main umm functions basically. So it can mean anything, these questions are broad, I know
5 they are very broad, some of them sound the same but it's been structured that way for... so whatever
6 comes to your mind, seriously. It won't be straight off the topic because that is what I want to hear are
7 the different things, so.

8 C: **Research I'd say. Just expanding research** in the field as one of the main purposes.

9 Mod: Mm, ya. Especially in South Africa there is very little there.

10 M: **I suppose again it depends on the discipline** so if you are talking about counselling

11 psychology it's obviously like for counselling, for support sort of area. Research **you know**
12 more an understanding base sort of umm, explanatory maybe you know how functioning side
13 of things. Aaah, umm, Oh and I forgot to mention something that interests me as well is
14 forensic psychology. So then I suppose if you are talking forensic side you know it would be
15 eyewitness testing, eyewitness accounts and that sort of thing. So ya I think it depends on the
16 discipline.

17 Mod: Ya it does make a big difference. Anything? And so what do you then think are the main,
18 the main focus of the discipline of psychology should be?

19 G: **I would just say awareness in general**, cause I don't think, I mean my mom had
20 depression. She didn't know what she had like for three, four years...

Psychology seems to be field that requires some improvement in the form of 'research' (line 8) and 'awareness in general' (line 19). Participant C offers her own view that it seems to only be research that needs improvement, which is seen by her stating 'I'd say. Just expanding research' (line 8). Participant G also gives a personal account seen by 'I would [...] say' (line 19) in which she feels its 'just awareness' (line 19). Participant M offers her own thought on the topic. M says: 'I suppose again it depends on the discipline' which also shows the complex nature of psychology as it 'depends on the discipline' (line 10). M stating 'you know' (line 11) gives one the sense that the other participants share a general understanding of what is being said. The participants' different thoughts of psychology still requires improvement in; maybe because it is so complex that it depends on what discipline

the person is discussing as mentioned by participant M. The participants are producing a meaning of psychology that allows for multiple facets (or sub-disciplines) within psychology as a whole. This can be contrasted to extract 5 where psychology is assumed to be (about psychopathologies) a ‘monolithic’ thing.

Extract 10 adds on to extract 9 with what the participants think psychology is lacking.

Extract 10:

1 A1: Psychology **is not accessible to everybody**. So I am **not going to give the usual**
 2 **answers for what psyc is for and whatever**. But umm it’s for everything that we have just
 3 been discussing. But ah ah it’s just not accessible to everyone. It’s like a lawyer whose,
 4 whose specialising in mal practice. If a poor person gets knocked by a taxi, whose gonna
 5 fight his case? **You know what I’m saying?** So umm we can help as many people as you
 6 can but only those **who can afford it**, who can afford to umm reach out to us. Who are brave
 7 enough to reach out to us. Umm, even as a neuro, I mean **neuro’s charge a lot of money**.
 8 Umm so basically we **can only help people** who are middle to upper class socio economic
 9 status. So umm we can’t help the poor people in our country who are the majority of our
 10 country [...]. The majority of our country are suffering from poverty, AIDs, sickness umm bad
 11 health care systems. So I mean **we not doing what we should be doing**.

A1 claims that psychology is ‘not accessible to everybody’ (line 1). A1 states that her opinion is not normally discussed when discussing psychology. She said that she is ‘not going to give the usual answers for what psyc is for and whatever’ (lines 1-2). A1 emphasises her claim as seen by the emphasis in her rhetorical question ‘you know what I’m saying?’ (line 5). The words ‘you know’ (line 5) refers to A1 assuming that the group has a similar understanding of what she is saying because they are in a similar field (also evident in extract 5). A1 goes on to explain the reasons for her comment she thinks that most people are unable to ‘afford it’ (line 6) as the professionals ‘charge a lot of money’ (line 7). A1 thus seems to view psychology as exclusive as it ‘can only help’ (line 8) some people. A1 concludes that psychology is not addressing what she thinks it ‘should be’ (line 11). The abbreviations of

psychology as 'psyc' (line 1) and neuro psychologists as 'neuro's' (line 7) is evident of certain talk that is used and constructed around certain people as they would understand it.

A1 articulates strident critiques of psychology, claiming that it is an elitist discipline that only serves an elite few. This differs to extracts 5 and 7, in which psychology is assumed to be a discipline geared towards 'helping other people'. A1 proposes quite strong constraints on who gets access to this kind of help. This critique of psychology is directed at a narrow claim of what counts as psychology to begin with. As psychology as stated as a field that offers services by professional psychologists (such as neuro psychologists- line 7) which doesn't allow for the possibility of types of psychology (such as community and research psychology) that are designed to be broader based and to help those most in need.

Psychology has appeared to have many meanings for the participants. Psychology was claimed to be single/ 'monolithic' field in one of the focus groups and then in another as a complex discipline with multiple sub-disciplines. Psychology was suggested as a unique field that offers practicality in everyday and professional life, and a field that helps people. The limitations of psychology was that it was suggested to need some improvement as it was claimed to label people and some parts are of it were said to be abstract or argued as outdated. Contradictions were present in the claim that psychology is not seen as a high status profession yet the high income of the profession suggests that it is. Psychology appeared to mean different things to some of the participants and similar things to other participants, depending on their own personal experiences.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

Social constructionism holds as an appropriate foundation to understanding the meanings in which these psychology honour's students were able to discuss their views of career choice and psychology. Each participant gave their own accounts of how they view psychology and career choice which seemed to have stemmed from their surroundings, their past interactions and their current (that is during the focus group) interactions. Thus the participants' meanings of psychology and career choice appeared to be different to other people's meanings (as was expressed in the focus groups). There were many meanings constructed with reference to both 'psychology' and 'career choice' as concepts. In the first analytic section, I examined the ways in which the participants interactionally negotiated meanings of career choice. Some of the meanings that emerged from these processes included career choice as daunting, a commitment, something that is preferable not to change, and something you are interested in or passionate about. In the second analytic section, I examined ways in which the participants interactionally negotiated meanings of psychology. Some of the meanings that emerged from these processes included psychology as monolithic, as broad with many disciplines, as a practical and special field etcetera. The meanings were used to justify the person's experiences and claims of the concepts. In both the analytic sections, the meanings were negotiated in the focus groups as seen from some participants agreeing with or challenging each other responses or by the use of protective devices to support the participant's response from potential disagreement from the other participants. This gave the meanings of psychology and career choice fluid and interactional characteristics. There was flexibility and variability in the way the participants engaged with these topics and built consensus around them.

This adds to the previous theories showing that greater flexibility needs to be integrated into career choice theories along with considering the person's meanings of career choice in relation to the categories provided by the theories. The theories should also provide fewer labels onto the person and provide the person with more information of the fields that may add on to the person's experiences of it. This would provide an interactional environment in which the person can negotiate his/her meanings in order to better equip the person to make a decision.

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Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH AND PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Career choices among Psychology Honours Students

Hello! My name is Haley Isakow. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study that I (an Educational Psychology Master's student) will be guiding, under the supervision of Dr. Kevin Whitehead.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding of how Psychology Honours students feel about their future careers, and how they make choices in this regard.

What will I be asked to do?

If you volunteer to participate in the study, I would audio tape the focus group conversations in which you are involved. Nothing further will be required of you beyond your participation in a focus group.

Will participating put me at any risk or cause me any inconvenience?

As part of this study, I will be asking that you allow me to audio-tape the discussions in which you participate. The recording equipment I use will be set up so that it will not distract you during the course of the session. The audiotapes from this study will be used for research purposes only.

There is a small risk that you might be recognized from what you say in portions of the focus groups that may be quoted directly in the written report of the research findings, but you are permitted to request that data in which you appear not be quoted in the report (see the signature portion at the bottom of this form).

There is also a risk that the things you say in the focus groups may be reported to people outside of the focus group by other participants from the focus group. For this reason, we are asking that you agree not to publicly disclose the names of your fellow participants, nor

anything that they say during the focus group (see the signature portion of this form). This will serve to protect you and the other participants from any risks associated with disclosure of information concerning the focus group.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to answer any questions that you would prefer not to answer. If you choose to be in the study, and feel any discomfort as a result of participating, you can change your mind and withdraw from the study at any time. If you want the recordings in which you appear to be withdrawn from the study, even after the recording has been completed, you can request this at any time by contacting the researchers.

What will the recordings be used for?

The recordings will serve as the data set for my Master's research report, and may subsequently be prepared for presentation at professional research conferences and/or publication in scholarly journals or books. If you would like to, you can obtain a copy of the research report after the completion of the study by contacting me at the e-mail address listed below.

Will the information I give be confidential?

You may be concerned that the things you say or do during your participation might be made public, and used against you in some way. I want to reassure you that your identity will be kept private, and you will not be personally identified in any written reports. The tapes will be transcribed by the researcher, and all personal names and identifying details will be excluded from the transcripts. You will not be identifiable from the transcriptions.

You may feel that you need to filter what you say in these focus groups if you wish to apply for masters in psychology. I will use pseudonyms when transcribing the focus group sessions, and take out any identifying factors that may cause people to recognize who participated in the study.

The recordings will not be destroyed following the completion of the study, as they will remain potentially useful for an indefinite period of time. However, they will be kept in a locked storage area, and electronic copies will be stored on secure, password-protected

computers. Only approved research personnel will have access to them, and only for research or educational purposes.

What are the potential benefits to me and to society?

It is unlikely that you will personally benefit from your participation. Upon request, a letter of participation can be given to you saying that you have participated in Master's Psychology research, which helped you gain practical experience of focus groups. There are potential benefits to society in terms of understanding career choices, which may lead to the possibility of improving career counselling services.

Will I be paid to participate?

You will not receive any payment for participating in this study.

How can I get in contact with the researchers?

My contact details are shown below. Please feel free to contact me or my supervisor should you have any concerns or enquiries about your participation in the research. On request I can send you a summary of the research findings.

Haley Isakow

Phone: 0832712274

E-mail: haleyisakow@hotmail.com

Supervisor: Dr Kevin Whitehead

Phone: 011 717 4530 (office)

E-mail: kevin.whitehead@wits.ac.za

Rights of Research Participants

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this research study.

Appendix B

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

If any questions you have about this research have been answered to your satisfaction, and you would like to participate in the research, please print your name and sign below.

In addition, please choose how you will allow the recordings in which you appear to be used, by indicating below in which contexts you are willing to have recordings in which you appear be played (check all boxes that apply).

Recording Permission:

- Research reports written for publication in scientific journals
- I give permission to the researcher to use direct quotes from the recording of the focus group in the analysis
- I give permission to the researcher to be able to record the focus group session

Non Disclosure:

- I will not disclose any information discussed during the focus group conversations and the names of the participants

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Cell:.....

Email:.....

Appendix C

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Introduction, then go around group and each person states his/her two undergraduate majors and the academic field the person comes from (e.g. BA, BSC, BCOM etc.)

Opening question: Since you all study psychology I would like to know what may have influenced you to major in psychology and then do psychology honours?

- What do you think psychologists do or should do?
 - If you become a psychologist what would you do?
- How did you decide to major in psychology and then do Psychology Honours?
- Being an Honour's Psychology student, what do you think the main purposes of the discipline of psychology are?
 - What do you think the main focus of the discipline of psychology should be?
- Please share some of your positive and/or negative experiences of psychology thus far.
 Negative experience prompts: Challenges? Struggles?
 Positive experience prompts: Accomplishments? Achievements?
- What do the words 'career choice' mean to you?
 - What do you think of when you hear the term 'career choice'?
 - What has been the biggest 'career choice' that you have had to make so far?
- Imagine where you would like to be in five years' time and how does it relate to your current educational choice of psychology now?
 - What factors do you think have influenced or still may be influencing your career choice?
- Psychology Honours students sometimes specialise in one of the psychology master fields, start working or try to study a new discipline. What would your ideal future plans for next year be?
 - How have you come to consider (the choices they have spoken about in the previous question)?
 - What do you think may facilitate or hinder your goals?
- If you could go back in time would you still have chosen the same academic path that has led you to where you are today?