

**Career and identity as flexible resources in talk: A  
discourse analysis of graduate employees' accounts  
of work experience**



By Christine Coupland BSc

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, October, 2001

## acknowledgements

I should like to acknowledge the influence and inspiration of people who have contributed to this work. Most directly my supervisors, Professor Kenneth Starkey and Dr Gill Musson who have provided, through their own style of guidance, an environment in which the project has been able to develop. My undergraduate tutor and subsequent colleague, Dr Elizabeth Stokoe, who showed me how to think differently and inspired me with the confidence to do it. Finally, my father, William Thompson, in memory of his confidence in my ability, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

## Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	8
1.2 The objectives of the thesis.....	8
1.3 Why study career?.....	9
1.4 Why study graduates?.....	10
1.5 The relationship between career, identity and personal change.....	10
1.6 Theoretical and methodological approaches.....	12
1.7 Contribution of the thesis.....	12
1.8 Outline of the thesis.....	14
1.9 Chapter summary.....	15
<b>2.0 Exploring the career literature</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	16
2.2 Career and the Chicago school of sociology.....	17
2.3 Career, the fifty years.....	26
2.3.1 Career as structure.....	27
2.3.2 Career as strategy.....	33
2.3.3 Career as a construct.....	39
2.3.4 Career and graduates.....	50
2.4 Chapter summary.....	56
<b>3.0 Constructionism and identity</b> .....	<b>58</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	58
3.2 Mainstream approaches to identity.....	58
3.2.1 Role theory.....	60
3.2.2 Social identity theory.....	62
3.3 Post-structuralist approaches to identity.....	64
3.4 Social constructionist approaches to identity.....	66
3.4.1 The rule-following agent.....	66
3.4.2 Identity and narrative.....	68
3.4.3 Ideology and rhetoric.....	70
3.5 Chapter summary.....	73
<b>4.0 Methodological considerations</b> .....	<b>76</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	76
4.2 Theoretical assumptions.....	77
4.2.1 Introduction.....	77
4.2.2 Language as social action.....	77
4.2.3 Discourse analysis.....	79
4.2.4 Ideological dilemmas.....	84
4.2.5 Validity, reliability and generalizability.....	84
4.2.6 Theory building.....	88
4.3 The context of the study.....	88
4.3.1 Introduction.....	88
4.3.2 The company.....	89
4.3.3 The graduate-training scheme.....	90
4.3.4 My association with the setting.....	91
4.3.5 Senior management contact.....	94
4.3.6 The recruitment literature.....	94
4.3.7 The current climate of the company.....	95

4.4	Data and analysis.....	95
4.4.1	Introduction.....	95
4.4.2	Data sources.....	96
4.4.3	Semi-structured interviews.....	96
4.4.4	Rationale for the selection of participants.....	97
4.4.5	Data collection.....	99
4.4.5.1	Audio and video data recording and transcription.....	102
4.4.5.2	Transcription conventions used in this study.....	104
4.4.6	The analysis.....	105
4.4.6.1	The development of analytic foci.....	106
4.4.6.2	Steps taken in analysis.....	107
4.5	Ethical considerations.....	110
4.6	Advantages and limitations of this approach to analysis.....	111
4.7	Chapter summary.....	114
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Progression and portfolios.....</b>	<b>116</b>
5.1	Introduction.....	116
5.2	Progression and development.....	118
5.2.1	Development as a reward.....	119
5.2.2	Development as a requirement for progression.....	128
5.2.3	Development as an assessed procedure.....	132
5.3	Portfolio people.....	139
5.3.1	Culture 'reasons' for leaving the company.....	140
5.3.2	Negotiating family, work-life balance.....	143
5.4	Chapter summary.....	149
<b>Career: definition, denial and management.....</b>		<b>152</b>
6.1	Introduction.....	152
6.2	Career in the context of the company recruitment literature.....	153
6.3	Career, definition and denial.....	154
6.4	Accounts of consistency.....	165
6.5	Managing the career.....	168
6.6	Chapter summary.....	174
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Identity as a resource in career talk.....</b>	<b>178</b>
7.1	Introduction.....	178
7.2	Repertoires of 'type'.....	180
7.3	Repertoires of the split, or partial, self.....	190
7.4	A Repertoire of roles and 'performing' identity.....	198
7.5	Chapter summary.....	208
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Career and change talk.....</b>	<b>213</b>
8.1	Introduction.....	213
8.2	Constructions of similarity.....	214
8.3	Constructions of difference.....	222
8.4	Talk of socialisation.....	229
8.5	Repertoires of self-initiated change.....	238
8.6	Chapter summary.....	245
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Discussion.....</b>	<b>250</b>
9.1	Introduction.....	250
9.2	General findings.....	250
9.3	Implications for theory.....	252
9.3.1	Implications for career theory.....	252
9.3.2	Implications for identity theory.....	258

9.4	Implications for practice.....	262
9.5	Future directions.....	268
9.6	Chapter summary.....	270
<b>10.0</b>	<b>Methodological reflections and findings.....</b>	<b>272</b>
10.1	Introduction.....	272
10.2	Methodological reflections.....	272
10.3	The interview situation.....	275
10.4	Chapter summary.....	280
<b>11.0</b>	<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>281</b>
<b>References.....</b>		<b>283</b>
Appendix 1.....		304
Appendix 2.....		305
Appendix 3.....		306
Appendix 4.....		307
Appendix 5.....		308
Appendix 6.....		309
Appendix 7.....		310

## **Abstract**

'Career', as a term, has been described as difficult to define yet frequently used, as if it is commonly understood what it means. Its relevance as a topic of investigation lies in its prevalence in people's accounts of themselves and their work. There has been a growing awareness of the constructed nature of the term 'career' which merits new empirical research. In addition, the relationship between identity and career from a constructionist perspective has rarely been explored. In the present thesis an empirical investigation of graduate employees' talk about workplace experiences aims to add to understanding about career and identity as resources which may be drawn on in interaction.

In keeping with the social constructionist perspective of the thesis, a discourse analytic methodology was adopted. The data was selected from transcripts of fifty-four interviews, a group meeting with graduate employees and the recruitment literature of one, large, well known, high street retailer.

Given the assumption that career is drawn on as a resource in talk we see that it functions in order to account for work-appropriate behaviour. The implications of the findings are relevant to both theory and practice. In theoretical terms, in contrast to much of the previous work in the field, the foregrounding of the language of career and identity provides new insight into commonly held assumptions about meaning. In this way the findings of the study extend previous notions of career, for example through the exploration of how the participants constructed differentiation as one part of a tension between two desirable states,

fitting in yet standing out. In addition, the exploration of how identity, or ways of talking about the self, is deployed in interaction highlights a new and important theoretical area for future research.

In practical terms the findings are of relevance to business and individuals. For business, a focus on the constmctions of development, self, skill and career highlights one perspective of the relationship between the individual and the employing company. For individuals the findings have emancipatory potential as they illustrate how alternatives to a dominant understanding about career and progression may be made plausible in interaction.

# **Chapter One**

## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I will outline the main objectives of the thesis, the aim of the study and the research questions. The rationale for studying the career talk of graduate employees will be presented. In addition, the relationship between identity, personal change and career will be considered. Following some discussion of the theoretical perspective adopted in the thesis, the theoretical and practical contributions will be proposed and the role of myself, as researcher, will be acknowledged. Finally, an outline of the chapters of the thesis will be given.

### **1.2 The objectives of the thesis**

The research question that guided the present study initially arose from a broad interest in people at the beginning of their working lives. Other studies of career, from a similar perspective, have focused on people who have already spent considerable time at work and whose accounts are characterised by retrospective rationalisation of past experiences (e.g. Linde, 1993). In contrast, the participants in the present study were at a very early stage in their working lives. There was an expectation that this would evoke a different version of career. Another broad interest that guided the research was an interest in how people talk about themselves as people who work. From the perspective that identity is something that we do rather than something that we are I identified a need to explore how career and identity are made relevant in talk about the workplace.

The aim of the study is:

To analyse graduate trainees' talk about career and to explore how identity is used in talk.

The aim will be addressed by exploring the following research questions:

1. How are 'common sense' notions of career drawn on in talk?
2. In what way is identity constructed and deployed in the talk?
3. How are the notions of career and change related to identity construction during interaction?

The aim, through the research questions, was to enable issues, within a broad framework, to emerge as relevant throughout the process of data collection and analysis

### 1.3 Why study career?

The concept of career has been studied from within several disciplines, each bringing its own understanding as to what relevance the term has for individuals at work. The Chicago school of sociologists set in motion an understanding about career which is re-emerging as providing a useful framework from which to address the fluid, multi-perspective, post-modernist issues which are influencing the meaning of career today. Although in the intervening fifty years or so the study of career has largely been carried out in a modernist tradition, there has

more recently been a move to explore career from a constructionist perspective. The present thesis intends to contribute to understanding gained from this perspective.

#### **1.4 Why study graduates?**

Although the Chicago school provides a historical argument as to the importance of the study of career, the present thesis acknowledges their important contribution and moves the focus of analysis to how people talk about their careers. From a general interest in studying how people at work talk about themselves, the category of graduate employees was selected for investigation. This group of people appeared to be positioned at a time of transition. That is not to say that career, or progression, would not emerge as an issue of relevance in interaction with other groups of people. Rather, 'common understandings' about graduates led me to predict that having a career may be regarded as important by the participants in the study. While acknowledging that the selection of this group will have resulted in a particular version of what career may mean in contemporary life, it is this version that will be examined for the understanding that may be gained. Other versions may be explored in future research.

#### **1.5 The relationship between career, identity and personal change**

Numerous theorists, beginning with those of the Chicago school, have investigated the relationship between career and identity. In the present thesis this too will be explored in the talk of the participants. There are particular ways of

talking about the self, or drawing on identity, that are accepted as 'common sense'. However, those that prevail in Western communities differ from other communities. Those that prevail today may be different to how the self could be talked about in pre-enlightenment times. This indicates a cultural and historical specificity to understandings surrounding how we talk about ourselves and our career, which is reflected in the assumptions and findings of the study. Taking the perspective that both identity and career are resources to be constructed and drawn on in talk brings commonly held assumptions to light. This enables a focus on how these assumptions function in talk, that is to blame, justify or legitimise an account. Talk about the self is located in conventions of discourse, which are embedded in wider concerns. One aim of the present study is to make visible these conventions, while exploring the rhetorical function they serve in the interactions.

Career, identity and change have been described as interconnected concepts where career has been referred to as a mechanism of socialisation. That is, norms and values at work become 'internalised' leading to individual change, according to the Chicago sociologists (Barley, 1989). Although other, more critical, writers have questioned 'internalisation', the connection between career, identity and personal change has been acknowledged (e.g. Fournier, 1997). This is also attended to in the present thesis by considering how the participants talk about 'change' since joining the company in the study.

## **1.6 Theoretical and methodological approaches**

The approach adopted in the thesis operates within a framework of social constructionism (e.g. Berger and Luckman, 1966 and Gergen, 1985, 1999, 2001). It derives its philosophical underpinning from Wittgenstein's (1967) notion of language as a game and Austin's (1962) speech act theory. The methodology of the present study comprises a combination of approaches. Firstly, there is a critical discursive psychological perspective (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996a and Wetherell, 1998). Secondly, there is a conversation analytic approach to the analysis in the form of 'conversation analytic constructionism' (Buttny, 1993). This approach derives from Sacks (1992) and draws on Garfinkel's ethnomethodology (Heritage, 1984). Some attention has been paid to narrative analysis, specifically derived from studies of career stories (e.g. Linde, 1993). Finally, the rhetorical function of the talk has been examined through the exploration of ideology and ideological dilemmas (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton and Radley, 1988 and Billig, 1996).

## **1.7 Contribution of the thesis**

The thesis is intended to contribute in both theoretical and practical terms. Theoretically, a synthesis between the methodology and the context of the empirical study raises fresh questions about career and identity. By making visible what we accept as 'just natural' in talk about these core concepts of the social sciences, greater potential for discussion may be created. In addition, the findings of the study have practical implications for both businesses and individuals.

In specific terms, referring directly to the research questions, firstly, 'common sense' notions of career are drawn on in talk to do discursive business. My focus on the tools and practices of interaction within a broad concern for career as an overarching concept situates the enquiry at a micro level. By focusing on the role of specific constmctive practices I extend the understanding gained from post-stmcturalist studies of career, while sharing their assumptions regarding the role of language. Secondly, from the perspective that identity is something we 'do' in talk, an exploration of identity constmction and mobilisation in talk about career and progression at work makes visible the practices of talking about the self and their function in interaction. Finally, the third research question enables a focus on how talk about work experiences opens up an opportunity to talk about personal change in the context of a career account. Talk of adjustment is related to constmctions of a company socialisation process in complex ways.

However, the theoretical assumptions that guide the research preclude attempting to create, or add to, grand theories. The aim instead is to consider the specific context of the workplace in the study and the discourses drawn on in the interactions with myself as researcher. My role in the research, from the co-constmction of the participants' accounts to the construction of the persuasive narrative of this thesis, is acknowledged along with my preconceptions and prejudices which have operated in and out of awareness throughout the period of research. Nevertheless, I intended to produce a credible analysis of work and selves in the context of the study as an example of contemporary corporate conditions.

## 1.8 Outline of the thesis

In chapter two a critical review of career literature is presented. This functions to both position the study in an ongoing discussion and to make visible prevalent understandings which surround career. In chapter three a discussion of the theoretical approach of the thesis, especially with regard to understanding about identity, is outlined. This is necessarily selective but works to position the approach of the thesis with regard to other theoretical stances. In chapter four I describe the methods of data collection and analysis and consider how the theoretical perspective of the study implies a particular style of research methodology.

Chapter five is the first of four analysis chapters. In this chapter I attend to how 'development' and leaving the company have emerged as issues from the interactions. In chapter six I explore how career is defined and denied by the participants and how 'managing your own career' functions rhetorically in the talk. Chapter seven is the analysis chapter that specifically attends to how identity is constructed and deployed in talk about career. Commonly held assumptions about ways of talking about the self have been made visible and analysed for how they provide distance for the speaker in interaction. Chapter eight is the final analysis chapter in which I explore how the participants talk about changing since joining the company in the study. Constructions of differentiation and talk of socialisation are emergent features from the analysis.

In chapter nine I summarise and discuss the key findings of the study. In addition, the practical implications of the study are considered. As an interdisciplinary

project, which embraces theoretical and methodological considerations from both psychology and sociology, the context of the workplace situates its relevance in a business school. The applied aspect of the thesis has implications for practice. In addition, I propose how future research can move on from the thesis. In the penultimate chapter, chapter ten, I assess the research procedure and discuss some important methodological findings. Finally, in chapter eleven I draw the thesis to its conclusion.

## **1.9 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have set the scene for the forthcoming chapters. This necessarily brief outline provides a guide to the content of the thesis. My intention is to provide a critical examination of this unusual synthesis between theory, method and context in the following chapters. In the next chapter I critically examine the career literature with a view to situating the present study in an ongoing discussion about career.

## Chapter Two

### 2.0 Exploring the career literature

#### 2.1 Introduction

Research questions:

1. How are 'common sense' notions of career drawn on in talk?
2. In what way is identity constructed and deployed in the talk?
3. How are the notions of career and change related to identity construction during interaction?

When contemplating this kind of literature review I am faced with a dilemma. Tradition suggests that the present work is positioned in contrast with preceding work in the area in order to illustrate what has gone before and how the present work offers something different. In order to look at the very beginning of the academic study of career it is necessary to travel backwards for 50 years to the Chicago school of sociology. However, during much of the intervening time period research has generally followed a nomothetic approach from a modernist, realist perspective which renders its general assumptions problematic to those adopted in the present research. Recent reviews of the area have acknowledged that the changing concept of career now requires different methods of exploration to those used formerly in order to gain understanding (e.g. Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999).

In order to attend to these issues a critical review of the literature on career will be undertaken in this chapter. This will necessarily be selective, focusing on work of particular relevance to the present study. The review will begin with 'career and the Chicago school of sociologists' and will highlight the relevance of this early approach to careers to the concerns of the present study. Research over the last 50 years has been marked with attending to either an organisational or an individual perspective. Some of the key writers in this area will be discussed and their contribution to our present day understanding of career will be critiqued. This will be organised under four headings. Firstly 'career as structure', followed by 'career as strategy'. Literature that attends to 'career as a construct' will be considered as the immediate background for the present research. Finally, in 'career and graduates', I will briefly review the literature specific to the context of the present study, in order to provide an illustration of contemporary perspectives on graduate career which may be prevalent in the prior academic institutions and the present workplace of the participants in this study.

## **2.2 Career and the Chicago school of sociology**

The University of Chicago was the first American University to establish a department of sociology. By the 1920's members of the department were conducting ethnographic studies of the people in the city of Chicago. Although these investigations were based on several topics, the study of social deviance was most influential in the development of a sociology of careers (Barley, 1989). 'Life history' was developed as a methodology to study "deviants'" own perspectives of their situation, for example homelessness, prostitution and delinquency. Career, as a sociological concept, was associated with the

situational, relational and chronological detail of a person's life by Clifford Shaw in his book 'The Jack Roller: A Delinquent Boy's Own Story' (1930). In this and other early studies life histories were viewed as documents of 'careers'. Although these sociologists adopted an ethnographic approach, a theoretical framework emerged whose concepts were role, self, identity, institution and career (Barley, 1989). However, they have been criticised for applying career to a much wider range of situations than is currently considered, for example ditch diggers and marijuana users (Wilensky, 1960). In addition Wilensky argued that there is a need to distinguish between the traditional, sociological concept of life career and the contemporary notion of work career (as a subset of the former). He criticised the Chicago sociologists' broad approach to career: "Let us define career in structural terms. A career is a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered, more or less predictable, sequence" (Wilensky, 1961: 523). However, the Chicago sociologists argued that from their broad perspective we can talk of the sequencing of an individual's life (roles and experiences) in a specified social environment over time (Barley, 1989).

The Chicago sociologists were further criticised for their 'theoretical woolly-headedness' which has been defended as due to a concern with premature generalisation rather than the result of 'muddled' minds (Rock, 1979). In retrospect, Wilensky was voicing concerns that have been adopted by the majority of studies of career since the time of the Chicago sociologists, and hence his definition has become a dominant 'understanding' of what a career is or should be. However, Hughes (1958) did not see career as only related to a series of jobs;

work careers were viewed as a subset of the term's proper domain, i.e. insanity, illness or family life as a mutually contingent set of careers. In the light of today's questioning of recent approaches to career and social science investigations generally, an exploration of this early approach will be useful.

Although ostensibly looking at career, these academics were actually using career as an analytic tool, a lens through which to look at institutions. They proposed that careers fuse objective and subjective; they entail status passages; careers are properties of collectives, and careers link individuals to the social structure (Barley, 1989). These four related themes will be explored in some detail and related to the present study.

Firstly, careers fuse objective and subjective. Modern studies have focused on either one or the other, with a few exceptions (for example Schein, 1984 and Van Maanen, 1977). Generally, psychologists look at the individual's subjective interpretations and sociologists look at the objective career (Barley, 1989). To bring this up to date, today's questioning of 'objectivity' in social science research requires a more meaningful definition of this aspect of career. The Chicago school described career as 'Janus like' where one can orient attention simultaneously in two directions, where 'subjective' refers to the individual interpretation of their career and 'objective' refers to its structural aspect (Barley, 1989). This structure takes the form of positions and statuses, which may serve as markers of a person's movement through life (Goffman, 1961). Studies since the Chicago school have referred to the latter as the 'organisational focus'. As over the last 20 years career theory has been dominated by organisational concerns,

some academics have argued that it is time for a revision of our understanding of the subjective career as a first step in redefining the concept of career (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998). Hughes' original conception was that these two faces were inseparable and only by attending to both can an analyst access social processes. In the present research, by attending to the participants' use of the term career there is a return to Hughes's original notion. The social and the individual are caught up in one another in talk, each shaped by the other

The second concept is that careers entail status passages. Although this term was borrowed from anthropology where it referred to rituals which were undertaken at fixed times in a life span, for example birth, puberty or marriage, the Chicago sociologists adopted the use of the term to attend to the duality of career. This duality consisted of role and identity change. They subscribed to Mead's (1934) notion that a taking on of a role included a 'making' of a role, which attended to some individual variation where roles emerge in an ongoing process of negotiation, "a conversation of gestures". In this way roles referred to the setting's interaction structure and identity referred to the subjective experience of that situated being. However, in the present study how the participants talk about 'role' and its function in the talk are of interest where 'identity' is considered as a tool and an achievement in the talk. Nevertheless, the present study also works on the assumption that these concepts are inseparable. Furthermore, the Chicago sociologists saw vertical mobility as but one type of movement and argued that the subjective interpretation of the career was where understanding may be gained of the individual/institution intersection. In addition, the Chicago school proposed that careers were a mechanism of individual change, with a mirror-like

relationship between role and identity. In this way career was regarded as a key mechanism for socialisation. They suggested that as careers unfold, different roles will involve change in identity, through change in the way we present ourselves to others, are treated by others and interact with others (Barley, 1989). In contrast to this, from the approach adopted in the present study careers may be regarded as constructions of norms used in a particular setting to perform a particular function. Fournier (1997) argued, from a **post-structuralist** perspective, that although careers are a mechanism of change and act as a lens through which graduates construe or read norms etc., they do not necessarily internalise these norms or expectations, instead they subsume them in their own accounts of organisational 'reality'.

The third concept relates to understanding careers as properties of collectives. This attends to the individual as a social being rather than a psychological one. Instead of looking for **intra-individual** explanations the focus moves to inter-individual; this aligns with the present research.

"as social beings persons are less defined by their uniqueness than by their membership of some category of actors that populate some setting." (Goffman, 1961: 127)

The above quote from Goffman illustrates how careers were something individuals experienced but were not something completely of the individual's making; options and choices were always limited by contextual possibilities. However, the Chicago sociologists claimed that career lines can only exist when others have followed the same path and that these provide a reference group and terminology for staking down one's identity. This assumption is questionable

from the perspective of the present research. It implies that progress is in a defined direction, which is socially understood to be 'better' than other directions and has no explanation for 'new' career routes. In addition, it appears to suggest that identity is to do with a taking on rather than drawing from many repertoires which may be available. As an alternative argument, we may draw on identities, which support alternative choices from 'the one true way' of vertical progression. Indeed it is in the light of these 'fractures' to a coherent career story that identities may be mobilised. However, the value of Goffman's and the Chicago sociologists interpretation lies in the illustration that there is a dominant understanding of career in any workplace situation which may be drawn on even when challenging its relevance to the individual who is talking about their own career.

The final concept refers to how careers link the individual and the social structure. In contrast to the notion that institutions should be understood in terms of how they influence people's lives, Hughes saw careers as a two-way relationship, shaping people's lives and simultaneously ensuring the existence of the institution itself, as they cannot be separated from the lives they shaped (Barley, 1989).

"A study of careers. . . . may be expected to reveal the nature and 'working constitution' of a society. Institutions are but forms in which the collective behaviour and collective action of people go on" (Hughes 1937: 67)

This concept is addressed in the present study by regarding structure as something people attend to in their talk. A concern with interacting in a plausible, authentic manner is one way that talk is structured. In addition, as the participants talk about their work experiences, the constraints and opportunities that they interpret

and construct for the interviewer are contextually relevant to the institution that is their workplace, yet at the same time they draw on resources from beyond the immediate context.

So, the study of careers was said to provide access to the empirical relationship between social action and social structure. However, the Chicago sociologists' ethnographic approach to studying particular social settings and their relegation of formal theory to secondary status meant that their portrait of careers was never taken to be part of a whole picture of society. Later sociologists have taken the Chicago sociologists' conception of career and applied it more generally in the form of, for example, structuration theory (Giddens, 1976, 1984). Furthermore, Collin (1998) proposed that Hughes' (1937) talk of the individual's "moving perspective" on their life and its meaning can not be studied by the nomothetic forms of research favoured by Western science:

"Unless the subjective experience of career is also recognised theory is robbed of an opportunity to conceptualise the multidimensional quality of career. Interpretative approaches in this area are very valuable because they allow both the contextualisation of career and an understanding of its subjective dimension." (Collin, 1998: 416).

Finally, in a recent review of work on career, Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, (1999) proposed that the Chicago school used the concept of 'career' to explore individual identity and social institutions, work and other experiences. The authors further argued for a need to move towards the perspective favoured by the Chicago school where careers were seen as a mediating force between the institutional realm and the day to day interactions of social life.

Critics of the Chicago sociologists have argued that they overemphasised subjectivity, that people's perceptions of careers inaccurately reflect 'objective reality' and interpretations are bound to specific contexts (Rosenbaum, 1984). In response to this it can be argued that what it is important to understand is whether such interpretations incite individuals to accept or resist the institution. In addition, other commentators have proposed that the accuracy of career accounts is not as relevant as the way their themes articulate with the surrounding social order (Schein, 1984).

Furthermore, it is more usual for individuals to belong to several institutions simultaneously, for example occupational and organisational, each providing competing schemes for understanding work from which conflicting interpretations may arise (Schein, 1978). In the present study the talk of the participants provides an arena for situated social practices in which, although within a particular context, the company in the study, they draw on resources from beyond the workplace in order to make sense for an outsider. This perhaps illustrates that the number of institutions from which we draw meaning can never be ascertained. Individuals in any workplace bring their own experiences and histories from which they draw on to account for themselves in interaction.

In consideration of how careers function as mechanisms for linking persons to institutions, the subjective dimension attends to individuals' own perspectives towards their careers. This is the symbolic interactionist perspective, where action is not determined by structures, rather forces and structures are to be mediated in their impact by processes of interaction (Rock, 1979). Hughes (1937)

said of social interaction, that people are constructors of their own actions and meanings, while structures constrain and enable action in experiencing them. The approach of the present research, while having much in common with the symbolic interactionist perspective, does differ in two quite fundamental ways. Firstly, although symbolic interactionism emphasises the relational aspect of self and other it retains an element of individualism, whereas the present study attends to inter-individual explanations. Secondly, although there is a suggestion of role making rather than role taking there is a socially deterministic streak in symbolic interactionism which presumes that how we think about the world and self is ultimately determined by others (Gergen, 1999). However, with relation to understanding career the questions required by research include the need to ask how workers experience their work and careers. This is addressed in the present study.

To sum up, the foregoing descriptions of the Chicago school's approach to career have been punctuated by modern day academics' arguments, who have drawn on their concepts in more recent work.

"Career is not a universal construct, it is not individual but contextual and relational not traditionally developmental but protean. This recognition indicates that the orderly form of career which has existed over the last 50 years or so has itself been the aberration." (Collin 1998: 421).

The present study is using the historic significance of the Chicago school by drawing on similarities in its assumptions. However I acknowledge this heritage largely as a starting point in order to explore contemporary meanings of career as deployed and drawn on by the participants in the context of the present study.

### **2.3 Career, the fifty years**

Since the Chicago sociologists began to look at career there has been a large amount of research generated on the topic. Periodically a review of the situation has been published indicating both an ongoing interest and perhaps a need to draw together the strands of the otherwise fragmented research. In this section of the chapter on the career literature I will look at the trends in the study of career over the period from the early Chicago school to the present day. Following the interpretative theme I have organised the material loosely according to different interpretations of career which have emerged. Although it is acknowledged that some research may belong in one or more of the groupings I have created, this approach facilitates a focus on how career has been explored over the period.

I have divided this section into four distinct parts. Firstly, 'career as structure' where the organisational focus is considered. Secondly, 'career as strategy' which focuses on the subjective, or individual view. Thirdly, 'career as a construct' which looks at research based on narrative, post-structuralist and constructionist research. Finally, 'career and graduates', which although not strictly an interpretation of career enables some exploration of relevant work in similar contexts to the present study.

Work in the area of career has been approached from within several disciplines: psychology, both organisational and counselling; sociology; organisation theory and management studies and anthropology (Ornstein and Isabella, 1993, Collin, 1998). Each discipline has asked different questions with their research and hence

multiple foci have been developed. However, their theories and research have largely shared the same basic assumptions of Western scientific orthodoxy, that is a positivistic philosophical position (Collin, 1998). This has resulted in a certain historically and culturally located view of the person. These assumptions guided research until the mid 1970's (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998), when the adequacy of positivism and its research methodologies began to be questioned due to a new thinking in social sciences (Collin, 1998). However, even fairly recent overviews have identified a need for some change to the way careers are studied (Harmon, 1994). In this review I will consider some of the areas of career study relevant to the present research. This is in order to provide a prevailing background of understanding upon which the participants in the present study may draw in their accounts.

### **2.3.1 Career as structure**

Career has been defined as an interstitial concept residing between the individual and collective levels of analysis (Bailyn, 1989). In addition, others have argued that a key aspect of career research is about understanding the relationship between the individual and the workplace (Arthur, Hall and Lawrence, 1989). Interestingly, Omstein and Isabella (1993) used the concepts of courtship, marriage and divorce to organise their review of career research, indicating an intimate relationship between the individual and the workplace. Career has been described as having an internal and external focus which represent a person's movement through a social structure over time (Hall, 1987). In this way it forms a link between individuals and institutions, enabling a study of the institutions and their members through the vehicle of career (Hall, 1987). More recently Weick

(1995) proposed that we should see the workplace as the dynamic nexus of interacting career behaviours as individuals enact (imposition of individual will where choice is possible) their careers.

From an organisational perspective, career, as a structure is a useful concept for planning. Organisations' senior managers are able to move valuable people through a series of planned positions so that they may, ostensibly, 'learn the ropes', that is, develop the knowledge and skills required in order to occupy management positions (Herriot, 1992). In this way career is seen as a logical sequence which legitimises the movement of people through managerial levels in order to meet the future needs of the employer, (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998).

Bailyn (1989) has argued that the objective, or external, career is part of the social control of society, culturally bound and rhetorically reinforced, part of the institutional order. Bell and Staw (1989) writing at the same time added that the picture that emerges is of the organisation as dominant. The individual is shown at best as a planner but more usually as a responder. An example of a model of career which focused on the dominance of the organisation is the tournament model (Rosenbaum, 1984). This is where successive cohorts are tested in a series of assignments where the 'winners' are allowed to remain in competition for a hierarchical position. Although critiqued as this kind of system discourages risk taking and encourages conformity (Hall, 1987), it denotes a particular kind of relationship between the individual and the organisation. In Everts' (1992) review of the reification of dimensions of career, she proposed that immediately

following the Chicago school's attention to the subjective view, in the 1950's and 1960's, the notion of careers was dominated with career structures and ladders which provided a 'norm' for the individual.

"Although individuals can choose not to climb the ladders they affect actions, individuals perceive them as having objective structure, as operating within a structure, in this way career structures are reproduced in the minds, actions and interpretations of the career builders themselves." (Evetts, 1992: 1).

However, the basic assumption that an individual is motivated to move up the corporate ladder may be primarily a Western value (Laurent, 1983). Gunz (1989) identified two distinct categories or levels of analysis of career. Firstly, at the organisational level, career may be seen as a route, or structure, but also as a process whereby the organisation renews itself. Secondly, at the individual or subjective level or category, career can be seen as a series of negotiations of constraints made by people between different opportunities offered to them. Evetts added to Gunz's levels a third which linked individuals' action with the system by arguing that career structures were actually the outcome of individual strategies (Evetts, 1992). This illustrated an understanding of a two-way relationship between the individual and the workplace.

Over the past 30 years there has been much development and elaboration of career structures both within organisations and within professions (Evetts, 1992). For example, the suggestion has been made that the ladder as a metaphor should be replaced with the climbing frame to allow for a framework which "captures the richness of organisational careers and which is not deterministic" (Gunz, 1989: 234). Much of the work at the organisational level of analysis has been criticised

(Dex, 1985). For example, implicit in the models is the assumption that the 'normal' career is the one that meets the organisations' requirement for replacement and flow of people, thus creating an 'abnormal' career as a deviation from the norm. The models also worked on the assumption that individuals would all want to work towards the promotional goal (Scase and Goffee, 1989).

Early career, on entry to the organisation, is characterised by a process of socialisation which impacts on individual adjustment. Socialisation has been defined as the interactions through which the newcomer learns the appropriate behaviours for success in the company (Louis, 1980). The connection between career and socialisation has already been discussed in the section regarding the Chicago sociologists' contribution to career theory. More recently it has been argued that the creation of a particular culture through socialisation is a source of competitive advantage for most organisations (Bamey, 1991). However, this notion of acculturated employees presents an oversimplified account of the newcomer socialisation process. Many of the topics in the career literature, for example job transitions, mentoring and coaching, are specific facets of the socialisation process (Hall, 1987). In this way career can be regarded as a lifelong bundle of socialisation experiences.

There has been a great deal of research in the area of socialisation (Louis, 1980, Schein, 1978, Van Mannen and Schein, 1979, Wanous, 1992 and Ashforth and Saks, 1996). The studies cover various aspects, which include transitions from outsider to insider, tactics of newcomer socialisation and outcomes for the individual and the organisation. This has relevance for the present study as

socialisation is explored as an issue raised by the participants. It is not, however, analysed with an aim to add to theory about newcomer socialisation, rather to consider how it is made relevant as an issue for newcomers in their talk about workplace experiences.

The majority of studies on career have until recently been based on the careers of white, middle class men (Brown, 1990). Exceptions to this have described the group being studied in terms of its deviation from the norm, i.e. the white middle class male. For example a special issue of the Journal of Organizational Behaviour was produced which concentrated on the careers of black professionals (Omstein and Isabella, 1993). This issue, it was claimed, aimed at providing a greater understanding of the experiences of black professionals. However, by using race as a determinant, this in itself is an argument for difference. Furthermore, the language of the academic literature works in such a way as to perpetuate these differences. For example, in a review of this area Omstein and Isabella suggested; "Certainly more work needs to be done to better understand the career experiences of women, blacks and other minority members." (1993: 260).

Such groupings, while motivated by a desire to understand difference, actually contribute to a legitimated, constructed difference when published in academic literature. This argument also applies to gender issues and career research. Much research in this area has concentrated on dualisms which perpetuate the notion of the goal oriented man and the communion oriented woman, for example (Marshall, 1989). However, there has been a call to abandon all masculine and

feminine essentialist accounts of careers. This is not to argue for a gender-neutral career approach, but instead for career as an outcome of historical processes (Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997). This is not to say that gender does not play a part in the workplace, rather its embedded nature renders its extraction for the purposes of study problematic. However, the organisation as a "contested terrain" suggests that, despite the sedimented success of past dominant groups in 'structures', conflicts and tensions may transform organisation which in turn affects future possible ways of organising (Halford, Savage and Witz, 1997).

It is recognised that this poses a problem to anyone wishing to research 'omitted' groups.

"Choosing an oppressed and omitted group for study does not necessarily alter the kinds of knowledge that are produced. Many studies of the psychology of women, for example, have reaffirmed rather than challenged the patriarchal status quo." (Mama, 1995: 66)

Although it is not within the scope of the present study to investigate these issues, their importance is acknowledged as an area for future research.

Present day careers are characterised by high mobility (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). Periods of non-movement have been called 'plateaux' which have led to the re-definition of this as a time of re-generation, for which mentors were devised (Marshall, 1989). Mentoring was designed in order to intervene in the employer / employee relationship so the mentor could be of assistance to the plateaued employee. Flatter organisations have contributed to this plateauing effect (Herriott, and Pemberton, 1995). The changing business environment and

flatter organisations have led to a questioning of the emphasis on hierarchical progression and of the career concept itself, in terms of the appropriateness of the bureaucratic notion of a work career (Herriot, 1992). However, others have argued that the traditional career is not yet dead (Guest and MacKenzie-Davey, 1996).

In summary, in this section I have considered some aspects of an organisational focus on career research. For the past 40 years writers have written of matching organisation and individual needs through career structures (Herriot, 1992). From the organisational perspective the tournament model (Rosenbaum, 1984) better sums up how career structures have been designed to meet organisational needs, as a method of ensuring the survival of the fittest (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998). In the following section I will consider how careers have been examined from the individual's perspective.

### **2.3.2 Career as strategy**

Studies of careers have been described as being able to be placed on a continuum with the individual at one end and institutions (labour markets, family, culture) at the other (Hall, 1987). The career processes having been examined using differing levels of analysis. Career as strategy, as the heading of this section, refers to how using an individual level of analysis assumes a proactive or agentic subject. An early definition of career attends to this subjective view:

"the career is the individually perceived sequence of attitudes and behaviours associated with work related experiences and activities over the span of the persons' life." (Hall, 1976: 4)

In a review of careers carried out in 1989 one of the contributors argued that the individual perspective had been examined to the neglect of the environment (Bailyn, 1989). Conversely, another contributor argued; "Person variables have been given far less consideration in recent work" (Bell and Staw, 1989: 232). As the publication of these two articles was in the same volume it is evident that drawing on differing accounts of career enables, or perhaps requires, a reconstruction of the immediate academic context in which the account takes place in order to present a persuasive story. Bell and Staw (1989) further identified a disparity between the popular and academic literature of the time. In the popular literature individuals were encouraged to take charge of their careers:

"You can create opportunity for the future by putting yourself in charge of your career. Your initial commitment is to take full control of your actions" (Greco, 1975: 19)

Academic literature, however, portrayed the individual as more passive:

"Like a sculptor's mould, certain forms of socialisation can produce remarkably similar outcomes, no matter what individual ingredients are used to fill the mould" (Van Maanen and Schein, 1979: 231)

This indicated a concern over the amount of control that individuals may, (should?) exert over their work lives. In addition, although over the last 40 years or so writers have espoused matching employer and employee needs, the needs of individuals and employers differ with regard to career issues. Herriot (1992) proposed that these differing needs should be matched in order to generate mutual benefit. However, it has been questioned whether individuals are able to bring about a mutually beneficial contract (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998).

The subjective career is the individual's interpretation of events, which demonstrates 'success' as an individually defined phenomenon (Stebbins, 1970). Although this attends to meaning as constructed between people, physical structures are experienced as constraint or facilitator. The analysis of the subjective career does not presume promotion or progress is sought, rather attention has been paid to how structures are negotiated in the course of a career (Woods, 1983). In addition, although the outcomes may be unplanned, symbolic interactionists have deployed 'strategy', as a term used to describe individual career behaviour.

Hall's (1976) notion of the self-directed or protean career has emerged. The 'protean' career describes how individuals may use skills such as self-reflexivity, learning from experience in order to see the self in relation to learning (Hall, 1986). The protean career has implications for the experience and construction of the individual: "As new career options open up boundaries around work, so also will they open up boundaries of identity" (Mirvis and Hall, 1994: 372). The notion that an individual will have several careers, involving periods of personal re-invention is within the Zeitgeist of today, without being new (Gunz, Evans and Jalland, 2000). However, as career describes a relationship between individuals, their work and the work context, the protean or person driven career should not be exaggerated at the expense of the social context (Mirvis and Hall, 1996). As Goffee and Jones state "(I)ndividuals make their own careers but they do not make them entirely under conditions of their own choosing" (2000: 271). In

addition, although the protean career appears to celebrate uniqueness, it promotes the self-sufficient American individualism of the entrepreneur (Richardson, 2000).

Studies of the choice of a career, recently called the 'courtship' element of the work / individual relationship (Omstein and Isabella, 1993), have focused on the interactive nature of the individual in the selection process. Some studies have looked at how the employees and organisations have been brought together (Caldwell, Chatman and O'Reilly, 1990), or at how the employee may be 'matched' to an organisation with realistic job previews (Wanous, 1980, Wanous, 1992). However, these studies have not attended to the constructive nature of the research process itself and its subsequent impact on any understanding gained. For example, a person's account of choosing a workplace is a retrospective account which is also attending to current and future considerations. The participants' responses in these studies were simply taken as 'truth', treating the participants as 'vessels of answers', which does not allow for the role of the immediate context, that of the interaction with the researcher. However, this is attended to in the present study.

Early studies on work and home life with regard to its impact on career have been criticised as merely attempting to "document the magnitude of the relationships, while ignoring their mutually contingent nature" (Hall, 1987: 310). Other studies have focused on the relationship as a series of conflicts (Omstein and Isabella, 1993). Hall (1987) reported a study carried out by Richter (1983) who explored people's transition styles in the 'thoughts' of commuters travelling to and from work. While it is questionable whether there is a medium which may capture

'thought' the study was innovative in that it looked at the home / work relationship as a two-way process. More recently, Eaton and Bailyn have argued that "professional careers are profoundly shaped by family and other extra-work relationships in which individual employees are embedded." (2000: 177). They further argue for the idea of career as a life path, which involves a series of initiatives and adaptations around employment, family and community. This has relevance for the present study as the participants weave career and home life accounts as co-constructions of one another to do discursive business.

A set of assumptions are emerging about 'new' careers (Mallon, 1998). Two recent concepts of the changing career are the 'portfolio career' (Handy, 1994), in which the career is made up of different work activities in different workplaces, and the 'boundaryless career' (Defillipi and Arthur, 1994, Arthur and Rousseau, 1996) where careers are made up of possible forms which are not confined to a single work setting. These concepts emphasise the career as belonging to the individual but played out in different arenas. However there have been criticisms of these new career concepts. Portfolio careers have been charged with overemphasising the control individuals may have in the selection and commissioning of their work (Parker and Arthur, 2000). And, in considering career boundaries, these may exist for one individual and not for another. It is a presumption to assume the organisation may be the only boundary of relevance. There may be something to be gained from understanding the forces that create these boundaries (Gunz, Evans and Jalland, 2000), or from thinking of the boundaries as creative spaces for negotiation and opportunity (Eaton and Bailyn, 2000). Flattened hierarchies reducing opportunities for progression internally

have led to a questioning of the expectation of loyalty in return for reward through progression (Yamall, 1998). However, to talk strategically of planning to leave the company may have implications for the speaker as a 'moral' person. This is attended to in the accounts of the participants in the present study. Nevertheless, the articulation of alternatives to hierarchical progression in one organisation provides alternatives which question the dominant path as the most obvious way to behave (Evetts, 1992).

Another recent concept in career literature is that of the 'intelligent' career (Arthur, Claman and De Fillipi, 1995, Parker and Arthur, 2000). This has been described as "a subjectively held component of career from which community building might be expected to evolve" (Parker and Arthur, 2000: 99). Peiperl and Arthur (2000) suggest that 'intelligent' career analysis encourages individuals to think about features within themselves that emphasise mobility. The 'intelligent' career notion focuses attention on internal subjective measures of 'success', relating to adaptation, growth and learning. However, this concept places the responsibility on the individual to develop their career competencies with regard to future employability. This responsibility has placed the individual in the position of an 'entrepreneur' with regard to his or her career. The new 'entrepreneurial' career contrasts with traditional career approaches in three ways: it is discontinuous and disorderly, it involves radical moves, and it substitutes lateral development and job enrichment for promotion (Herriot, 1992).

However, the image of the individual as an 'entrepreneur' extends its logic to all domains, and all life experiences may be translated into career opportunities

(Foumier, 1998). This stands in contrast to the most recently noted Zeitgeist of the 'leisure ethic' which provides an alternative ideology where work, and by implication, career interests may legitimately be given lower priority in individuals' accounts. This suggests that individuals taking responsibility or initiative for their careers (Arthur, 1994), returns the career to the individual from the former preoccupation that it may be managed by an employing organisation. However, despite its emancipatory potential, that is the individual is placed 'in control', some post-structuralists have identified its regulatory function. This is further explored in the following section.

### **2.3.3 Career as a construct**

Some studies of career from within the disciplines of psychology and sociology have adopted a questioning stance towards the assumptions of the traditional, or mainstream, approach. From within psychology, along with a more general critique of the intra-individual or psychological explanations of social behaviour, studies have focused on talk, or text, as an area of interest in its own right with regard to career. In sociology a concern with the 'reification' of the concept of career has led to a re-visiting of how this phenomenon should be examined. Furthermore, studies in life story narrative have enabled a focus on how career is managed in talk. Finally, with specific reference to studies of workplace talk of career, post-structuralist influenced studies have investigated 'career' as a construction from within a regulatory framework. In this section of the chapter some studies whose researchers have adopted this more critical perspective will be examined.

The constructed nature of career has been referred to as an enactment perspective (Weick, 1995). Enactment has been closely related to 'talk as action' which aligns with the present study: "How can I know what I think until I see what I say" (Weick, 1979: 133). Stories are created as careers are enacted, and the stories are interpreted retrospectively (Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). A coherent picture appearing in c.v.'s and when specifically asked. The present study is one instance that illustrates how people may be asked about career.

From within psychology the trait/type approach to looking at career choice and identity has been predominant (Omstein and Isabella, 1993). However, the assumption that 'career' is a construct that people may draw on and use in their talk for some function or other requires a different focus. Marshall and Wetherell (1989) looked at how people talked about their career and gender identities. The aim of the research was to show the methods available to ordinary people for making sense of themselves as they talk about their careers. By making these methods 'strange' they could be seen as constructions which serve a particular purpose. By treating language as an activity in its own right it becomes a central arena for the reproduction of social structures. Working from an understanding of different possibilities for **self-construction** at any one moment enables a focus on the choice of representation made by the speaker and the ideological implications of that choice. In Marshall and Wetherell's (1989) study, talk of the career routes of the participants supported the continued oppression of women. The participants drew on aspects of identity theory in order to provide a 'legitimate' account of their experiences. An example of this is where trait theory was invoked with regard to there being a right and wrong type for the profession of

law. This was shown to function as a rationalisation in the event of failure as the personal self is deemed to be so fixed that no amount of training can change it. Otherwise how would one account for failure? However, this notion of personal self is held in tension with the professional self who is able over time to take on a role.

Although this concept of role resolves the tension, role taking is deemed as 'inauthentic' and 'the real self shines though', 'need to just be yourself' are both examples of where the 'common sense' understanding is of an essential self. Interestingly this essential self 'device' is used in different ways to provide rationalisation in the face of failure and in the face of eventual success. In this way the 'repertoire' of the essential self has consequences for what may be explained or rationalised. It may be mobilised in order to legitimate a particular account of a career. In the present study the inter relationship between identity and career is also examined.

Moir (1993) looked at people's accounts of career choice in a similar way to the earlier study carried out by Marshall and Wetherell (1989). Traditional studies in this area have used participants' answers as a means to reveal underlying internal structures or processes governing career choice. In contrast this study looked at responses generated in an interview situation and was concerned with their interactive function. The focus of the study was on how people produced coherent credible accounts of their career choice. The accounting was retrospective which attended to Garfinkel's (1967) notion of decision making having little to do with choosing from alternatives and more to do with a

rationalising of the decision once it had been made. Moir also considered the role of the interviewer and how he or she indicated whether an answer was satisfactory. The particular repertoires that the participants drew on either led to a new topic or the further persual of the current topic. An example of this is where 'nurses help people' was drawn on as a standard membership categorisation device (Sacks, 1992). The participant said that they liked helping people and the interviewer moved on to a new topic. In contrast the 'family influence' repertoire 'my aunt was a nurse' was less persuasive as it led to further, protracted persual of the topic by the interviewer.

By attending to how accounts are made persuasive, and how they are treated as such by the interactants, then repertoires which are contextually relevant, are made apparent. In the present study the accounts of the participants are largely framed within an interview situation where the interviewee and myself, as interviewer, aim to make sense for one another, each drawing on their own understandings of what constitutes 'career' in this place.

Concerns regarding reification have been expressed within the discipline of sociology (e.g. Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981). In her review of work carried out in the area of career, Evetts (1992) argued that it has been the practice of sociological theorists to reify the social world and that this may be avoided through the analysis of change in the case of career. Earlier, Collins related the practices of theorists to those of individuals going about their everyday business:

"It is not only the practice of sociological theorists that may contribute to reifying the social world, but the practice of people in everyday

conversations, and the effects of the latter are by far the most important." (1981: 90)

In the present study attention is paid to the conversations of individuals, each instance and trajectory of talk about career providing an arena in which to explore how it is made relevant in this workplace. Individuals are both enabled and constrained by their understandings of available career ladders or frames in their everyday actions and conversations (Gunz, 1989). People therefore take career to be an expression of opportunities manifest in assessed achievements. Collins (1981) has argued that reification of career has resulted in a particular ideological way of seeing the world. Career structures are reproduced in the interpretations of the career builders themselves, which then support the legitimacy of those who have benefited from promotion in a career. The fundamental nature of a career structure as a relation between people is hidden.

Evetts (1992) advocated a focus on change in career patterns in order to attend to career structure as a transient concept. Drawing on Giddens' (1981) and Harre's (1981) reconciliation of structuralist and interactionist models of career in structuration, career structures could be seen as the outcome of individual strategies. However, the focus of the present study is to attend to how people draw on commonly understood patterns in careers, how they are persuasive in providing a rationalisation for an account of work experience. Although other studies have seen value in looking at career structures as an aggregate of individuals negotiations and choices about work (e.g. Collins, 1981), the present study is concerned with how these may function in talk.

Other studies have recently considered individuals' subjective experiences of career in order to redefine the concept according to 'lay' understandings (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998). In response to the questioning of the adequacy of positivist research methodology and its underlying assumptions, new approaches have offered a different construction of the individual (Collin, 1998). These new approaches no longer investigate the person and the environment as independent variables (Walsh and Chartrand, 1992), but call for attention to be paid to contextualism and constructionism (Young, Valach and Collin, 1996). One problem with an attempt at constructing an overarching 'career theory' is that it is likely to be of no value to large segments of the working population (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1994). In addition, as 'career' is a social construction it is constantly up for renegotiating. At any point in time its status as a relation between people may be challenged. It is in the local negotiations of this process that understanding may be gained. The present study is attempting to explore these negotiations through talk about career.

Criticism of social science research as no longer able to claim 'social realism' has led to an understanding of narrative as constructions of truth (Lincoln and Denzin, 1994). Studies of life narratives have enabled an exploration of issues of career. Marshall (2000), when examining women managers' career stories, proposed that these accounts were often incomplete, multiple and contradictory. The act of telling the story required attention to be paid on the part of the storyteller, overtly or covertly, to dominant social values. Rosenwald and Ochberg (1992) have suggested that people draw from socially and culturally allowed themes when constructing their own life narratives. I would argue that this is not quite as

deterministic as it sounds, as if there are a limited number of options available. While acknowledging that people have access differentially to alternative narratives, it is in the potentially unique deployment of these 'themes' that alternative persuasive stories may be told. An awareness of particular ideologies, which are operating in interaction, may lead to a critique of those ideologies. If a critique occurs widely it may alter not only how individuals can construct their identities but how they talk to one another and social order itself (Rosenwald and Ochsberg, 1992). With reference to career, for example, women are portrayed as preoccupied with personal, family and domestic obligations which leak into their working lives (Goffee and Jones, 2000). The function of this particular ideology is self-evident. Marshall (2000) proposed that it is in this way that the issues of society and control are in the articulation of life stories and talk about career. A constructionist perspective enables attention to be paid to the rhetorical function of career (Collin, 2000).

A constructionist approach to narrative as a way of exploring career attends to narrative as a process rather than a product (Marshall, 2000). In a study of thirteen white, middle class American speakers, choice of profession was used as an interview topic Linde (1993). This was based on the assumption that for this group of people their work was a necessary part of a socially acceptable self-presentation in their narratives. Life stories are of interest both for their own sake and as an arena which makes available understanding about processes which are common to a whole culture, while attending to processes relevant to a particular individual (Linde, 1993). Treating the life story narrative as a product indicates its use as a means of discovering 'what really happened' or as an indication of

some underlying area of interest such as personality or cognitive structure of the speaker. In contrast, regarding a life story narrative as process enables attention to be paid to how coherence is negotiated as a co-operative achievement of the interactants. Appearing as competent members of a culture is a social obligation to be carried out in talk (Linde, 1993). The only people who are excused are the insane and children. This negotiation of coherence is based on cultural understandings of common sense. From within a culture these common sense beliefs are so obvious to its members that they are rarely made explicit as assumptions. Narrative study is relevant to the study of career as it enables some exploration of what kind of self is recognised as a self in this culture; coherence principles regarding causality and continuity in narratives of career are contextually made relevant in talk.

Stories have been used as a methodological tool in career research (Mallon and Cohen, 2000), their value lying in their potential for exploring the relationship between individual action and the wider social and cultural contexts. These authors studied people's accounts of moving from employment to self-employment and argue that the stories are not about providing accurate catalogues of events. Emergent themes of pioneers actively engaged in changing dominant career scripts arose in a retrospective story telling event. Some narrative approaches to career counselling have focused on predictions (e.g. Cochran, 1997). This resonates with the talk of the participants in the present study as they are near the beginning of their work lives.

Finally, some studies of career from within the post-structuralist framework have attended to how this operates as a regulatory system (e.g. Grey, 1994, Fournier, 1998). Contemporary opinion tends to view the individual as agentic: "the self is seen as a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible." (Giddens, 1991: 75). Grey (1994) has argued that within this project of self management occupational careers play an important role as they offer a relatively well defined scenario within which people may develop, express and create themselves. From within an understanding of the individual as a self governing entity:

"Individuals are to become, as it were, entrepreneurs of themselves, shaping their own lives through the choices they make among the forms of life open to them." (Rose, 1999: 230)

From a post-structuralist perspective career offers a site for realising the project of the self in supposedly benevolent ways (Grey, 1994). The relationship between recruitment and appraisal, and career, is one in which disciplinary power is exercised through hierarchical surveillance and normalising judgement. The concept of career transforms these exercises of disciplinary power into self-discipline. In his study of accountancy recruits Grey analysed their talk of work experiences. The present study has similarities to Grey's study, although it differs significantly in some respects. While I acknowledge power as an integral part of all relationships which becomes evident in interaction, I would focus on how and if it is made relevant in the talk rather than working on an a priori assumption of its impact on the participants' talk of career. However, as 'power' is not the focus of the present study, that may be left for future analysis of the talk.

From the perspective of a critical social psychological study of corporate work, which concentrates on discursive practices, it is possible to explore how some communications are accepted and legitimised as 'true' (Casey, 1994). In her study of people in a work organisation where a deliberate attempt had been made to orchestrate a culture change she looked at how people talked about workplace experiences. Her findings have relevance to the present study as they deal with issues regarding how people talk about change, how they refute current company rhetoric about the workplace and the relationship between workplace talk and the self. Rhetorical devices such as 'the learning organisation' or 'learner employees' may act as new forms of discursive domination (Casey, 1994). She draws on the work of LaBiere (1986) who, from a psychoanalytic perspective, looked at corporate workers. By exploring everyday practices in the workplace he looked for sources of 'modern madness', episodes of neurotic behaviour. He proposed that: "Career conflicts are part of a larger malaise related to how we envisage and practice adulthood in our society." (LaBiere, 1986: 8). In addition, he argued that 'careerists' despite displaying a surface sanity are disguising neurotic symptoms internally. Whereas the notion of 'depth' in the psychoanalytic approach indicates an essentialist view of the individual, Casey argues:

"This does not necessarily predicate a unified, essentialist inner core. I am invoking an idea of fluid, or atomic depths rather than fixed or mechanistic core." (1994: 211)

Her research focused on the effects of the discourses of the new culture on corporate discourses of the self. This has relevance to the present study in that the possibilities of how one may talk about oneself at work, and hence about one's

career, are drawn from a wider repository of words, made relevant, legitimate or believable in a particular context.

One study of discourses of career from a post-structuralist perspective regarded them as technical practices. Employees are mobilised as subjects whose desires are related to organisational desires of excellence; this has been called the new career discourse (Fournier, 1998). Drawing on the Foucauldian notion of power as relational that is subjects are constituted as having certain interests and resources, the disciplinary effects of career operated on many levels according to Fournier. Her study of graduates' talk of career led to the construction of two groups, those who bought into the 'entrepreneurial' career discourse and those who resisted this by drawing on a more militant discourse. She argued that the militant discourses both reproduced and subverted the dominant enterprise discourse that they sought to oppose. Although the present study has much in common with Fournier's approach it differs in so far as I argue that there is much more complex negotiation in the positioning of groups in the workplace. The new career discourse of enterprise does call for the self to be entrepreneurial and how this is done in talk, (e.g. 'knowing one's strengths', 'development', 'status') is extremely useful in understanding what this new view of career means to people. However, it may be resisted in many ways and resistance is made up of the mobilisation of alternative ways of being in the workplace. Fournier argues:

"However, the career discourse does not only constitute subject positions (such as the entrepreneur or the militant other) it also performs some social ordering by mapping subjects onto a hierarchized space where entrepreneurs occupy a central position and the militant 'others' are pushed to the margins." (1998: 55)

I argue, in contrast, that the other is in relation to self; in the workplace it may be that a desire for differentiation from the tribe may lead to a marginalisation of the self in comparison to the sameness of everyone else. In addition, other ideologies drawn on from outside the work context may be influential in providing alternatives to the entrepreneurial self in the new career discourse.

The post structural approach to research shares the present study's regard for language as an opaque phenomenon worthy of study for itself rather than as a medium, or conduit, onto other processes. Despite differences, the findings from these studies in the area of career provide a useful point from which to take the analysis of people's evocation of the concept of career further. One illustration of how career as a construct is invested with ideology can be seen in talk of new perspectives. One author has explicitly not used the word 'career' and substituted 'work' instead (Richardson, 2000). This centralises a focus on language and its constitutive, or constructed, nature, which is a primary concern of the present study. In the following section other writers who have investigated career in similar contexts to the present study will be examined.

#### **2.3.4 Career and graduates**

Graduate trainees are regarded as an important population for research as they represent a major investment in the future managers of the company (Preston and Hart, 1998). In addition, as they have little or no prior work experience their interpretations of their work experiences are likely to be peculiar to the current employing organisation. There have been studies which have focused attention on the particular relationship between graduates and employers (e.g. Herriot and Pemberton, 1996, Doherty, Viney and Adamson, 1997, Preston and Hart, 1998).

The graduate population who enter a company on a training scheme have been considered as 'feedstock' for senior management (Tyson, 1995). In this way both the individual and the organisation have high expectations of one another.

Some attention should be paid to the nature of the experiences of these graduate employees in so far as they share a university education. Fournier (1998) suggested that we need to consider the norms and expectations that are prevalent among university educated employees, together with the norms, expectations and vocabularies which are at play in the organisation. Bakhtin's notion of a 'mixed stew', a repository of words from which we draw when we speak or write, which is given significance in its current context, has relevance (Gergen, 1999).

There is an assumption that for this population, responsibility, challenge and upward mobility would be important criteria (Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994). So, from this perspective, notions of promotion and progression are likely to be central to the meanings that graduates attach to their career (Fournier, 1997). Lower level entry with relatively structured promotion ladders and the expectation of low turnover have been regarded as major facets of an internal labour market (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996). However, de-layered, flatter organisation structures have reduced the organisations' ability to make or keep promises of advancement (Doherty et al, 1997). As graduates are considered to be a resource for the long term development and competitiveness of a company there is a need to attract and retain graduates (Fournier, 1997). However, according to the literature, 50% of graduates leave their first employer within two years (Mayo, 1991). A lack of opportunity for career development is one reason given for this

(Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994). It appears that seducing graduates with a few success stories is a self-defeating strategy (Foumier, 1997).

In a study of graduate development programmes in eight U.K. companies Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey (1994) found that the usual technique of 'hard sell' in order to recruit graduates led to unmet expectations. Organisations' explicit statements about their graduate development programme, ensuring a supply of executives for future competitiveness, is now being questioned (Doherty et al, 1997). In addition to changes in structural arrangements there has been an increase in the number of graduates competing for graduate posts, and the attraction and retention of the 'best' candidates has created a paradox for organisations. While there is a need to perpetuate the illusion of predictability and stability in managerial career systems, there is no longer an ability to offer privileged routes to the top for the majority of the graduate intake (Adamson, Doherty and Viney, 1998).

The relationship between graduates and employer in the form of a job for life in return for loyalty is becoming increasingly untenable (Doherty et al, 1997). This indicates a much more complex environment in which to construct a career; more choice with more uncertain outcomes has replaced the obvious routes to the top (Nicholson and West, 1988). In their study of organisational philosophy and practice for managing fast track graduates Doherty et al (1997) found that organisations were concerned about retaining their potential 'high fliers'. Of the twenty companies who took part in the study one third no longer used the word 'career' in the recruitment literature. This was replaced for example with "provision of a long-term opportunity for fast trackers" (Doherty et al, 1997: 175).

In addition one third had removed the phrase 'high flier' from any correspondence with the graduate newcomers ostensibly in order to avoid raising unrealistic expectations. Although the companies are concerned with the retention of graduates, the offers they now make in their recruitment literature are designed to appeal to graduates' understanding of the potential short term nature of their relationship with the employer. They indicate instead that they are providing conditions for 'employability', 'marketability' and other transferable development opportunities. This new career model of lateral open mindedness (Goffee and Nicholson, 1994) appears to place control in the hands of the individual. This positioning has impact on the choices that may be made and how the individual is accountable for these choices.

Many organisations purport to expect graduates to take control of their own progress through the company (Doherty et al, 1997), with the onus resting on the individual to 'control development'. In addition, career has been expressed in the literature as a self-managed project through which one can realise self while contributing to organisational excellence (Fournier, 1998). In her study of graduates Fournier argued that the new career discourse calls on subjects as entrepreneurs and consumers. In the enterprise culture we have no choice but to make a choice. Furthermore, if career is a matter of personal choice we only have ourselves to blame for not getting on (Fournier, 1998). The new career discourse, which assumes a reduction in boundaries and rules, presents wider possibilities with the fantasy of becoming more or better. Those who do not buy into the discourse of enterprise with regard to their career are marginalised. However, from this position of marginalisation the participants in her study drew on a

discourse of 'integrity' and a position of 'control' as they were not 'duped' by the myth of career freedom (Fournier, 1998). In the present study attention is paid to how the participants construct career alternatives for themselves in contrast to the 'norm' of the 'enterprising self' where: "the enterprising self is one that calculates about the self and works upon itself to better itself." (Rose, 1992: 146)

Grey (1994) looked at graduate trainee auditors' accounts through semi-structured interviews with a view to exploring the concept of career as an ensemble of discursive and non-discursive practices. In his study some attention was paid to senior management rhetoric; for example, despite being told to 'be themselves', there were clearly understood haircut, dress and attitude expectations. Grey called these 'normalising judgements'. In addition, an exploration of senior managers' rhetoric implied that there was a 'perfect auditor' waiting to be realised by using such rating comments as, "appears to lack confidence" or "appears unenthusiastic" on appraisal forms which were returned to the graduate trainees. These comments focused on what was required of the individual, as if the graduates' 'real' self had these qualities. In this way the assessment procedure was transformed into a benevolent process through which the self may be realised. Furthermore, the participants produced appropriate forms of behaviour in a self-disciplined fashion via the operationalisation of the category 'career'.

"I don't mind h (repetitive task) because it's a stepping stone, not just to being qualified but having a career, so I'm enthusiastic anyway."  
(participant, Grey, 1994: 487)

The above extract is in response to some talk about having to appear enthusiastic despite the tediousness of the work. The link between basic tasks and career

development provides a self-regulatory concept through career according to Grey. However, from the perspective of the present research this talk also attends to being authentic. The construction of an account where the participant does things in an explicitly instrumental way may imply a shallow, fickle self. This is an example of identity management in a research interview, which draws on understanding from broader cultural demands to be authentic. Nevertheless, Grey's connection between task and career is an important one and attends to how career may be used in talk to perform a function, which is the focus of the present research.

In the light of the current era of de-layering and downsizing, with a growing population of graduate entrants, career development is being seen in terms of organisational politics (Foumier, 1997). Arnold (1990) proposed that the discovery of organisational politics was a source of shock to graduates. The rhetoric from senior managers in Fourniers' study was re-presented by a graduate as: "The message we get from senior management is that promotion is not important as we are all one team" (1997: 386-387). Espoused values of teamwork, lateral development and job enrichment may render graduate talk of success as moving up the ladder unwelcome, although the rhetoric 'encourages' open dialogue about opportunities, aspirations and alternatives (Doherty et al, 1997). This intimates a dilemma for graduate trainees, on the one hand messages of "opportunities for progression are what you make them" (Arthur, 1994). This aligns with the control of a career belonging to the individual, versus, on the other hand, the potentially contradictory stance that lateral development has replaced hierarchical progression (Adamson et al, 1998).

Finally, some studies of graduates and their careers have attended to the notion that the workplace is but one social domain of interaction (Herriot and Pemberton, 1996). Changes in social arrangements (e.g. young dual career couples) also have implications for what graduate employees want and can offer an employer. Adamson's (1997) study of graduates' career stories found that re-evaluation of career was focused around non-work factors. This study used a discourse analytic approach to explore interviews with graduates. From the data emerged constructions of broader notions of career, which drew on common sense understandings of psychological and sociological explanations. The author concluded that vocational destination may be seen as a point of congruence between work and life careers, and that career may be viewed as a vehicle through which individuals construct the self. These findings have much in common with the approach of the present study, for which the relationship between identity and career in talk is also of immense interest.

## **2.4 Chapter summary**

In this review the importance of the Chicago school of sociology has been positioned as influential both for the subsequent research of the last 50 years and for the present study. The relationship between identity and career, which was emphasised then, is drawn on now to explore contemporary notions of career. The research literature which has been outlined under headings of 'structure' and 'strategy' has implied a much more rigid outlook to the kind of questions asked by research. The historical positioning of research provides some explanation for this and for the more recent growing concern with the socially constructed nature

of research phenomenon. The concept of career as a social construct has been explored and has provided some understanding for the position taken in the present study. In the section on graduates and career attention has been paid to relevant studies and their findings. These have been, and remain, influential in creating what is generally understood as a graduate career. From the literature it is evident that post-structuralist studies of graduates and their careers share similarities with the present research with regard to assumptions about the kind of questions that may be asked and the role of language. It is by focusing on these commonalities that I can draw on and develop their findings as they are made relevant in the talk of the participants in the present study. In the following chapter I outline the theoretical approach of the study through a brief examination of theories of identity.

## **Chapter Three**

### **3.0 Constructionism and identity**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

As the aim of this study is to explore how identity is used (as a strategic and emergent phenomenon) in talk in order to analyse graduate trainees' talk about career, some background should be given regarding the theoretical perspective of the research. In this chapter I will outline the assumptions which underlie the social constructionist perspective. However, initially some mainstream approaches to the study of identity will be discussed. Finally, I shall highlight some similarities and differences between the constructionist and the post-structuralist approaches. As a main focus of this study is identity, as a constructed phenomenon, it will be useful to contrast the different approaches' treatment of identity. This will illustrate some of the implications of taking a social constructionist perspective in research.

#### **3.2 Mainstream approaches to identity**

The notion that an individual has an essential inner self, which is carried around and can behave appropriately, dominates the Western concept of people in social situations. This view, as a historically bound notion, may be seen in the rise of individualism for which: 'most would credit the Enlightenment as the birthplace of our contemporary...beliefs about the self (Gergen, 1999: 6). Although social theorists from different standpoints have: '..questioned the universality of the contemporary Western concept of the person' (Rose, 1999: 221), this remains the

dominant notion of the self. In addition, studies of other cultures have shown their people as de-personalised from a Western point of view, which implies his cultural specificity (e.g. Geertz, 1973). Although in this thesis the constructionist viewpoint is adopted, it is acknowledged that the dominant, essentialist understanding of the individual is likely to be attended to in the accounts of the participants. The incompatibility between the theory of the unitary self as an illusion and the lived experience of the unitary self creates a scenario in which theories of multiple, or de-centred, selves are slow to be taken up (Turkic, 1995). For example, Ashforth and Mael argue, 'We like to think of ourselves as individuals.... characteristics which we identify as ours are replayed in context and validated by others' (1999: 94).

The person in the street may believe she, or he, has free will and so is responsible for her or his actions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). However, the question that should be asked is how the notion of freedom comes to be taken for granted in one society and not in another, how its 'reality' is maintained. To relate this to identity, the production of the self is seen as a social enterprise. Institutions are experienced as having a reality which confronts the individual as an external fact. Identity emerges as a phenomenon from the dialectic between the individual and the social world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The present study moves on from here to propose that identities are constructed 'on-line', situated in on-going interaction, and constructed to perform accounting or explanatory work in talk. Attention to the micro detail of talk enables the exploration of the 'on-line' construction of plausible, persuasive identities. Members of a work community draw on, deploy and re-construct resources, which are available in that context

and the broader context in which the workplace is situated. In this way identity is viewed as a situated self which is set within a wider system of identities (Carbaugh, 1996).

Underlying traditional, or mainstream, approaches to understanding identity is the assumption that identity is something an individual or society has (Widdicombe, 1998). From this perspective the questions asked in traditional studies of identity include: What criteria distinguish identities from one another? Or, what part do identities play in society? One aim of the studies is to use identity as a predictive variable (e.g. Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Working from the assumption that identities, (e.g. middle class), correspond to an existing social structure, and are not just externally attributed but internalised through socialisation, attempts have been made to link individuals with the social structure through this process. This may be contrasted with the social constructionist approach, which treats the self as a merged view of the person and their social context (Harre, 1983; Gergen, 1985; Bruner, 1990; Shotter, 1993; Wetherell and Maybin, 1996 and Gergen, 1999). Two of the traditional, or mainstream, theories that attend to the individual / social structure / socialisation process are role identity theory (e.g Goffman, 1959) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978).

### **3.2.1 Role theory**

Role theorists propose that society is made up of roles which are internalised as identities that people take on (Goffman, 1959; Burke, 1980). Although influential in terms of understanding work identities in particular, this theory has been criticised because it places the person in the position of 'social dope' where the

self comprises a 'time' self and a 'social' self (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). However, what is of particular relevance to the present study is that this influential version of the person operates as an ideology, that is, it may be drawn on as a plausible way of talking about the self. Other commentators have investigated the prevalence of this way of talking about the self in studies of interactions explored from a discourse analytic perspective (e.g. Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). The question being asked of role theory from this perspective is focused around how it functions rhetorically in talk. The current study adopts a similar approach by focusing on the language of 'role' as an opaque phenomenon worthy of investigation.

The view that individuals are actors performing roles provided by society has been further critiqued as a 'calculating' and 'intellectual' view of the self (Bmner, 1990). In a similar way it has been argued that discourse analysts who adopt the approach of the present study treat 'discourses' as cultural or social resources, as if one could construct self at whim. This would also imply some leaning towards a 'calculating' view of the self, if it were not for the 'structures' of plausibility, authenticity and reasonableness in the talk. To disregard these in interaction would be to risk being thought mad or at least being misunderstood. To attend to how these function in talk makes visible common sense, hidden, ideologies surrounding how we are able to talk about the self today. Finally, other critics of role theory argue that the notion of a script from within this dramaturgical perspective implies that the words are already decided (Billig, 1996). This underestimates the creative potential of interaction for the construction of the self. However, what is useful about this theory of the self from a constructionist point

of view is how a common understanding of 'roles' and their relationship to identity may be drawn on in talk. This is made relevant in the present study.

### **3.2.2 Social identity theory**

Social identity theorists suggest that social identities have a reality in relation to social groups. This approach developed from a concern within social psychology to include a relationship, theoretically and empirically, between individual psychological functioning and the wider social processes which both shape this functioning and are shaped by it (Tajfel, 1981). Individuals become aware of group membership and their preference for particular groups. In this way the structure of society is reflected in the structure of the self as category memberships are internalised (Tajfel, 1978).

Its close relation, self categorisation theory, although concerned with people's categorisations of themselves, assumed them to be psychological, subjective, mental processes (Turner, 1982). Tajfel's influential social identity theory has been interpreted, modified, developed, challenged and expanded in numerous studies since its inception, an indication of the author's contribution (Robinson, 1996). However, one of the criticisms of Tajfel's work was that language was simply not an issue. If discussed at all it was in terms of a psychological process along with motivation. This reflected the orthodox view of the time embodied in Chomsky's (1965) psycholinguistics from within a structuralist framework (Wetherell, 1996). This should be contrasted with an ethnomethodological concern with people's own displays of understanding as adopted by conversation analysts (e.g. Widdicombe, 1998) and reflected in the approach of the present study. From this perspective a salient identity is a local, occasioned matter where

members construct categories and draw on their rights and obligations in talk (Sacks, 1992).

With reference to understanding group identity, the question being asked from the mainstream approach has focused around how people identify with groups and what the consequences are of such identification (e.g. Hogg and Abrams, 1988). However, an alternative proposal, from a discourse analytic perspective, is that it is useful to explore how people draw on membership of groups in order to perform a function in their talk (Billig, 1996).

These and other traditional, or mainstream, approaches to identity have theorised largely at the intra-individual level, regarding categorisation as a cognitive process. In contrast, the social constructionist approach focuses on inter-individual explanations where categories and groups are considered to be discursive resources: "...we do not merely treat social identities as the vehicles for social action but regard them also as resources for social action" (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995:69).

Finally, traditional, or mainstream, approaches share a view that language is a transparent medium, or conduit, onto some hidden, internal process and therefore they ignore the constitutive nature of the interaction. In the present study a move is proposed from considering the self as an entity to considering the self as a construct, (Gergen, 1985), specifically in order to consider how the self is talked about.

### 3.3 Post-structuralist approaches to identity

From within an overarching post-modernist perspective the term 'post-structuralist' is applied in the present study to those writers who have been influenced by theorists such as Foucault (1972), e.g. Hollway (1989) and Parker (1992). Although they share an understanding with other post-modernists (i.e. social constructionists) that language is a phenomenon worthy of investigation in its own right, they presume discourse operates as an organising factor through which identities are produced (Burkitt, 1991). This contrasts sharply with Barthes' view of language as constituted of "...skids, slips, leaks and overflows" (1977: 69) which questions the purported unity of prevailing discourses from which selves and identities are treated as products. Linde (1993) further criticises this view of discourse due to its ambiguity:

"In many of its present uses the term 'discourse' seems to float in the air, the discourse of the family or the discourse of medicine is discussed but the analyst does not specify what kind of linguistic units used in what kind of social situations constitute the practice of this discourse." (1993:224)

From this approach subjects are 'interpellated', or called to positions (Parker, 1997). This version of positioning began with Althusser's (1971) argument that ideologies in institutions (e.g. church, school) mean that people are trained to recognise themselves in a particular way. Furthermore, post-structuralist writers argue that living under prevailing ideologies creates the illusion that we have chosen our way of life (Widdicombe, 1998). The focus of the post-structuralist approaches' study of identity has largely been on the relationship between power and discourse in that we are all claiming and resisting identities from within prevailing discourses (e.g. Hollway, 1989). However, this denies a role for accountability rather than 'discourse' in filling the take-up of positions in talk

(Wetherell, 1998). In addition, the post-structuralist view of language has been further criticised as it disregards language's constitution through argument, while focusing on how it operates to obliterate argument in the interests of domination (Billig, 1996).

While it would be much simpler to adopt a stereotypical stance which constructs clear, defined, distinct differences between the post-structuralist approach and the constructionist approach which I have adopted in the present study, this would be an over simplification and a deployment of difference where similarity could be another relevant version of the relationship between these approaches. I acknowledge that, although there are philosophically grounded differences, in practical terms each may gain from the other in empirical investigation. In the present study I acknowledge understanding gained from post-structuralist studies and extend the understanding gained by considering specific instances of talk to demonstrate the role of constructive practices.

In this section of the chapter I have considered how, from within a post-modernist perspective, taking a post-structuralist approach has implications for the kind of understanding to be gained from analysis. In the following section I will outline the eclectic approach adopted in the present research. The approaches are not incompatible, as they share many features; however, they reflect different concerns of research from within an overarching post-modernist framework. Finally, to pre-empt a point discussed in some depth in chapter four, the methodology chapter, the extremes of both the post-structuralist approach and the social constructionist approach adopted in the present study would rarely be

proposed in any case, as one would presume complete control and the other none. It is in the mitigation of the extremes that these two approaches meet in academic terms and in the everyday talk of individuals where it is manifest. It is the nature of the question to be addressed by the research that leads me to draw, eclectically, from the current thinking about these issues.

### **3.4 Social constructionist approaches to identity**

There are two major ways that social constructionists have considered how the self, or subjectivity, is related to culturally available linguistic forms. Firstly, Harré (1985) has argued that subjectivity is located in the logic or grammar of language. Secondly, theorists have explored the relationship between identity and culturally available forms of narrative (Sarbin, 1986 and Bruner, 1986). These will be explored in some detail below.

#### **3.4.1 The rule-following agent**

'To be a self is not to be a certain kind of being, but to be in possession of a certain kind of theory' (Harré, 1985: 262)

Harré proposed that we should regard the 'I' and the 'me' not as if they represented real entities but as words to perform actions in a moral universe (Harré, 1989). For example, 'pull your self together' illustrates one way that the speaker attends to the dramaturgical perspective of a 'real' self and a 'social' self, which provides a way of accounting for the self in talk. This accounting strategy enables the speaker to disavow responsibility, claim credit or manage accusations in interaction. Harré (1989) paints the individual as a rule-following agent who

learns to be more sophisticated in manufacturing accounts, according to the linguistic accounting rules of his or her culture. However, Billig (1996) has criticised this rule following theory as overlooking the argumentative aspects of social life. That is not to say we are not rule-following agents but we are also rule-breaking, rule-creating and rule-changing agents. From a conversation analytic perspective participants bend, evade and violate the constraints in a sequentially organised talk. However, these violations are to be accounted for by the speaker as plausible or justifiable accounts (Zimmerman, 1991).

Harré also looked at the relationship between agency and talk. The question is not whether or not humans have agency but how the language of agency is used and to what purpose. As a product of the linguistic conventions of a Judeo-Christian society, for example, agency would be drawn on differently in comparison to societies where an individual's future is already decided by Allah (Burr, 1995). With reference to subject positions and discourse Davies and Harré (1990) proposed, in alignment with post-structurally influenced constructionists, that human beings are simultaneously produced by discourse and manipulators of it. However, they differ from post-structuralists in that they argue there is room for choice within discursive practices. They further propose that we adopt positions and assign them to others in talk. Once positioned there are sets of related concepts which may be drawn on in talk, but this positioning is not necessarily regarded as deliberate (Davies and Harré, 1990; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The offering, resistance and acceptance of positions in talk provides an arena in which to explore how identity is related to discourses, or repertoires, which in turn make

visible some of the ideologies prevalent in this context. This will be illustrated in the analysis chapters of the present study.

### **3.4.2 Identity and narrative**

The second strand of social constructionist understanding of identity focuses on how identity is related to culturally available narrative forms (Sarbin, 1986; Gergen and Gergen, 1986). Bmner argued: "Our sensitivity to narrative provides a major link between our sense of self and our sense of others in the social world" (1986:69).

Both the analyst and story teller concentrate on both the content and form of the narrative. "The telling itself is treated as the object to be described rather than being treated as a transparent medium" (Bmner, 1990: 113). Furthermore, Bmner proposed that narrative as a factually indifferent process provides an arena in which the self can be studied. However, this requires, firstly, a focus on the meanings of the terms by which the self and the culture are being defined. Secondly, some attention should also be paid to how the self is negotiated, that is, the practices through which the 'meanings of the self are put to use (Bmner, 1990: 116). When talking of retrospective experience, we organise our accounts in terms of a narrative structure that is, with a **beginning**, middle and end, to some identifiable goal or end point. However, our constructions of narratives are subject to social sanctioning and negotiation. Through situated communicative practices participants make available particular positions for each other; moral grounding for claims being made about identities may be established or shaken through validation or rejection in subsequent talk (Carbaugh, 1996). This has implications for identity in that there is a concern with "bringing off a publicly

sanctioned version of ourselves while attending to the limitations on our capacity to do this" (Gergen and Gergen, 1986: 137). Sacks (1992) brought a conversation analytic perspective to this argument through his talk of 'category entitlement' where certain kinds of people in certain contexts are treated as knowledgeable. However, these 'entitlements' may require 'working up' in talk or insulating against rebuttal (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995). These categorisations are discursive actions, and their relevance in the talk should be considered by asking 'why this, why now?' How they are used, and what discursive business is being done in their deployment are of interest to the present study.

Linde (1993) used narrative analysis in her study of *career* as talked about in the life stories of professional people. She identified a narrative as a discourse unit, a stretch of talk recognisable as a story in contrast to, for example, a chronicle which may be produced in response to questions like 'what have you been doing with yourself?' The differing concepts of narrative and chronicle have implications for what may be said, the former requiring an end point to justify the story and the latter requiring no justification as it most likely arises in response to an explicit request. In this way conventions regarding how the self may be talked about may be made visible during analysis. Narrative organisation of for example, the order of events, or who the characters were, can be regarded as a sequence which increases the plausibility of a description, where what is described becomes expected (Potter, 1996a). Linde (1993) further argued that we draw on coherence systems, which are systems of common sense, in order to appear as competent members of the culture. Popular versions of expert coherence systems may include Freudian psychology, behaviourism or astrology.

However, some are so transparent as to render them invisible as assumptions, for example splitting the self into parts in talk. In the present study this is analysed with reference to how it functions in talk about career.

Although the constructionist perspective appears to imply that we can construct self at whim, the desire to be a 'good' self is essential to being a social self (Mead, 1934) this is made relevant through the notion of accountability in interaction. Furthermore, constructed identities must be plausible. We need to be seen as behaving in **meaningful** ways or else be thought mad (Wetherell and Maybin, 1996). With specific reference to narrative, the act of narration splits the narrator and protagonist as the narrator stands apart from and comments on the experiences. The reflexivity of the act of narration means the speaker is always moral even if the protagonist is not (Linde, 1993). How this is attended to in talk provides some exploration of what it means to be a moral person in the context of the present study.

### **3.4.3 Ideology and rhetoric**

Finally, in order to draw together the strands of the constructionist argument regarding identity, as something one 'does' rather than something one 'has', some consideration should be made of the relevance of ideologies to the argument. In contrast to the previously mentioned ideology of Althusser, described as having a concrete life within institutions, the notion of a 'lived' ideology as dilemmatic will be explored. Billig et al (1988) drew attention to the distinction between two types of ideology, lived and intellectual. Intellectual refers to religious, political or philosophical systems of thinking, whereas lived ideology refers to a society's way of life. However, the notion of an individual thinker as an unthinking bearer

of an ideological or cultural patterning would underestimate the contrary themes which are evident in ideologies, and the capacity for argument that they create (Billig, 1996).

Contrary themes of social knowledge may be seen in phrases like 'too many cooks spoil the broth' and the equally persuasive 'many hands make light work'. These contrary themes are preconditions when faced with difficult decisions; without them the decision would not be so difficult. Discussion, argument and rhetorical skill are required in order to attend to the dilemmatic nature of prevalent ideologies. An explicit example could be expressed: "On the one hand I want to buy all the plastic surgery I can afford (ideology: beauty is essential) but on the other hand I don't want people to think I attach much importance to physical appearance (ideology: beauty is only skin deep)." On a broader scale, the individualistic nature of Western, capitalist society may enable demands for the rights of the individual but this does not mean there will be unanimous opposition to counter values such as social responsibility (Billig et al, 1988). As these ideological dilemmas may be found in conversations and interviews, we should explore how contrary themes of social knowledge are revealed in everyday discourse. Analysis will bring to the surface implicit ideologies and their counter-meanings, not in order to undermine but to explore the complexities of meaning (Billig et al, 1988).

From this perspective ideologies may be regarded as arguments and counter-arguments in social knowledge. This may imply that no argument is ever settled. However, the use of 'witcraft' (Billig, 1996) as a skill in rhetoric suggests the

most skilful will, temporarily, quieten opposition through persuasion. Argument and rhetoric imply that alternatives are possible. In the instance of categorisation, for example, which is a normal, expected process according to social psychologists (e.g. Taylor, 1981); this implies its opposite, particularisation is not possible (Billig, 1996), or at most 'deviant' in contrast to 'normal'. However, by identifying this ideology as only one side of an argument the potential for resisting it is created. Furthermore, the assumption that there are contrary themes in ideology, while acknowledging that ideology may produce conformity, also provides counter-themes, which enable deliberation to occur. Bakhtin (1981) referred to the two-sidedness of arguments in his description of the dialogic nature of language. In contrast to the word 'rhetoric', which implies a destroying of the opponent, dialogue refers to a more informal exploration of topics in discussion (Billig, 1996).

Thompson (1986) related lived ideology to culture as they both refer to the social patterning of everyday thinking. Carbaugh (1996) also regarded the self as culturally configured and identified three major problems that should be addressed when exploring the self in communication and rhetoric. Firstly, there is a need to consider how communication is shaping agents in this place. Secondly, there is a need to explore situated communication practices as radiants of cultural meaning (e.g. from history or society), not as a larger environment but as socially active in the patterns of social interactions. Thirdly, some consideration should be given to how mental or psychological notions are heard in talk (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Kondo, 1990). With particular reference to

identity, how notions of self, especially those related to work activity, enter into communicative life is of particular interest in the present study.

Other writers have attempted to study communal processes of identity or identification in social interactions. Bakhtin (1986) demonstrated how forms of communication enabled some identities while constraining others. In addition, he talked of drawing on a repository, a 'mixed stew' when communicating. This places in motion the 'utterance', which carries with it fragments from its diverse heritage, and significance from the context of its present use. Gergen (1999) suggests we draw on Bakhtin but place relationship at the centre of the production of meaning through considering the functional and relational embeddedness of the utterance. By re-thinking any identity as a set of communicative practices, that is more salient in some scenes than others, the shift in focus is from the individual to the scene (Carbaugh, 1996). Any scene involves individuals playing some arrangement of selves over possible others, where the social and the cultural are assumed to be features of actual communication practices. Social identities then can be seen as both a dimension and outcome of interactions, socially negotiated and culturally distinct. "Who I am depends partly on where I am, with whom I am and what I can ably do there." (Carbaugh, 1996:24).

### **3.5 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have outlined some of the ways that the present study attends to identity. The social constructionist approach adopted in the present study has been contrasted with two major, traditional, or mainstream, approaches to identity with specific reference to the relationship between the individual and social

structure. The notion of having an essential self as a Westernised view of the person has been acknowledged as a persuasive coherence system which may be drawn on in talk about the self in order to carry out discursive business. Understanding from role theory and the distinction between 'I' and 'me' provide further 'expert' systems, or ideologies, from which people may draw in their talk. In contrast to categories as imposed by the analyst, categories as a participant's concern have been proposed. While acknowledging my selection of graduate employees as a category of people of interest, it is their constructions of self and others that has emerged as relevant in talk about their workplace experiences. The present study's social constructionist approach has been compared and contrasted further with a post-structuralist approach and, it has been acknowledged that while sharing some understanding regarding language, the post-structuralist view denies a role for accountability in talk and the importance of argument.

A useful model has been proposed for considering the part that these different approaches add to understanding gained through discourse analysis. Words and syntactical possibilities may be regarded as bricks and girders, post-structuralist discourses may be seen as pre-fabricated wall and ceiling sections, conversation analytic devices and procedures function as bolts and cement. Nothing works without the understanding gained through conversation analysis (the bolts and cement) but a study of fact construction is limited without a close examination of bricks and pre-fabricated parts. The shortcoming of this model is that all the parts are treated as solid prior to interaction (the building). The bricks and pre-fabricated parts need to be regarded as soft and pliable, vague in outline, which snap into shape when placed together in interaction (Potter, 1996a).

With reference to the importance of accountability, positioning and narrative have been discussed as tools which may be drawn on in order to talk about the self. Some consideration has been given to the role of argument and contrary themes, with particular reference to ideologies, which has illustrated how alternatives are possible. Social identity has been described as both a dimension and outcome of interaction. In the present study this is investigated with reference to how identity is made relevant in talk about career.

With regard to employing a constructionist approach to study identity, in the present study I have adopted this approach whose underlying assumptions 'make visible' taken-for-granted ways of talking about the self. This is applied to the study of career, an area which has rarely been investigated in this way. Although studies of career, identity and change have been undertaken from a post-structuralist perspective, this approach denies a role for rhetoric, or accountability in interaction, seeking instead to identify discourses per se. In the present study a unique combination of theory, method and context have enabled particular understandings to be gained and new questions to be raised. These will be addressed in the forthcoming analysis chapters. However, in the next chapter I outline the methodological considerations of the study.

## Chapter Four

### 4.0 Methodological considerations

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the methodology adopted in the study. Some consideration of the theoretical assumptions which have guided the research will be made. The context and format of the study will be described. Practical considerations regarding the data collection and analysis will be outlined together with some critical evaluation of the advantages and limitations of the process. Initially, however, I will reiterate the aim and research questions of the thesis.

The aim of the thesis:

To analyse graduate trainees' talk about career and to explore how identity is used in talk.

The aim will be addressed by exploring the following research questions:

1. How are 'common sense' notions of career drawn on in talk?
2. In what way is identity constructed and deployed in the talk?
3. How are the notions of career and change related to identity construction during interaction?

The kinds of questions being asked in this research indicate a particular epistemological stance. This renders any description of methodological issues to involve more than just a methodology. In the following section I will develop the

discussion of my theoretical assumptions with particular reference to how I selected appropriate and relevant data collection and analysis techniques.

## **4.2 Theoretical assumptions**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

Drawing on my descriptions of the theoretical assumptions that guide the present research, as outlined in chapters one and three, it is necessary to explain how these have impacted on my choice of method and analysis. The aim, research questions and social constructionist, theoretical framework required the research design of the study to be idiographic. In this section of the chapter I will outline the different types of discourse analysis and how they are to be drawn on eclectically in this research. I will discuss the issue of generalizability and the criteria by which the work should be evaluated for its theoretical contribution.

### **4.2.2 Language as social action**

As this research is based on the premise that language can be regarded as social action, this is reflected in the methods adopted to obtain and analyse the data. This contrasts with other, more mainstream, studies whose approach indicates a regard for language as a transparent medium onto something else.

"It seems as if it's a question about how one describes what is there. But what is there is itself a discursive production, just as what *was* there is a discursive production put to use in memory studies."

Harre and Stearns, (1995), (italics in original)

The issue of the transparency of language fundamentally guides the choices made during the collection and analysis of the data. Indeed it determines the kind of

question that may be asked by research and the criteria by which his contribution to knowledge may be judged. Although 'discourse analysis' is the term used for the kind of analysis used in this study the term itself has to be regarded as an "umbrella' which covers a wide variety of research practices with different aims and theoretical backgrounds" (Burr 1992:163). However, one overriding notion in discursive research is to explore the way that people actively use language in their everyday meaning construction.

In the present study the analysis has two inter related aspects of topic and structure. This enables a twin focus on discursive content and the form of the discourse, where the form of the discourse includes its structure and its function at a rhetorical level. Although constructionist writers have, in the past, emphasised the action potential of talk this has been in contrast to a dominant understanding that language just describes what already exists. Consequently, critics frequently describe a social constructionist perspective in stereotypical terms, as if by focusing on the once radical idea that talk does things it implicitly denies that it also describes things. What has been neglected to be explained is that many constructionist writers do not deny a world outside talk (Edley, 2000). For example:

'Descriptions are not just *about* something but they are also doing something; that is, they are not merely representing some facet of the world, they are also involved in that world in some practical way.'  
(Potter, 1996a: 47 italics added)

This has particular relevance for the findings of the present study in that their implications for practice are largely based on the content of the participants' talk.

In the following section I will outline the usefulness of discourse analysis to exploring the research questions.

### **4.2.3 Discourse analysis**

In order to explore the research questions that led to this study, an eclectic choice of analytic methods has been made. From within the broad template of discourse analysis the major influence has been the approach frequently referred to as discursive psychology (see Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992, Potter, 1996a and Wetherell, 1998). This approach is derived philosophically from work on speech acts, Austin (1962), the social constructionist approach, Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Wittgenstein (1967). Wittgenstein proposed that psychological events like emotion or sadness do not only occur within the head of the person who is said to have that emotion. We learn the socially accepted criteria for 'being sad', which will include visible outward behaviour and so we can with confidence say 'you're looking sad today' to others (Wittgenstein, 1967). Austin's speech act theory emphasised the practical nature of language in contrast to the more traditional philosophical concern with the 'truth' value of statements, (Potter, 1996a). Berger and Luckmann's now classic book has been influential in establishing the processes of social construction as a relevant topic of study.

In conjunction with Potter et al's 'discursive psychological' approach in this study I will also be drawing on conversation analytic methods in order to attend to the micro detail in the talk. Several writers have drawn on this particular combination, and emphasised its usefulness in combining attention to talk with cultural and contextual influences on meaning (Buttny, 1993). The approach

adopted in the present study also draws on Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology as an attempt to study the methods people use to make sense of their everyday lives (Heritage, 1984). Sacks' lectures over a ten-year period reproduced as one volume in 1992 were an early influence in this area. Recent writers whose work is relevant to this study, as they attend to identity, the workplace and language as constructions, thus combining empirical study with the underlying assumptions governing the present research include: Boden, (1994), Widdicombe and Wooffitt, (1995) Edwards, (1997) and Antaki and Widdicombe, (1998).

Mention should be made of an alternative strand of discourse analysis which develops the work of Foucault who focused on the 'rules of discourse' that allow present-day talk about things to make sense (Parker, 1997). However, the aim of this post-structuralist approach is to take a critical and political stance to truth claims. "Discourse analysts can now champion the cause of a particular discourse by elaborating the contrasting consequences of each discursive framework, and can promote an existing (perhaps subordinate) discourse." (Parker and Burman, 1993:170). Examples of writers in this area are: Hollway, (1984) and Stenner, (1993). From this approach texts are examined for discourses that inhabit them. One criticism of this particular school of discourse analysis is that discourses are treated as objects, which have an existence independent of the people who use them and the contexts in which they are used (Burr, 1992). The pieces of text in a study are regarded as useful in so far that they yield 'clues' to the discourses that are operating through them. While it is acknowledged that this is useful, it neglects what the speaker is doing with his or her talk, and that this constructive process will differ according to the social context in which the talk/text takes

place. Nevertheless, it is understood that post-structuralist discourse analysis is more sophisticated than suggesting that individuals are merely passive responders to strategic discourses and practices (Knights, 1992).

However, the approach adopted in the present study, in the main, follows Potter (1996a) by attempting to, in part at least, make an account of devices, or procedures, that contribute to the sense that discourses are literally describing the world. To contrast this with a Foucauldian, or post-structuralist approach, Foucault's notion of discourses in relation to specific instances of talk, or text, is not well developed. Foucault draws attention to discourses as objects, moving like plate tectonics, crashing into or sliding over each other (Potter, 1996a). One problem with this account is that discourses become pre-formed, coherent entities. That is, the process of interest is focused upon one abstract discourse working on another abstract discourse. The approach is not sensitive to the way particular discourses operate, for example, in a job interview or on a help desk. However, this is not a plea to abandon the big issues to look only at the micro aspects of talk as proposed by conversation analysts. Rather to consider how, in the context of the interaction, that there are repertoires, discourses and understanding gained from ideologies on which we draw in order to create plausible, authentic, believable accounts, through which our identities are constructed. This is not to say we can say anything (or else be thought mad) but that structure (opportunity and restraint) is in our ability to be plausible and accountable.

Whereas two completely different strands of discourse analysis may be too dramatic a picture to paint, the key differences appear to lie in their emphases on

power and ideology, with the Foucauldian stance examining the power implications of trans-individual discourses and the discursive psychological approach focusing on the situated, varied and contradictory features of talk. The strategic action of individuals is in question - are we discourse users or are we situated in discourses? The extremes of these would rarely be proposed, as one would presume complete control and the other none. It is in the mitigation of the extremes that these two approaches meet in academic terms, and in the **everyday** talk of individuals where it is manifest. It is the nature of the question to be addressed by the research that leads me to draw, eclectically, from the current thinking about these issues. Findings from post-structuralist influenced research into career (e.g. Grey, 1994 and Fournier, 1997, 1998) have been extremely valuable in shifting attention to language as an opaque phenomenon. My approach shares this focus but concentrates on the more positive potential of the speaker as a discourse user, able to follow rules but also able to bend, break and challenge them creatively in interaction.

The analytic position of discursive psychology and the one adopted in this study is not just to accept the explanations of the participants (Edwards, 1997). This is not to say these accounts are to be treated as fiction rather than fact, dishonest as opposed to sincere, rather it is to examine and explicate how they work. Both sides of these opposing dichotomies should be seen as part of the phenomena being explored. The work done in the talk includes attending to their status as factual, sincere or self-serving, as discursive concerns. These accounts are stories, or rememberings, constructed in interaction. When we recall and recount events in our lives we become accountable on two levels (Edwards, 1997). We are

accountable in the story being told and in the current conversation. Firstly, in the story being told, we expect each other to be reasonable, we hold each other as responsible, treat each other as rational agents and expect accountable actions (Boden, 1994). Secondly, in the current conversation, how a story is produced, the descriptions which are selected from a whole host of alternatives, both describes and does things in the telling (Austin, 1962). Others have focused on narrative as something that comes from an isolated individual's head without looking at the actual telling of the story (Edwards, 1997). One purpose of this thesis is to look at how the story attends to interactional concerns rather than just looking at the story as how the participants 'see' things.

To re-iterate the theoretical position adopted in the study, from a social constructionist perspective I will be drawing on understanding gained from post-structuralist studies of accounts of career. Post structuralism's shared assumptions about language make the findings relevant to the constructionist view, especially when compared with a traditional, mainstream, or essentialist, approach to the subject. However, there are differences, but rather than focus on these I will attend to where these approaches add understanding to the topic under investigation. McHoul and Grace when contrasting the post-structural and the conversation analytic approaches to discourse argued:

"the conversation analytic version of discourse looks for techniques of saying, how turns are taken in conversation. By contrast Foucault's discourse theory looks for techniques of what can be said." (1993: 207)

I hope to address this contrasting feature by looking at how what can be said is made legitimate, authentic and plausible. This makes visible the 'mles' of everyday common sense located in specific interactions.

#### **4.2.4 Ideological dilemmas**

Finally, the contradictory nature of our everyday talk leads me to draw on a particular view of ideology.

"Ideology is not seen as a complete, unified system of beliefs which tells the individual how to react, feel and think. Instead ideology, and indeed common sense, are seen to comprise contrary themes." (Billig et al, 1988:2)

The focus of this approach and the one adopted in the present study, is on how people solve ideological dilemmas in their talk. From this perspective these ideologies are not regarded as something that is situated outside the individual, rather a 'lived ideology' which we negotiate continuously in our everyday interactions (Nikander, 1995). By examining the accounts for their rhetorical nature this leads to the emergence of devices, which we use to persuade one another. As the accounts in this study are located in a particular social context the devices used to present an authentic, plausible, believable story expose one way that people skilfully reproduce the moral order. This has been explored in more detail in chapter three.

#### **4.2.5 Validity, reliability and generalizability**

The terms validity and reliability have come to hold particular meaning in research. However, due to the theoretical assumptions in discourse analysis and adopted in the present study these issues are addressed here somewhat differently

to traditional, or mainstream, studies. Other commentators have suggested alternative criteria with which to assess qualitative research from alternative paradigms. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described a list of criteria as 'authenticity criteria', consisting of, resonance (research reflecting the underlying paradigm), rhetoric (the persuasiveness of the argument), empowerment (the findings enable readers to act) and applicability (findings can be applied in the readers' own contexts). The present study should be measured according to these criteria.

Although the notions of reliability and validity imply a 'scientific objectivity' (Symon and Cassell, 1998) which is not claimed from within the theoretical stance adopted in the present research, other commentators have re-interpreted those terms and applied them to interpretative research. For example, Sacks argued on the issue of reliability:

"It was not from any large interest in language or from some theoretical formulation of what should be studied that I started with tape recorded conversation, but simply because I could get my hands on it and I could study it again and again, and also, consequentially, because others could look at what I had studied and make of it what they could, if, for example, they wanted to be able to disagree with me." (1984: 26)

However, it is acknowledged that key aspects of reliability also involve the quality of the recordings and the adequacy of the transcripts. Furthermore, by selecting to record verbal information only, some aspects of social behaviour are invisible in this study.

Validity, and to some extent reliability, may be addressed through: deviant case analysis, participants' understanding, coherence and readers' evaluation (Potter,

1996b). In a search for regularity amongst a collection of instances of talk about something, there will be some instances that are deviant in some way. These may function to highlight the way the standard pattern 'works'. In mainstream research these may represent 'outliers' and be discarded. From the perspective of the present study they are explored for their relationship to the standard pattern. Participants' understanding may be explored through their responses. Ambiguous questions are picked up and dealt with according to issues that the participants deem relevant.

Coherence in this area is built up from cumulative work. Studies that say something useful about how talk operates in particular settings may be drawn on in subsequent work. In the present study the findings from earlier writers in the area will be contrasted with my findings in a critical way, while acknowledging multiple versions, or readings of any text, to consider the usefulness of one to the other. Finally, readers' evaluation is made possible due to the presentation of the transcripts alongside the interpretations being made. As skilful interactants, judgements can be made by the readers about cultural competencies and the wider claims made by the study. This is not to say that the interpretations are 'true' in any way that can be established, rather they need to be persuasive for the reader. Although these features do not guarantee the validity of an analysis, 'there are no such guarantees in science' (Potter 1996b: 138).

Finally, the concept of generalizability should be considered. As a study that is necessarily based on a small theoretical sample, the general usefulness of its findings must be questioned. Theoretical sampling has been defined by Mason as:

“..selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position... and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing” (1996: 93).

Firstly, as the study focuses on ordinary conversation, albeit in an interview situation in a particular context, the baseline assumption is that the findings should be generalizable to the whole domain of ordinary conversations (Perakyla, 1997). In support of this, as the basic structures of social order are to be found anywhere, you will find the same order, due to the obvious pervasiveness of social forms (Sacks, 1992). In addition, although the talk in this study cannot strictly be classified as 'institutional talk' as it is talk about work to an outsider rather than talk at work, the context of the talk is still made visible through the practices common to that workplace. However, as the topics being explored are relevant to people at work generally, the usefulness of the findings may be more broadly considered. In support, it has been proposed that studies which are limited to a particular set of interactions allow their examination for how particular talk is embedded in particular patterns of social organisation (Silverman, 2000).

Despite arguing my case for generalizability, Alasuutari has proposed that what we attempt to achieve in qualitative research is better related to extrapolation, which resonates with the present research.

"Generalization is..(a) word that should be reserved for surveys only. What can be analysed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand...extrapolation better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research." (Alasuutari, 1995: 156-157)

## **4.2.6 Theory building**

As the basic assumptions of this study rely on multiple versions of 'reality', there can be no claim to discover 'tmth'. The goal of the study is pragmatic. Following Symon, Cassell and Dickson (2000) in their call for a greater interest in innovative approaches to understanding work experiences, the aim of the present research is to create new insights into concepts which have emerged in a particular context. It should be judged, therefore, on how useful the findings are in providing insights and understanding. The aim is not to use the transcripts to find out what 'really' happened; what counts are the claims made or disputed by the participants, and how this is done. Using a constructionist framework enables an exploration of the fine detail of people's activities without treating their social organisation as an external force. People are neither treated as 'cultural dopes' (Garfinkel, 1967) nor as 'manipulative agents' (Goffman, 1959) but as individuals who skilfully reproduce the moral order (Silverman, 2000). To conclude this section, John Shotter, in his work entitled "The Manager as Practical Author" suggests:

"These are turbulent times both for and in organizational theory - many theories are offered but few seem adequate or helpful . . . . I want to argue, along with Winograd and Flores (1986), that it is not yet more or different theory that we need in management studies, but a better understanding of conversation and conversational realities." (1993: 148).

## **4.3 The context of the study**

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

In order to address the research questions of this study it was necessary to locate a company who had the practice of recruiting graduate trainees each year. As the

aim was to focus in detail on the discursive practices of a small theoretical sample, only one company was sought. In the present research the accounts of graduate trainees who were working for one company provided a theoretically logical sample in order to explore graduates' talk and their constructions of career. Other people who have carried out longitudinal, idiographic studies have argued that the in-depth design required to gain insight into the processes of interest would not render a comparative study feasible in the time scale (Foumier, 1993). The company in this study was approached and was willing to allow me to have access to their graduate trainees for the purposes of the research. They will be referred to as "Company A" throughout this study. In this section of the chapter I shall provide some background information about the company, some details about the graduate-training scheme, my association with the setting and the process of selecting participants. Finally, I shall discuss a particular external influence on the climate of the company towards the end of the period of the research.

### **4.3.2 The company**

The company is best known for its high street retailing business with over 1400 stores and sales of about £4bn a year (company literature). However, it also operates internationally in around 130 countries and owns manufacturing plants in addition to its diverse retail activities. The Company's head office is situated in the Midlands and compares its location favourably with being situated in London because of easy access to the countryside and a comparably lower cost of living.

### 4.3.3 The graduate-training scheme

The Company recruits from universities in the usual 'milk round' manner. The intake is expected each year for all departments in the autumn, with some departments also recruiting to start in January. The company also recruits from the undergraduate population for sandwich and summer positions. Current graduate trainees are asked to play some part in the recruitment process. The official training scheme is expected to last between two and three years, at the end of which a particular management grade is predicted. Each graduate trainee is assigned a senior manager as a mentor. There are ten 'career disciplines' which are outlined in the recruitment literature, all of which require an honours degree, some requiring a degree in a specialist subject, e.g. engineering.

During the selection process the graduates are assessed and offered either 'direct entrant' or 'group-wide' positions if they are successful. There are two essential differences between these two offers of trainee employment. The group-wide graduate may be placed anywhere in the company and may be moved to any other division of the company, whereas the direct entrant is placed within a division and is expected to remain in that division at least until the official training scheme period is over. The graduates' own interpretation of this grouping of the graduates includes the notion that the 'group-wide' people have been identified as potential high fliers, whose career will be managed in a 'fast track' way. This has been attended to in the participants' talk, which is explored later in the study. However, this distinction is not evident in the recruitment literature.

#### **4.3.4 My association with the setting**

Company A was the first and only company that I approached with a request for access to carry out research. One of the senior managers came to the university to talk about gaining access to companies for research purposes. In a round of introductions the post-graduate students gave a brief resumé of their potential area of study. He expressed an interest in the area I wanted to explore so I followed up our brief encounter with a letter requesting a further meeting, with a view to carrying out some mutually beneficial research. Subsequent negotiation for access included a meeting with the graduate development manager. It was at this point that concerns were expressed regarding the number of graduates who leave after the official training scheme had finished. I was asked if I could look at this during my research. As my, then, broad research question was based around how newcomers, specifically graduates, interpret their work experiences this did not appear to present any deviation from my original idea. In retrospect, I did not explicitly ask the participants any questions about leaving the company at any time during the period of the study. However, it was brought up many, many times by all of the participants. Clearly this was an issue of relevance to all of us who were concerned with this research.

An advertisement was placed for participants, in the form of a letter, in the 'in-house' newsletter (see appendix 1). At this juncture it was expected that a selection of respondents would have to be made if there was a large response. This may have been done on the basis of the order of response or one from each division represented by the volunteers, or names picked from a hat. However, in the event, twelve people volunteered so I decided to contact all of them. They

varied in their length of time with the company and in their physical work location. Together, they presented me with access to accounts of work experiences from the required theoretical sample of graduate trainees.

I contacted each of them by phone or email to arrange a convenient time to meet. The company provided a room and tea or coffee facilities at their head office. In order to fit in with the working arrangements of the participants, the first interviews took place during a three week period in April and May 1999. In practice I was with each participant for around half a day during which time I recorded between one hour and one hour and a half of conversation. The rest of the time was typically taken up with meeting, waiting for the room to become available, having coffee, or lunch, or visiting their workplace.

The second phase of interviews took place six months later during October and November 1999. The format was the same, and access to the company premises was readily available. By this time one of the participants had left the company, which we had talked about during the first interview. In the intervening period I contacted the participants on several occasions by letter or email, with a Christmas card and extracts from our conversation transcripts to ask for permission to use them and for their comments generally. Finally, for this first cohort's main data collection period, a group meeting was arranged to fit in with as many of the participants as possible, during February 2000. This was held on university premises as several of them had expressed a desire to see the new building. In April and May 2001 I met with the participants again and carried out individual interviews with eleven of the original participants.

In November and December 2000 I carried out a series of interviews with ten more participants from the current year's cohort using the same arrangements of selection. These were interviewed once again during May and June 2001. In addition, arrangements have been made to maintain contact with all of the participants with a view to carrying out a more extensive longitudinal study in the future. The details of contact with the participants are presented in table form in the next section of this chapter.

An interim report was presented to the participants who took part in the group discussion, and a copy posted to those who were not present. They were asked to look at it and let me have their comments before I forwarded a copy to the graduate development manager. Some aspects of the report were discussed in the group and no adverse comments or objections were made with regard to its contents. A copy was subsequently sent to the company. Another interim report was forwarded to the participants for comments and then to the company in April 2001.

Each of the subsequent meetings with the participants involved some conversation regarding the research findings and some concentration on a reciprocal feedback process. The participants have expressed a desire to continue taking part in the research which may indicate that this kind of interaction with an outsider talking about the workplace is both unusual and beneficial. The senior management team has asked if I can present my findings on specific issues to selected members of their management team. With regard to ending the data collection I have been

given permission, both from the employing company and the participants, to continue contacting the participants every six months for 'more of the story' for as long as the participants wish to continue.

#### **4.3.5 Senior management contact**

During the period of the research I met with some of the senior management of the company on several occasions. Interim reports have been presented at group meetings of the recruitment and training team. It is anticipated that further meetings, or written communication, will take place in the future.

#### **4.3.6 The recruitment literature**

In order to consider the 'discourses' or 'interpretative repertoires' which may be prevalent in the particular context of this workplace it was important to explore the literature to which all of the participants would have been exposed prior to and during their early days at the company, with the proviso that these 'discourses' do not exist prior to any one individual but that they in some way represent a general understanding of what works as a persuasive argument in this workplace. The aim was to explore how (if) the participants draw on, or refute, these discourses in their own constructions of a persuasive argument for the purposes of the interaction with me, an outsider.

I contacted the graduate development department and asked for a copy of all the literature they used in the recruitment of graduates at the beginning of the period of research. In October 2000 I downloaded all the information available on their new, on-line company recruitment web page, as this had become the method of application during the term of the research. The major difference between the two

sources of information was that there were more personal testimonials of past graduate trainees in the on-line version. In addition, recent press releases from the company were available under the heading 'corporate news'.

#### **4.3.7 The current climate of the company**

During the period of the research the share price of the company dropped to an all time low. At one point its value halved over a very short period of time. Rumours of take-over bids abounded in the press and in the talk of the participants. This occurred just before the group discussion and as a topical issue I brought the subject up at the beginning. I did this for several reasons. If I had ignored the current position of the share price I would have appeared either lacking in knowledge or, perhaps, unsympathetic towards the situation at the company. It may have been something the participants wanted to talk about but were not sure the group was a relevant place to talk about it; my introduction of the topic made it an issue that was acceptable in the context of the group discussion. If the subject had not been explicitly broached, using Billig et al's (1988) notion of rhetorical talk, it may have been the 'problem', which all talk addressed. That is, its non-appearance as an explicit topic may have led to a rhetorical response of 'everything is fine', in not so many words.

### **4.4 Data and analysis**

#### **4.4.1 Introduction**

In this section the methods used to obtain the data necessary to explore the research questions will be described. The phases and sources of data collection

will be discussed. Ethical considerations will be outlined. Aspects of audio and video recording and transcription will be explained. Finally, practical issues regarding the analytic method used to explore the data will be examined.

#### **4.4.2 Data sources**

Although the study focused on graduate trainees' talk of adjustment, a variety of sources of data were explored in order to investigate the 'discourses' or 'interpretative repertoires' in talk and texts of this workplace. These were seen as sources of data which provided further perspective rather than a competing notion of truth (Marshall, 2000). Firstly, the literature available to potential employees was collected. Secondly, the greater proportion of data was collected during four phases of semi-structured interviews and a group discussion with graduate employees of the company.

#### **4.4.3 Semi-structured interviews**

The semi-structured interview format provided a structure around which to focus the talk without restricting the participants' opportunities to move the topic into an area of related interest (see appendices 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7 for the interview schedules). In contrast to traditional approaches to interviewing which aimed to capture a minimalised report of experience (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997), the questions in this study were constructed in such a way as to relate the participants' past experience to the research agenda. This suggests the description of 'active interviewing' as described by Holstein and Gubrium (1997). They describe traditional approaches to interviewing as treating the participants as 'vessels of answers'. In contrast, in the present study the participants are treated as co-constructors of knowledge along with the interviewer. Attention is paid both to

what issues guide the interview and how the interactional process of meaning-making unfolds during the interview (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997).

Recent criticism of data collected during interviews proposed that the interviewer should be seen as the co-producer of any meaning that was created (Leudar and Antaki, 1996). My role as interviewer in this study has been acknowledged, through a series of responses such as 'mmm', or a question, where I assisted in the production of the story by, among other things, showing understanding. The research is regarded as a co-production where my assumptions have guided the questions that were asked and, it is acknowledged that the topics may never have been talked into being without my arrangement of these particular interactions. It may be that the interviews provided a unique experience during which the social organisation of the company was made explicit for an outsider. However, as members of a wider culture the participants drew on resources from outside the context of the interview. In some ways the interview can be described as a special kind of interaction, a 'natural-interaction-in-interview' (Potter, 1996a).

#### **4.4.4 Rationale for the selection of participants**

The newsletter used to recruit volunteers is circulated to all members of the company. This was useful as it was anticipated that people with differing tenure within the company would respond thus providing a wider source of experiences for the study. The heading of the advertisement was "Research Project - Graduates Making Sense of the Organisation". The target audience was deliberately made vague on the advertisement to ensure that anyone could respond who interpreted it as having relevance for them. The advertisement was circulated in April of that year and resulted in twelve participants.

As this study has focused on language use, rather than the number of people generating the language, then the unit of analysis shifts from the number of participants or interviews to the topic of study under exploration, the analytic unit becomes the utterance (Buttny, 1993; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998 and ten Have, 1999). The unit of analysis in this instance is the word 'career' and its trajectory in talk. However, it is acknowledged that interpretations have been made regarding exactly what constitutes career talk. The working definition for the present thesis is loosely coupled around talk of progression. On the subject of deciding how much data should be investigated from this perspective, other writers have proposed: "If one is interested in discursive forms, ten interviews might provide as much valid information as several hundred responses to an opinion poll." (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 161). However, a requirement to expand the number of participants in order to gain a broader data set for analysis was met through the opportunity to recruit participants from the new year's cohort of graduate entrants. This resulted in a further ten participants.

These interviews provided an additional source of data against which comparisons could be made during analysis, again not in search of 'truth' rather a source of data providing further perspective (Marshall, 2000). According to Kirk and Miller (1986), when discussing the reliability of ethnographic research, reliability entails whether or not the researcher would expect to obtain the same findings if research was carried out in the same way. This data enabled a search for contrary, similar or parallel findings between the two cohorts.

The following table identifies the number of participants taking part and indicates their participation in the study.

Table 1 Data Collection Schedule

Date	Apl/May 99	Oct/Nov 99	Feb 00	Nov/Dec 00	Apl/May 01	May/Jun 01
Phase of data collection	Phase 1	Phase 2	Group meeting	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Participant group	1 <sup>st</sup> cohort	1 <sup>st</sup> cohort	1 <sup>st</sup> cohort	2 <sup>nd</sup> cohort	1 <sup>st</sup> cohort	2 <sup>nd</sup> cohort
No of participants	12	11	6	10	11	10

#### 4.4.5 Data collection

The first group of people were interviewed individually during April and May 1999. They were then contacted again and a second phase of interviews took place during October and November. This was not in order to do a 'time one' and 'time two' type of comparison, rather to do 'some of the story' and 'more of the story'. The interviews were semi-structured following an interview schedule, which was designed to elicit talk about workplace experiences. The first series of interviews (see appendix 2) opened with, 'Would you like to tell me something about yourself?' This was deliberately vague to enable issues of relevance to the participants to emerge. However, the context of the interaction, that is the workplace, was expected to impact on their responses. How this was done is of interest. The second series of interviews (see appendix 3) began with, 'Tell me what has happened since we last met'. Again, this was deliberately vague to allow issues to emerge within the context of a workplace conversation. In the second interviews the questions were designed in order to explicitly address the issue of personal change and the notion of an 'ideal' person for the organisation.

Finally, the word 'career' was introduced at the end of the interview as a challenge, to position the participant as one who was expected to have a career, for the participant to account for this in his or her talk of workplace experiences.

The third series of interviews (see appendix 4) took place in November and December 2000 with a different cohort of participants. The interview schedule addressed similar issues to the two other interview schedules. The fourth series of interviews took place in April and May 2001 with the original, first, cohort of participants (see appendix 6). This was in order to give and receive some feedback about the findings of the research, to negotiate what direction the research may take in the future and to hear 'more of the story' of their work experiences. The fifth, and final so far, series of interviews took place in May and June 2001 with the second cohort (see appendix 7). This was designed in a similar way to the fourth series of interviews as it was acknowledged that this would be the final data collection period prior to the submission of the thesis, and required some tying up of loose ends while keeping the research relationship open.

These interviews all took place at the head office of the company. A private room was arranged with table, chairs and coffee / tea facilities. All of the participants were familiar with the building but it was not their usual place of work. The length of the interviews varied from between one hour and one hour and a half. The overriding restriction was the time available to the participant. Although there was an interview schedule, the conversation followed issues of interest which were raised by the participants, and this led to the varying length of the

interviews. All of the interviews were recorded on a hand held audio recording device. The device was placed on a coffee table in front of the participant, which was close enough to record but out of sight of the speakers for most of the time. At the end of an hour the recording device stopped recording with a resounding 'click'. This may explain why some of the interviews finished at around an hour, with the participants perhaps being reminded of the nature of the interaction. I experimented on one occasion with another device that just stopped recording without making any noise, but my concern with 'losing' the recording of the latter part of the interview caused me to look at the device more often, and I feel this will have impacted on the conversation. Also, despite my monitoring of it, the device did stop without being noticed and the end of the interview was not recorded. I recorded all subsequent interviews with the device that audibly stopped recording, as the lesser of the two evils.

Finally, all the first group of participants were invited to take part in a group discussion, which took place on university premises in February 2000. Due to work commitments it was impossible to arrange a date and time when they could all meet up. However, six of the participants were able to meet together. When the participants were invited to the group discussion, at the end of the second interview, they were advised that it would be video recorded and asked if they would have any objections. The rationale for the video recording was explained, namely that in order to differentiate between the voices, visual information would be required. No objections were raised and the seating was organised in such a way that the camera pointed directly at me so that none of the participants were looking directly at it. It provided sufficient additional information in the form of

hand and head movement during talk to identify the speakers. In addition to the video recording, an audio recorder was placed on a table in the room as a back-up device in the event that the microphone on the video camera did not record all the talk in sufficient clarity. It was placed nearest to the participants who were farthest from the camera. Both of these recording devices were placed outside the circle of participants in order to minimise their effect on the conversation. In the room were tea / coffee facilities. As all the participants were unfamiliar with the building I met them in reception and took them to the room.

The group discussion was designed to be more flexible than the interviews. There were three main issues which I intended to raise explicitly: the unusualness, or not, of the interaction; some of the findings from the interviews, and the taking part in research (see appendix 5). Although it served to 'round off this part, at least, of my relationship with the participants by drawing together some threads and looking ahead, it was also an opportunity to look at how the talk about their workplace experiences was 'managed' in a small group situation.

#### **4.4.5.1        *Audio and video data recording and transcription***

##### 4.4.5.2

The interviews and group discussion were recorded using audio and video equipment. Transcripts of the conversations were then made according to a simplified amalgamation of several transcript conventions (Jefferson in Atkinson and Heritage, 1984; Potter, 1996a and Silverman, 1998). The selection of how much detail to transcribe was made by considering what aspects of the talk and non-verbal behaviour could be included without rendering the transcript inaccessible to the reader un-versed in conversation analytic transcription convention. Verbatim transcriptions were produced.

" A rich transcript is a resource of analysis. At the time of transcribing, the researcher can not know which of the details will turn out to be important for the analysis" (Perakyla, 1997: 207).

The transcripts used in this study included turns taken and overlapping speech. Pauses were timed to the nearest second and lines of speech were numbered to enable identification in the complete transcript.

Punctuation was not used, instead pauses of less than a second were marked thus:

... .it was a (.) a big decision

Some contextual information was provided in double round brackets:

....since being so big ((indicates with hand about 2 feet from ground))

Other non-verbal interaction was not included in the transcription process for several reasons. Firstly, transcribing non-verbal behaviour would mean a much longer transcription process. Furthermore, even when language data is fully complemented by non-verbal information it has to be recognised that it is impossible to capture on paper the complete nature of any interaction. The accuracy and representative qualities of a transcript must therefore be considered. In this way transcription is a constmctive, interpretative process, and the interests of the transcriber will have some influence on the features of the talk which are salient to her or him. "Transcription is a selective process, reflecting theoretical goals and definitions" (Ochs, 1979, 44).

In the case of the group discussion the main reason for using video recording equipment was to render the deciphering of talk easier, especially in distinguishing between different speakers. I acknowledge that field notes could have been used in addition to an audio recording, but this would have detracted from the discussion taking place as I was a member of the discussion group.

I transcribed all the interviews and group discussion. This was in preference to having them transcribed by a professional. This enabled me to get to know my data early on in the research process. This also contributed to the merging of data collection and data analysis as an iterative process (Symon and Cassell, 1998), whereby analysis during transcription impacts on the following series of interviews.

#### **4.4.5.2 *Transcription conventions used in this study***

The transcription notation used is explained below:

1. Inaudible speech (. . . .)
2. A pause (< 1.0 second) (.)
3. A timed pause (> 1.0 second) (2.0)
4. Pauses within and between turns are represented thus:
  - 1 Jody yeah (.) yeah
  - 2 (.)
  - 3 Lyn rather than just us
- 5 Double round brackets contain contextual information, i.e.:  
( (laughter) )
- 6 Simultaneous square brackets indicate the start of overlapping speech, thus:

1 Ann then (.) wow (.) look at the[ opportunities  
 2 Des [ yeah  
 3 Ann [what  
 else can we do

7 '=' indicates no distinguishable pause between participants' turns:

1 Harry twice a day / every day=  
 2 Int =mm=  
 3 Harry =and / but / er=  
 4 Ann =what's it at

The verbatim transcript with the level of detail indicated above enables analysis that may attend to pauses, overlaps or intermptions. These can be of interactional and therefore analytical significance (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998). The timings of pauses are therefore relevant. How relevant can not be ascertained until some analysis has been attempted; however earlier studies have explored the significance of attending to such detail, (for example, Jefferson, 1989 and Pomerantz, 1984).

#### 4.4.6 The analysis

Although details of specific analyses will be discussed in the analysis section, an outline of the practical steps of analysis is presented in this section. How a graduate trainee talks about her or his workplace experiences was the primary concern of this study. Following a review of the literature it became evident that 'career', 'identity' and 'socialisation' (or change), have been inextricably linked in earlier studies of newcomers to the workplace. This study moves on from here in that how the newcomers attend to these notions in their talk has become the essential focus of the research. In the following section of the chapter firstly, the

development of analytic foci will be explained followed by a discussion of the steps taken in the analytic procedure.

#### **4.4.6.1        *The development of analytic foci***

Several broad areas of interest have become the issues for the analysis chapters.

Career talk as a resource (i.e. to justify, legitimate acts, including leaving)

Identity talk as a resource (i.e. to do authenticity, differentiation)

How do the participants attend to the notion of having changed (i.e. as a dilemma)?

Being managed as opposed to managing careers

Graduate identity, differentiation

Family / home / life talk

These analytic foci developed in two ways. Firstly, the area of study chosen provoked broad questions about newcomers at work and the language used to both describe and construct their experiences. These broad questions were refined as I read and reviewed the literature on career, socialisation and identity. Other commentators have described how, in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of texts, the process of constant comparison of categories within the data evolves through exploration, refinement and merger (Brown, 2001). At the same time constant reference to the literature enables a reflexive questioning, revision and analysis (Brown, 2001). Secondly, as the data was collected, transcribed and read, salient features of the talk began to 'cue' questions that had already arisen during my reading of the literature. For example, Grey wrote; "the focus is on the concept of **career** as an organising or regulative principle. . . . . how career as a part of the project of the self, can constitute labour process discipline and **surveillance** in certain, and supposedly benevolent, ways." (1994: 481). This

suggests a requirement to take a close look at how 'career' is brought up and deployed in talk about the workplace. It also provides a link to 'the self which is evident in identity talk drawn on to be authentic or persuasive in some way. As an interesting contrast, the literature from the company also draws on 'career' and 'identity'. This source of data illustrates some of the predominant discourses, which are relevant in the participants' workplace.

Where the present study moves on from Grey's work is by looking at how the participants draw on other, cultural understandings from outside the workplace to construct the relationship between their identity and their career. So, from a broad question about newcomers in the workplace, refined through my particular data from a theoretical sample of graduate trainees and through an analysis of the literature in the area, issues emerged which required a discourse analytic focus.

#### **4.4.6.2**        *Steps taken in analysis*

Most descriptions of how to do qualitative analysis come with the caveat that the description provided is by no means the one best way, rather a sharing of experience (Symon and Cassell, 1998). More specifically, discourse analysis has been likened to a craft like bike riding or chicken sexing, not lending itself easily to a recipe following approach (Potter, 1997). However, the following is a description of my analysis technique, adopted from several academic sources, but offered as only one way to slice the cake.

Having transcribed the data, all the time gaining familiarity with it, the transcriptions were re-read in conjunction with the audio and video tapes, each time noting anything which might be of interest. One starting point for carrying out discourse analysis is a suspension of belief in what is normally taken for

granted in language use (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). How you analyse discourse depends on the questions you are asking; categories for coding are determined by this (Gill, 1996). In the present study some of these categories were relatively straightforward, i.e. all instances of 'career', their precursors and trajectories. Others were less so, i.e. would all talk of a 'plan' come under this category? In the initial stage it is better to be as inclusive as possible, and all vaguely relevant instances should be included (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

It is at this point that some more traditional qualitative studies end their analysis. Referring back to Holstein and Gubrium's (1997) 'vessel of answers' approach to participants, these categories would then be explored for some intra-individual explanation for the accounts, based on an assumption that the role of language is a conduit or mirror onto other processes.

The second stage of analysis involves a questioning of the ways I make sense of something. Instead of reading for gist, a researcher needs to interrogate 'why am I reading this in this way?' (Gill, 1996). This phase of the analysis is made up of two related phases. Firstly, there is the search for pattern in the data, either of variability or consistency. Secondly, there is a concern with the function of certain features of the discourse, checking these against the data.

The former of these two phases will be called different things, according to the tradition of discourse analysis being followed; it may be called an identification of 'interpretative repertoires', (Potter, 1996a) or an identification of 'discourses', (Burman and Parker, 1993; Fairclough, 1992). In the present study I call these

patterns 'discourses' without necessarily attending to the possible interpretations there may be of this action. However, the post-structuralist analyst would not be involved with the second concern, that of the function of certain features of the data. By treating the discourses themselves as objects post-structuralists draw attention away from the practices and contexts in which they are embedded (Potter, 1996a). That is, their concern is with how one abstract discourse works on another abstract discourse. A Foucauldian sensitivity to the way particular 'discourses' operate in specific instances of talk is not well developed. This description is not repeated here purely in order to criticise, rather to identify how the approach that I adopt differs in some respects from a post-structuralist approach.

Finally, I have employed a strategy that was suggested by Widdicombe (1993) which involves treating what is said as a solution to a problem. In an attempt to identify the problem and how the talk constitutes a solution I have examined the rhetorical nature of the talk. Billig et al (1988) have discussed how common sense, or ideologies, contain contrary themes which give rise to ideological dilemmas when in opposition to each other. The use of discourse to persuasive effect has been explored both in the talk and in the written text from the recruitment literature of the company.

During the process of analysis of the data I have participated in three research analysis groups. Their aim is to provide a forum in which the members may present their data for the consideration and interpretation of the other members. Some data from each of the analysis chapters has benefited from the input of the

members of these groups. The analytic approach of the present study is an interpretative one, from which multiple and varied versions are expected and acknowledged. Input into the analysis from other academics constructs a more persuasive argument as to the plausibility of the findings, without presuming to have achieved consensus over an interpretation. The research groups consisted;

Nottingham University, Social Policy Department, Data Analysis Group,

The Open University, Social Science Discourse Group, and

Loughborough University, Human Sciences Department, Discourse and Rhetoric Group.

#### 4.5 Ethical considerations

Both the company and the participants of the study were assured that their confidentiality would be maintained. All identifiers like place or department names would be given pseudonyms to ensure this. During all recording sessions the control of the recording equipment was passed to the participant, together with instructions as to how to turn it off. At the beginning of the group and individual sessions it was made clear that at any point in time the recording device could be turned off. The participants were informed that the tape would be transcribed and would only be used for the purposes of the study. The written transcripts were made available for the participants to read at various stages during the study. Before any extracts from the data were used for either verbal or written presentations the participants' permission was sought. They were advised they could withdraw their permission to use the data at any time.

Following the group discussion several of the participants asked if we could meet up again in one year's time. In the group transcript there were instances of talk about the process of taking part in the research, about how it had impacted on the participants. When evaluating research the pragmatic goal of usefulness as opposed to the 'truthfulness' of any findings, is a relevant criteria (Nikander, 1995). Although this is usually applied to the researcher's reading, or interpretation of the data, in this instance the participants identified and made relevant this issue. The request for further contact implies some kind of benefit for those people who were taking part. Talking about the workplace to an outsider, or as a group away from the workplace, may be a relatively unique kind of interaction for these participants.

#### **4.6 Advantages and limitations of this approach to analysis**

Firstly, this kind of data collection and analysis is limited to a small-scale study. Although the focus is on the micro detail of the talk, larger data sets and cross data set analysis would only be possible with the use of some kind of computer assisted analysis of qualitative data (CAQDAS) software package. However, for the purposes of the kind of conversation analysis and discourse analysis I have used, computer-assisted techniques appear to offer only a sophisticated data-handling system which actually imposes a particular kind of analytic logic onto the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). These writers further argue that computer-assisted packages are more useful for organising and retrieving content rather than the discovery of form and structure, both of which are of relevance to the analytic procedure adopted in the present study. In practice, analysis has been carried out through a constant re-reading of the transcripts, once themes, or repertoires, had

emerged a search was initiated using a word processing package in order to identify other instances of a particular word use. Word processors can clearly do some of the things done by specialised packages (Seale, 2000). It may be that a larger data set would require a more sophisticated handling and storage system but this would have to be combined with a manual, critical analysis of the data. "Using CAQDAS is no substitute for thinking hard about the meaning of the data." (Seale, 2000: 165).

The theoretical assumptions that guide this study have been outlined in chapters one and three. Therefore, advantages and limitations should be addressed from within the epistemology of the approach of the present research. As a combination of analytic approaches has been used, their strengths have been drawn on to provide a richer source of understanding from the data. This has enabled a micro detailed analysis from the school of conversation analysis. However, in addition, the identification of practices of discourses, or repertoires, has enabled the researcher to go beyond the talk to consider its function. Finally, the exploration of the rhetorical nature of talk and text has made 'visible' the cultural and ideological environment in which the talk takes place.

Each approach has been criticised so an eclectic use could attract the criticisms levelled at all of them. However, it is proposed that the strengths of each will outweigh their combined limitations. The discursive psychological approach (e.g. Potter and Wetherell, 1987) has been described elsewhere, by post-structuralist influenced discourse analysts, as 'more cautious' (Parker, 1997) and 'impoverished' (Fairclough, 1992) when contrasted with their own approaches to

discourse analysis. They both pay similar attention to the way we actively use language in our everyday meaning construction, however they differ in some important aspects. One criticism is that the analysis is not located in wider discursive practices (Parker, 1997). However, my attention to rhetorical aspects of the talk depends on my drawing on my knowledge of these wider discursive practices in order to recognise them in the talk. For example, the participants' management of talk about having changed since joining the company may be seen as problematic due to the prevalent Western notion of an essential individual and thus identified as an ideological dilemma. What the critics may mean, however, is that their understanding of wider discursive practices have not been addressed, i.e. gender, race or class.

On the other hand, from a discursive psychological perspective, a critique of a post-structuralist influenced approach may include the claim that it fosters marginalisation while advocating 'giving people a voice'. For example, from an initial enthusiasm of discourse analysis by feminists (e.g. Weedon, 1987) there is now increasing caution in its use for emancipatory projects (Burman and Parker, 1993). That said, an acknowledgement of multiple readings can still work to show dominant accounts as problematic, or at least questionable.

Another post-structuralist-influenced criticism of the discursive psychological approach adopted in the present study is that where 'variability' is explored in the talk, this should be seen as 'contradiction'. This intimates an acknowledgement of diversity and pluralism, on the one hand, compared with power and deconstruction on the other (Parker, 1997). Again the rhetorical analysis of the

present study particularly enables an exploration of ideologies and persuasion, whereas, complementarily, the discourse analysis enables an exploration of how this is carried out in a specific interaction. However, Fairclough suggested:

"when ideology becomes common sense it ceases to be ideology, this is an ideological effect, because ideology is only effective when it is disguised" (1989: 107)

In contrast to this, the analysis in the present study indicates that common sense ideas are drawn on in talk to support or refute ideologies. What goes for a 'reasonable' explanation in talk is culturally, contextually and historically situated. However, the dilemmatic nature of these common sense ideologies enables two sides of an argument to be taken. This has been discussed in some detail in chapter three.

Finally, the major advantage of the analytic approach of the present study is that it focuses on how the detail of talk can illustrate how macro notions such as career may be constructed and deployed during interaction. This may provide one instance of Karl Weick's (1984) notion of 'small wins'. He proposed that you need to pay attention to small wins in order to understand and facilitate social change.

#### **4.7 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have outlined how the underlying theoretical assumptions of this research have guided my choice of method and data analysis. Some attention has been paid to the kind of theoretical understanding which may be gained from this kind of research, specifically that it should be judged on its usefulness in

providing insight. Some detail has been provided regarding the context of the research and my negotiation of access and subsequent relationship with the participants in the study. The steps taken in the analysis of the data have been described and critiqued with reference to their strengths and limitations. In conclusion, in this chapter I have outlined the practical aspects of this study and the major influences that have determined its process. In the following chapter, I begin to analyse the data. It is the first of four analysis chapters

## Chapter Five

### 5.0 Progression and portfolios

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter relates to the aim of the thesis by addressing the first of the research questions set out in chapters one and four, and repeated below:

1. How are 'common sense' notions of career drawn on and deployed in talk?

In this analysis chapter two distinct strands of career talk will be discussed. These have emerged from the talk about workplace experiences and their importance cued from a review of the literature. However, the perspective adopted in the present study questions taken-for-granted understandings surrounding some of the terms used to describe career and progression. It is evident from the literature in this area that there are assumptions surrounding the expectations of graduates (e.g. Tyson, 1995). A close analysis of their talk enabled an investigation of the way they attended to these expectations in their accounts of workplace experiences.

The first strand of analysis that will be considered in this chapter will focus on talk of progression. This has emerged as being managed through talk of development. Other academic writers have discussed self-development as a work ethic and have described its potential to replace career development (e.g. Savickas, 1993). However, investigation of the use of this term in the present

study has enabled an exploration of its deployment as an explanation of career related experiences.

Secondly, in the light of current trends of 'portfolio people' (e.g. Handy, 1994), the participants' talk of eventually leaving the company has provided an arena in which to explore how this may be accounted for. If, as suggested by the literature (see chapter two), the predominant understanding is that it is quite acceptable for the graduates to move on following their training, then the accounts would include unproblematic stories of the next move being away from the company. However, the participants in the study drew on persuasive, culturally available explanations for their possible departure from the company. This questions some of the claims made by mainstream career theory. Moreover, it is apparent that there were broader understandings being addressed in the talk. For example, the participants may be concerned with what their account 'says' about them as reasonable, moral individuals. Analysis of how this is done in the talk enabled an exploration of what goes for 'reasonable' behaviour in the context of this workplace. In addition, in the light of the assumed goal of promotion being most desirable for graduate trainees, (Arnold and MacKenzie-Davey, 1994), alternatives to this predominant understanding were analysed.

In the following section of the chapter the first strand of analysis will be discussed, in which the participants' talk about progression and development will be explored.

## 5.2 Progression and development

From recent research on the subject of career an understanding has emerged of the individual having responsibility for his or her career (Arthur, 1994; Fournier, 1998). In addition, the prevailing western ideology is of an agentic, enterprising individual (Rose, 1992). The participants' talk is therefore from the perspective of having choice and control with regard to their career. However, a dilemma for graduates has been identified, whereby explicit talk of success in terms of upward progression may be unwelcome where lateral progression, team working and job enrichment has been espoused as desirable (Doherty et al, 1997). Furthermore, some commentators have identified a dilemma for companies in their need to attract and retain graduates while no longer able to offer promises of career progression (Adamson et al, 1998). These dilemmas require talk of progression to be managed both by the company in their recruitment literature and by the participants in their talk of future plans. It is from this dilemmatic perspective that attention has been paid to the use of the term 'development'.

Taking a perspective that it may be problematic to explicitly talk of successful progression in terms of upward mobility, an analysis of the use of development in the context of talk about progression has been carried out. Following an analysis of the data three themes have emerged around this concept. The first of these identified development as a reward, where the participants constructed development as a right, or desirable part of work. Secondly, development was treated as a requirement for progression and, finally, it was described as a procedure constructed by the company through appraisal and review. In the next section I will consider how the participants constructed development as a reward.

### 5.2.1 Development as a reward

A frequent use of development, which emerged from an investigation of the recruitment literature of the company, was as an incentive for graduate applicants. In the light of the paradox of companies needing to present a stable, predictable picture of upward potential progression while being unable to make promises about career (Adamson et al, 1998), they too may have been drawing on 'development' as a solution. The following quotes were taken from an on-line version of the recruitment literature of the company in the present study:

"In total there are ten Graduate Development Programmes from which to choose."

"The more you see do and experience, the better placed you'll be to determine the shape and nature of your career development."

"We firmly believe that the quality of our training and development programmes reflects the quality of the feedback we receive from all the graduates who experience them."

(Graduate recruitment literature, company web page , 2000)

The above are three examples of how 'development' has been used in the company recruitment literature. In addition, the department that co-ordinates the placement of graduates was called 'Graduate Development'. In all these instances 'development' did not indicate a direction, (i.e. upward) and in its use as a department and programme name it functions to perpetuate a particular ideology. It was in the context of the company's use of the term that the participants' use was investigated. That is, as a term deployed by the company through 'official' avenues it was rendered available to be drawn on by the participants in their talk.

In the following extracts the participants draw on the idea of development as a reward. However, what is interesting is how they relate the development to themselves, their role or their career.

#### Extract 5.1 Jane interview 1

This extract is taken from Jane's response to a question about why she chose this particular company.

62 Jane you know (.) I just thought (.) oh (.) enn (.) ((Company A)) seem  
63 to give a lot of training (.) they seem very interested in (.) in  
64 developing you as a person (.) which for me personally (.) yeah great  
65 (.) but equally if you want to do personnel (.) you want to be in a  
66 company that care about developing their employees (.) I don't want  
67 to be in a position where I represent the company and have to say to  
68 people (.) well (.) if it won't help us then we are not going to let you  
69 do this course (.) that sort of thing (.) erm (.) what else (.) I like  
70 the diversity of it (.) the other places I applied to were all retail based  
71 (.) so you work in the store (.) or you go to their (.) comparably  
72 small head office (.) where you work as a manager (.) or whatever=

In this extract Jane uses 'development' in her explanation of her choice of the company. She relates this development to her self. However, this turn is constructed in a way that questions the promise of development.

The use of 'seem', (lines 62 and 63) on two occasions early in the turn, begin this particular questioning version of the offer of development. Prefacing this by 'I just thought' (line 62) signals a theme which runs through the participants' talk where 'thinking', or 'speaking' is of less importance than 'doing'. This functions to construct the start of a tentative explanation. The participant goes on to relate this to other employees from the position of one who 'does' personnel 'if you want to do personnel' (line 65). In this way she strengthens her comments as they

do not relate directly to her self, rather they relate to other employees, and so she avoids the potential claim of vested interest which would undermine the comment being made (Potter, 1996a). By constructing the company as one who cares about developing their employees 'a company that care' (lines 65-66), by implication, so does the speaker on choosing the company.

Interestingly, she goes on to provide more 'reasons' for choosing the company through 'erm (.) what else' (line 69). This indicates the speaker does not deem the explanation sufficient. Development as a possible reward does not constitute a 'good enough' explanation for choosing the company, on its own. This compares in some ways with the following extract where development is constructed as a right, rather than a reward, and its lack a legitimate complaint.

#### Extract 5.2 Arm interview 1

This extract is in response to a question about appraisals.

476 Ann I think you could be proactive in that (.) and if you felt that your (.)  
477 your (.) line manager wasn't developing you enough (.) you could ask  
478 somebody else for feedback (.) you could ask your mentor (.) or  
479 somebody (.) which I've done in the past (.) I've had a line manager  
480 who (.) who refused to give me (.) development (.) so I've had to go  
481 somewhere else (.) erm (.) and that's because he (.) I think he got  
482 very frustrated cos (.) he couldn't see the out (.) see the whole picture  
483 (.) if you like (.) and I wanted to know about the whole picture (.) it  
484 was (.) there was (.) lots of things (.) but he was (.) quite (.)  
485 difficult when it came to that

In the above extract Ann constructs 'development' as a right. However, her pronoun use, 'your', makes the claim on behalf of a generalised 'other' through 'if

you felt that your (.) your (.) line manager wasn't developing you enough' (lines 476-477). This works to provide distance between the speaker and what is said (Goffman, 1981; Malone, 1997). The ambiguity surrounding whether the speaker is included in 'you' ends when the participant moves the account from the general to the specific, through the pronoun change 'which I've done in the past' (line 479). In addition, she constructs an understanding about how much development is 'enough'. Through an example of an occasion where development was withheld, 'development' is constructed as a right or reward. This is clearly an account of a problematic relationship between the participant and her manager which is retrospectively accounted for through the notion of 'development', which functions in this account to allow for criticism of her manager. In the context of this particular workplace where 'development' is offered in the recruitment literature and in the form of a 'graduate development department' it may therefore be drawn on as a valid expectation for a graduate employee. Interestingly, her explanation of why he 'got very frustrated' (lines 481-482) is repaired from 'he couldn't see the out (.) ' to ' (.) see the whole picture' (line 482). This is an example of an online repair during which the speaker upgrades the persuasiveness of the account to include 'big picture' talk as opposed to the more usual 'out side'. 'Big picture' talk is also prevalent in the recruitment literature, for example:

"The ability to see the big picture as well as the detail."  
(Graduate recruitment literature, company web page , 2000)

In this way the speaker uses rhetoric which is prevalent in the workplace, in the form of recruitment literature for example, and uses it to construct a persuasive

account of a problematic event. Organisational events, or explanations, are up for interpretation and deployment. They may be talked up, down, over and possibly out (Pye, 1995). In addition by drawing on 'management speak' she positions herself as more than a novice and therefore entitled to know what 'enough' development might be. In the following extract Jody also deploys 'development' as a right; however, in this extract it is related to control.

### Extract 5.3 Jody interview 2

This extract is taken from a response to a request near the beginning of the interview, when the participant was asked to tell me what she had been doing since the last interview.

273 Jody =and I've (.) I've actually said (.) if I (.) I'd really like to do a  
274 project role next (.) so I've been quite (.) straightforward in (.)  
275 this is what I need for my development

In the above extract Jody talks about development in a way which legitimates a demand for control over her next position. Again, this appears to be drawing on a particular understanding about development in this workplace. The offer of development as an alternative to hierarchical progression by the company is taken up by the participants in their talk and used in order to legitimate their demands. In this way company rhetoric of promises of development may be drawn on and deployed in ways that the speaker deems relevant to his or her **OWN** interests. Development is therefore used in strategic ways. The end of this extract also highlights how development is constructed as a personal experience through the use of 'this is what I need for my development' (lines 274-275). An argument to

satisfy a personal 'need' is bearably more persuasive than if 'career' was substituted for 'my' in the extract. 'Self development legitimates a demand for control in this instance. However, in the following extract Jordan shifts the development talk from 'self to 'career'.

#### Extract 5.4 Jordan interview 1

The following extract is taken from Jordan's response to a question about whether he thinks his relationship with the company is balanced.

406 Jordan =yeah (.) I mean the pay back is not just financial (.) career  
407 development is really strong (.) I didn't know this at the time but  
408 the development thing is really highly regarded (.) outside  
409 ((Company A))=

In contrast to the earlier extracts, in the above extract Jordan relates 'development' to 'career' (lines 406-407). It is also explicitly positioned as a reward through the use of 'pay back' (line 406). Its value is upgraded through providing an assessment from outside the company, which is further strengthened through the temporal change, 'I didn't know this at the time' (line 407). As the development talk is related to career, this implies a relationship is understood to exist between self and career. In this extract the participant's use of 'career' may be as an alternative to 'me' or 'self' which indicates a particular understanding of the concept and how it may function in talk. Clearly, in other contexts the terms are not interchangeable; it is this particular context that lets these terms be regarded as alternatives to one another in the account. It may be that in a work context 'career' may be a legitimised way of talking about the self, an acceptable way of attending to personal issues through the notion of development for

example. In the following extract Ann constructs development as an expectation, which though promised was not met.

Extract 5.5 Ann interview 1

This extract is part of a response to a question regarding whether the participant's experiences were what she expected.

179 Ann =you'll have (.) a (.) a (.) a (.) and your career will be tailored to  
180 your (.) your development will be tailored to your needs (.) etc (.)  
181 etc (.) but it (.) but it tends to be a bit of a conveyor belt (.) the  
182 whole graduate scheme (.) it tends to be (.) like (.) this (.) this is  
183 this year's intake (.) and these are (.) are (.) the golden people (.)  
184 this year (.) and we'll do everything for them (.) and we'll really  
185 take a lot of notice of them (.) and I don't think anyone really told  
186 you that we would (.) kind of (.) get dropped off the end of the  
187 conveyor belt (.) after two years=

In the above extract Ann uses development as a reward, as an unmet expectation and therefore grounds for the criticism which followed. The hesitancy and repetition at the beginning of the turn, (line 179), may indicate something problematic in what follows (Buttny, 1993). The criticism is initiated through the use of a metaphor 'a bit of a conveyor belt' (line 181), which, although mitigated with 'a bit', implies an automatic process during which no 'tailoring' takes place. Consider the contrast between these two terms, 'tailored to your needs' and 'bit of a conveyor belt'. They both attend to a production process, one as an individually designed system and the other as a mass-manufactured system. The latter was constructed as applying to the 'whole graduate scheme' (lines 181-182). This functions to position the promises of development against an alternative version of the experiences of graduate employees.

This is followed by a list of three parts; 'these are (.) are (.) the golden people (.) this year (.) and we'll do everything for them (.) and we'll really take a lot of notice of them' (lines 183-184), which is characterised by extreme case formulations. Both of these methods have been identified as persuasive techniques in talk (Pomerantz, 1986; Jefferson, 1990). This sets up a sequence in the talk of detailed extreme descriptions of promises, followed by the inevitable contrast, 'dropped off the end of the conveyor beh' (line 186) as a construction of what 'really' happens. The pronoun use at the end of this turn in talk is relevant in that footing shifts from the generic to the specific (Goffman, 1979; Malone, 1997). Throughout the turn 'you' is used to refer to the graduates and 'we' is used when reporting what the company 'said'. However, the final 'we', in 'that we would (.) kind of (.) get dropped' (lines 185-186) is inclusive of the speaker and the graduates. The account is constructed as a generalised event, which occurs between two groups of people until the end, the punch line almost, where the participant includes her self in the group being described. By responding as a graduate employee, a bearably self-inclusive category of 'golden people' is constructed prior to this change in footing. This extreme description functions to enable the criticism of unmet promises of development to appear reasonable through contrast. In the following extract Alan also questions how development may be operationalised in job or career moves while talking about development as a 'perspective'.

#### Extract 5.6 Alan interview 1

This extract is part of a relatively long response to a question about the

participant's expectations of the company.

267 Alan =and that (.) and that seems a bit str (.) it's more (.) as things  
268 have come up (.) you've been slotted into those things (.) as  
269 opposed to (.) it really being sold on the (.) best thing for yourself  
270 from a development perspective (.) so a bit more (.) sort of (.) to  
271 get you (.) go away fi-om that nice rosy picture=

In the above extract Alan describes how he has been moved from one job to another while on the graduate-training scheme. This description is constructed in a particular way, deploying development to legitimate criticism about how this has been done. The participant constructs an alternative (better?) way to progress from job to job in the training scheme through, 'the (.) best thing for yourself' (line 269). As in extracts 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 development is related to the self and thereby strengthens the claim being made. An alternative could be 'the best thing for your career' which implies a strategic, instrumental demand, which is less persuasive. The construction of development as a perspective implies that there are other perspectives, which have prevailed according to the account being given. In addition 'nice rosy picture' (line 271) as a description of the 'development' perspective may indicate that it is an unrealistic one.

In this and the former extract the participants construct the development promises as unmet or unrealistic. This provides an illustration of criticism of the purported practices of the workplace through the drawing on and deployment of the rhetoric of the workplace, from the recruitment literature. The analysis of the extracts in this section of the chapter has focused on how development was constructed as a reward or right; in the following section the focus is on how development was constructed as a requirement.

## 5.2.2 Development as a requirement for progression

In the talk of the participants there was some drawing on development in accounts of required change in order to progress. In the career literature, knowing one's strengths and weaknesses has been identified as part of the new career discourse of enterprise (Foumier, 1998). In the following extract Des attends to development as an outcome of 'challenge'.

Extract 5.7 Des interview 1

This extract is part of a response to a question regarding Des' contribution to the company.

274 Des right (.) erm (.) since we've been here (.) erm (.) they've given me  
275 some (.) nice (.) responsibilities (.) as I say (.) which have been quite  
276 challenging (.) I think that's helped to develop me (.) I didn't (.)  
277 expect to (.) be tasked with the running of the training courses (.)  
278 quite so early (.) and that was nice (.) to run the whole training event  
279 (.) and (.) at first I wasn't sure (.) you know (.) whether I could do this  
280 ((laughter))

In this extract Des talks about challenges which are related to development. He begins the turn by describing 'nice (.) responsibilities' (line 275) which may be seen as an unusual way to describe responsibility but in line with expectations of graduates (Arnold and MacKenzie-Davey, 1994). He ends the turn by constructing his initial doubt in his ability, which functions to support the claim for development having occurred. This use of the term draws on an understanding of development occurring in the construction of difficulty. In the context of the workplace it may be that our accounts of difficulty are dilemmatic in that in order

to talk of our successes we have to construct difficulty in order to indicate how well we have done. To do otherwise may indicate that the task was not difficult at all. So in the above extract Des 'manages' this account of difficulty through talk of development. In this extract it is 'me' (line 276) who is being developed which works as an explanation of triumph in the face of 'challenge' in this workplace.

The intimate relationship that is constructed here between development and the self may be contrasted with an alternative - developing skills perhaps? Interestingly, in this extract the developing self is not constructed as an agentic self. Other discursive studies have argued that the self is described as in control in talk of workplace experiences (e.g. Grey, 1994; Casey, 1995 and Fournier, 1998). In addition, the Western ideology is of an agentic, enterprising individual (Rose, 1992; Sennett, 1998). By talking of development the participant has constructed a legitimate space for the un-agentic individual at work. In a similar vein, in the following extract Alan draws on development to manage talk of being criticised.

#### Extract 5.8 Alan interview 2

This extract is part of a long turn in response to a question about whether the participant thinks there is an ideal person for the company.

710 Alan well (.) it certainly focused my mind (.) hard to take (.) but pointed  
711 out that I have some more developing to do (.) so from that point of  
712 view it was probably good (.) it wasn't particularly nice (.) but at  
713 least I could understand it

The above extract follows talk about criticism of the participant by his manager. In this extract, 'developing' (line 711) is drawn on in the account to 'manage' the

criticism. So, in stark contrast to 'developing' being something offered as a reward to graduates, a weakness may be described in terms of the amount of development required to rectify it. And, as development is something a graduate is entitled to, as promised in the recruitment literature (see extracts earlier in this chapter), and described in academic literature, (e.g. Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994; Savickas, 1993) weakness may legitimately be constructed as due to lack of opportunity to develop.

This may be one way that individuals at work may resist responsibility for their career, which is the predominant understanding, (Arthur, 1994; Fournier, 1998) by explaining a failure in terms of a lack of development opportunities. This is also an interesting opportunity to consider whether and how the language of practice enters academia i.e. development replacing career promises, rather than the opposite direction of influence as is traditionally presumed (see comments on use of Belbin in chapter seven).

In this and the preceding extract 'development' functions as an explanation of weakness or lack of success in some area. It is interesting to note that although it works as a company-legitimate term to draw on in this way (through the recruitment literature, for example), it remains close to the individual, through 'my development', for example. In contrast, alternatives such as 'skill' or 'role' development would provide distance between the constructed weakness and the individual. The following extract is an example of how this may be achieved.

Extract 5.9 Jody interview 1

This extract is part of a response to a question about what the participant would change about the company if she could. This led to talk about appraisals.

541 Jody yes (.) yeah (.) we have a performance contract (.) erm (.) which is  
542 based on (.) you know (.) what you need to achieve (.) erm (.) and  
543 we also have a development review (.) erm (.) which (.) is based on  
544 the competencies that you need (.) either in your job (.) to develop  
545 (.) or (.) possibly (.) you know the next level up (.) and to try and  
546 develop those competencies before you get to that level

In the above extract Jody constructs a relationship between development and progression through talk of the 'next level up' (line 545). The turn begins with talk of 'performance contract' (line 541) and 'development review' (line 543), which perform a normalising function rather like talk of appraisal in Grey's (1994) study. This will be examined in more detail in the next section.

For the purposes of exploring how the participants constructed development as a requirement for progression, this extract provides an interesting contrast. In the earlier extracts of this section the participants related development to self. However, Jody focuses on 'competencies' (line 544) as skills that may be required in the future rather than weaknesses that have been identified retrospectively. In addition, by constructing the 'competencies' as requiring development this account successfully moves any required change away from the individual, providing some distance. This contrasts with other examples in extracts 5.7 and 5.8 where development is constructed as being part of the individual.

In this section I have considered how 'development' is drawn on as a requirement for progression; in the following section I shall consider 'development' when constructed as a company-instigated process.

### 5.2.3 Development as an assessed procedure

In Grey's (1994) study appraisals were regarded as exercises in self-discipline as they were transformed into 'benevolent' measures through the concept of career. This supports Fournier's (1998) notion of the 'career discourse', which positions the self as entrepreneurial. In addition, a focus on how individuals draw on understandings of an assessment procedure in talk enables an exploration of the reifying practice of people in conversation (Collins, 1981). That is, an understanding may be gained of how assessment procedures are talked into being and treated as concrete structures. In the following extract Alan constructs a 'process' while talking about criticism.

#### Extract 5.10 Alan interview 2

This extract follows some talk of criticism of the participant by his 'boss'. See extract 5.8 for preceding talk

716 Alan =and hopefully I really try to (.) erm (.) take it on board (.) erm  
717 (.) and that was the development review process (.) which this  
718 was a new boss who tasked his senior managers to do it (.) and  
719 they had to do it (.) so it wasn't that my boss would naturally do it  
720 (.) but he was quite good at doing it (.) so (.) yeah good feedback  
721 (.) can only be positive

In this extract the participant constructs a questioning of the development review process by deploying identity-relevant characteristics of the person who was accountable for the process.

The criticism of the participant was constructed as legitimate through 'development review process' (line 717), a normalising judgement as discussed in Grey's (1994) study. However, in this instance the participant goes on to provide detail about the person carrying out the process. This detail may serve several functions. Firstly, by providing it there is an indication that some explanation was deemed to be required. The instigator was described as a 'new boss' (line 718) which positions the process historically as a fledgling phenomenon which carries with it the potential criticism of being 'novice' while simultaneously attracting the label of 'irnovative'. It begins to become more clearly a criticised process with 'they had to do it' (lines 718-719). The implication is that they would have chosen to do otherwise. The evaluation of the participant's 'boss', 'but he was quite good at doing it' (lines 719-720), deflects a potential charge that it may be a valuable process badly undertaken by one particular individual. In addition, 'it wasn't that my boss would naturally do h' positions the process as an 'unnatural' act, at least for the participant's boss. By constructing it in this way it questions the hegemonic version that it is a legitimate, uncontested and incontestable process.

In the recruitment literature 'feedback' is featured on several occasions, for example:

"Throughout the programme you'll receive informal feedback and structured assessment."

(graduate recruitment literature, company web page , 2000)

"Feedback was good and it's excellent to know that senior management are buying into your career right from the beginning."

(graduate trainee quoted in graduate recruitment literature, company web page , 2000)

The participant may be drawing on this kind of understanding and describes the criticism as 'feedback', which is evaluated as 'good' (line 720). In addition, the statement 'good feedback (.) can only be positive' (lines 720-721) may be seen as a summing up. Drew and Holt (1988) looked at the use of idiomatic expressions when making complaints. In addition to their proposal that idioms may be used to bring a description to a close, they also talked of idioms being used to seek affiliation when a story is complaint-relevant. In this instance the implied criticism of the 'development review process' may function as a complaint which ends by drawing on a contextually relevant summing up in the form of an idiomatic expression, which prevails in other talk and texts of the workplace. This too may be a way in which the rhetoric of the workplace functions as a normalising judgement in so far as the members of the workplace, to perform particular functions in talk, may draw on it. In this instance, it functions to provide an account of criticism normalised through the use of a legitimate company term, 'feedback'.

Although there were several instances where 'development' was associated in the talk with processes instigated by the company, the following extract has been selected as it relates development with progression through 'the next level up'.

Exfract 5.11 Jody interview 1

This extract forms part of extract 5.9, shown earlier in this chapter, and follows talk of what the participant would change about the company and its appraisals system.

541 Jody yes (.) yeah (.) we have a performance contract (.) erm (.) which is  
542 based on (.) you know (.) what you need to achieve (.) erm (.) and  
543 we also have a development review (.) erm (.) which (.) is based on  
544 the competencies that you need (.) either in your job (.) to develop  
545 (.) or (.) possibly (.) you know the next level up (.) and to try

In this extract Jody constructs two methods of company assessment, 'performance contract' (line 541) and 'development review' (line 543). The 'development review' is related to 'what you need to achieve' (line 542). This contrasts with other extracts where development was constructed in relation to the participants' selves, i.e. 'my development'. This different way of speaking about development, as closely related to skills which are required to do the job, or 'the next level up', may be a way of challenging the implicit understanding that the company may (have a right to?) develop the person. In addition, by relating development to the next step up the participant raises the instrumental aspect of this process as an issue of relevance. This may be one way of attending to the implicit understanding that 'development' is actually about progression as a desirable event for the participant. This perhaps contrasts with other participants' extracts where development is related to the self and progression or career interests are not explicitly made relevant.

From a post-structuralist perspective these assessment processes have been regarded as self-regulatory through the discourse of career (Grey, 1994). Grey argued that self-discipline resulted from appraisal exercises through the concept of career. In the talk of the participants in the present study, however, what is interesting is how they make notions such as the 'development review' relevant in the current interactions. This attends to the argumentative aspect of talk. This does not deny that career or progression as an ideology does not have some influence on how people talk about workplace experiences, rather there is room for manoeuvre, which is evident in these interactions. The processes of appraisal that are attended to in the talk are not merely reproduced as unquestionable processes, rather they are re-constructed in the talk. In contrast, in Casey's (1994) study of talk about workplace experiences she proposed that rhetorical devices such as 'the learning organisation' or 'learner employees' may act as forms of discursive domination. The participants in the present study attend to 'development' in a questioning way. As a company oriented rhetorical device constructed in the recruitment literature, review, process, department and programme it is up for deployment by the members of the company. Although, according to Silverman and Jones in their study of work-place talk;

"(T)he intelligibility of bureaucratic work can be recognised in members' display to each other, despite personal biases, particular biographies and the like, their activities are indeed in-accord- with-a-community-rule-applied-in-a-community-spirit."  
(1976: 173)

And this understanding of company processes makes them a powerful 'normalising' force. However, some of the extracts presented in this section have indicated the deployment of 'development' as a resource on which the members

draw in order to construct criticism of the company's use of the term. This illustrates how constructions about an organisation may be challenged or supported by subsequent members' talk (Pye, 1995).

To summarise, in this section of analysis I have considered how 'development' is drawn on and deployed differentially by the participants. It functions as a reward or right due to constructed expectations of both the participants and as found in the company literature (see foregoing examples of extracts from the company recruitment literature). This has provided an arena in which lack of development may therefore be drawn on to legitimate criticism of the company, or senior members of the company, in a way which would otherwise be seen as problematic. The participants made distinctions between self and skill development where self development has been the subject of much more detailed description than is found in the simpler constructions surrounding 'skills'. This may be due to the personal nature of self-development as a portable reward, which requires more 'justification' in talk, as opposed to skills, which, will be used for the obvious benefit of the company. Career development is treated in a similar way to self-development in that it is an expectation and therefore can be drawn on to legitimise criticism of the company when it is unmet.

In contrast, 'development' has also been drawn on as an explanation of 'weakness' or required change. Accounts that construct development in this way largely describe it as a triumph over adversity where some work has been done, earlier in the talk, to indicate the complexity of the task. This relates to a narrative structure of goal, problem, and solution in the talk. This may be compared to how

we talk about being ill. Our actions must hide and reveal the shape of the illness we are labouring under (Billig et al, 1988). In this way the speaker has to construct his or her problem prior to claiming how well they have coped; otherwise, how would anyone know the extent of the problem that has been overcome? In this workplace there are expectations of graduate trainees which may create a more difficult scenario in which to talk about weakness. 'Development' appears to provide a plausible, legitimate, authentic repertoire on which the speakers draw for these accounts.

Finally, 'development' has been constructed as part of the procedures and practices of the company, in department name and assessments for example. In some of the extracts these practices have been questioned, while describing their relevance as a procedure in the company. As company-instigated procedures they are up for re-constmction in their use by the members. Grey (1994) has implied that this kind of assessment procedure is 'transformed' into benevolent measures through the discourse of career. In the talk of the participants in the present study there have emerged instances where 'development' talk actually constmctcs opportunity for criticism. This has become evident on analysis of the detail of the talk. This is not to say that 'assessment', as an ideology, does not appear to ftinction in some way as a benevolent measure, it is that a deconstmction of how it is talked about enables consideration to be given to contrary poshions.

In this section I have discussed how participants have attended to an expectation of progression and its constmcted dependence on development. In contrast, in the

next section of this chapter I will explore how people talk about the possibility of leaving the company, as an alternative way of progressing.

### **5.3 Portfolio people**

Recent ideas surrounding career have proposed a more fluid approach in contrast to the traditional, hierarchical, internal labour market model. The individual is no longer expected to be tied to any one company; skills may be gained and transferred to another workplace unproblematically (e.g. Handy, 1994; Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). The participants in the present study, however, talk about leaving the company in complex ways. They construct leaving the company as an option while paying attention to what their account 'says' about them as moral individuals. This accounting for leaving would not be necessary if the academic literature were to be taken as the dominant understanding regarding careers. In addition, the participants have drawn on non-work activities in this accounting, which questions promotion as the presumed goal (see Scase and Goffee, 1989).

The following extracts are taken from where the speakers have given consideration to the possibility of leaving the company. In these examples they draw on constructions of culture and family as explanations. These were selected as particularly interesting as one refers to an internal, or work-related explanation and one to an external, non-work related explanation with regard to the company. The introduction of non-work issues into a work-related interaction supports the proposal that career refers to broader understandings than those of the workplace. In addition, it also functions to highlight how issues of relevance to the participants may be attended to; the workplace interview is not necessarily just for

talk about the workplace. Home talk about family or achieving balance performs a particular function in talk at work.

### 5.3.1 Culture 'reasons' for leaving the company

In the following extract Alan draws on 'cultures' in order to account for leaving the company in the future.

#### Extract 5.12 Alan interview 1

This extract is part of a response to a question about where the participant sees himself in five years' time. This extract is also discussed in chapter seven, as extract 7.7, with regard to identity work in the talk.

603 Alan (2.0) erm (.) I'd cert (.) I'd certainly (.) whoo (.) I'd cert (.) my  
604 intention is to move forward (.) and upwards (.) definitely (.) erm  
605 (.) just exactly where (.) I'm not (.) I don't really mind (.) something  
606 inside me says that it would be good to experience different cultures  
607 (.) companies (.) you know (.) just from a wider knowledge  
608 experience (.) erm (.) so I certainly wouldn't cross out moving from  
609 ((Company A)) (.) if (.) if it looked advantageous at the time (.) I  
610 am trying to get away from this (.) I can't stand people who talk about  
611 ((Company A)) all the time (.) you know  
612 ((laughter))  
613 Alan so I'd much rather not talk and just do

In the above extract Alan talks about the possibility of leaving the company in terms of 'good to experience different cultures' (line 606). The beginning of the turn is marked with hesitation and repetition, which may indicate the sensitive nature of the question (Buttny, 1993). He locates the potentially uncomfortable notion of leaving the company to 'something inside me' (line 605). This positioning is of interest because, while it appears to be located within the

individual, it 'says' things to the individual. This draws on an understanding of an essential self, which may be able to tell you the 'right' thing to do. In a culture where an essential self is a given this works as a persuasive tool. It is unlikely that anyone would challenge this kind of comment. However, it functions as if it were something more authoritative perhaps, beyond the control of the speaker and therefore more believable.

The participant goes on to repair 'cultures' to 'companies' (line 606); this makes explicit that he is talking of leaving the company, as opposed to moving to another division within the company. This is followed by a mitigated explanation, which draws on a common understanding of 'wider knowledge experience' (line 607). It may be that the context of an interview with an academic researcher may have provided an appropriate arena in which to draw on this kind of repertoire, as an academic audience could not deny the legitimacy of this explanation. The turn is brought to a close by an explicit evaluation of the topic being discussed: 'so I'd much rather not talk and just do' (line 613). This is further indication of the problematic nature of the talk as the participant constructs 'talk' in opposition to 'do'. The interaction is 'talk' and therefore less desirable. In this extract the participant has drawn on and deployed multiple tools, or repertoires, in order to 'manage' his account of leaving the company. As part of this accounting 'culture' has been deployed as a legitimising term. However, in the following extract Ann constructs 'culture' as something she wants to get away from.

Extract 5.13 Ann interview 2

This extract is part of a turn, in response to a question about what the next step may be for the participant.

339 Ann Christmas (.) thinking (.) this isn't (.) this isn't (.) any longer (.) what  
340 I want to do (.) or (.) this is (.) not the right structure (.) I'm not  
341 enjoying it as much (.) or (.) but (.) the (.) the (.) pressure (.) well the  
342 culture is (.) that I definitely want to be out of the culture (.) so (.) so  
343 I'm prepared for looking for something else (.) afterwards (.) and (.)  
344 I've already spoken to (.) my boss (.) and said (.) you know (.) that (.)  
345 there's got to come a point (.) where (.) if (.) if you're asked to do  
346 more (.) and more (.) and more (.) and don't get rewarded (.) at the  
347 end of the day (.) I've got on my cv that I've worked for ((Company  
348 A)) for four years (.) and I've done (.) you know (.) five (.) six jobs  
349 (.) I've got (.) excellent training (.) and it's a brilliant graduate  
350 scheme to say you've been on (.) got a lot of (.) sel (.) selling points  
351 (.) to other companies (.) so I'll be (.) tempted to (.) go out (.) and  
352 look elsewhere (.) having (.) having been (.) for (.) this other job (.)  
353 like I said (.) its made me realise of course (.) there is a lot more out  
354 there (.) so (.) I'll be (.) quite tempted to (.) have a look round (.) see  
355 who would (.) who would offer me what (.) you know

In the above extract Ann also talks of culture. It comes near the beginning of the turn at the end of a list of five 'reasons' for 'looking for something else' (line 343). As a list this signals interactional trouble in that, as a general rule, three items work to be persuasive (Buttny, 1993; Jefferson, 1990). As an issue of relevance to the participant, 'culture' is deployed as if no explanation is required; it works in this interaction as a commonly understood term. It functions as a 'common place' where criticism may be directed (see Billig, 1996). This contrasts with extract 5.12 where, although it is drawn on in a similar way, it functions to 'explain' a move towards other 'cultures', rather than away from the 'culture' of the present company.

There is some construction of being asked to do too much, 'more (.) and more (.) and more' (line 346) followed by an idiomatic expression 'at the end of the day' (lines 346-347), a summing up often used during a complaint (Drew and Hoh,

1988). The turn continues with constructions of the 'selling points' (line 350) of the participant. Interestingly, the search for an alternative company is minimised to 'have a look around' (line 354) and the job application process is changed into 'who would offer me what' (line 355). The function of this talk appears to be to silence or write out the efforts required by the participant to get another job, as if she would play a very small part in it. It is constructed as if all the described attributes would attract another employer as a natural course of events. This creates a description of leaving the company which is triggered by, among other things, culture, but which is only to be expected in the light of the outstanding qualities of the participant and the apparently unsolicited offers from alternative companies.

The preceding two extracts have been used to examine how participants drew on 'internal' explanations for leaving the company. In the next section I will explore an 'external' construction focused around family talk.

### **5.3.2 Negotiating family, work-life balance**

In this section the participants' talk is explored for how they manage talk about leaving the company while deploying non-work repertoires in the construction of plausible accounts.

Extract 5.14 Lyn interview 2

This extract is part of a response to a question about having a long-term plan.

216 Lyn and I'll have to say (.) when I had my interview to come to the  
 217 company (.) I was very (.) you know (.) oh yes (.) in five years (.) ten  
 218 years (.) enn (.) I (.) I'd like to carry on going up the ladder (.) a bit (.)  
 219 but (.) I'm quite realistic (.) in the sense that (.) I do (.) at some point  
 220 want to stop and have a family (.) so (.) it's balancing that (.) I guess (.)  
 221 and I'm (.) I'm (.) fairly sure that (.) when I (.) sort of (.) some time (.)  
 222 settle down to do that (.) it won't necessarily be at ((City A)) (.) which  
 223 (.) kind of (.) limits (.) what you do (.) in terms of ((Company A)) (.)  
 224 cos ((Company A)) is (.) basically ((City A)) (.) so (.) in terms of (.)  
 225 yes (.) I want to gradually work up (.) and (.) I think (.) do cross  
 226 functional moves (.) cross business units (.) cross ftnctions (.) is the  
 227 way to go if you want to get higher up the ladder (.) cos it gives you so  
 228 much (.) more (.) of the picture of what the company does (.) so that's  
 229 probably right (.) but I'm being realistic in the sense that (.) I'm not  
 230 going to keep working (.) sort of (.) indefinitely (.) like I say (.) in a  
 231 few years (.) when I (.) either stop working for a few years (.) or (.) go  
 232 to another company (.) if I want a relocation=

In the above extract Lyn negotiates a balance between work and 'family' to explain the possibility of leaving the company. She begins the turn by talking about how she 'was' (line 217) when she began with the company and orients to the concept of a 'ladder' (line 218). Interestingly, as noted earlier, the career literature implies that the ladder is an outdated metaphor for career progression (Gunz, 1989); in this instance the participant deploys the term in an unproblematic way which may indicate a gap between theory and practice in terms of how people draw on understandings in their talk. 'Family' talk is pre-empted by a self-description of 'quite realistic' (line 219) which implies an alternative view may be deemed 'unrealistic'. What this says for career paths of other women in other workplaces could only be speculated upon; however, in this instance the realism is linked to 'climbing the ladder' versus 'having a family'.

Prior to this extract the participant talked of moving to be near her parents when she decides to have a family and this is referred to in the talk of location in this extract. She goes on to construct her self as 'knowing' what is required in order to progress in the company, 'cross functional moves (.) cross business units (.)

cross functions' (lines 225-226), in the form of a persuasive three-part list (Jefferson, 1990). However, the participant returns to the notion 'but I'm being realistic' (line 229) to construct her self as not aiming to progress 'indefinitely' (line 230) within the company. This may be one way that the expectation of the graduates' goal being promotion, as proposed in the literature (e.g. Scase and Goffee, 1989), is challenged in talk. The dilemma being addressed by the participant in this instance is that it is necessary to 'show' in talk that the speaker knows what is required in order to progress in the usual way, i.e. up a ladder, while constructing an alternative path. It is in creating a 'knowing' self that the choice of an alternative to the dominant route becomes plausible. Fitzgerald and Betz (1994) touched on this when they argued that any overarching career theory has little relevance for large segments of the working population. I would add to this that any 'theory' functions as a backdrop against which to position the self in interaction. In the following extract Jane deals with a career/family dilemma in quite a different way.

#### Extract 5.15 Jane interview 2

This extract is part of a turn in response to a question about future plans.

623 Jane =and (.) I'd (.) probably (.) be sort of (.) reasonably senior (.) but I  
624 don't think I'd be (.) really (.) pushing the (.) senior management (.)  
625 area (.) as yet (.) I'd still be quite struggling with the issue of (.) is  
626 career more important to me in life than other things (.) and I look at  
627 my present manager now (.) has two children under five and yet (.)  
628 she's quite often in at weekends (.) she works horrendous hours (.) and  
629 I just think (.) you know (.) she travels (.) she's in (.) maybe (.) two  
630 European countries a week (.) sometimes (.) and I just think (.) okay (.)  
631 she obviously enjoys it (.) erm (.) and nothing against the choice that  
632 she's made (.) and (.) you know (.) the kids are being looked after (.)  
633 and (.) so on (.) but I don't think (.) that's what I'd like to do (.) and (.)  
634 in five years' time I may be at a stage where I'm looking at (.) you

635 know (.) family and settling down (.) at the moment (.) I am quite  
636 career focused (.) but that (.) just because I haven't got anything else (.)  
637 really (.) driving me in my personal life

In the talk the participant constructs a detailed account of a woman with a family in order to position her self in a different way. I shall unpack what this may mean for career, family and talk about leaving. She begins the turn with a projection of where she may be in five years' time, and qualifies this as being dependent on the resolution of a 'struggle' between 'career' and 'other things' (lines 625-626). This begins the either / or theme which runs through this turn. The detailed description of her manager works to construct a scenario against which Jane simply positions herself with 'but I don't think (.) that's what I'd like to do' (line 633). The implication is that having a family precludes having a career for the female speaker. This is reinforced when she ends the turn by contrasting 'career focus' with 'personal life' as if the career focus is instead of, or until there is, something 'driving me in my personal life' (line 637). It may be that in the present culture women have an alternative to a career in the workplace which is regarded as legitimate and which may be drawn on as part of a projected life pattern. It is unlikely that a man could legitimately talk about his 'personal life' being prioritised over his career plan. In the context of talk about possibly leaving the company women may have access to a more culturally persuasive repertoire to authenticate their accounts than men have. In order to illustrate this point the following extract provides a contrast.

#### Extract 5.16 Des interview 2

This extract is also part of a response to a question about future plans.

292 Des I think (.) how everything goes in the next two years will (.)  
293 determine where I'm at in five years if that isn't too much of an  
294 evasive answer (.) erm (.) if I get some good opportunities to maybe  
295 explore some of the areas I have just mentioned there (.) and gain  
296 experience (.) then I can see myself definitely staying within the  
297 company (.) and (.) hopefully (.) building a career (.) within the  
298 company (.) erm (.) if (.) if I feel that I'm (.) being given piecemeal  
299 bits (.) you know (.) just as a sop (.) you know (.) and (.) and not  
300 really getting the chance to flex my creativity (.) or whatever (.) you  
301 know the chance to use my potential (.) then (.) then (.) I'd (.) I'd  
302 have to think about something else (.) I was even dabbling with (.)  
303 and this is completely confidential (.) about returning to education

Des is answering the same question as Jane in extract 5.15 about where they see themselves in five years' time. He begins the turn by orienting to the interview itself, as if there is an understanding that a particular response is called for with 'if that isn't too much of an evasive answer' (lines 293-294) (Dingwall, personal communication). The participant constructs 'reasons' for remaining with the company and relates this to 'building a career' (line 297). Following this he goes on to provide detail in support of his leaving the company. This part of the turn is characterised with hedging, 'you know', 'whatever' (lines 299-300) which perhaps indicates the problematic nature of the account he is giving (Buttny, 1993). The argument is made up of 'piecemeal bits', 'just as a sop', 'flex my creativity' and 'use my potential' (lines 298-301) which arguably present a less persuasive account than Jane was drawing on. The turn ends with a minimising 'dabbling with' (line 302) of alternatives to the present company and then a deployment of 'education' (line 303) which may be of relevance to the nature of the interaction taking place, that is a research interview.

To contrast this extract with Jane's account in extract 5.15 it is clear that each have **drawn** on different repertoires in order to account for the possibility of leaving the company. However, while Jane may have access to those constructed

by Des, this does not apply the other way around. While this may be an unusual 'take' on gender difference in the workplace, especially in relation to career differences, close analysis of talk enables this kind of questioning of assumptions of success in a career.

In summary, in this section of the analysis attention has been paid to how the participants talk about the possibility of leaving the company, in the light of academic literature which describes fluid, boundaryless, portfolio careers. The issue of leaving the company was raised spontaneously by the participants; however, instead of the expected unproblematic account of an expectation to move to other companies, the participants 'managed' their talk in different ways. As an interaction with an outsider who may be producing a report of findings from the conversations for the senior management of the company, the pressure to be accountable may have been heightened. Nevertheless, the extracts have provided some examples of how the participants constructed both internal 'culture' and external 'family' explanations. In these extracts the search for alternative companies is minimised and explicit reference to a career 'ladder' casts doubt on the academic career literature claims of its inappropriateness as a metaphor. The 'family, work-life balance' repertoire which has been drawn on provides a culturally legitimate 'reason' for eventually leaving the company which is deployed by some female participants. This may have implications for how personal concerns may be prioritised over company expectations in talk. In addition it also provides a plausible alternative to the presumed goal of promotion within the company.

## 5.4 Chapter summary

The notion of development and the issue of eventually leaving the company are constructs that indicate some of the common sense understandings surrounding career. Their relevance is highlighted as they were attended to by all the participants in interactions about work experiences, although only a selection has been analysed here.

In this chapter I have considered, firstly, how the participants talk about progression and the function of 'development' in this talk. By focusing on development as a resource in talk it makes visible its multiple meaning. In the context of 'development' being formalised in the company through processes and departments the participants draw on it differentially in their talk. As a reward it has been drawn on as a right, promised in the recruitment literature and therefore works, in some instances, to legitimise criticism of the company, through talk of unmet expectations. In contrast, the participants also construct weakness in relation to development. It has been deployed as a repertoire which legitimises and makes plausible their accounts of lack of success in some areas. In a similar way, lack of opportunity for development is a useful tool to talk about potential failure. How else could you explain it? In today's agentic self-perspective, responsibility lies with the individual. This may be one way that responsibility for failure can be passed on to the company (structure?) through talk of promises of development being unmet.

Development has been positioned in relation to self, or career, or skills. Each of these positionings creates a particular space between the claim being made and the

speaker. In addition, a job focus appears to lie in contrast to a development focus in the talk of some of the participants. Career development talk seems to be a combination of the two - a legitimate way of talking about personal needs and desires in the context of the workplace. This has implications for practice, for both individuals and business. For the company there are fewer costs involved in promising to develop 'skills', as they can be justifiably company-oriented. However, offering to develop the self or person is more subjective; it can be challenged and may not relate directly to the company. On the other hand, self, or person development is offered in recruitment literature perhaps on the understanding that it is desirable and therefore may attract more, or better, graduates.

The participants' talk of leaving the company in the future, as a spontaneous issue raised in the talk, appears to align with an understanding of portfolio people as espoused in the literature. However, following the analysis it has become evident that this is not simply an unproblematic drawing on a common sense understanding of 'what graduates do in their careers'. The interaction is the arena in which a common sense understanding is up for negotiation. In this instance the participants' interaction appears to orient to being a moral individual, in that it is not morally acceptable to talk about planning to leave immediately after the training period. The verisimilitude of the talk being immaterial here, it is the construction of the moral individual and its subsequent impact on the negotiated deployment of common sense notions surrounding career that is of interest.

In addition, the construction of the company's culture as a 'reason' to leave included some talk of a career 'ladder', which contrasts with much of the recent career literature. Interestingly, a particular tool was drawn on in the talk of leaving the company, which enabled a kind of dual-positioning. Through a 'common sense' way of talking about the self (i.e. 'something inside me') the speaker could make a prediction about leaving the company, while still maintaining a partial commitment to staying. The 'family, work-life balance' repertoire appears to provide a strong culturally relevant explanation for some of the women participants talking about leaving the company in the future. This has been contrasted with repertoires drawn on by a male participant and has enabled an exploration of alternatives to the presumed goal of internal promotion. Furthermore, the persuasive accounts of alternatives to the dominant career path (i.e. up a ladder) are made persuasive in the construction of the 'knowing' self. In this way the ideologies that emanate from career theory, or current literature work as a backdrop to individual career accounts. They may be drawn on to differentiate the speaker.

Some common sense notions of career have been analysed in this chapter. The wider implications of the analysis for theory and practice will be addressed in the discussion chapter. However, the definition of career remains an elusive concept. The participants orient to this as they construct definitions in order to deny and claim career, which is addressed in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six

### Career: definition, denial and management

#### 6.1 Introduction

This is the second of two chapters in which I present some analysis in order to address the first of the research questions, set out in chapters one and four, and repeated below:

1. How are common sense notions of career drawn on and deployed in talk?

In a similar way to the analysis in chapter five, in this chapter the aim of the thesis, to explore career and identity in talk, is attended to. By specifically addressing the first of the research questions, emphasis is placed on career, rather than identity in this chapter. However, in the talk these constructs are clearly inextricably linked. Some mention of identity deployment will be made but a more in-depth analysis will follow in chapter seven.

In this second analysis chapter, I will explore how the participants both respond to and spontaneously evoke talk about career. In the literature about graduates' careers there are assumptions about upward mobility being important to this group (e.g. Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994). These assumptions generate expectations of the graduates, which they attend to in their accounts. The analysis will be divided into two strands. However, initially, the company's use of career in their recruitment literature will be briefly examined. This functions to illustrate

some of the context in which the participants are situated and in which the study takes place. The participants' constructions of career will then be investigated as the first strand in the analytic argument of the chapter. I will explore how 'career' is simultaneously denied and acknowledged in the talk and how this may be related to their providing a coherent account. Finally, in the light of an expectation for graduates to take control of their careers (e.g. Handy, 1994; Doherty et al, 1997), the participants' talk of managing their careers will be analysed.

## **6.2 Career in the context of the company recruitment literature**

In a study of recruitment literature Doherty et al (1997) found that one third of the companies who were studied no longer used the word 'career' in their graduate brochures. However, in the recruitment literature of the company in the present study this was not the case. The first page of the on-line brochure included:

"For graduates of all disciplines joining us now that means the scope to build extremely diverse careers - there's no need to be narrowly focused." (Graduate recruitment literature, company web page, 2000)

Further on in the literature the following can be found:

"Perform to a consistently high standard and your career progression will match that performance."

"You may choose to pursue a specialist career or move into a broader management career."

"Most importantly you'll have the opportunity to shape and choose your own career direction as you progress and prove yourself"

(Graduate recruitment literature, company web page, 2000)

In addition the early training process through which the graduates progress is divided into what are termed, 'career disciplines' (e.g. marketing, logistics, IS consultancy) and called, the 'graduate development programme'. In the context of the company's use of 'career' it will be useful to explore how the participants in the present study orient to it in their talk. In the following section the participants construct career definitions and draw on these definitions to deny particular understandings about career for themselves.

### 6.3 Career, definition and denial

The original aim during the interviews was to see if and how the participants brought up 'career', and its subsequent trajectory in talk. However, towards the end of each, second, individual interview I introduced 'career' in order to explore how the participants responded to it as a challenge. That is, the asking of this question positioned the participants as people who talk about such things. They, therefore, accounted for themselves in the light of this positioning. As co-constmctor of the interactions, my impact has already been acknowledged. However, it is in my introduction of the word 'career' that I explicitly position the participants in such a way that they have to provide a response. Other commentators have proposed that career as a story is created retrospectively, unwritten (except in a cv.) and unspoken (unless specifically asked) (Weick, 1995 and Arthur, Inkson and Pringle, 1999). One part of this study is one such instance. As this occurs some way into my research relationship with the participants, and the earlier interactions have instances of spontaneous talk of career, this manipulation of the talk is justified through an interest in how being charged with having a career may be interpreted as a challenge. Nevertheless, it is

acknowledged that some conversation analytic wrhers would critique my intervention as moving too far beyond 'naturally occurring data' (e.g. Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998).

From the position of responding to an expectation of having a career the participants define career. As a concept it is generally presumed we know what career means. However, each of the participants defined the term in order to deny aspects of common understanding surrounding career. This has relevance to how the study raises and answers fresh questions about career. The following extract is in response to my direct question about career.

#### Extract 6.1 Ann interview 2

Part of this extract has been further analysed with regard to the 'split-self repertoire in chapter seven, extract 7.8. However, the current focus is on how career has been defined and made relevant to the speaker.

562 Int I've two words written down (.) one is career, which we've (.) kind of (.)  
563 touched on (.) er (.) do you think you have a career  
564 (.)  
565 Ann (3.0) what do you mean by career (.) if career means (.) the same (.) if career  
566 means the same (.) sort of (.) profession (.) but working my way up (.) no (.) er  
567 (.) I see myself as (.) just bettering myself in (.) whatever that is (.) I've got no  
568 (.) I'm (.) to me (.) a career is (.) er (.) being a (.) lawyer (.) or a (.) doctor (.)  
569 you know (.) something where you've learnt your profession (.) and do that  
570 trade (.) and (.) I (.) I'd say (.) I have a career (.) in that I'm happy to just do  
571 what I'm doing  
572 (.)  
573 Int okay  
574 (.)  
575 Ann sometimes (.) it'd be nice to think (.) I just don't have to worry about it (.) I just  
576 can stay and do the same job (.) and that's okay (.) but I wouldn't be happy with  
577 my self (.) I've got a career in that sense (.) but I wouldn't say I've got a career  
578 (.) I've got a master plan (.) of how I'm going to get to director of finance

In this extract I have constructed 'career' as a word, (line 562). There has been discussion regarding how constructions of objects, such as beliefs for example, invoke attached meanings (Billig, 1996). By relegating the status of an object to a belief it renders its factual description as questionable. This has implications for how the object is subsequently dealt with in interaction. The underlying assumption of the present study that 'career' is a socially constructed phenomenon has been made visible in the talk, by calling it a 'word'. This explicitly positions the object 'career' as one which is up for re-construction. This understanding may have been taken up by the participant due to the prolonged silence at the beginning of her response, (line 565). Repetition and questioning further indicate uncertainty regarding what is required (Buttny, 1993). A questioning of what is meant by 'career' has relevance in that it is generally expected that people 'know' what it means. A denial of this common understanding in the interaction perhaps focuses on the accountability, which would accompany a more straightforward acceptance.

In the second part of the turn she constructs her approach to work as a contrast to what a 'career' is: 'being a (.) lawyer (.) or a (.) doctor' (line 568). She draws on 'job' (line 576) as an extreme alternative but denies this as a description of herself through 'but I wouldn't be happy with myself (lines 576-577). After this she provides a mitigated acknowledgement of having a 'career' through, 'I've got a career in that sense' (line 577). Interestingly, however, the turn does not end with this. The participant repeats her denial of having a 'career' (line 577) and upgrades it to 'master plan' (line 578), an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986). The use of the title of the most senior member of the company in the

participant's department, 'director of finance' (line 578), further upgrades this description.

Finally, this tum in the talk is not followed by laughter, which would signal that a rather different interpretation could be made of the final part of the utterance (Jefferson, 1984). Throughout this tum the participant positions her self in relation to extremes, not just a person with a job but not heading for a directorship. This may be something to do with achieving a balance in the account. Linde (1993) also talked of this when looking at career stories of professional people. In order to establish adequate causality for a choice of job the account must be neither too random nor too deterministic, rather an equilibrium of reasonableness. In the following extract Harry also provides an extreme description of 'career' as a contrast to a constructed vagueness in his account.

#### Extract 6.2 Harry interview 2

This extract is also in response to my question about career, which was at the end of the second interview.

827 Int mm (.) mm (.) yeah good (.) my next topic is (.) career (.) we have already  
828 touched on this earlier on  
829 (.)  
830 Harry I think (.) you would have to be (.) god like (.) to be able to plan  
831 ((laughter))  
832 Harry I'm moving to this job (.) I will develop in a (.) my personal skills in this  
833 way (.) which will enable me to move to job (.) c (.) which will enable me to  
834 end up in (.) job d (.) which is where I want to be (.) no way (.) you don't  
835 know (.) you don't know if job d is going to exist (.) by the time you get  
836 there  
837 ((laughter))  
838 Harry erm (.) the people in personnel have done a lot of work (.) to identify (.) the

839 necessary skills (.) that they think will be needed (.) enn (.) and they change  
840 from time to time  
((detail omitted))

851 Harry I need to be a bit more **strategic** in my thinking (.) I need to look at (.) er (.)  
852 not react to what the competition is doing (.) but (.) do things (.) that (.)  
853 would lead us to where we want to be (.) and erm (.) so (.) I don't think it's  
854 possible (.) to have have such a (.) tightly planned (.) career plan (.) I think  
855 (.) probably (.) you should be looking at (.) general areas  
856 (.)

857 Int good=  
858 Harry =but (.) to say (.) oh well (.) I'm moving to this job (.) with a view of  
859 moving to that job (.) with a view of moving to that job (.) that's too  
860 restrictive

In this extract the participant again denies having a career at the beginning of the response, through the extreme formulation of 'god like (.) to be able to plan' (line 830). However, in contrast to the former extract this is followed by laughter, which serves to indicate that there may be something problematic about the utterance (Heritage, 1984). He goes on to provide detail about how this would 'work' before repeating his denial. Interestingly, an 'on-line' repair in line 832 shifts the focus from self to skills through 'I will develop in a (.) my personal skills in this way'. In this account the participant constructs what a 'plan' is (lines 832-836). As this is in response to a question about career perhaps this is what 'career' is to this participant, or at least it is a characterisation of a career.

The participant continues the turn to construct a company-oriented version of the earlier account of a 'plan'. This is positioned through, 'the people in personnel have done a lot of work' (line 838). So, despite denying that it is possible to develop skills in order to progress to certain jobs, Harry then talks at length (some detail omitted) about how the company does this for its members. With reference to the repair at line 832, the shift from 'self to 'skill' development constructs a legitimate opportunity to talk of the company's role in the individual's career.

'Skill' development may be regarded as more closely related to work activities than self-development and therefore a place of legitimate interest to the company.

There is an interesting use of pronouns in the turn beginning 'I need to be a bit more strategic' (line 851). The participant begins using the personal pronoun 'I' but changes to 'us' and 'we' before reverting to 'I' (line 853) at the end of the turn. Goffman (1981), in his notion of footing, and Sacks (1992) talked about pronoun use. Sacks observed that 'we' may be used as an organisational reference and this may tie the conversation to a wider social structure. In this instance, although the turn begins using the personal pronoun, the claims being made about the future may be problematic, which is signalled by the pronoun change to a more inclusive 'all of us in my position' descriptor. This works to distance the individual speaker making them a token of a larger social unit (Malone, 1997). Finally, the turn ends with a reiteration of a 'restrictive' plan.

With reference to understanding how the participant is constructing and then drawing on what 'career' is in this interaction, this is largely carried out through contrast with what it is not. The apparent contradiction around having a plan is managed through detailed description of an extreme 'plan', contrasted with the legitimate 'plan' carried out by the company on the participant's behalf. Finally, the pronoun change may indicate that it is problematic to talk about being explicitly strategic with regard to career and so a generic term constructs an inclusive category in order to manage this. In the following extract Des also constructs a denial of career through contrast; however, this contrast is related to 'opportunity'.

### Extract 6.3 Des interview 2

This extract is taken from the response to a question about career, towards the end of the second interview with this participant.

519 Int good (.) erm (.) **career** (.) do you see yourself as having a career  
520 (.)  
521 Des no (.) I admire people who seem to have their lives mapped out for the next (.)  
522 four or five years (.) whatever (.) but (.) no (.) I (.) I'm just of the mind at the  
523 moment where I'll (.) er (.) take opportunities as they arise (.) I've not got any  
524 great master plan or anything like that (.) I think I've got a general direction of  
525 what type of skills I'm looking for in order to (.) er (.) say (.) which would be  
526 valuable (.) in the future (.) not just now (.) er (.) but (.) but it's about as loose  
527 as that

In the above extract Des denies having a career again through the use of 'great master plan' (line 524). He begins the turn by constructing a group of people against whom he positions himself. However, this construction implies a questioning of this group through 'seem' (line 521). His own 'plan' consists of talk about 'skills' (line 525) and taking 'opportunities' (line 523). In this extract having a 'career' or 'plan' is constructed as restrictive in contrast to the participant's own account which is characterised with vagueness through 'general direction' (line 524) and 'as loose as that' (lines 526-527). This aligns with the way that the participant in extract 6.2, this chapter, referred to a restrictive description of 'career' through 'tightly planned' and in extract 6.1 through the denial of aiming for the specific job title 'director of finance'. In this extract the participant also constructs having a career as a restricting notion, which is described through contrast with taking opportunities. The implication is that having a career precludes this. In the following extract Lyn also orients to this version of having a career but relates it to what she 'should' be doing.

Extract 6.4 Lyn interview 2

This extract is in response to my question about career, at the end of the second interview with this participant.

- 229 Int do you think you have a career  
230 (.)  
231 Lyn erm (.) I think I should have  
232 ((laughter))  
233 Lyn but (.) no (.) I don't think I have (.) in int sense of (.) in a years' time I'm  
234 going to do this (.) in two years I'm going to do that (.) ana I know a lot of  
235 people who do (.) ard who do swear by it (.) and (.) it partly (.) I think (.) it (.)  
236 it's (.) scary (.) in the sense 'hat I'm not sure that I really want to commit to  
237 what I want to do (.) cos I don't know what I want to do ((laughter)) so (.) so  
238 (.) it (.) it's nice (.) sort of see if an opportunity comes up (.) I'll take it (.)  
239 rather than (.) thinking (.) that's not quite along my plan=  
240 Int =yeah=  
241 Lyn =enn (.) and I probably should have one (.) in some sense (.) but (.) never got  
242 round tn it

In the above extract Lyn orients to someone's expectations for her through 'should' (line 231) have a career. This perhaps aligns with studies reported in the literature about particular expectations of graduates (e.g. see Arnold and MacKenzie-Davey, 1994; Fournier, 1997, 1998). Through this, the participant constructs and deploys normative understandings about careers in order to talk about her self. The participant continues the turn by providing an account of one version of career, 'in a years' time I'm going to do this' (lines 233-234). This contrasting, alternative version is constructed as common place, or normative, through 'a lot of people' (lines 234-235). However, through an extreme case formulation 'who do swear by it' (line 235) (Pomerantz, 1986), this version is positioned as undesirable for the speaker. In a similar way to the earlier extracts in this chapter the participant contrasts 'opportunity' (line 238) to having a 'plan'

(line 239) in the talk. The reasonableness of 'taking opportunities', in rhetorical contrast to 'being committed' to a plan, effects a plausible argument for the speaker.

These examples of talk about career all draw on the notion of having a plan as being restrictive, albeit in slightly different ways. One guiding principle behind selecting participants from this group, that is graduates at the beginning of their working life, was to explore how 'career' may be deployed in the talk. I was working from the assumption that any career account of someone with some experiences of the workplace would be a version of a retrospective rationalisation of those experiences. In line with Linde's (1993) study and other narrative studies where coherence is constructed in the telling of the story for the particular audience, there is an expectation that this would apply in these accounts. However, where there is little or no experience about which to rationalise, then the constructions of career were expected to be different. In a similar way others have studied how people produce credible accounts for career choice, and how they are treated as plausible in the interaction (Moir, 1993). However, the focus of the analysis in the present study is on how 'career' is mobilised in these interactions. Two conclusions may be drawn from the last four extracts. Firstly, that the participants at the beginning of their working lives talk about 'career' as if it is something, which requires definition and that others have, but which is not relevant for themselves. Secondly that talk about career is constructed around restriction as opposed to opportunity.

In contrast, in the following extract the participant defines career in a different way. Career is not denied, but it is constructed as changeable which may be of relevance in the light of the version of career prevalent in the earlier extracts, that is, as a restrictive notion.

Extract 6.5 Jordan interview 2

This extract is taken from the response to a question about career, towards the end of the second interview with this participant. Part of this extract has also been analysed with regard to drawing on identity types in order to perform a function in talk, chapter seven, extract 7.3. However, the focus in this section of the analysis is on the construction and deployment of 'career'.

549	Int	I've got two words down (.) one of which is (.) career (.) do you think you
550		have a career (.) have you thought about (.) career
551		(◉)
552	Jordan	I think so (.) yeah (.) I think (.) anyone that starts to think in terms of (.)
553		five years (.) by definition (.) is thinking about a career (.) when it's not
554		just a job (.) when you don't just (.) wake up (.) go to work (.) go back
555		back (.) and then (.) then do your life (.) I think it's (.) become a career (.)
556		even if you're not thinking in terms of five years (.) erm (.) that's probably
557		a big difference between store and head office (.) as well (.) but (.) erm (.) I
558		(.) definitely think (.) I've started a career=
559	Int	=mm=
560	Jordan	= and (.) I think (.) that career (.) might (.) probably will (.) change (.) enn
561		(.) just because (.) of the type of person (.) that I am (.) will (.) always look
562		for something better (.) and at some point (.) I'll probably think there is
563		something better (.) at the moment I don't (.) very happy with what's
564		going on (.) but (.) I'm sure (.) several years down the line (.) that (.) I'll
565		come across something (.) and I'll think (.) yeah (.) fancy a go at that (.)
566		and I might be wrong (.) and I might come back to ((Company A)) (.) or I
567		might go elsewhere (.) or I might (.) do whatever (.) but (.) I'm sure I (.)
568		I'll always be reassessing what's going on

Jordan talks about a 'definition' of 'career' (line 553) early in this turn in response to the question. Firstly he defines it through a temporal description, 'five years' (line 553), followed by a construction of what a career is not, 'just a job' (lines

553-554) with much supporting detail. In this way the extract is similar to the earlier ones in which the participants talked about what a career is in order to deny having one. However, in this instance the participant goes on to talk about having a career 'I (.) definitely think (.) I've started a career' (line 558). Beginning with the apparent contradiction between 'definitely' and 'think' (line 558), the participant constructs 'career' as a concept which may be partially claimed (that is, in thought as opposed to deed and through a temporal positioning 'started') and hence flexibility is negotiated. The version of a career produced by this participant is one that is described as likely to change. This implies that 'career' is commonly understood to be unchanging, any deviance from this requiring explanation or justification. The participant draws on 'the type of person (.) that I am' (line 561) as an explanation. This deploying of identity, through talk of being a 'type', as a tool in talk about career, functions to provide coherence in what could otherwise be interpreted as a fragmented account of the future given by an arguably fickle individual.

What is most relevant for the purposes of this section of the analysis is that in this extract career is plausibly described as something that is infinitely changeable. In addition, it has been claimed from the position of someone who can account for this potential incoherence through the stability of identity. However, in the following section I have explored how the participants construct their career in a consistent or coherent account in the light of apparent 'fractures'. Although the participants are at the beginning of their working lives, consistency in accounts of preceding work and non-work behaviour is made relevant.

## 6.4 Accounts of consistency

The following two extracts have been selected as the participants construct consistency in different ways. These accounts of consistency are connected with 'choice' in that there appears to be a reciprocal relationship between them. When accounting for the choice of a career, 'consistency' is deployed as justification; similarly, when constructing a consistent account the choice of career is used as a supporting resource.

### Extract 6.6 Harry, interview 1

This extract was taken from the first interview with the participant. It was part of a response to a request for the participant to 'tell me something about yourself.'

19 Harry =it was while doing my PhD that I decided I don't like research  
20 ((laughter))  
21 Harry and I tried to gear the PhD towards trying to get some computer skills=  
22 Int =right (.) right=  
23 Harry =and (.) I've now joined ((Company A)) in the IT function of the group-wide  
24 graduate scheme

In this extract Harry is accounting for a complete change of track. This piece of talk is taken from early in the interview not long after I had described myself as a researcher. This spontaneous reference to 'my PhD' may have something to do with establishing some common ground between us. However, as the end of the last line includes talk of the 'group-wide graduate scheme' (line 24), it is as likely to be something of a status marker. Although this extract is used as an example of an account of consistency, it also works to differentiate the participant from the researcher and from the rest of the graduate entrants, who may be presumed, from outside, to be his peers. I shall unpack these ideas with close reference to the text.

Firstly, the creation of common ground through 'PhD' (line 19) is immediately undermined by 'I don't like research' (line 19). The researcher, as clearly positioned opposite to this, by doing research, whether by choice or necessity, is the intended recipient of this point. The view given is legitimated by saying, 'while doing my PhD' (line 19); this is someone who has practical knowledge, of doing a PhD, and despite not liking it, has been successful in it and so has a 'right' to talk in this way (Sacks, 1992). This is the beginning of the status construction. The end of the final line in this extract includes 'the group-wide graduate scheme' (line 24). To all members of the company this is shorthand for those graduates who have excelled during the selection process and have been chosen as potential high fliers, less than 5% of the graduate intake. This provides some more of the status work which is being carried out in this early turn in the interview. This also functions to differentiate himself from the majority of the graduate entrants; few are in the top 5%, and from within that group they are unlikely to have a PhD. As a successful PhD student the participant also draws an evaluative comparison between himself and the researcher. As these issues were raised by the participant from among many he could have chosen to answer the question, they illustrate how the current interaction provides a particular context in which to tell a story. Finally, back to the issue of consistency, Harry's change of track may indicate at first that he is not telling a consistent story. However, he talks of 'trying to get some computer skills' (line 21) as a deliberate strategy and then talks of the 'IT function' (line 23) as the second part of that utterance. This is an example of a sequence in talk, which may be described as doing 'authenticity' (Sacks, 1992). That this has occurred over time, since before the end of the PhD, supports longer

term interest than if he woke up one morning and decided to change; in this way authenticity may be constructed (Woofitt, 1992). Through this 'authentic' interest in IT, consistency is created for Harry in his account of choice, despite, or perhaps because of, an evident change of track. In the following extract Jody also raises the issue of a 'fracture' in her career account.

### Extract 6.7 Jody interview 1

This extract is taken from the participant's response to a question regarding her choice of Company A as an employer.

39 Jody =I had (.) I had all the (.) kind of (.) my intention had been to do marketing (.)  
40 cos that's what my degree was in=  
41 ~~It~~ =yeah=  
42 Jody =and (.) I did a couple of interviews (.) and it was quite tough in 97 (.) erm (.)  
43 you know (.) recruitment took (.) a bit (.) of a (.) dip (.) and people were (.) a  
44 little bit (.) and were people going to get jobs (.) erm (.) which made me look  
45 around and say (.) okay (.) now what is it I really want to do (.)  
46 ((some detail omitted))  
47 Jody and I think the (.) it was a ((Company A)) ad that I read (.) er for (.) for  
48 logistics graduates and I just thought (.) er that's me (.) you know (.) the way it  
49 was written was all about (.) challenging (.) early responsibility all that kind of  
50 stuff

Again this extract is about consistency in the face of a change in direction. After constructing a legitimised 'reason' for wanting to 'do marketing' (line 39) through the degree choice, Jody draws on 'environmental' issues as explanation for change, 'it was quite tough in 97' (line 42). In Linde's (1993) study this was rarely, if ever, done in accounting for career choice; all 'reasons' were located with the individual. This description of an external influence on her choice of the job, and the company by implication, serves to 'justify' her change of direction. However, in the second part of the extract Jody locates the 'reason' for being attracted to the advertisement in personal characteristics, 'that's me' (line 48).

This can be more closely compared to Linde's (1993) study where she argued that life narratives focus on the individual, not on the economic climate of the time. It may be that by being able to account for change as due, in part, to external factors, the balance of equilibrium (neither random nor determined) is achieved in a different way. The strategy of this consistency is to locate the individual as agentic, able to make a decision, despite external influences to the contrary. The consistency is located within the individual in personal characteristics, which have not changed and indeed are described as recognisable in the advert. The notion of the individual constructed as agentic is continued in the following section of the chapter where I consider how the participants have attended to career as within their control.

## 6.5 Managing the career

Some of the more recent career literature has attended to career as a self-managed project (e.g. Grey, 1994; Fournier, 1998 and Goffee and Nicholson, 1994). In the present study the talk of the participants was explored for if and how they oriented to 'managing their career' and what function this performed in the interaction.

During the interviews the participants all referred to two distinctive groups within the graduate trainees. These groups are not mentioned in the recruitment literature but were frequently attended to in the talk. 'Group-wide' are graduates who have been selected during the recruitment process to be employed by the head office and 'direct entrants' are the rest of the graduates who are employed within the divisions of the company. In the following extract Harry, after having described himself as a 'group-wide' graduate, constructs this category during the

interaction. This has relevance for exploring the participant's talk about being 'managed'.

Extract 6.8 Harry interview 1

This extract is part of a sequence in the talk in which the participant raised the issue of 'group-wide' and 'direct entrant' graduates, positioning himself in the former category.

237 Harry =oh (.) yeah (.) erm (2.0) this is a difficult one to word (.) but if (.) if you (.) if  
238 you're group-wide (.) you've done better in the assessment centre=  
239 Int =I see (.) okay=  
240 Harry =whether it's psychometric tests or interviews or whatever (.) er (.) if you're  
241 (.) you will still be moved around within that business unit if you're direct  
242 entry (.) if you're group-wide you get moved between business units=  
243 Int =okay=  
244 Harry =erm (.) within IT (.) IS (.) there are (.) only (.) four group-wide graduates  
245 compared with about 100 direct entries=  
246 Int =okay (.) clearer picture now  
247 ((laughter))

In this extract Harry constructs the two categories for the benefit of the interviewer. He begins by explicitly attending to the potentially problematic nature of this account 'this is a difficult one to word' (line 237). This may be one way that talking about the self in glowing terms, through membership of an elitist group, may be managed. By beginning the sequence in this way it works as a stake inoculation against the potential charge of talking himself up and the subsequent accountability that entails (Potter and Edwards, 1990). The construction of difficulty immediately precedes a positive evaluation of an inclusive category with 'you've done better' (line 238). As in earlier extracts the use of the pronoun 'you' provides distance for the speaker (Malone, 1997). At the end of the sequence the participant upgrades the assessment of the 'group-wide'

category through uniqueness, 'four group-wide graduates compared with about 100 direct entries' (lines 244-245). This is a description constructed out of contrast where the participant attends to creating categories in the talk in such a way that he is positioned in one of them.

With regard to managing the career the participant talks about the two groups in a similar way, 'moved around within that business unit' (line 241) and 'moved between business units' (line 242). This questions the self-managing notion espoused in the career literature, for the participant. In addition, the differences between the groups' experiences have been minimised, with reference to how much they are managed, in this construction of events. Indeed through the use of 'still' (line 241) the 'being moved around' appears to function as a reward for the 'group-wide' people, the difference lying in whether it is within, or across, divisions of the company. So, for this participant, in the present interaction, being managed or moved around as part of a career path does not seem to represent a challenge to an agentic, entrepreneurial self as espoused in some career literature (e.g. Fournier, 1997, 1998). A distinction has been made between 'types' of moving around 'within units versus between units' which not only suggests that career is partially driven by the company but that in some instances this is desirable, as a mark of belonging to an 'elite' group. However, it is acknowledged that it may be that for people on a training programme there is an expectation to be 'managed' for a period of time. In the following extract Des also orients to these categories of graduates but from the position of a 'direct entrant'.

In the following extract Des attends to the two groups but from the position of being a 'direct entrant', which was established earlier in the talk. This provides a contrast to the former extract as the participant orients to a difference in how much the career is managed for the two groups. The extract is part of a series of turns in which the categories are constructed and described in response to a question about why the participant chose to work at Company A.

- 73 Des at the assessment centre (.) the results of the psychometric tests or whatever (.)  
 74 they will make you either a group-wide offer (.) or a direct entrant (.) now if  
 75 you're a direct entrant you'll go to one of the businesses (.) and you'll remain  
 76 within that business (.) I mean there are opportunities (.) to move outside of it (.)  
 77 but (.) erm (.) the main difference (.) er (.) group-wide you are given placements  
 78 (.) they actually make plans for you to move from one business to another (.)  
 79 and after about six or twelve months (.) I think it is (.) and so the group-wide  
 80 don't even know if (.) it's very much project based (.) and they will only be  
 81 doing it for a certain amount of time (.) they will get experience in other areas  
 82 (.) erm (.) I'm quite happy with what I'm doing ((laughter))=  
 83 Int =and will you be moved around here  
 84 (.)  
 85 Des erm (.) well (.) it's (.) very much of my own volition how my career develops  
 86 now (.) erm (.) if I look for opportunities elsewhere within ((division of  
 87 company in which the participant is currently employed)) (.) different functional  
 88 areas (.) I mean (.) nothing stops you from doing that (.) whereas (.) as part of  
 89 the graduate development programme (.) it's all organised for the group-wide (.)  
 90 you know (.) they don't have to do (.) er (.) erm (.) really (.) think (.) think too  
 91 much about how their career is being developed (.) cos it's all charted and  
 92 mapped out for the two years=  
 93 Int =right (.) whereas it's up to [you  
 94 Des [right (.) yeah to develop yourself=

At the beginning of this turn Des draws on company instigated processes, which work to authenticate the allocation of the graduates to groups with, 'assessment centre' (line 73) and 'psychometric tests' (line 74). The notion of the group-wide graduates being managed is described, 'they actually make plans for you to move' (line 78). In this utterance the function of 'actually' may be performing disbelief or incredulity. This interpretation is strengthened when later in the turn the

participant constructs criticism of this process 'so the group-wide don't even know if (.) h's very much project based' (lines 79-80). This draws on the notion that as an individual you would (should?) 'know' the kind of work you will do next and has a bearing on the common sense understanding that a career should be driven by the individual. This functions as a criticism of the other group as not 'even' (line 80) being able to do this.

This interaction has taken place in the context of an understanding that the 'group-wide' people have been identified as potential 'high fliers' by the company. Criticism of the group in this instance is constructed around their managed movements around the company. This works as a contrast to the 'direct entrants' group, of which the participant as a member, plausibly describes his own self-controlled situation through the resource of an understanding of career as self-managed. This is further strengthened in the second part of the turn with, 'h's (.) very much of my own volition how my career develops now' (lines 85-86). In this instance 'career' is spontaneously introduced by the participant and functions to make explicit the notion of control.

Alternatives to 'career' that may have been used from earlier in the turn could have been, 'where I move next' or 'what I do next'. Fournier (1998) described the new career discourse as one that calls for the self to be entrepreneurial. 'Career' is used in this instance as a resource in the talk to invoke attendant meanings surrounding the entrepreneurial individual. In this way criticism of the 'group-wide' graduates in the light of a contextual understanding that they are 'better' than the group to which the speaker belongs may be authenticated by

drawing on broader, common sense understandings regarding career. In the following extract, in contrast to being 'managed', Alan talks about uncertainty characterising his career path.

#### Extract 9.10 Alan interview 1

This extract is in response to a question about the thing the participant has liked least about his experiences since joining the company. It follows a question about the experience that he liked best.

- 213 Alan I think it's the phases you go through (.) when you (.) erm (.) are looking for  
214 (.) the next step (.) if you know what I mean (.) it's (.) erm (.) what (.) what (.)  
215 what is the next progression I should be in (.) it's (.) is this what I've been  
216 doing the last few months (.) and that to (.) to meet the challenges (.) I'm  
217 achieving at the moment (.) I think it's not unusual (.) but it happens on an  
218 individual basis (.) then it's no good thinking that this isn't what I wanted to  
219 do (.) er (.) I'd like to (.) I'd like to be given the opportunity to go and try  
220 something else (.) I think that (.) sort of (.) gets under my skin (.) a little bit (.)  
221 you know=  
222 Int =yeah=  
223 Alan =if there was more (.) sort of (.) structure (.) and you knew a bit more about  
224 what the next stage might be (.) that could (.) that could readdress that issue (.)  
(some detail omitted)  
231 Alan its more to do with (.) you know (.) what is the next step (.) what is the next  
232 challenge (.) what is the next best thing (.) for me

Although in this extract the participant does not use the word 'career' he does talk of 'progression' (line 215) and relates it to not knowing 'the next best thing for me' (line 232). This has relevance to being 'managed' as in this turn he constructs criticism of the lateral moves instigated by the company. Doherty et al (1997) identified a dilemma for graduates when talking of a need for upward progression in a context where lateral development is espoused as desirable. In this instance the participant explicitly constructs an argument against opposing a company directed move through 'its no good thinking that this isn't what I wanted

to do' (lines 218-219). However, this is followed with the complaint, 'I think that (...) sort of (...) gets under my skin (...) a little bh (...) you know' (line 220-221) which positions the argument as ongoing, albeit in a mitigated way. In the second part of the turn the participant draws on 'structure' (line 223) and 'stage' (line 224) to construct a more desirable (controllable/measurable?) situation. In this way the participant addresses an understanding that lateral moves create a more complex situation in which progression is less easily defined. As notions of promotion and progression are likely to be central to the meanings that graduates attach to their careers (Foumier, 1997) this aligns with the literature as the participant constructs difficulty. In addition, the participant constructs an understanding about expectations of his career through 'what is the next progression I should be in' (line 215), (Arnold and Mackenzie-Davey, 1994). As graduates are positioned as people with choices, about career among other things, they have to be accountable for the 'choices' they make.

In summary, in the last three extracts the participants have talked about 'managing' their career, or progression in the company. In the talk categories were constructed within the graduate group and self-managed 'careers' were drawn on as a device in order to make plausible criticisms of a group to which the speaker did not belong. However, members of the criticised group constructed similarities between the groups with regard to control (or lack of) of their careers.

## 6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have explored how the participants have drawn on 'career' in their talk, both spontaneously and in response to an explicit question about career.

Interdependencies have been identified in the talk between career and identity, with each contributing to a plausible version of the other. These interdependencies were then drawn on to do discursive work. With reference to providing insight into understanding career as a resource in talk, the participants' constructions have been relevant. In these extracts career has been defined in terms of what it is not. Interestingly, the restrictive nature of a plan was drawn on in the construction of a denial of a career for some of the participants. Contrasts were created between career and flexibility. Talking in terms of having a career appears to imply a tight strategic path for the participants. In the example of the participant who talked of having a flexible career (see extract 6.5), identity 'type' was **drawn** on to create coherence.

Earlier studies of accounts of 'choice' have looked at the issue of coherence (e.g. Linde, 1993). This was also an issue for some of the participants in the present study. Where there was an evident 'change of track' the participants drew on and mobilised identities in their talk to produce a coherent account. In so doing these identities were reconstructed. In contrast to Linde's (1993) findings one of the participants in this study drew on the 'economic climate' to construct 'justification' in the account (see extract 6.7). However, this was presented as a hurdle that had to be overcome and so worked to authenticate the identity presented.

The second strand of analysis was pre-empted by the dominant understanding of career as a self-managed concept according to the career literature. In the talk of the participants this was drawn on to perform a function in the interaction. The

participants constructed two categories of graduates and deployed the notion of 'being in control' in order to make plausible criticisms of the company-evaluated 'high fliers'. It appears that an understanding of career as a self-managed project perhaps lies uneasily with being moved from one placement to another with little or no choice. This is drawn on by those who are not treated in this way in order to criticise the group who are. Those who are treated in this way construct it as something that happens to everyone. The new career discourse of the **entrepreneur**, as one who manages one's own career, provided legitimacy for the criticism.

Finally, with reference to the lateral moves described in the academic career literature as becoming more usual for this group, uncertainty and progression were attended to. When criticising a company-instigated process, more structure and more explicit stages were called for. This suggests that company-directed issues are supposed to be structured; the flexibility that lateral progression brings with it is undesirable as there are no explicit markers to the right or best way to go, or indeed how successful, or not, you are. This contrasts with talk about individual 'career' and the criticism that it implies structure in an undesirable way. Interestingly, one participant (see extract 6.10) drew on the notion of structure and stages as remedies to the problem of uncertainty surrounding progression, whereas the talk about career was characterised in terms of any structure being restrictive.

Although career denial is constructed through 'planning' as an undesirable concept, career planning is then legitimised as a company-oriented process. This

suggests that it is less acceptable for an individual to talk of being strategic, with the accountability this implies in the event of not hitting the target, than for the company to be strategic on behalf of the individual. This is at odds with current literature, which espouses the self-management of career as a prevalent notion. This raises questions regarding the notion of accountability in talk about having a career. This may be addressed to some degree by focusing on how the participants position themselves as people who talk about career. This will be investigated in the following chapter.

## Chapter Seven

### 7.0 Identity as a resource in career talk

#### 7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analyse how notions of identity are drawn upon and mobilised in talk about progression and career. This will address the second research question which was outlined in chapters one and four and is repeated below:

2. In what way is identity constructed and deployed in the talk?

Early and more recent theorists who studied career have linked career to identity, in some respects presuming that you become what you do through socialisation (Gini, 1998). From a discourse analytic, constructionist perspective, however, the link between career and identity is occasioned in talk, which is the interest of the present study. A focus on the taken-for-granted way in which we talk about our selves at work raises fresh questions about how identity may be deployed in talk about career.

As previously discussed in chapter three, identity theories have resulted in certain 'versions' of the individual being prevalent in the talk of Western culture. 'To be a self is not to be a certain kind of being, but to be in possession of a certain kind of theory' (Harre, 1985:262). These versions function as ideologies in the talk in that they are examples of 'expert' systems drawn on in popular use. The term

'ideology' is used in preference to 'cultural understanding' because as a system of meaning it reproduces and perpetuates a particular way of being. This also ties in with Linde's (1993) consideration of the use of coherence systems in narratives about the self. Certain ways of talking about the self are acceptable and the more 'common sense' (that is, uncritically accepted) the ideology appears to be the more invisible it is to the speakers. I have analysed the data paying specific attention to how career talk is related to the self.

There are three main devices that were drawn on which are identifiable as relating to theories of identity. Firstly, there is the use of 'type' or 'trait' in the talk. This reflects some understanding of trait theory, according to which a person is a group of traits and cannot help but behave according to these traits (e.g. Eysenck and Eysenck, 1967). The detailed analysis focuses on how this understanding of the self is drawn on in the talk to perform a function when talking of workplace experiences. Secondly, the use of the partial, or divided self was explored. An example of this would be where the self is constructed as able to reflect upon the self. This may echo Mead's (1934) notion of the private 'I' and the socially negotiated 'me'. Other theorists have considered the self as a cast of characters (e.g. Goffman, 1959), which implies an understanding of the self as split, or made up of parts. However, what is theoretically new about the present study's analytic perspective is the argument that this understanding, when deployed in talk, constructs an opportunity for dual-positioning. In terms of career prediction this is of interest, although the participants also 'split' the self when talking about dilemmas and past decisions. This has potential for future investigations.

regarding how the speaker creates distance between herself and what is said in a similar way to footing (Goffman, 1981) and pronoun use (Malone, 1997).

Finally, the use of 'role' in talk about the self will be examined. Role theorists have argued that people become social performers and the role is performed due to socialisation mechanisms (Goffman, 1959). However, for the purposes of the present study I have considered how these devices work to carry out two distinct functions in the talk, firstly in the construction of categories and secondly in the performance of identity. In the following section I will explore how constructing the self as a type of person provides a repertoire of associated meaning which has implications for the account being created.

## 7.2 Repertoires of 'type'

In this section of the chapter I will explore how the participants drew on an understanding of an identity 'type' and its function in talk about career. In the following extract Jane is near the end of a long turn in which she described the experiences which led her to consider leaving the company.

### Extract 7.1 Jane interview 2

613	Jane	I just felt very stressed about (.) well [ ] and I loved my other job (.)
614		and (.) it was part of settling down (.) but I just (.) really (.) thought (.)
615		really thought (.) seriously about (.) dropping off the scheme
616		(.)
617	Int	really
618		(.)
619	Jane	well (.) talked about it (.) probably didn't ever really consider it (.) just
620		thought well (.) you know (.) yes I'm getting to various (.) but I'm being
621		put places where I don't want to be (.) and not me (.) and I'm moving
622		and everyone's got a chip on their shoulder about graduates (.) and (.)

623                               you know (.) maybe I should just manage my career my own way (.) as  
624                               (.) as I've seen some of my peers go on and do

In this extract I shall focus on how the construction of having an identity 'type' is mobilised as part of a complaint and how it is related to career in the talk. In addition, how Jane constructs the category of 'graduates' (line 622) in contrast to 'everyone else' (line 622) and then draws on that category membership through 'peers' (line 624) to 'justify' proposed behaviour is of interest.

This extract begins at the end of a long turn in which Jane describes her experiences since being placed in a new position. In the turn the participant constructs a complaint which appears to end with the assessment, 'I just (.) really thought (.) seriously about (.) dropping off the scheme' (lines 614-615). Interestingly, the participant contrasts 'talk' with 'doing' in such a way that talk is not as serious as action, a construction which is deployed in other participants' accounts. My response, 'really', (line 617) functions as a news receipt marker and works to elicit a denial followed by further elaboration of the complaint. Part of this further elaboration includes 'and not me' (line 621), which attends to an understanding of herself as being a self with recognisable traits. It is only from within an understanding of people having essential traits that this denial works. Furthermore, this denial functions as resistance through the understanding that 'me' as a felt entity cannot be challenged. In addition, by constructing the 'places' as being of the kind in which a person like her would not want to be, this upgrades the earlier complaint 'places where I don't want to be' (line 621), from a mere 'want' to an identity-based rebuttal. In this way, drawing on an

understanding that we have 'types' of personality strengthens the justification for complaint.

Jane continues by constructing a self-inclusive category 'graduates' about whom 'everyone's got a chip on their shoulder' (line 622). Interestingly Jane treats the constructed complaint as unfinished and so further upgrades its legitimacy through membership of a whole category of people who are badly treated. The use of the metaphor 'chip on their shoulder' works to de-legitimise how this 'other' category behaves while not providing any detail that may be challenged. In chapter two I described how, although the literature suggests a self-managed career as a common understanding (Arthur, 1994), this group of trainees is 'managed' over the training period. This turn ends with reference to the understanding of career as a self-managed project and perhaps also draws on a contemporary understanding of the self as a self-governing entity (Grey, 1994). In this instance I propose that Jane is drawing on this understanding of career, with its intimate relationship with the self, in accounting for her complaints. Furthermore, the self-inclusive group 'peers' is constructed as having some members who have managed their own careers, even in the context of being in a 'managed' group. For example, 'maybe I should just manage my career my own way (.) as (.) as I've seen some of my peers go on and do' (line 623-624). So, managing her career is constructed as normative and therefore cannot be challenged, especially when she is asked to do something that is 'not me'. In this way an essential identity 'type' may be drawn on as a resource in order to provide a justifiable account of complaint.

There were several instances where participants draw on a personality 'type' in order to warrant a complaint. However, in the following extract this is done through the denial of a 'type'.

Extract 7.2 Harry interview 1

Earlier in the interview I asked what the participant enjoyed doing most, and then what he least enjoyed. This extract is from his response to the latter question.

93 Harry =the things I enjoy least (.) are (.) things like (.) presentations (.)  
94 because we're right at the beginning of the thing (.) and don't have  
95 anything to show yet (.) I'm kind of having to do selling presentations  
96 without any product to demonstrate=  
97 Int =right=  
98 Harry =and (.) I'm not a sales man (.) I've never had any (.) sort of (.) sales  
99 fraining (.) and I find that (.) to be (.) unexpected (.) it's not what I  
100 expected to be doing when I took on an IT job=

In the above extract Harry constructs 'salesman' (line 98) as a category in order to deny his own membership of it. In a similar way to the talk in extract 7.1 this identity work is part of a construction of a legitimised complaint about work experiences. At the beginning of the turn 'presentations' (line 93) is used, elaborated to 'selling presentations' (line 95) at the end of the first part of the extract. Harry then denies being a 'salesman' (line 98) which works to justify the foregoing complaint. The complaint might otherwise be regarded as inauthentic, as selling may be something he was reasonably expected to be capable of, especially in a retail company. This deployment of an identity which is closely related to a person, 'salesman', rather than perhaps 'I can't sell', or 'do sales' works to lay the blame, or weakness, outside the speaker as he is not the 'type' of

person who does this. In this way identity work can also be done in the denial of identities in talk; in this instance this functions to manage accountability.

Furthermore, 'salesman' and the implied identity or category entitlements may be contrasted with 'IT job' (line 100); one is related to the individual and one to the workplace. In this instance the participant does not construct his work in close relation to his self, that is, by saying 'IT man'. This contrast may be due to the talk of 'expectations' immediately preceding the talk of 'job'. Talk of having a 'job' implies a looser connection with identity. There is a sense that careers rather than jobs have implications for personal development (Sennett, 1998). Correspondingly, less may be legitimately expected of the participant in the context of having a 'job'. In this way weakness, or a lack of skill, can be deflected from the responsibility of the individual through the denial of membership of a category whose members could more reasonably be expected to have those skills.

However, more usually, identity 'types' were claimed in order to construct support for a persuasive account in the context of doing other conversational business, as in the following extract. The extract is part of a response to a question about having a career.

### Extract 7.3 Jordan interview 1

564 Jordan I think (.) anyone that starts to think in terms of (.) five years (.) by  
565 definition (.) is thinking about a career (.) when it's not just a job (.)  
566 when you don't just (.) wake up (.) go to work (.) go back back (.)  
567 and then (.) then do your life (.) I think it's (.) become a career (.)  
568 even if you're not thinking in terms of five years (.) erm (.) that's



The second part of the extract begins by attending to 'career' (line 572) as a changeable notion. Justification for this is constructed through 'the type of person (.) that I am' (line 573). This is followed by talk of looking for 'something better' (line 574) as the thing that people like the participant do. This functions to make the utterance both normative (i.e. it's not just me as an individual) and natural (i.e. behaving according to a 'true' self). The potential moral implications of the following utterance 'will (.) always be looking for something better' (lines 573-574) are thus deflected through a deployment of identity. Fournier (1998) proposed that the new career discourse plays on the fantasy of being 'more' or 'better'. However, she connects this with a 'reinvention' of the self, whereas in this instance the self is 'invented', or constructed, in order to attend to the interactional business of claiming a 'career' without the attendant restrictive understanding which may accompany it. At the same time the participant is able to construct a moral, plausible self in the interaction.

Finally, talking of having a career as opposed to a job may also be a membership categorisation device (Sacks, 1992). The detail provided in the definition of a career was all about what it is not. In addition, the outline of 'just a job' in lines 565-567 exceeds the normative persuasive three-part list (Pomerantz, 1986). This indicates that the participant is 'working up' an identity as one who knows the difference between a career and a job. Planning ahead 'in terms of five years' (line 564) was originally offered as a definition, which was contradicted further on in the turn; 'even if you're not thinking in terms of five years' (lines 567-568). Other than 'not just a job' (line 565), the definition is constructed as the difference

between 'store and head office' (line 569). As the participant works at head office he is authenticating his membership through claiming a 'career'.

Another way that the participants drew on the notion of their selves as a 'type' is evident in the following extract where the participant is accounting for a change in direction, from being a marketing graduate to being a graduate trainee in logistics.

#### Extract 7.4 Jody interview 1

In this extract Jody is responding to a question about why she selected the present company. Interestingly, her response does not focus on the company as one amongst other, alternative companies. Instead she attends to her job and how it differs from her degree.

32 Int =right (.) okay (.) and (.) er (.) what attracted you to ((Company A))  
(some talk omitted)  
52 Jody my perceptions are probably a bit different now (.) but I perceived  
53 marketing people were pie in the sky (.) that I needed to be creative  
54 to (.) er (.) make it (.) and a bit kind of (.) poof ((indicates with  
55 hands)) and I'd be saying that won't work (.) what do you want to do  
56 that for  
57 ((laughter))  
58 Jody so that's why I ended up going down the logistics route (.) to start off  
59 with (.) and then I fravelled (.) for 13 months (.) erm (.) and when I  
60 came back I was (.) even more practical (.) even more determined to  
61 (.) stand on my own two feet (.) and do things which were (.)  
62 challenging (.) and I think the (.) it was a ((Company A)) ad that I  
63 read (.) er for (.) for logistics graduates and I just thought (.) er that's  
64 me (.) you know (.) the way it was written was all about (.)  
65 challenging (.) early responsibility all that kind of stuff (.) and that's  
66 my plan (.) forgot what the question was  
67 ((laughter))

This extract begins with a construction of a category of marketing through her description of 'marketing people' (line 53). This is followed by a 'performance' of an identity through characteristics, 'even more practical (.) even more

determined to stand on my own two feet' (lines 60-61), which is constructed in contrast to the marketing description. As an account for change, this works by constructing self as not fitting the original choice of occupation, that is, marketing. This may function as a persuasive account perhaps because it relies on an understanding of people having recognisable traits or as being of a specific type. This understanding is demonstrated and deployed implicitly by the participant through their ability to recognise the self in the advert, with 'that's me' (lines 63-64). Coherence is constructed through this device in what may otherwise have been an account of inconsistency. This supports Linde's (1993) findings that 'fractures' in accounts are the concern of participants and are subject to much supporting detail. In narratives of career stories coherence is created in the telling; retrospective accounts enable the past to be told in the light of the present.

One way that support is gained for Jody's story as having coherence is through drawing on an identity 'type', which has been constructed and mobilised to create a plausible account in this interaction. This works to both claim and resist identity types to do interactional business. In the final extract of this section the participant draws on a 'type' which may have particular relevance to the context of taking part in research.

#### Extract 7.5 Pam interview 1

This extract is taken from the end of a long turn, which was in response to a question about what the participant brings to the workplace.

261 Pam moved on so many times (.) and done so many roles (.) I bring different bits  
 262 (.) of learning (.) with me (.) and (.) em (.) I think I have (.) I think I have  
 263 always had a tendency to look at the wider picture and not see myself as  
 264 within a specific job (.) within a specific department (.) I've always seen  
 265 myself as part of the larger organisation (.) and the greater good (.) erm (.)  
 266 of (.) of (.) doing things for the good of ((Company A)) as a whole (.)  
 267 rather than something short term (.) erm (.) dedication and hard work (.)  
 268 and a bit of a (.) completer (.) finisher (.) kind of person (.) so a (.) little bit  
 269 (.) er (.) into (.) precision (.) and detail  
 270 ((laughter))  
 271 Pam and I won't let something go (.) until its completed

In this extract the talk provides three examples of theorising about identity. Firstly, this is carried out through the use of 'roles' (line 261), as constructing justification for 'having moved on so many times' (line 261). This may otherwise be interpreted negatively; 'role' perhaps reduces the potential charge of being fickle or presenting an incoherent account. The second example of talk about self is through a device that splits, or divides, the self to carry out some interactional work. In the extract, 'seen myself' (line 265), although frequently used in conversation unproblematically, it does rely on an understanding that this may be possible. That it is rarely (ever?) questioned implies an invisible ideology surrounding the notion of having a social and private self, (e.g. Mead, 1934; Goffman, 1959) which may be drawn on. It is only when questioning an assumption that the illusion of concreteness, through long use, becomes self-evident (Gergen, 1999). In this instance this partial identity device works to tentatively make a claim, although preceded by an extreme case formulation 'always' (line 265). The claim is a self-evaluation, 'part of the larger organisation (.) and the greater good' (lines 265-266). As a positive assessment it may attract the charge of vested interest, which would undermine the account (Potter, 1996a). Dividing the self in the talk, which interactionally creates a space to make tentative claims about the self, deflects this.

In addition, at the end of a long description of personal attributes, 'a bh of a (.) completer (.) finisher (.) kind of person' (line 268) provides a mitigated summing up. The phrase 'completer-finisher' comes from Belbin's (1981) model of team structures. Belbin is a well known 'management gum' who features in any Business school degree at some point. 'Belbin's model is now so widely disseminated it has become the lingua franca of team work' (Fincham and Rhodes, 1999:191).

In this extract the utterance, containing fragments from a diverse heritage, derives significance from its present context (Bakhtin in Gergen, 1999). Bakhtin's idea of language as a 'mixed stew'; consisting of a repository from the past mixed with the context of the present, explicates how in this way graduates may draw on particular resources to construct themselves as 'knowing' individuals. Not only does this account gain coherence through being a 'kind' of person, it is further upgraded to construct knowledgeability in a way that is deemed relevant in the present interaction, that is with an academic researcher from a Business school.

In this section I have explored how participants draw on identity 'types' in their talk about workplace experiences. In the following section I further explore how partial, or splitting, identity devices are deployed.

### **7.3 Repertoires of the split, or partial, self**

Leading on from the analysis of the final extract of the preceding section, in this section of the chapter I will explore in more detail how the participants deploy the

notion of splitting, or dividing, the self with particular reference to career talk. As an interaction oriented device it appears to offer an option of 'dual-positioning' in the talk.

Extract 7.6 Jordan interview 2

This extract follows some talk about finishing the training scheme.

377 Int so (.) you haven't got a (.) kind of (.) long term plan  
378 (.)  
379 Jordan well (.) yeah (.) the er (.) that's the (.) kind of (.) shorter tenn (.) I  
380 guess (.) but (.) long term (.) I think (.) five years is (.) a good (.) time  
381 period (.) to talk (.) cos it's not too far (.) but far enough=  
382 Int =mm=  
383 Jordan =erm (.) and I think (.) I still see myself in ((Company A))  
384 (.)  
385 Int right  
386 (•)  
387 Jordan which is quite a big (.) commitment (.) at least (.) even if it's just in  
388 my mind (.) erm (.) cos I think the company's got so much to offer (.)  
389 in (.) erm (.) breadth (.) and depth=  
390 Int =mm=

In the light of earlier analysis in chapter five which investigated the nature of 'leaver talk', talk of a plan introduces the possibility of talking about leaving the company at some point in the future. Jordan attends to this in the above extract with, 'I think (.) I still see myself in ((Company A))' (line 383). The 'I think' begins an utterance, which spontaneously introduces the topic of leaving while constructing doubt, by talking of the 'self in two parts. This analysis draws on and develops Goffman's (1981) notion of footing providing distance for the speaker from what is said. Rather than considering how, for example, pronoun use may be deployed in order to do this, how the individual talks about his or her self may be explored in order to attend to the accountability of the speaker.

The early part of the tum is marked with pauses (lines 379-381) which may signal a problem in that the question positions the participant as a person who *should* have a long-term plan. By talking about himself in this way he utilises two positions in order to make a prediction: the narrator and the protagonist. Where the narrator is always moral, the protagonist may have done some dirty deed but the reporting of it provides an opportunity to account for that deed (Linde, 1993). In this instance, 'seeing oneself doing something implies a view of the individual is being drawn on where one part of the self is beyond control of another part, which merely looks on and reports upon the activities. This is followed in the extract with a summing up, 'quite a big (.) commitment' (line 387), which constructs the participant as being committed to staying with the company, but this is immediately followed by further splitting of the self, 'even if it's just in my mind' (lines 387-388). This may be likened to the contrast in extract 7.1 which was constructed between action and talk. In this instance a contrast is drawn between action and thought, where thought is deployed as a less serious or binding way of talking about commitment. This also works to provide distance for the speaker, turning what appears to be a firm commitment into a questionable promise through the understanding that the self is not always in control of its own actions. That this generally goes unnoticed in conversations indicates how, as ideologies, the 'expert' systems of identity theories may be deployed as people account for their selves.

In the following extract Alan also draws on the notion of a divided self while talking about the possibility of leaving the company. This functions to construct a lack of agency, which is implied through this particular version of the self

Extract 7.7 Alan interview 1

603	It	how (.) or where do you see yourself in five years time (.) and in the
604		longer term
605		(.)
606	Alan	(2.0) erm (.) I'd cert (.) I'd certainly (.) whoo (.) I'd cert (.) my intention
607		is to move forward (.) and upwards (.) definitely (.) erm (.) just exactly
608		where (.) I'm not (.) I don't really mind (.) something inside me says
609		that it would be good to experience different cultures (.) companies (.)
610		you know (.) just from a wider knowledge experience (.) erm (.) so I
611		certainly wouldn't cross out moving from ((Company A)) (.) if (.) if it
612		looked advantageous at the time (.) I am trying to get away from this (.)
613		I can't stand people who talk about ((Company A)) all the time (.) you
614		know
615		((laughter))
616	Alan	so I'd much rather not talk and just do

In a similar way to the participant in extract 7.6, the question positions the participant in such a way that he *should* be able to provide some kind of response.

In the context of this interaction there are dilemmas and tensions which are being addressed in the talk. For example, there is a need to be ambitious, but not over ambitious, to value your self, but not overmuch. There is no simple, normative answer to a question like this so the tensions complicate how to be accountable in this setting.

In this extract Alan attempts to describe what may happen in five years' time. The hesitancy, pauses and abruptly cut off words early in the turn (lines 606-607) indicate interactional trouble (Buttny, 1993). The introduction of the possibility of leaving is prefaced by 'something inside me says' (line 608). This works in a

similar way to the splitting analysed in extract 7.6; however in this extract one part of the self is not just standing by and observing, one part of the self is telling another part what to do. The rhetorical function of this dual-positioning is that it allows the speaker to talk of alternatives without commitment. This way of speaking about the self has implications for constructing a particular kind of agentic self. It enables a certain amount of fence-sitting while locating control within the individual. This management of agency, for example, enables the participant to talk of leaving the company without making too specific a prediction; also it enables them to talk as a knowledgeable person who can consider the big picture while espousing 'loyalty'. The analysis enables an exploration of how the participants construct and deploy this device to interactional ends.

In the following extract Ann constructs a divided self where one part evaluates the other when talking about career.

Extract 7.8 Ann interview 2

This extract is part of the participant's response to a question about whether she has a career. See chapter six, extract 6.1 for the preceding talk.

572 Ann sometimes (.) it'd be nice to think (.) I just don't have to worry about it (.) I  
573 just can stay and do the same job (.) and that's okay (.) but I wouldn't be  
574 happy with myself (.) I've got a career in that sense (.) but I wouldn't say  
575 I've got a career (.) I've got a master plan (.) of how I'm going to get to  
576 director of finance

This extract begins with a construction of not having a career, 'just can stay and do the same job', (line 573) as a less worrisome alternative to having a career. However, despite the apparent desirability of this alternative option she goes on to construct herself as having a career which is justified through 'I wouldn't be happy with myself (line 573-574). This deployment of the self as a self-evaluating construct works to 'explain' why one would choose a more difficult path, that is by having a career as opposed to a job. Again this analysis illustrates how this version of the self, as occupying a dual-position, may be drawn on to provide distance for the speaker. She then returns to the refined definition of 'career', 'I've got a career in that sense' (line 574), which is contrasted with an upgraded extreme definition through 'master plan' (line 575) and further through the job title of the highest position in her division of the company, 'director' (line 576). In this way she positions herself as in possession of a career but refutes the potential associated strategic implications this claim may invoke.

This may be one example of how positioning may be more to do with being accountable in talk than with a simple drawing on of available discourses. This accountability may be related to difficulty surrounding talking well of oneself (Coupland, 2000), which also has implications for how we can manage the dilemma of talking about future aspirations.

In the following extract Jane explicitly attends to the notion of future aspirations and deploys a divided self in the talk.

Extract 7.9 Jane interview 1

This extract is part of a lengthy response to a question about where she may be in five years' time.

693 Jane =so I initially started off thinking (.) well I'll do my fraining (.) and I'll  
694 get to a nice comfortable position (.) and I'll just sit tight and that'll be  
695 fine (.) now I'm in the job I'm (.) I'm more ambitious about (.) I see  
696 things (.) and I get interested in them (.) but I have to check with  
697 someone (.) and there's a part of me now that keeps thinking (.) I want  
698 to be good and I want to (.) probably having spent many years in  
699 academia (.) I want to (.) sort of (.) pass this level (.) and I want to get  
700 on (.) and I'm not sure (.) it's sort of bubbling inside me (.) whether or  
701 not I'll be someone who'll really go out and **strive** and (.) I think from  
702 (.) from where I am (.) and from (.) feedback I've had from various  
703 people (.) I could make it to a very senior level within the company (.)  
704 if that was what I chose to do=

Jane begins this turn by drawing on a temporal construction, 'I initially started off thinking' (line 693) which creates a space for a change to be presented. Wooffitt (1992) suggested that this constructs authenticity as it may be contrasted with, 'I just woke up this morning and decided', as an alternative. If alternative positions have been considered then the present one must be more plausible. She goes on to construct being 'more ambitious' (line 695) and draws on 'there's a part of me now' (line 697) both to indicate a changed scenario and a partial commitment to being ambitious. She justifies this position, as an ambitious person, by drawing on membership of the category 'graduate', for whom, arguably, ambition is an expectation (e.g. Arnold and MacKenzie-Davey, 1994). This is done through 'spent many years in academia' (line 698-699), where the vagueness and extremisation of 'many' functions as a persuasive device (Pomerantz, 1986). The formulaic pattern of this expression may be contrasted with other alternatives; 'having been a student', or 'having studied for three years'; this contrast highlights the persuasiveness of this kind of general, vague description.

'Academia' (line 699) perhaps may be identified as one of Billig's (1996) 'common places' but not as a place where criticism may be directed, rather in order to draw on 'knowledge' as an entitlement of a member of the self inclusive category being evoked. Furthermore, in this extract there is a notion of a dilemma being managed in how one may speak of future aspirations while avoiding the potential charge of stake and interest (Potter, 1996a). In making claims of future potential, in order to be credible, an identity of an ex-academic may be drawn on to support the claim. The notion of a split self, or dual-positioning, is returned to in the extract through 'h's sort of bubbling inside me' (line 700) which is explicitly related to identity through 'I'll be someone who'll...' (line 701). In this way the participant manages talk of being ambitious by constructing it as a physical (biological?) process which will eventually rise to the surface (implicitly) without the intervention of the participant.

The construction of lack of agency over this process is followed by other people's evaluations, 'I could make it to a very senior level within the company' (line 703), which works to provide an objective, indifferent account and therefore avoids the charge, 'well you would say that wouldn't you?' Interestingly, despite drawing on the split self and constructing ambition as an uncontrolled process, Jane ends this turn by drawing on a 'choosing' self, 'if that was what I chose to do' (line 704). According to Rose (1999) the image of the choosing self entails a vision of work as an activity through which we discover and experience ourselves. In this instance, however, Jane is also attending to the business of the interaction, in that concerns of the past and future may be relevant for the present conversation. In a

similar way that stake and interest may undermine the plausibility of past claims (Potter, 1996a), they also have implications for what might be said of future predictions. By constructing herself as having a choice the participant creates the possibility of an alternative to the presumed desirable career goal of promotion while attending to the accountability of the present interaction.

In this section I have explored how a split or divided self may function as a dual-positioning tool in interaction. In the following section I investigate how 'role' is drawn on and how identity may further be performed in talk.

#### **7.4 A Repertoire of roles and 'performing' identity**

In this section of the chapter I will explore how people use 'role' in their talk and explicate how it relates to identity work. Secondly, I will investigate the 'performance' of identity through the deployment of an understanding of how a member of a particular category could, (should?) behave. Post-modernists have proposed that rather than assuming people talk the way they do because of what they already are, it can be argued that people are who they are because of, among other things, the way they talk Cameron (1997). This highlights one of the main differences between traditional, or mainstream, studies of identity and critical, or constructionist, approaches. The present study intends to elaborate and extend understanding from the latter perspective.

Although there were many instances of 'role' talk, the following extract was selected as particularly interesting due to the number of occasions 'role' was used in a relatively short piece of talk.

## Extract 7.10 Pam interview 1

The extract is towards the end of a long turn in response to a question about what the participant had been doing since joining the company.

- 65 Pam the personnel officer had gone on maternity leave (.) and so I took her  
66 role on (.) so (.) er (.) not as a support role (.) very much in the depths of  
67 it all (.) and then I got approached to see if I would go down to Redditch  
68 (.) to spend a year at Browns ((subsidiary business)) and moved away  
69 from (.) generalist (.) sort of (.) personnel (.) into more a project based  
70 role (.) I went down there for a year=  
71 Int =mm (.) mm=  
72 Pam =and then came up again in September 98 (.) to take on a permanent role  
73 as a senior personnel officer at ((Company A)) transport division (.) and  
74 then about 2 weeks ago (.) moved into graduate development (.) my (.) er  
75 (.) bias is more towards development and training  
76 (•)  
77 Int oh (.) right  
78 (.)  
79 Pam and in the generalist role (.) although I'm getting bits and pieces of  
80 experience of that when (.) er (.) Sue Brown went on maternity leave and  
81 they approached me and said (.) would I like more of a solely training  
82 focused role (.) I jumped at the opportunity

Although Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical perspective invites us to consider our social identity as an acting out of roles, in the workplace role may be drawn on to manage the tension between doing what we want to do and doing what is required. Marshall and Wetherell (1989) in their study of women's talk of careers proposed that 'role' talk relieved the tension between a personal self and a professional self. In this extract it is useful to consider the alternatives to 'role' that Pam could have used; 'job' or 'position' could be substituted in every instance in which Pam used 'role'. The use of 'role' in preference to all other possibilities raises the discourse analytic 'why this, why now?' question (Wetherell, 1998).

At the beginning of the turn Pam talks of a role as a 'taking on', 'I took her role on' (lines 65-66). From the perspective of one identity theory the self is linked to society in terms of the roles performed by the individual (Goffman, 1959). As an available 'expert system' (Linde, 1993) this way of talking about the self may be drawn on as a communication practice. However, other discursive theorists have argued that 'role' talk was in some way inauthentic and that 'the real self shines through' in the talk of their participants indicated an essential, more authentic self (e.g. Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). Nevertheless, in this extract 'role' may be functioning to provide coherence. As part of a sequentially organised retrospective account of experience, coherence may be constructed in the light of frequent change of workplace and job. This may be achieved by drawing on an essential self which is performing or acting out a series of roles. Otherwise the changes may be regarded as a fractured account. By using 'role' the participant is drawing on a culturally understood way of talking about the self, especially relevant in the workplace, which retrospectively constructs coherence for the interaction.

There are implications for the construction of agency in the 'role' talk in this example. The speaker as agentic is a consistent construction throughout this extract. 'So I took her role on' (lines 65-66) silences the whole process of being selected for the job; the company's part in this account is omitted, thereby positioning the speaker as agentic. Where the company does play a part in the account it is through, for example, 'and then I got approached to see if I would' (line 67). The use of 'approached' instead of 'asked' as an alternative reduces the company's directive power in the account. The decision to comply is explicitly

attended to as the participant's own decision. This functions to construct a coherence in that in the light of several job changes, which are all constructed as moves decided upon by the participant, there must be a pattern or plan. The theme or 'plan' emerges at lines 74-75 'my (.) er (.) bias is towards development and training' and 'I jumped at the opportunity' (line 82) (when offered a training role). This compares with a discourse analytic study where the agentic 'true self' is contrasted with a 'royal role' (Abell and Stokoe, in press). In the present study the 'true self' provides coherence to role talk in the interaction.

The dramaturgical theme is continued in the analysis of the next extract through which I explore one way in which identity may be 'performed' in talk.

#### Extract 7.11 Liz interview 1

500 Int yeah (.) erm (.) in what way do you feel you contribute to ((Company A))  
 501 (.)  
 502 Liz erm (.) well I'm quite honest (.) and (.) maybe (.) provide a different  
 503 viewpoint (.) erm (.) I try not to (.) I think (.) it's difficult as a graduate at the  
 504 moment (.) because I'm (.) sort of (.) creating an impression as well (.) but I  
 505 try not to (.) just agree (.) because it's the (.) the right thing to do (.) and I (.)  
 506 I'll be honest as well (.) and I don't do that all the time=  
 507 Int =yeah (.) yeah=  
 508 Liz =it obviously depends on how comfortable I feel with (.) those people=  
 509 Int =yeah=

Liz begins this turn by constructing herself as a 'kind' of person, 'I'm quite honest' (line 502). This aligns with the discussion earlier in this chapter regarding constructing self as made up of traits, or as a type of person. The participant follows this with a mitigated claim for what this 'kind' of person would bring to the workplace, 'provide a different viewpoint' (lines 502-503). This is constructed as 'difficult' (line 503) by drawing on membership of a category, 'as a

graduate' (line 503). Sacks (1992) talked of the rights and obligations that are attached to category membership. In this instance the participant is drawing on membership of the category 'graduate' in order to 'justify' not being totally honest. This is supported through, 'I'm (.) sort of (.) creating an impression as well' (line 504), offered as something that graduates are expected (entitled) to do. In this extract there is an emergence of a certain amount of tension between 'time self and 'role talk'. This is managed through claiming membership of a category whose members have particular rights and obligations.

However, despite this membership work, which entitles the speaker to behave in a particular way, (as a member of the category, 'graduate'), the participant constructs this as an optional way of behaving. This provides an illustration of how categorisation may be drawn on to provide a 'usual' scenario, while particularisation may be drawn on to construct the speaker as different from the group. It may be that we need to talk of our rights, or obligations, as members of a particular category but require differentiation in order to manage interactional business. The interactional business at hand in this extract is an attempt to construct a consistent identity of an 'honest' individual despite having claimed membership of a category for whom honesty is not necessarily a priority. 'Just agreeing' is described as 'the right thing to do' (line 505) for the group, to which Liz adds 'I'll be honest as well' (line 506) which particularises the account for the speaker. In this extract I have considered how performing an identity as a graduate is inextricably linked to the current interaction. Its relevance to career is implied in how the participant constructs a tension between what is expected of a graduate, in order to progress and a particularised account. However, in the

following extract Lyn relates identity directly to career choice.

#### Extract 7.12 Lyn interview 1

This extract is part of a response to the first question of the interview, 'Would you like to tell me something about yourself?'

26 Lyn and (.) I did a degree in geography (.) which I decided I was  
27 interested in when I was doing my A levels (.) it was a BSc in  
28 geography (.) so (.) did more of the physical (.) standing in rivers (.)  
29 side (.) than the (.) people (.) side of it=  
30 Itt =yeah (= yeah=  
31 Lyn =em (.) lots of (.) modules (.) alongside the geography (.) as well (.)  
32 for example (.) economics (.) some environmental studies (.) some IT  
33 (.) computers (.) and then (.) decided (.) from that (.) that I didn't want  
34 to do an MSc in geography (.) though a lot of people stayed on to do  
35 that (.) em (.) I decided to move into logistics (.) erm (.) hard decision  
36 in the sense that (.) all I knew was that I didn't want to be an  
37 accountant (.) and I didn't want to be a marketeer  
38 ((laughter))  
39 didn't know what else I wanted to be (.) at all (.) so (.) I tried the  
40 career service (.) like everybody else (.) and I got (.) lots of brochures  
41 (.) erm (.) regarding the companies (.) and I went through (.) logistics  
42 (.) kind of (.) stood out (.) to me (.) as (.) lots of (.) problem solving  
43 (.) lots of people issues (.) em (.) not too much analytical (.) which I  
44 wasn't too keen on=  
45 Itt =right=

The turn is very long and takes the shape of a 'chronicle', which enables the speaker to provide detail without having to provide the more usual 'justification' or end point to a story (Linde, 1993). From a conversation analytic perspective early parts of conversations between strangers are commonly characterised with 'pick up' questions like 'what do you do?' or 'where are you from' (Sacks, 1992). These questions invoke inference-rich categories as explanations. These work as immediate explanations as they make a class of activities immediately understandable (Silverman, 1998). In this instance the participant relates career choice to 'being' a particular kind of person. The early part of the extract is

marked by talk of 'doing', 'I did a degree in geography' (line 26), 'I didn't want to do an MSc in geography' (lines 33-34). However, when talking of career choice Liz constructs her choice in terms of what she did not want to *be*, 'I didn't want to be an accountant (.) and I didn't want to be a marketeer' (lines 36-37). This draws on an understanding that certain kinds of people do certain kinds of work, and conversely that if you do a certain kind of work this 'shows' you are a 'kind' of person. This indicates an intimate relationship between career choice and identity and it is drawn on in this instance to deny particular 'identities' for the speaker. Interestingly there is no attempt at justifying this denial; it is as if the speaker may speak authoritatively on the kind of person they are not, without having to draw on authentication devices. With reference to performing identity, in this account of a career choice, a career has been constructed as something you are rather than something you do, albeit in order to deny certain career paths.

In this extract Lyn draws on normative repertoires as part of her account of choosing logistics. In lines 34-35 'though a lot of people stayed on to do that', positions the speaker as different to the majority and functions to construct choice, that is, she could have done the same if she wanted to. In addition, 'I tried the career service (.) like everybody else' (lines 39-40) further works to authenticate her choice. It is neither random nor determined but a managed, considered decision legitimated by drawing on 'expert' help in a way that 'anyone' would.

In the following extract identity is performed in a different way. This extract is taken from a group discussion involving six people and myself. At the beginning of the discussion each participant introduced himself or herself, spontaneously

attending to the length of time they had worked for the company. This clearly had relevance for the interaction. In the following extract a relative newcomer (Harry) constructs himself as a graduate 'being managed' and two more experienced members of the company (Lyn and Jody) construct themselves as 'managers'.

### Extract 7.13 Group discussion

724 Harry =you know (.) I've already had two managers (.) since I've been (.) and  
 725 they've both been (.) completely (.) at sea (.) you know (.) they didn't  
 726 know what to do (.) with a graduate (.) they didn't know what the  
 727 expectations were (.) they didn't know what development opportunities  
 728 (.) how much freedom you should be given (.) all that sort of thing=  
 729 Irt =mm=  
 730 Jody =in fairness (.) the truth is (.) they don't have (.) they don't have the  
 731 same expectations (.) because they've seen all the other graduates go off  
 732 (.) and drop off the abyss (.) and they think (.) well (.) why do you (.)  
 733 why do you think you're so special (.) but (.) yeah (.) you usually get (.)  
 734 that (.) yeah (.) kind of (.) feedback (.) from graduate recruitment (.) and  
 735 then you're asking for the staff (.) and (.) your manager thinks you're  
 736 just (.) nuts (.) you know=  
 737 Lyn =yeah=  
 738 Irt =mm=  
 739 Jody =and it (.) it's getting divisive (.) because it's putting a divisor[ between  
 740 Lyn [yeah]  
 741 Jody [and  
 742 it's taking a lot of time to get over that (.) yes I'm [...]  
 743 (•)  
 744 Lyn and you are completely judged by the graduate help you give as well (.)  
 745 because they tend to send graduates to the same (.) departments (.) the  
 746 same(.) managers(.) the same(.) and then you have some(.) arrogant[  
 747 Jody [mm]  
 748 Lyn [person  
 749 (.) and you know you are (.) judged (.) exactly the same (.) and it's (.)  
 750 that whole area of (.) well (.) actually (.) you need me

In the analysis of this extract I shall concentrate on how identities are being performed to do interactional business where identity involves a display of membership of some feature-rich category (Sacks, 1992; Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998). Harry begins his turn by talking as one who is managed, 'I've already had two managers' (line 724) and constructs an inclusive category of 'graduate' (line 726) in order to talk about their entitlements. The change of pronoun in Harry's

tum of talk from 'I' (line 724), to a self-inclusive category, 'graduate' (line 726), works to generalise the complaint, that is it functions to ward off the potential imputation that *he* may be the problem. Jody's response begins by drawing on 'fairness' and 'tmth' (line 730). As a stock phrase for which understanding may be assumed due to its commonly understood meaning, the implicit suggestion, that the previous tum is neither fair nor true, is hidden. This veiled criticism slips in unnoticed under the guise of an appeal to even handedness which further works to deflect any potential charge of vested interest in her account.

Jody's account begins as ambiguous as to whether the speaker is including herself in the group 'managers', using the organisational pronoun 'they' (line 730) (Sacks, 1992). However, by talking as one who knows what other managers 'think' (line 732) authority is constructed through this implied knowledge (Potter, 1996a). She goes on to say what managers 'think' using active voicing, 'well (.) why do you (.) why do you think you're so special' (lines 732-733). Wooffitt (1992) has argued that this kind of reported speech functions in talk to provide 'otherness', that is it is not the speaker's judgement and 'objectivity' is established by crediting others with the reported 'thoughts'. Lyn joins the interaction with overlapping 'yeah' (line 737) and then begins her tum as a continuation of Jody's earlier tum with 'and' (line 739). She then talks as a manager of 'graduates' by whom she may be 'judged by the graduate help you give' (line 744-745). In this way she co-constructs the group 'managers' with Jody's earlier tum which is positioned alongside the group 'graduates'.

Sacks (1992) proposed that if people in a group were all alike it would make arguments more troublesome and hence more effort would be made to prevent them. In this instance, although the category 'member of the company' may have been applied by an onlooker to all the participants, or 'gender' applied as an analyst's category, in the talk it is useful to consider how the speakers self-categorise for the purposes of the interaction. With little or no attempt to prevent outright conflict or avoid threats to face (Heritage, 1989) with 'then you have some arrogant...' (line 746) the two groups become positioned in opposition to one another. Lyn continues to construct a complaint about 'graduates' being the mechanism by which she and other managers are judged 'and you know you are judged (.) exactly the same' (line 749). However, the end of this turn constructs an alternative, seemingly contradictory view, 'well (.) actually (.) you need me' (line 750) which implies a two-way dependency between the groups

With reference to performing identity, Harry's complaint about managers was constructed from the position of one who is 'managed'. Others in the group responded from the position of 'managers'. These identities were drawn on and deployed without regard for the potential 'face-threatening' conflict that these identities may engender. This is in contrast to self-descriptions that display affiliation in group talk (Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984). In this instance the categories were constructed in opposition to one another, for which their dependency on each other may have relevance. The newcomers require the more senior managers for guidance, future references, or grading; the managers require the newcomers for appraisal, or judgement. In the context of the present

interaction these inter-dependencies were made explicit through the construction and deployment of identities.

## **7.5 Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have paid particular attention to how notions of identity, or the self, are used in talk to attend to interactional business. As the business in this instance focused around career talk, looking at how identity was drawn on enabled some exploration of 'common sense' understandings regarding the relationship between the two. The shift in focus adopted in the present study makes visible what is usually invisible and taken-for-granted in the way we talk about ourselves. As an alternative perspective to a traditional, or mainstream, assumption that regards language as a conduit to some internal meaning, it offers an opportunity to explore what is being done in the talk.

Analysis has been made of the participants' use of 'type' with reference to their identity. Extracts have been explored where type was drawn on in the talk to 'justify' a complaint. When talking about career, an identity type may be used as a device to explain choice, plausibly defend a lack of skill, or construct flexibility. This provided an interesting contrast with an identity type being used as a device to construct a coherent account in the light of evident 'fracture' in the career story. The findings support other literature about coherence in career stories (e.g. Linde, 1993) while attending to how it has been done. In addition, some analysis has highlighted how the participants, as past students, may be deploying academic 'knowledge' as part of their constructions of their selves as 'types'.

The notion of the self as a splh, or divided, phenomenon was investigated. In terms of theoretical newness this has the greatest potential. It seems to be drawn on in such a way as to offer a possibility to the speaker of dual-positioning not just when making a prediction but when managing a dilemma in talk. Specifically, in talk about career this worked as a device which constructed distance for the speaker. There were several instances of this device being deployed where one part of the self overlooked the other, or one part evaluated the other, which worked to provide a mitigated accountability for the predictions being made about the participants' future plans. Elsewhere in the data body parts have been constructed, for example 'just in my mind', 'gut feeling', 'deep in my heart' which have not been included in the analysis but suggest future research possibilities. These don't just provide distance but also proximity; consider 'heart talk' - in what way is this persuasive? The implication of these findings relates primarily to the usefulness of the methodology, that is, attending to what is being done with the talk rather than to a priori assumptions about identity. However, it is important to explore how people are persuasive in talking about their careers; how they draw on devices of the self to do this is of relevance.

The participants' use of 'role' was briefly examined. Earlier studies had found that role talk was a tension-relieving device (e.g. Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). Role talk may have particular relevance in talk about the workplace because of the presumed tension between doing what we want to do and doing what we have to do. Consider the alternatives to role, job or position perhaps? Role implies an acting out, a dramaturgical perspective on work behaviour, or a 'real' self directing all the moves which, though many and diverse, are given coherence

through role and the implied meaning of its use. One of the implications of talking of work activities as carrying out roles may be one way of constructing 'intelligent' career behaviour (Parker and Arthur, 2000). That is, it is a way of expressing, 'I'm not really buying into all this but know what it is appropriate to do'. It provides a legitimated way of talking about the self at work, which is available as a common sense understanding, due, in part, to the efforts of identity theorists, and drawn on to do interactive work. This indicates perhaps that it is a concern of the speaker that they construct overall control in the light of being 'managed'.

Finally, the performative nature of identity in talk was explored, and its relationship to category membership. Although the basic premise guiding the research is that identity is something we do rather than something we are, which implies that all identity is performed, this part of the chapter focused on talk about the self *as* something. This lies in contrast with the earlier analysis, which explored talk about the self. The performance of identity focused around talk like 'as a graduate...' followed by what graduates do. Often this was to position themselves as different to other graduates. This contrasts with traditional, or mainstream, theorists who may impose the category 'graduate' and perhaps concentrate on their shared characteristics. The methodology adopted in the present study looks at what they do in their talk and allows the exploration of particularisation as an emergent issue.

The participants constructed the categories for themselves and others as part of an identity performance. Some instances of particularisation were drawn on in the

light of constructed categories. In the denial of an identity the participant provided less detail, implying that not 'being' a kind of person was explanation enough. Denial of a work identity was simply a matter of constructing it as a fact with no elaboration; as a device this works as an effective disclaimer. However, in constructing a career choice, account detail was provided in that performing being knowledgeable functioned as 'evidence' of the good fit between the 'kind' of person they are and the job they have chosen.

Some analysis has been carried out on the talk of a group discussion where the category of 'graduates' was further refined to two sub-categories defined by 'being managed' or 'managing' by the participants. This is of particular relevance as, externally, the participants may have been regarded as a homogenous group. Even though there were shared identities which could have been made relevant in the talk, for example, company members or ex-students, in the extract analysed they constructed and deployed identities, which were in conflict in the interaction. As conflict in group interaction is less likely to occur, saving face being the norm, the constructed dependency of the categories on one another for future progression may have had relevance. This has implications for how groups speak to and of one another when the other group in some way determines their career progression.

In this chapter I have explored how the link between career and identity is occasioned in talk. A focus on the taken-for-granted way in which we talk about ourselves at work has made visible how identity may be deployed in talk about career. The findings have implications for both theory and practice. These will

be outlined in the discussion chapter, chapter nine. However, in the next chapter I will explore how the participants related career and change to identity in the talk.

## Chapter Eight

### 8.0 Career and change talk

#### 8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will consider how the participants talked about personal change since joining the company. I will look at how the participants, in their accounts of adjustment, orient to a particular version of the self, which performs a function in the interaction. This will address the third research question:

3. How are notions of career and change related to identity construction in interaction?

The Chicago sociologists were among the first to consider career as a lens through which to look at institutions, in that they link the individual to the social structure through work. They argued that careers were a mechanism of individual change through socialisation, where different roles will involve a change in identity through an internalisation of norms and expectations (Barley, 1989). From a post-structuralist perspective it has been acknowledged that although careers may be a mechanism of change it is not due to internalisation of norms, but their incorporation into individuals' accounts of 'reality' (Foumier, 1997). The present study moves on from these two perspectives and the understanding they have brought to the study of career, by attending to how individuals talk about change. Although in the extracts used in this chapter there is not always an explicit use of the word career, it is implied through talk of expected progression. What is made

explicit is the relationship between identity, adjustment and socialisation in this talk, which is of relevance in addressing the research question cited at the beginning of this chapter.

In this chapter I will explore how the participants talked about adjustment since joining the company and the implications this may have for identity in the interaction. Some of the instances of 'change' talk are responses to an explicit question about change. How the participants attended to this as a relevant question in the interaction about workplace experiences provides some understanding about the concept. This will, initially, be investigated through constructions of similarity and difference between the speaker and other company employees. These are drawn on to 'justify' accounts of adjustment, or authenticate a lack of it. The second strand to this chapter will focus on explicit reference to 'socialisation' as a company-instigated process and the repertoires that are drawn on to resist the process. Finally, this will be contrasted with talk about change as a self-directed process.

## **8.2 Constructions of similarity**

In this section I analyse how the participants constructed similarity between themselves and other members of the company. This has relevance for the **exploration** of 'change' talk as these constructions emerged in the context of questions about change. By being asked a question about personal change the participants were positioned as people who talk about such things. Constructing similarity between themselves and other people in the company is one way that they accounted for themselves in the light of this expectation. As co-constructors

of the interactions my impact has already been acknowledged. This is relevant to how the study raises, and possibly answers, fresh questions surrounding career, identity and change.

#### Extract 8.1 Harry interview 1

The following extract is taken from the first interview with Harry. It is part of his response following my explicit reference to change.

- 431 Int do you think you have changed since joining ((Company A))  
432 (•)  
433 Harry depends who you talk to (.) if you talk to my house mates  
434 ((laughter))  
435 they will say that I'm becoming corporate (.) erm=  
436 Int =how would they describe that (.) do you think  
437 (.)  
438 Harry a company man (.) everything I do is for the company and with the  
439 company and all that sort of thing (.) erm (.) but they were saying that  
440 within a day of me starting  
441 ((laughter))  
442 I think they are coming to the conclusion that I was probably a corporate  
443 man before I joined ((Company A)) (.) and I say the oddest thing is (.)  
444 yeah that's because ((Company A)) only employ ((Company A)) like  
445 people=  
446 Int =oh=  
447 Harry =erm=  
448 Int =that's interesting (.) how do you feel about that (.) you say that's your  
449 house mates description (.) what about you  
450 (•)  
451 Harry I think they are probably right (.) and that (.) I don't mind that because I  
452 think I probably was before I joined ((CompanyA)) (.) erm (.) I've been  
453 (.) aware of (.) sort of (.) management anyway (.) because I did it for a  
454 degree (.) so engineering and management (.) erm (.) its probably just  
455 become more tightly focused (.) you know (.) I have a specific  
456 organisational context erm (.) and (.) yeah (.) I think its true (.) everyone  
457 I've met in ((Company A)) is a ((Company A)) person (.) all friendly  
458 people (.) someone said to me (.) I don't think ((Company A)) employ  
459 nasty people  
460 ((laughter))  
461 Harry I think that's right (.) and other people have said the same thing (.) that  
462 99% of the people you meet are nice people

In this lengthy extract the participant deals with the notion of change in a complex way. He is saying something about himself by referring to what 'others' say about the people who work for the company. In addition, the account is explicitly evaluative with regard to 'company people'. I shall unpack some of the detail to illustrate how this is achieved in the talk.

Harry's response begins by drawing on others' accounts of himself, 'if you talk to my house mates' (line 433). It serves to move the account from his own, potentially self-interested and therefore less persuasive opinion, to the opinions of several others. This provides a more disinterested account. As an opening to a turn in talk, it functions as the start of a particular sequence (Wooffitt, 1992). It is the beginning of a contrast being built up between what 'the house mates' say and something else. The participant is 'doing authenticity' with regard to the identity description he is giving about himself (Sacks, 1992). However, this is not just achieved through the contrast pair; other strategies are evident. It may be seen as problematic to describe himself in this way, due to his evident 'stake' in the description being offered, so he effects the description through his 'house mates' (line 433) and uses the verb 'becoming' (line 435) to illustrate a changing scenario. By presenting this description as belonging to others, space is provided for this view to be inaccurate or for an alternative view to follow.

This is followed by 'but' (line 439) which marks the upcoming contrast of the second part of the utterance. Using a specific temporal term 'within a day' (line 440) serves to cast doubt on the 'becoming corporate' description as an unbelievably narrow time frame during which change may occur. This theme is

continued, firstly by describing the "house mates'" perceptions as the element that is changing, and secondly, more explicitly, by describing his house mates' conclusion that he was 'a corporate man' before joining Company A. So, this construction as a 'corporate man' is separate from the workplace. There is a category of 'corporate man', which is not connected to the company: Harry was already like that, and his house mates are beginning to realise this, according to his account. This is part of his doing authenticity as a rhetorical opposite to a stereotypical description of a corporate man, which he is resisting in his account.

Relating back to the contrast pair which was started at the beginning of the turn, Harry's fourth utterance presents his own 'thoughts', 'I think', (line 451), but suggests that the house mates' descriptions could have been interpreted as derogatory in some way through the use of 'I don't mind' (line 451). He goes on to construct himself as unchanging as a response to this potential criticism in the house mates' descriptions. Harry's talk of being 'aware of (...) sort of (...) management' (line 453) is legitimised through the description of academic studies, the course title being provided as supporting detail. He is drawing on his past identity as a student to work up an entitlement to talk knowledgeably in this area. This construction of Company A people, which includes himself, has provided a positive evaluation of the participant through the description of 'all' the other employees of Company A.

In addition, this account is given an 'otherness' through the use of 'someone said to me' (line 458). Again it is not just the participant's view we are presented with here, through active voicing, but an unidentified person's view, which is provided

as support (Wooffitt, 1992). Harry has effectively constructed himself as a 'nice', 'corporate' person while using other people's descriptions to give rhetorical strength to his account. The notion of 'nasty people' as a rhetorical opposite to 'nice' implies that one has to be 'nice' to work in the organisation and, in a circular way, if you work in the organisation you must be 'nice'. This is an example of how the talk not only describes but is also the source of action. In this account the participant creates an illustration of how he is described by others and then draws implications from the accounts he has presented.

Finally, the participant's use of 'the oddest thing' (line 443) serves to show the description being presented as peculiar. An unusual, or unexpected account of the company being able to select a certain 'kind' of person, of which group he claims membership, 'Company A only employ Company A-like people' (line 444). This explicitly constructs a 'sameness' about 'all' the people who work in this organisation, while acknowledging that he is aware how 'odd' that notion might be.

In the following extract the participant deals with similarity and difference in rather a different way to the participant in extract 8.1. It is reproduced here because it shows a contradictory account of the individual as unique yet one of a number. Furthermore, the participant moves the description of potentially problematic aspects of the organisation to 'norms' and 'culture'.

Extract 8.2 Jordan interview 1

This extract is taken from a response to a question about what the participant brings to the Company.

366 Jordan I think (.) er (.) the culture of ((Company ))A is (.) er (.) very strong (.) I  
367 (.) I did a little bit of this at university and it (.) because it's so big (.) and  
368 so well established (.) there's going to be some fairly well established (.)  
369 sort of (.) norms (.) erm (.) and I think (.) to an extent (.) you have to  
370 work within that (.) but (.) I think there is (.) the more and more people  
371 like myself on on the scheme (.) whatever the nature of the job they do  
372 (.) the more and more fresh blood that comes in (.) the easier it will be  
373 for the (.) er (.) the culture to (.) to adapt (.) and I think that's the main (.)  
374 that's the biggest benefit you can bring (.) on an individual level you can  
375 do individual things=  
376 ~~It~~ =mm (.) mm=  
377 Jordan =and (.) so I could (.) find an (.) innovative way to do (.) sales plans (.)  
378 you can do individual things (.) but I think as a group of people we can  
379 (.) make ((Company A)) (.) ready (.) ready for (.) anything (.) I think  
380 that's how I look at it (.) by just being ourselves

The above extract has been selected to illustrate an alternative way in which a member of the company constructs himself as belonging to a group within the company. It is clearly not simply a matter of identifying with other members; it is more to do with providing an evaluative account of 'us' and 'them'. So, similarity and difference are constructed as cohabiting the same space; similarity is made possible by difference, and vice versa. However, perhaps due to the particular context of this interaction, the workplace, the implied criticism of the evaluative talk is not explicitly directed at other, longer serving, members of the company. Instead it is directed towards more general notions like 'culture' and 'norms'.

The participant introduces 'culture' (line 366) near the beginning of this turn and legitimises his ability to talk on this topic by saying, 'I did a little bit of this at university' (line 366-7). He goes on to describe himself and his peers as 'fresh blood' (line 372). This suggests the norms and culture are upheld by 'stale blood', or more established members of the organisation. His description

distances his criticism from other organisation members by using generic terms. Constructs of 'commonplace' arenas, for example, 'the media', may be taken-for-granted and may be used to support an argument (Billig, 1996). In this instance, Jordan constructs 'norms' (line 369) and 'culture' (line 366) as common places, which allow for criticism to be directed generally rather than specifically. The hesitation in line 373 'the easier h will be for the (.) er (.) culture to adapt' may indicate a problem with this description.

Much has been written on culture in organisations and it is not the aim in this chapter to discuss this area of academic literature; however talk of 'culture' being able to 'adapt' does indicate some shifting of agency in this particular interaction. It is presented as if separate to the actions of individuals.

The pronoun changes in the second part of this extract describe the participant as an individual and yet part of this larger group. This discursive work is carried out, in part, through, 'but I think... we can.. .I think.. .that's how I look at h (.) by just being ourselves' (line 379-380). In this utterance there is some construction of similarity rather like Harry in extract 8.1, but there is a more complex separation between the participant, a selected group and the rest of the people in the organisation. Again this construction is evaluative because it positions the participant and the inclusive group against people who work within 'established norms' and the 'very strong culture'. The last part of this utterance serves to deny any change. Jordan explicitly states that if he were to change, to be more like the established members of the company, this would not be desirable. The final part of this turn constructs the positive potential of this group for the company. As an

example of 'on-line' identity construction this, rather complex, similarity / difference story illustrates how categories are created in talk in order to 'do' things. This category of which the participant is a member is mobilised to describe how the company may (and should?) change.

Some comment should perhaps be made on the use of terms such as 'norms' and 'culture' by participants who have had experience of academic study during which these terms may have been prevalent. In the present study such terms have been identified as examples of Billig's (1996) common places towards which criticism may be directed. However, their use illustrates how a particular interaction in a specific context enables the construction of common places of relevance to the interactants. In this instance the ex-student constructs his 'knowledge' of prevalent analytic terms used in the academic analysis of companies, which functions as both a tool and an end in itself. As a tool it works to legitimate the account in terms of shared academic 'knowledge' between the interactants. As an end in itself it enables criticism from an authentic position of 'one who knows about such things'. Bakhtin's classic notion of a 'mixed stew', a repository of words from which we draw when we speak or write, the words being given significance in the current context, has relevance (Gergen, 1999)

In the participant's talk, evaluative interpretations have been offered which we have been persuaded to share. The comparison of 'nice' with 'nasty' is a good illustration. However, the talk of 'norms' and 'culture' in the second extract implies that what is 'normal' in a company is not necessarily accepted as the appropriate behaviour for this participant. It has been suggested that using

normatively prescribed metaphors could provide the appearance of buying into an organisational culture (Carroll, 1995). In this instance, a detailed analysis of a newcomer's talk has indicated that challenges may be made even when using company rhetoric in a non-ironic manner. In the following section I will consider how constructions of difference also function as identity tools in talk about change, either to acknowledge or refute it.

### **8.3 Constructions of difference**

In contrast to the earlier accounts, the following extracts construct difference between the speaker and other members of the company. Perhaps, from the company's perspective, this group of graduate trainees is treated as relatively homogenous. However, others have addressed the issue of differentiation with particular relevance to managers (Watson and Harris, 1999). To be labelled as 'typical' is at odds with the notion of a manager as an exceptional person in the workplace. It also lies uneasily, perhaps, with our notion of ourselves as unique individuals. Others generally utter the phrase 'people like you' about us. It is unlikely that we would imagine that there was a whole group or even one other person 'like us'. This lies in contrast to the earlier emergent issue of similarity and provides an alternative arena in which to consider how the participant attends to change.

The following extract is rather long, but the sequence of turns is relevant. For the reader, what comes before and after is necessary in order to follow the development of the issues in this turn of the talk. The analysis of this extract is explicitly focused on change, or adjustment, in relation to differentiation.

Extract 8.3 Des interview 2

This extract is from a sequence of turns in response to a question about a company 'ideal' and how the participant thinks he measures up to the ideal.

- 494 Des I think (.) er (.) the year (.) really (.) just looking back on it (.) its been me  
495 adjusting (.) its probably not what ((CompanyA)) wants to hear but it has  
496 been me sort of trying to adjust myself to the job (.) I know (.) they pay a lot  
497 of money when they recruit (.) but (.) but there is a balance has to be struck  
498 (.) and this is like a very different area of work than I was used to (.) and  
499 erm (.) there's been a lot of me (.) adapting to (.) that (.) erm and may be its  
500 blunted some of those other (.) skills which (.) er (.) I can bring but I think  
501 (.) it's just (.) they are on the back burner (.) when I have got more  
502 confidence (.) within this role (.) I think I can (.) sort of like (.) force the  
503 issue of something else  
504 (.)  
505 Int this notion of changing is not unusual (.) you know  
506 (.)  
507 Des well (.) I have certainly heard of instances where (.) so far where (.) people  
508 have come in (.) and they have obviously (.) at the forefront of their mind's  
509 been the (.) attitude (.) I'm a new graduate (.) I'm expected to bring  
510 something new and fresh to the company (.) and dynamic (.) and they have  
511 hit against a brick wall=  
512 Int =mm=  
513 Des =and (.) you know (.) they've (.) you know (.) come off (.) a bit (.) bloodied  
514 (.) as well (.) so (.) er you've got to admire them for that (.) but I think  
515 you've got to work (.) sometimes within the consfraints (.) of the (.) er (.)  
516 environment

In this extract the participant describes his experience with the company as a period of adjustment (lines 494-495). The temporal detail of 'the year' (line 494) serves to describe a relatively short time period in terms of workplace experiences. This description is explicitly acknowledged as potentially, politically inappropriate 'its probably not what Company A wants to hear' (line 495). The company's expectations are constructed as justified by the talk of, 'they pay a lot of money' (line 496-7). Some description is given to account for the period of adjustment, but this is followed by a veiled criticism of what this adjustment might be doing to 'other skills' (line 500); these are described as

'blunted' or 'on the back burner' (line 501). In this talk there are shades of Jablin's (1982) notion of individualisation.

The second part of this extract follows my indication that the participant is not alone in presenting this kind of account, and attends to other people's experiences. The participant has constructed his account of how he has adjusted over the last year and now 'justifies' this story by presenting an alternative scenario outlining what might have happened if he had behaved in a different manner (lines 507-511). The 'other' graduates are constructed as having taken on board company expectations, 'I'm expected to bring something new and fresh to the company' (line 509-510) and have 'hh against a brick wall' (line 510-511). Contrasted to the participant's account of his first year it is presented as understandable, 'you've got to admire them for that' (line 514) but dangerous, 'they've come off (.) you know (.) a bit bloodied (line 513).

As in earlier extracts, the participant moves the criticism, which could potentially be directed at other people who work in the organisation, to a generic term, or 'common place', 'the environment' (line 516), (Billig, 1996). Studies of workplace talk have identified words like 'environment' as useful fictions in a narration of organisational life (Czamiawska-Joerges, 1995). In this instance Des is using this particular fiction to construct an all-embracing, yet indefinable version of the company as a constraint, which indicates how these fictions may be useful.

In summary, in this extract the participant describes his activities and contrasts them with those of some other people in the workplace. This description is evaluative in that his behaviour, though seemingly less 'admirable', is certainly 'safer'. The constraining notion of an 'environment' is used to justify his actions. This extract illustrates how difference between the speaker and his work colleagues is created and evaluated in talk of experience in the workplace. To relate this to identity construction, the creation of categories has become ever more complex in that the new graduates have been described as two distinct groups, those who are adapting, the majority, of whom the participant is a member, and those who are the 'bloodied' and gmdgingly admired minority. The participant's talk of 'role' (line 502) works to construct a legitimised position of having changed which is temporary, a requirement met before returning to the 'tme' self (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989).

In the following extract, the participant constructs herself as separate from what may, ordinarily, be described as her peer group by other organisation members. She brings into the account aspects of 'play' which works as a legitimising tool in order to talk of separation in a way which does not impact on her work role.

#### Extract 8.4 Jane interview 1

This extract is taken from the response to a question about what the participant would change about her work experiences.

618 Jane that's my social circle (.) there is a fair amount of social things going on with  
619 the graduates at ((Company A)) (.) but (.) to be honest they are all too fast  
620 for me (.) they go out drinking till all hours in the week (.) and I just

621 ((laughter)) one thing I find is (.) I'm very tired when I work (.) and (.) it hit  
622 me harder initially (.) I (.) I sort of can quite happily now do a 10 or 11 hour  
623 day with out a break (.) and that's not unusual (.) erm (.) much more than  
624 I'm contracted to do (.) but not unusual

In this extract the analysis is focused on how Jane separates herself from her 'peers' and justifies this separation with a self-positive evaluation. In this extract Jane talks about 'the graduates' (line 619) and then goes on to call them 'they' (line 619). This indicates a clearly constructed separation between herself and the group she is describing. Recent studies of talk in organisations have explored the use of the phrase 'work hard, play hard' (Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson, 1998). Their participants attended to this notion as 'an old cliché' (p584); however, it was interpreted as 'a rite de passage' (p585) to organisational membership, and served as an organising influence on newcomers. In this instance, Jane is attending to this notion but goes on to question its desirability. The phrase 'to be honest' (line 619) indicates a forthcoming description which may be seen to be problematic (Drew and Holt, 1988). In this instance, the interviewer's empathy or support is enlisted at the beginning of this specific criticism. Arguably, in the light of understandings surrounding the cliché of 'work hard, play hard', affiliation may be sought to support a view that is contrary to 'common' understandings.

Jane goes on to describe how she has changed, using the temporal distinction 'initially' (line 622). This constructed 'inability', which functions to differentiate her from other graduates, could also be seen as a potential weakness. In order to distance her self from this description, the passage of time is used. The end of this excerpt constructs a new description of the participant as able to 'quite happily' (line 622) work for long periods of time. By drawing on specific units of time,

'10 or 11 hour day' (line 622), detail is provided as to how much longer than a commonly understood average the participant works each day. By describing this as 'not unusual' (line 624) a clear picture of the work pattern of the individual is created. Finally, this behaviour is attributed to herself, as a choice made, by talk of 'much more than I'm contracted to do' (lines 623-624). This provides a contrast in the form of a positive evaluation of what a graduate entrant 'should' or is expected to do.

Other writers have argued that some graduates construct a discourse of 'integrity' as an alternative to the dominant career discourse, and through this they create a separation from others in the company (Foumier, 1998). The Foucauldian perspective of Foumier's paper led to a focus on how one of the groups, called the 'militant' group, 'reproduced and subverted the dominant culture they seek to oppose' (1998: 55). In the present thesis attention to interactive business enables an exploration of how, specifically, this constructed identity of someone who is different to others creatively works with the potential risk of being considered deviant. In Foumier's (1998) study of graduates, the group who did not 'buy in' to the dominant discourse were regarded as being positioned at the margins. In this instance the detail of how many hours that the participant works may serve to refute the negative potential of this marginal identity. Furthermore, in common with Foumier's marginalised participants' accounts, she constructs herself as 'in control' as a choice maker with regard to the effort she expends for the company. Finally, the participant's talk describes working beyond what may reasonably be expected, thereby constructing an account of 'epic heroism', where career is regarded in terms of heroic challenges (Collin, 2000: 170).

In the following extract I further explore how Jane talks about herself as different to other graduate employees. This extract was selected as the issue was spontaneously returned to by the participant on several occasions thus indicating it a matter of relevance for the participant.

#### Extract 8.5 Jane interview 1

The following extract is from the same participant as in extract 8.4, later in the interview. This follows some explicit talk about other graduates.

667 Jane so (.) I feel that they have probably had wider life experiences (.) and a  
668 much more (1.0) probably much more full of life than I am (.) erm (.) in a  
669 sort of very much a work hard (.) play hard (.) I go to the gym every night  
670 type thing which (.) I'm much lazier than that((laughter)) but (.) you know  
671 (.) I think (.) looking at them I work much harder than a lot of them (.) and  
672 much longer hours=

In this context the use of stock phrases such as 'work hard play hard' (line 669) can be compared with organisation members' use of cliché (Anderson-Gough et al, 1998). In this instance the phrase 'work hard play hard' (line 669) is upgraded to constmct excess, 'I go to the gym every night' (line 669), against which contrasting descriptions will seem more reasonable. A self-deprecating statement, 'I'm much lazier than that' (line 670) follows these descriptions of the 'others'. Then there is a request for reassurance or understanding in the form of 'you know' (line 670). This may be for the preceding laughter and hs function of 'not really' to the former remark, or to understand the phrase, which follows. The acknowledgement of being 'lazier' (line 670), as a self deprecating remark, has been balanced by an equally explicit poshve self- description. 'I work much

harder than a lot of them (.) and much longer hours=' (line 671-672). It is interesting to note that the positive element of this construction is about behaviours, which may be observed from outside the individual. This description of behaviours, may be a counter argument for the self-professed 'laziness', the 'laziness' itself already having been constructed in such a way as to relate to 'play' rather than work. As this interaction is in, and explicitly about, the workplace it is evident that the participant has weighted work behaviours as the topic of greatest interest and so most valuable.

By spontaneously returning to this topic the participant highlights the relevance of this issue of differentiation. The construction of difference between herself and other graduates relies on creating particular identities for both parties so that a contrast may be made. In the following section the participants' talk will be investigated for company instigated-processes of change and compared to participant-driven change accounts.

#### **8.4 Talk of socialisation**

The notion of personal change during time spent within the company has been explored through accounts that attend to similarity and difference. In contrast, in the following extracts participants describe a company-directed socialisation process, the impact of which is acknowledged and refuted in diverse ways. This is then compared to extracts in which the 'change' is constructed as instigated and legitimated by the participants.

This extract is taken from a response to a question that explicitly asks if the participant has changed since joining the company.

289 Des er (.) I guess (.) I guess so (.) I think it's (.) yes (.) I (.) I am perhaps a little  
 290 more patient now because erm (.) at university and in the summer  
 291 placement that I did (.)  
 ((detail not transcribed regarding summer placement))  
 298 so coming to ((Company A)) (.) you know (.) lots of good ideas (.) and (.) I  
 299 think you have to (.) really (.) adjust your mind-set a little bit there (.) erm  
 300 (.) I think some people might feel that it's part of the socialization which  
 301 they are trying to move away from (.) within the organization (.) sort of (.)  
 302 you know (.) changes people (.) but (.) you know (.) you have to accept the  
 303 fact that (.) you know (.) you are working for an organization which (.) you  
 304 know (.) it (.) it can't (.) be changed that quickly (.) you have to go with (.)  
 305 go through the appropriate **channels** (.) and (.) to get something done (.) it  
 306 (.) it's more (.) persistence (.) I (.) I would say (.) okay (.) you just have to  
 307 (.) to keep at 'em (.) you know (.) it's been (.) I think (.) my (.) my (.) little  
 308 cause of frusfration since I have been here (.) some of the things I would  
 309 have liked to have changed (.) I've really had to (.) er (.) badger people (.) I  
 310 guess (.) to get (.) to get (.) things altered=

Des describes some change and provides a temporal location between 'now' and 'the summer' (line 290). Some description is given of the summer placement, which is omitted in this extract. The scene is set on arrival at the company, 'lots of good ideas' (line 298) and this is followed by a, mhigated, description of the required adjustment, 'you have to (.) really (.) adjust your mind-set a little bit' (line 299). By constmcting himself as able to adjust his 'mind-set' a particular version of the individual is being deployed. This compares with earlier analysis in chapter seven of how identity is dravm on in talk to provide dual-poshioning. In this instance h allows for change while retaining some element of the 'true' self which maintains overall confrol. The following talk is moved away from the speaker by 'I think some people' (line 300), suggesting a general class of unidentifiable people, implicitly not inclusive of the speaker who is constructed as

doing the thinking. This is a subtle separation, during which the use of 'people' as a category in talk is not neutral, but heavy with implication (Malone, 1997). 'Socialisation' is then described as something 'they are trying to move away from (...) within the organisation' (line 301). This is an interesting construction of events. Socialisation is usually regarded as something that members of an organisation deliberately, whether explicitly or implicitly, attempt to 'do' to newcomers (Louis, 1980). That is not to say that the newcomers are not working equally as hard to 'learn the ropes' and work out ways of 'being normal' within the organisation. The account is then mitigated by 'sort of (...) you know' (lines 301-302) to evoke understanding of the hearer. Without waiting for a confirmatory response Des goes on to describe what socialisation 'does', it 'changes people' (line 302). This offers an account of a newcomer's interpretation of early workplace experience.

So far, this relatively long turn has constructed the participant as being full of ideas on joining the company but then having to adjust. The notion of socialisation is cast as undesirable by the use of a generalised 'they' within the organisation. However, Des carries on to argue a case for the change he has already described; 'you have to accept the fact' and 'go through appropriate channels' (line 302-305) are constructions of how this less than desirable way of working is justified in talk. Although Carroll argued that 'talk remains the best tool for control...platitudes are building blocks for more complex control machinery' (1995: 139). In this instance the company rhetoric is being used to justify potentially undesirable behaviour. Des then talks of 'frustration' which is minimised by 'little' (lines 307-308) regarding getting things changed, although

the word 'altered' (line 310) is used which is, arguably, less radical or challenging. In this utterance he accounts for being affected by the required 'adjustment' to his 'mind-set', while constructing the company's need, or right, to demand it.

Interestingly this response to a direct question about personal change is characterised by accounts of changes in the way the company works. This illustrates how, in talk, issues which are of relevance to the speaker may be raised in order to perform a function. In this account Des acknowledges the legitimacy of the question yet denies personal change as one who 'knows' about company agendas for change through socialisation. The managed critique of the company, as the object that 'should' change, further works to authenticate his unchanging yet flexible identity as morally defensible. So, it is not simply a matter of looking at how people are positioned through questions in research. How a challenging question is answered, in which the speaker constructs a morally defensible account, may be analysed in order to understand the rhetorical resources that are available to construct alternative positions in talk. In the next extract Jordan also describes the company's impact with regard to 'change'.

#### Extract 8.7 Jordan interview 2

This extract follows some talk of having feedback from a summer placement job, in the form of the offer of a permanent job with the company, and its impact on the participant's confidence.

385 Jordan =and that's nice anyway (.) and in the work setting it's just as nice (.)  
386 emm (.) I don't think I've changed (.) and if ((Company A)) tried to  
387 make me change (.) which they won't (.) but if they did (.) I don't think  
388 I could (.) you know (.) I'm quite happy with who I am (.) and all that  
389 (.) but/ emm (.) yeah (.) they (.) they've made me much (.) much more  
390 self confident=

This short piece of talk illustrates just how complex the notion of individual change might be. The end of this turn constructs the company as having an impact on the individual, 'they've made me much (.) much more self confident' (lines 389-390). An alternative version of this could have been 'I have become more confident', which indicates some attention to the role of the company in the description being offered. What is most striking is that this immediately follows a description of how the participant is unlikely to be able to change and the even greater **un-likelihood** that the company would 'try' to effect this change (line 386-387). This positions the change process as within the control of the individual. The desires of the company for the participant to change can only be made effective when the participant wants to comply. The question being addressed here is, why does he not want to change according to company desires? Jordan draws on 'happiness' with 'I'm quite happy with who I am' (line 388) as a reasonable, legitimate claim to make about how he feels about himself. The implication of this talk is that a person would only change according to company demands if he or she were unhappy with 'who' they were. This illustrates one way that identity may be drawn on in talk about career and change.

There are tensions between versions of the self and career, in that there are different ways available to make sense of the relationship between the personal self and occupation (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989). In this instance Jordan is drawing on 'the real self shining through, simply being himself, as a version

which challenges the company's potential right to change the individual. This contrasts with post-structuralist studies of graduate trainees' talk where career discourse was seen to offer possibilities of reinventing the self so the projects of self and organisational excellence become mutually implicated, the fantasy of being more or better being available through the career (Fournier, 1998). A focus on the detail of interaction enables an exploration of the argumentative nature of talk. Jordan has deployed an expert coherence system, (Linde, 1993), in order to challenge what may be regarded as a legitimate demand in the context of the workplace, that is for the participant, especially one positioned as a trainee, to change in some way.

Within this account there is contradiction, 'which they won't (.) but if they did' (line 387) which simultaneously positions something as a possibility while denying it. This may indicate a dilemma being addressed on-line. By constructing a response in the event that this impossible situation may arise, the participant confirms its likelihood. The account of the company not trying to change him becomes less persuasive through this construction. In this instance the participant may be attending to the idea of change through socialisation as being problematic. The more persuasive construction in this extract is concerned with how identity is deployed in order to argue his position. Several participants drew on a need / right to be 'happy' as a legitimate demand. In this instance Jordan deploys h to resist even the remotest possibility that strategic 'change' may take place. Other studies of the effects of discursive practices of work on self-constituting processes have emphasised how, although people are 'smart believers', 'self-constituting processes other than work will configure

selves'(Casey, 1994: 197). Interestingly, in this extract Jordan appeals to a general understanding about being 'happy' about ones' self to deny the company's right to change this. In the following extract Ann also resists expectations of change.

#### Extract 8.8 Ann interview 2

This extract follows some talk about an 'ideal' person for the company and how the participant measures up against this constructed ideal.

529 Ann because I'm leaming to be (.) political  
 530 (.)  
 531 Int right  
 532 (.)  
 533 Ann (1.0) but (.) there's also this nagging voice (.) says (.) I don't want to (.)  
 534 and I don't want to do that (.) why should I=  
 535 Int =don't want to play this game  
 536 ((laughter))  
 537 Ann no (.) no (.) because I'm not going to (.) because I end up (.) spouting these  
 538 things now (.) to people (.) and I'm thinking (.) I don't agree (.) with this  
 539 (.) you know (.) I'm just leam (.) I've just learnt this (.) and (.) it's very  
 540 difficult to know (.) whether (.) that's me (.) that's me (.) growing up (.)  
 541 and that's how I should become (.) or whether it's because (.) I'm being  
 542 sucked in to the organisation (.) and it's difficuh to know that (.) because I  
 543 haven't been elsewhere (.) and I think that's one of the reasons lots of  
 544 people want to go out and experience (.) other things (.) and (.) particularly  
 545 (.) I suppose most people (.) my age (.) now (.) want to get off (.) and go  
 546 fravelling (.) and see the world (.) move companies (.) because they feel (.)  
 547 there's always something else on offer (.) and (.) what if I'm missing  
 548 something while I'm here

The talk immediately preceding this extract includes a construction of being 'political' as a requirement to do well in the company. At the beginning of the extract the participant attends to this when talking of personal change with 'I'm leaming to be political' (line 529). In this way she has constructed herself as a person who 'knows' what is required in order to progress through the company. However, drawing on the detailed analysis in chapter seven, she uses a splitting mechanism, or a partial identity device, 'this nagging voice' (line 533) to

construct an alternative way of behaving, despite a display of 'knowing' what she should do. In contrast to many of the examples of this way of talking about the self, which are to do with speaking about uncertainty or prospective biographical detail, this is in the light of something which may be deemed to require sensitive handling. The next turn then provides detail regarding this evident departure from what is required. The construction of 'spouting these things' (lines 537-538) is a downgraded version of how she speaks to others in the company. It functions to question any taking on of, or believing in, the things that she 'spouts'. She goes on to position herself as a novice in the workplace, 'I'm just learn (.) I've just learnt' and in life, 'that's me (.) growing up' (line 539-540) which functions to 'explain' the questioning of an apparently established way of behaving. Interestingly she aligns the political behaviour with 'being sucked into the organisation' (lines 541-542), an utterance which implies lack of agency, the questioning of which positions the speaker as agentic by constructing an alternative course.

The rest of the turn is characterised by claims to what may be regarded as normative behaviour, other examples of how people like the participant ordinarily behave. This functions to support her account through 'lots of people', and 'most people (.) my age' (lines 543-545). There is a constructed comparison being made by the participant between being a newcomer at work and being a young person. She is drawing on an understanding that young people have an 'entitlement' to question what would be expected of other groups of people, that is, older members of the company. She also draws on age to manage the issue of leaving the company. The analysis in chapter five illustrated that talk about

leaving the company is treated as a sensitive issue by the participants. In this extract the participant works up to this potentially problematic issue beginning with 'most people (.) my age' (line 545) which is followed by a persuasive three part list (Pomerantz, 1986), 'and go travelling (.) and see the world (.) move companies' (lines 545-546). The first two parts of this list are generalised, non-work behaviours about which there is no dilemma. Ordinarily they would be agreed universally as things young people may want to do. However, the final part of the three, 'move companies', does have moral implications, but the hearer's understanding and agreement to the first two parts of the list would be expected to be carried on to the last item. It is as if agreement for the end of the list is gained under cover of the reasonableness of the earlier items. Finally, the pronoun change at the end of the extract from 'they feel' (line 546) to 'I'm missing' (line 547) constructs the account as moving from the general to the specific. Having established that moving companies is something that people like the participant are expected to do then a claim may be made by the speaker which positions her as only doing what is expected.

With regard to talking about changing, the participant draws on cultural devices from outside the workplace to resist expectations of change. The desirability of changing is questioned and leaving the company is spontaneously attended to as reasonable for a growing, learning person. In the following section of the chapter self-initiated change talk is explored.

## 8.5 Repertoires of self-initiated change

In this section the participants all orient to change in a different way to the earlier extracts. The participants have accounted for change as a conscious decision. This has repercussions for presenting a coherent account for which identity has been constructed and deployed.

### Extract 8.9 Pam interview 1

The following extract is taken from talk about gaining in confidence since joining the company. The participant was working her notice at the time of the interview having made the decision to leave the company.

300 Pam I think (.) at one stage (.) if we'd had this interview (.) maybe a couple of  
301 years ago (.) I would have been (.) feeling quite hem (.) not quite  
302 hemmed in (.) that's probably the wrong word (.) but very (.) erm (.) very  
303 loyal to the organisation and I would (.) so much see myself as (.) erm (.)  
304 I wouldn't be thinking about moving off because there would be too  
305 much to lose (.) and I think it would be (.) very much (.) there would be  
306 far more to lose than gain  
307 (.)  
308 (.)  
309 Int mm=  
310 Pam erm (.) and I'd see myself with the organisation for many (.) many years  
311 and be quite serious (.) and think about everything in terms of (.) what's  
312 it going to do in terms of my cv (.) you know (.) quite like that (.)  
313 whereas now I'm through that iteration (.) and (.) erm (.) learning from  
314 others (.) I guess (.) I'm now much more relaxed (.) I see that (.) you  
315 know (.) in this day and age (.) you're going to be working for many  
316 different organisations (.) every one adds a certain amount of (.) richness  
317 (.) to your experience (.) and (.) you know (.) there's more to be gained  
318 thinking about moving on than (.) thinking about new experiences (.)  
319 than there is to (.) you know (.) thinking what you're going to lose (.)  
320 really

In this extract Pam talks about change from the position of one who is about to leave. At the beginning of the extract she begins a sequence characterised by historically locating the change which is about to be described. This creates a space for an alternative view to be constructed. The repair 'quite hem (.) not quite

hemmed in' (lines 301-302) is further repaired to 'very loyal to the organisation' (lines 302-303). This moves a potentially critical account to a more positive one, in this way repairs are used to mend social or moral transgressions (Arminen, 1996). Another example of a splitting mechanism, or partial identity device, is evident in 'I would (.) so much see myself as' (line 303). Unusually, although this appears to construct a part of the self, it is upgraded through 'so much', which emphasises the point being made. This implies more than just a partial commitment to the point being made; the construction is about how this point is performing a function in the current interaction, that is to narrate the changing self over time.

In the second turn of the extract the participant contrasts 'quite serious' (line 311) with 'more relaxed' (line 313) in describing the change. As justification the idiom 'in this day and age' (line 315) is drawn on. This appears to align with an understanding of portfolio careers (Handy, 1994) and illustrates how 'expert' systems may be drawn on in talk in order to perform some interaction oriented role (see Linde, 1993). This utterance is an explicit positioning of the participant in a particular historical and cultural context. Its usefulness in talk requires a shared understanding of what this may mean. In the context of the present interaction it works to explain or account for leaving, the participant having constructed a rather different position earlier in the extract. This functions to justify leaving as something anyone in this era would (and should?) do, having 'worked up' an identity of a loyal hard working individual against which to position this.

This extract has provided an opportunity to explore how talk about change has much to do with what this talk 'says' about the speaker. From the position of someone who has decided to leave the company, what is relevant in the interaction is how a morally defensible argument may be made for the decision. This contrasts with the accounts of possibly leaving the company which were analysed in chapter five and with earlier accounts of change in the present chapter. It may be that the constmctions of justification for a decision having already been made to leave the company may align with the discourse analytic findings from retrospective career accounts. There may be subtle differences in talking about having a strategic plan to leave in the ftiture and talking about already being committed to leave which have identity relevant consequences. In the following extract the participant orients to change but as a self-initiated process, which has implications for the participant's talk about career progression.

Extract 8.10 Jody interview 1

This extract is taken from a relatively long response to a question about having changed since starting with the company.

328 Jody know (.) are actually pretty interesting now (.) erm (.) other ways that  
 329 I've changed (.) I think you just carry on developing all the time (.)  
 330 erm (.) I'm probably more detennined to find out (.) what my  
 331 weaknesses are (.) and (.) try and improve those (.) whereas (.) I think  
 332 to get in to ((Company A)) (.) you have (.) you have to have  
 333 something about you (.) and so you (.) kind of (.) frade on (.) I've got  
 334 something about me  
 335 ((laughter))  
 336 Jody or why (.) here are my positives  
 337 ((laughter))  
 338 Jody I'm really good at this (.) or (.) I'm really good at that  
 339 ((laughter))  
 340 Jody and at some point you've really got to say (.) we (.) well (.) if I really  
 341 want to be well rounded (.) and move around the organisation there  
 342 are some things that I'm going to have to prove that I've got (.) and if

343                   you're not a (.) natural (.) whatever (.) and for me it's (.) planning (.) I  
344                   (.) know (.) that I'm going to have to do something about that (.) and  
345                   it's quite a challenge to think (.) okay (.) who's good at this (.) who  
346                   can I base myself upon and do something differently (.) it's (.) it's a  
347                   personal challenge (.) as well as a career challenge

In this extract Jody continues her response about having changed with, 'erm (.) other ways that I've changed' (lines 328-329) which indicates an understanding that the information already given is not sufficient in some way. She then draws on 'developing' (line 329). In chapter five I discuss how this term is deployed in greater detail, but in this instance it may be one way that change is made legitimate and justified. That is, legitimate from the company's perspective as development is offered as something of benefit to the individual (see Grey, 1994), and justified from the individual's point of view as a 'normal' progression which would occur independent of the influence of the company, rather like maturity. She goes on to talk about her 'weaknesses' (line 331); this aligns with Fournier's (1998) notion that the self is turned into an enterprise through career discourse. By being able to talk about assessing one's strengths and weaknesses this implies that, with some investment of training, or development, future returns of career progression may be expected.

The next part of the turn works to construct a 'now' and 'then' scenario, in order to talk about change (lines 331-339). It is as if in order to construct 'weaknesses' a better self must be constructed first, to establish that these 'weaknesses' are not the whole picture, but mere aberrations in the light of a generally 'strong' person. I have talked previously about difficulty surrounding talking well of one's self and the dilemma evoked in that this may occasionally be required in the workplace (Coupland, 2000). In this instance this argument works in reverse in that by

talking of 'knowing' one's weaknesses this supersedes the earlier, more naïve self-talk on joining the company. The positive self-evaluation is temporally positioned, 'to get in to Company A' (line 332), by speaking as a newcomer and hence begins a sequence for something else to be offered, a 'that was then, this is now' scenario. The classic three part listing (Pomerantz, 1986), punctuated by joined laughter, works to construct the description as something which requires an indication of understanding by the hearer. The description is deployed to be persuasive, but it is set up in order to be doubted later. In this instance the three part list appears to work to construct an 'extreme' in that people would rarely positively evaluate themselves so explicitly and so many times, the repetition and laughter serving to cast doubt in readiness for the upcoming utterance.

Following the extreme construction of how 'good' the participant was on entry to the company, talk of 'weakness' may be introduced. This 'weakness' is distanced from the participant in two distinct ways. Firstly Jody draws on the 'tme self repertoire (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989) through 'if you're not a natural' (line 343) which works to discount an expectation that the participant should be able to do this thing. In the versions of self that are available to talk about self and career 'tme self may be drawn on in order to 'explain' a fracture between the demands of the occupation and the readiness of the individual to meet them. Secondly, the participant describes the 'weakness' in terms of a function, 'planning' (line 343). How this works may be investigated by considering alternatives, one of which may have been 'I'm not a planner' for example. This self description would bring the weakness much closer to the speaker and implies a much stronger claim to inability than the less problematic description of being unable to perform a

particular function. Finally, after constructing difficulty, 'and it's quite a challenge' (line 345) the participant explicitly constructs two aspects of this talk about change as separate concepts. 'It's a personal challenge' (line 346-347) brings the construction of change closer to the individual, that is it is no longer just a particular job that is required to be learned. 'As well as a career challenge' (line 347) perhaps functions to justify why this change may be necessary. Post-structuralists have suggested that the career discourse of the individual as an enterprise constitutes the subject as having certain interests and resources (Foumier, 1998); a focus on how these resources work in interaction is of interest in the present study. The participant draws on 'career' which functions as a legitimising device for a kind of strategic change, which might otherwise imply a fickle self. In addition, although Casey (1994) has argued that 'learner employees' may be a new form of discursive domination, as a description it is evidently available for deployment in talk to provide a legitimated account of knowing one's strengths and weaknesses in order to construct progression. In the following, final, extract the participant responds to a question about change by accounting for moving from a graduate-training scheme.

Extract 8.11 Alan interview 2

This extract is taken from a response to a question about whether the participant had changed since the first interview.

234	Alan	I don't think I quite (.) I think I understand (.) a little bit (.) how it works
235		now (.) I think it was always a bit (.) certainly a bit (.) less (.) naïve (.) enn
236		(.) from the (.) angle (.) I thought (.) I think (.) I appreciate that you've got
237		to step out of being wrapped up in cotton wool as a graduate ((i.e. on the
238		graduate-training scheme)) (.) I think I was finding that quite difficult to

239                    make the transition (.) coming out of the cotton wool into the real world=  
 240        Int            =yeah=  
 241        Alan          =sort of thing (.) erm (.) and I think I have made that (.) now (.) and I  
 242                    understand that these (.) this is the way it works (.) and things aren't  
 243                    necessarily always laid out on a plate for you (.) and (.) you know (.)  
 244                    you've got to work at it (.) and (.) which hasn't really bothered me (.) but I  
 245                    think it's more the understanding=

The talk in this extract is marked initially with hesitation, repetition and hedging.

This may signal that this is a problematic topic of talk. With reference to how this is an example of talk about change, this is constructed as the responsibility of the individual through 'you've got to step out of (lines 236-237). An alternative way of saying this might be that things are different after the period of graduate-training is over, which would locate change within the context rather than as required of the individual. The graduate-training scheme is then contrasted to 'the real world' (line 239) into which one has to make 'the transition' (line 239). Again this works to locate the responsibility with the individual; neither circumstances nor context are drawn on to 'explain' change. The beginning of the sequence is characterised as part of a 'that was then, this is now' scenario (lines 234-239). The second part of the utterance provides detail of having made 'the transition' (line 239). Interestingly this detail is in the form of 'stock phrases', 'this is the way it works', 'things aren't necessarily laid out for you' and 'you've got to work at it' (lines 242-244). This constructed generic vagueness works to generalise to 'everyone' who is in this position (Sacks, 1992) and requires no supporting 'evidence' which could be questioned. The persuasive pattern of a three-part list is also recognisable here. This construction of 'the real world' (line 239) is then described as unproblematic for the speaker, whereas a change in 'understanding' (line 245) was located as an area of difficulty. In this way the participant has described himself as a 'knowing' subject, aware of what work in

the 'real world' is like, while deflecting the possible charge that this may be problematic for him. Although locating the problem as lying in 'understanding', which appears to be relatively close to the individual, this may work to construct the individual as one who lacks understanding. However, the potential for face, or identity, challenge is minimised through the temporal detail of the talk, that is, 'that was then, this is now' which creates an opening for a justifiable account of **change**. It suggests that a training scheme, albeit an unrealistic introduction to work, characterised by a protective 'cotton wool' environment is a context of justifiable change. Nevertheless, the participant works up and deploys an agentic identity to account for transition.

In this final section of the chapter extracts have been explored which attend to self-initiated change. Illustrations have been provided of interpretations of the concept of socialisation. In the accounts, socialisation has been constructed as a potentially undesirable process, from the viewpoint of the company and the individuals. However, despite this there were clear constructions of how an individual justifies changed behaviour. Furthermore, some changes, for example being more confident, are attributed in the talk to the company experience, while refitting an explicit company agenda of newcomer 'change'. The interaction between talk about change and constructed identity has been explored with regard to how it functions in the talk.

## 8.6 Chapter summary

To sum up, these extracts have provided examples of how individuals have talked about adjusting since joining the company. One way that this has been attended

to is in the construction of themselves as similar to their organisationally defined peer group. The participants drew on similarities between themselves and others in the company in order to perform various functions in the talk. In addition, in subtle ways the participants have described themselves as different and better than the 'other' against which they have been positioned in their accounts. So, the typical 'company person' is constructed as less desirable in many ways than the speakers. The implications that this may have for future treatment of newcomers include the possibility that some attention should be paid to the current organisation members' expectations. It may be that demands for 'new blood' are in name only and do not go beyond the recruitment literature; experiences in the organisation lead to a redrawing of what is required of the newcomer.

Referring back to extract 8.1, a re-drawing of the self as 'always been a company man' constructs a fit between the speaker and what is required of a member of the company. This implies that no change is required; indeed descriptions of the company have been constructed in such a way that the positive aspects are implied descriptions of the speaker. Constructing the self as a company person may have implications for issues of innovation, where a fear of not fitting in represents a barrier. In some of the extracts in this chapter there was some attention paid to a competing dilemma of fitting in 'being typical' and yet unique. This aligns with Watson and Harris' (1999) findings. In addition, there was also a dilemma of appearing consistent yet flexible. These dilemmas were managed in the talk through identity deployment. This was related to career through talk of progression from being a newcomer. In a reciprocal way career was drawn on to 'justify' change.

What was increasingly evident in the talk was the management of criticism which could be directed at other organisation members; the use of general terms like 'norms' and 'culture', to account for problems constructs the required distance to enable criticism to be heard. This depicted a 'safe' way to be critical of other company members. However, criticism of norms and culture may function to deny agency and thereby responsibility, by implication.

In addition, some attention has been paid to instances where participants talked of socialisation as a company-directed process. This provided an arena in which to explore how socialisation, although constructed as a concept which the company may legitimately draw on, was refuted as a practice in this particular company. It was in the refutation that identity has been deployed. Complex constructions of the undesirability of socialisation, from both the individual and company perspective, were described. The denial of an explicit company socialisation process served to make visible the participants' understanding of it. However, its impact was resisted by drawing on 'being happy', 'time self and 'being sucked in'. Furthermore, a common understanding of socialisation as something that happens to newcomers was constructed as a backdrop to identity work. For example, the category of 'young person' enabled a legitimate questioning of an established way of behaving, which offers potential for innovation.

In contrast to Silverman and Jones' (1976) study of talk at work which showed how an organisation may reproduce itself through selection, the present study, through the newcomers' accounts, has explored how this reproduction may be

challenged or supported. The participants' spontaneous talk of socialisation further illustrated how individuals can attend to company rhetoric and yet challenge it. This is carefully managed and avoids direct criticism but functions to justify behaving in the 'appropriate' manner while showing an awareness of other ways of behaving. Company rhetoric as described by Carroll (1995), ceases to work as a mechanism to create a sense of belonging to an organisation. There are more powerful repertoires and discourses which are culturally available. In addition, these create dilemmas for the individual when describing change since joining an organisation. Carbaugh's (1996) notion of identity being set within wider systems of identities goes some way to explaining this. The workplace is just one arena of social interaction for the individual, it is a particular context making particular demands.

From the talk of a participant who was leaving the company, see extract 8.9, justification included contrasting 'serious' with 'relaxed', where serious was aligned with doing things in terms of the cv. Relaxed related to leaving the company, thus questioning the presumed motive of promotion. As desirable employees the participants can choose to work elsewhere. However, 'serious' suggests a strategic approach, which contrasts with denials of 'career' in chapter six, where having a career was denied as being too strategic. Career as a strategy may be deployed in talk in order to carry out discursive business, but denied as a predictor of the future, perhaps due to the possibility of being called to account for failure.

Finally, adjustment has been explicitly related to career in constructions of self-directed change. This functioned to justify or legitimise change in the light of what may otherwise be regarded as an inauthentic version of self, that is, as fickle or manipulative. Talk of 'weaknesses' and 'natural' aligns with Fournier's (1998) findings; however the terms also perform a function in the talk, for example, in constructing a coherent identity in the light of an alternative 'fickle' self, weaknesses were positioned as a lack of skill rather than identity traits, or a 'true' self. In this way a 'natural' repertoire works to explain why the speaker has this weakness, that is, it is only to be expected. However, these may also be instances where discourses of career work as technical practices of regulation, as identified in post-structuralist studies of career talk (Grey, 1994 and Fournier, 1998). The identification of one's weaknesses may illustrate a knowledgeable self who can work upon the self (Fournier, 1998). Nevertheless, in the present study how this is carried out while attending to interactional business is of relevance.

These examples show how, under the constraint of creating a morally defensible account in this particular context, that is talking to an outsider, sanctioned by senior management, about the company, criticism may be legitimated. This illustrates one way that resistance and change may be made visible in talk, while acknowledging the impact of culture and ideology, which are often claimed to be rendered invisible from this approach to discourse analysis (Nikander, 1995). The relevance of these findings for both theory and practice will be further explored in the following discussion chapter, chapter nine.

## Chapter Nine

### 9.0 Discussion

#### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider the general findings of the study. They are discussed in depth at the end of each analysis chapter, in the chapter summaries. At this point I intend to discuss the wider implications of the findings for both theory and practice. In addition, I propose some future directions for research.

#### 9.2 General findings

From within a social constructionist framework, the aim of this study has been to explore graduate trainees' talk about career and identity. Findings, therefore, should be described as working assumptions rather than confident conclusions. Adopting the perspective that talk does things enables a focus on language and how it has been used to make 'factual' descriptions of career and identity. In addition, how these descriptions have been put together in particular ways to perform functions in talk is of note. Although I recognise that the study is limited to an analysis of talk in a particular time, space and circumstances, its findings have broader relevance. In a general sense, reflection on discursive conventions has the potential to be liberating. Furthermore, the making visible of what we accept as 'common sense' or 'just natural' will provoke dialogue.

In specific terms, referring directly to the research questions and reiterating my comments made in the introduction, firstly, 'common sense' notions of career are

drawn on in talk to do discursive business. My focus on the tools and practices of interaction within a broad concern for career as an overarching concept situates the enquiry at a micro level. By focusing on the role of specific constmctive practices I acknowledge and extend the understanding gained from post-structuralist studies of career, while sharing their assumptions regarding the role of language. The contribution of the thesis in this area is, by focusing on the detail of the talk, to illustrate how macro notions of career are constmcted and deployed in interaction. The notion of the speaker as a discourse user, whose stmctures are invested in being plausible, authentic and accountable in interaction, focuses attention on how we may creatively construct our experiences. Secondly, from the perspective that identity is something we 'do' in talk, an exploration of identity constmction and mobilisation in talk about career and progression at work makes visible the practices of talking about the self and their function in interaction. Dual-positioning and the function of 'role' talk in work experience accounts is a potentially innovative and exciting area to be explored in future research. Finally, the third research question enables a focus on how talk about work experiences opens up an opportunity to talk about personal change in the context of a career account. Talk of adjustment is related to constructions of a company socialisation process in complex ways. The creative, argumentative, nature of interaction is emphasised as the participants appropriate and reconstmct company rhetoric to do discursive business.

As the theoretical assumptions that guide the research preclude attempting to create grand theories, the aim instead is to consider how, through the exploration of talk in the specific context of the workplace in the study, these findings may be

extrapolated beyond the research situation. The usefulness of the study should be measured in terms of how it adds to existing understanding in the area. Therefore, in the following section the more specific implications of the study for theory will be discussed.

### 9.3 Implications for theory

In the study I have attempted to synthesise career and identity, influenced initially by the Chicago school of sociologists who first related these two concepts. The research has been, largely, driven by the emergence of the concepts as constructs in the talk of the participants who constructed and re-constructed each in the terms of the other. The implications of the study for theory therefore address two, (historically at least) distinct areas, career theory and identity theory. In the following section I will reflect on how the study has raised fresh questions for career theory.

#### 9.3.1 Implications for career theory

The study aimed to contribute to a growing understanding of career as a socially constructed concept. From the work of the Chicago school (Barley, 1989) to more recent constructionist writers (e.g. Collin, 1998; Collin and Young, 2000) the relevance of the study of career to understanding the relationship between individuals and institutions is undoubted. More specifically, writers have argued for attention to be paid to how careers function as a force between institutions and day to day interactions of the members (Arthur et al, 1999). It is to this argument that the present study contributes. However, it is acknowledged that the

interactions which have been analysed in the study are not solely between the members of the company. My role as co-creator has been signalled as instrumental in bringing about discussions about workplace experiences. In addition, following spontaneous talk about career, I have positioned the participants as people who may be expected to have a career. This has brought about a particular version of career for consideration. Nevertheless, the versions of career are drawn on and made visible for analysis. The detailed analysis of the data indicates how they reflect common understandings surrounding career which operate in the company of the study, which was selected to provide an example of contemporary corporate conditions.

In the career literature review carried out in chapter two, the current academic understanding of career as a self-managed phenomenon is evident, from both traditional, or mainstream, and post-structuralist perspectives (e.g. Hall, 1976; Fournier 1997, 1998). However, as the participants were treated as 'vessels of answers' in the former research and as positioned in discourses in the latter, the present study contributes to understanding by moving the focus of analysis to the language of interaction and thereby raises fresh questions regarding career as a self-managed phenomenon. One example of how this was explored in the data was through an examination of how career as a self-managed concept may operate as an ideology. That is, it reproduces and perpetuates a particular way of looking at things and, by implication, inequality. In chapter six, extract 6.9, Des draws on this understanding in order to critique the company 'high-fliers'. Criticism of people who do not manage their careers functions as a legitimate criticism only in the light of common understanding that career should be managed by the

individual. If we disregard for the moment the verisimilitude of the account and focus on how it is made plausible, taken-for-granted understandings become visible as tools for deployment in interaction.

This has relevance for career theory in that the 'new' career discourse of the individual as self-managed, or entrepreneurial, has been described as a regulatory principle by post-structuralist writers (Grey, 1994 and Fournier, 1997). In the context of the present study the self-managed, or entrepreneurial, career discourse also functions as a construct which is available to do discursive business. That is not to say that we can 'say' anything; rather it is in the light of dominant understandings, repertoires, or discourses that arguments may be made. However, it is acknowledged that people have differential access to alternative repertoires; it may be unusual that a member of one group legitimately criticises a member of another group by drawing on an understanding of an overarching concept. Nevertheless, understanding about career appears to function in this way in the present study and therefore offers valuable insight into both career theory and broader social processes.

Other writers who have examined accounts of careers have, in the main, done so from a retrospective viewpoint. That is, in their studies the participants have been in the middle of their working lives (e.g. Linde, 1993; Mallon and Cohen, 2000 and Marshall, 2000). In the present study the participants were selected as people at the beginning of their work experiences and therefore aspects of their career talk were expected to consist of prediction. This aligns the study in some respects to work carried out in career counselling (e.g. Cochran, 1997). However, in the

present study the participants, largely, constructed career as a restrictive phenomenon. In their denial of having a career, or plan, flexibility was constructed and deployed. Taking opportunities as they arise was one way that they resisted an expectancy of having a career plan. As potential managers the participants may have been drawing on alternative versions of themselves as flexible, adaptable people, which is a prevalent version of today's successful manager (Watson and Harris, 1999).

However, despite denying career as too restrictive for the speaker, the participants described the company career structure as lacking in explicit stages, or markers, in essence suggesting the company take on a larger role in the individual's career. This suggests that, although talking strategically about having a career carries with it potential for accountability in the event of failure to meet predictions, a company career strategy may be constructed as desirable and deployed in talk for interactive purposes. An example of this is in chapter nine, extract 9.10, Alan describes requiring more structure as part of a complaint about not doing what he wanted to do. In this way the utterance functions as a critique of the company in that a company career structure would make explicit the way in which lateral moves relate to career progression. This relates to comments of some writers of career theory who have described the uncertainty of routes to the top for graduate employees (e.g. Nicholson and West, 1988). However, it more closely relates to post-structuralist writers who argue that this proposal of wider possibilities, which accompanies the new career discourse, offers a myth of career freedom (Fournier, 1998). In the present study's attention to the detail of the talk, Alan can be clearly seen as not duped by this myth and his talk functions to criticise the company as

perpetuating the myth through its ambiguous lateral positioning of graduate employees. In a similar way that a 'self-managed career' as a common understanding may be drawn on and deployed in talk, a 'company career structure' may be constructed as desirable. However, when drawn on in talk it functions in order to legitimate a critique of the company, in other words to attend to discursive business.

Finally, some of the findings from the analysis support and extend post-structuralist arguments surrounding how the new career discourse of the entrepreneurial self operates as a regulatory principle (e.g. Rose, 1992; Grey, 1994 and Fournier, 1998). This has been explored in the participants' talk of personal change since joining the company. The participants talk of change both as an issue spontaneously raised in the discussions of workplace experiences and in response to my question, which positioned them as people who may have changed since joining the company. The rationale for my deliberate attention to this issue as a challenge is that it enabled an exploration of how this may be resisted in talk. What resources could the participants draw on to deal with the issue in a plausible way? The findings of the present study align with Fournier's (1998) in so far as she identified knowing one's strengths and weaknesses as indicative of an entrepreneurial career discourse. The participants in the present study also drew on these repertoires. However, resistance was constructed in the mobilisation of these discourses to do discursive work in the interaction. One example of how a participant resists the identity-threatening potential of claiming weakness can be seen in chapter eight, extract 8.10, where Jody draws on a true-self repertoire, through 'I'm not a natural' (Marshall and Wetherell, 1989), to

distance herself from the weakness. In addition, the weakness itself is constructed as a skill, or function, rather than something closer to the speaker. Implicit in this argument is that a skill is something that can always be learned, whereas 'I'm not a natural' works as a defence against an expectation that the speaker should have the skill already.

These findings have relevance for career theory in that, although having much in common with Fournier's (1998) post-structuralist argument, the present study's analysis moves on to illustrate when and how dominant understandings may be constructed and deployed in interaction. In addition, the present study also makes visible how these understandings may be resisted. In many ways career theory works as a backdrop to individual career accounts. Fournier (1998) proposed that those who did not buy into the dominant entrepreneurial career discourse were positioned at the margins. It may be that constructing differentiation from the group, appearing to be unique yet still fitting in creates a tension, a dilemma to be addressed in the talk. This is a major contribution of the work to understanding career discourse. In the present study the participants constructed themselves as knowledgeable about dominant understandings about career, yet used this construction to position themselves differently. This has implications for career theory in that differentiation is one part of a tension between two desirable states and not indicative of an undesirable positioning of marginalisation.

To sum up, by exploring how the participants talked about career and progression some understanding has been gained regarding how common sense notions of career have been drawn on in talk about workplace experiences. Through

addressing this first research question the initial part of the research aim of exploring how career is used in talk has been attended to. The findings have implications for career theory in that they support the usefulness of studies from a constructionist viewpoint. In addition, the findings extend knowledge gained from a post-structuralist perspective through a shared attention to the role of language, while shifting the focus to the detail of the talk. When talking of moving forward, in terms of new theories surrounding career, commentators have proposed that there need to be ways of mapping surface changes without drawing rapid conclusions regarding deeper changes (Collin, 1998). In the following section I will discuss how the findings of the study have implications for understandings about identity.

### **9.3.2 Implications for identity theory**

As the aim of the study was to explore how identity was constructed as a strategic and emergent phenomenon in talk about career, there was no intent to add to specific current foci of identity theory. However, following the analysis of the data, issues have emerged that have relevance for theories about identity. These issues require some discussion.

Following some limited discussion about identity theories in chapter three, ways of talking about the self were identified. The data were analysed in terms of how these ways of talking about the self were drawn on in talk about the self at work, specifically in relation to career. In this way the concepts of career and identity, as key concerns of the social sciences, were constructed in relationship to each other, initially by the participants in their talk which was then examined in my

analysis. What became apparent was how identity may be drawn on in the talk to perform a function. The analysis consisted of two strands. Firstly, talk about the self and, secondly, talk about the self as something. It is in talk about the self where I considered how role, type and a split self, functioning as expert systems, enabled a particular way of talking about the self

Role talk, especially in the workplace context, may have some tension-relieving function. Describing work activities as a role relieves a tension between doing what we want to do and doing what we have to do. In addition, talk about having a role implies an overall 'real' self who chooses to perform that role. This works to construct the individual as being in control; in the light of an understanding that the participants in the study are being managed this may have particular relevance. Nevertheless, this may suggest that future research into how we talk about ourselves as having a role, and its implications for constructing agency, or responsibility, as a broader social issue may be important.

The participants also drew on an understanding of the self as a type in order to do discursive business. Type was constructed and deployed to explain choice, defend weakness and to construct a coherent account in the light of an otherwise evident fracture. That this functions as an expert system on which to draw when talking about the self is without question; however, the complex nature of how it works to either claim or resist identity is of interest.

The third and arguably most theoretically exciting way of talking about the self which emerged was that of separating, or splitting, the self in order to attend to

interactive business. This potentially offers the speaker an option of dual-positioning. However, it was not only drawn on to make a prediction, which would require some attention to be paid to accountability in the event of failure to meet the prediction; h was deployed in different situations and functioned to distance the speaker in some way from what was being said. Although other writers have explored how we construct distancing in talk, they identified the use of pronouns as relevant (e.g. Goffman, 1981 and Malone, 1997). In the present study, common sense understandings about how we may talk about ourselves have been made visible following close analysis of talk. Taken-for-granted assumptions, which render 'I wouldn't be happy with my self as an unproblematic way of describing a situation, should be explored to understand how this works as a plausible construct. This is an example where an expert system (from identity theory) provides a mitigated accountability for the speaker; this has broader relevance to all studies of the language of self

Also, talk about the self *as* something emerged. That is, a performance of identity which was largely drawn on to position self as being different to the group or category in some way. For example, talk about the self as a graduate, for the present study, led to emergent constructions of the speakers as being different, through particularisation. This lies in contrast to mainstream approaches to the study of identity where the category 'graduate' would be imposed and similarities sought in the analysis. It has been argued elsewhere that categorisation is the norm in psychological studies (Billig, 1996). In the present study the participants constructed themselves as being knowledgeable about a category, of graduates for example, in order to make plausible an account of themselves as different,

particular. This suggests that it is in showing one's self as knowledgeable about alternatives that a particularised account is rendered believable. This may also be compared with how the participants constructed yet resisted dominant career path understanding as having relevance for them. It functions to position the speaker as one who has, and knows about, alternatives, thus making the **current** selection justified.

Finally, it was in the talk of the participants that interdependence between career and identity emerged, particularly in accounts of fractures. Although the participants were at the beginning of their working lives, coherence was a pervasive notion in their accounts. This aligned with other career account analyses (e.g. Linde, 1993). Consistency was constructed from university course to career choice through several avenues, one of which was through the deployment of identity. Similarly, flexibility and the likelihood of career change was constructed as neither random nor deterministic but given coherence through identity.

To sum up, contrasting these findings with those from more traditional, or mainstream, approaches to identity, requires a shift in focus away from an assumption that identity is composed of fixed characteristics, towards an understanding that self is constructed in discourse. Historical and cultural conventions constrain and enable the versions of the self which are available. The social constructionist question, and the one adopted in the present study, is to consider how the self is theorised in talk. This does not add to identity theory *per se* but asks fresh questions about how, and in what way, identity theories are made

relevant in talk. In the following section how the study has relevance for practice will be discussed.

#### **9.4 Implications for practice**

The context of the study is a workplace, and the thesis is undertaken in a business school. It follows, therefore, that some practical relevance should be gained from the study. In practical terms, knowledge gained in the study of career should be of interest to both individuals and businesses. This discussion focuses on some of the findings that demonstrate how career may be viewed differently following the present research. A dual focus on both content and form of discourses enables analysis of structure and topic. Taking a constructionist perspective does not preclude an understanding that we operate in a world where constructions are taken to have reality and are regarded as such. In other words, to paraphrase Edwards (1997), replacing 'mind' and 'analyst' from the original with 'career' and 'company and the employee', career is real for the company and the employee, the analytic task is to explore how it is built within cultural and social settings and practices. The approach adopted in the study therefore draws on an understanding that language both describes and does things:

'Descriptions are not just about something but they are also doing something; that is, they are not merely representing some facet of the world, they are also involved in that world in some practical way.'  
(Potter, 1996a: 47)

Although the above author was writing in order to explain the action potential of talk this description also makes clear that discourse is about something (Edley,

2000). It is this approach to social constructionism that enables some focus on content of the talk.

Firstly, some exploration has been made of the use of 'development' as an alternative to promises of long-term career expectations. This was investigated in both the talk and, to some extent, in the recruitment literature of the company in the study. The participants constructed a difference between self and skill development. Promises from the recruitment literature of self development provided a legitimised opportunity to criticise the company when these promises were not met. As a subjectively defined concept, it is difficult to relate some aspects of self development directly to company needs, therefore it has potential to create dissatisfaction among employees when unmet. The offer of skill development, however, can more easily be aligned with company needs and therefore can be agreed upon, or not, depending on whether it is relevant to the work of the individual. This makes it a more attractive method of promising development to potential newcomers from the perspective of the employing company. However, if potential employees are regarded as discerning applicants, they may attend to this more rigidly defined offer of development and promises of skill development alone may not be sufficient to attract the best graduates. Nevertheless, if the notion of the portfolio person is to become dominant, promises of portable skills may be more persuasive. Finally, promises of career development appear to offer a compromise between skill and self development. This can be seen as an appropriate, or legitimate, vehicle through which to talk about personal and company requirements.

Despite understandings regarding a flattened hierarchy justifying lateral career moves, the ladder is still an appropriate metaphor in the talk of progression of the participants in the company of the study. This is contrary to academic claims that the ladder is no longer an appropriate metaphor (Gunz, 1989). Too many lateral moves are regarded with suspicion; however, explicit talk of a desire for upward progression is problematic where the company espouses teamwork and lateral moves in order to create a more rounded person. The participants faced a dilemma when talking about progression. To express a need for upward progression is to run the risk of being considered an 'unaware' employee, with regard to the requirement of being well-rounded. To question lateral movement suggests that the speaker is unaware of how important an understanding of the 'big picture' is to a potential manager. This functions to send both talk and signals of career success 'underground' in terms of explicit understanding. This results in the individual endeavouring to seek confirmation that the lateral moves are the 'best' for them while the company is able to provide different experiences to selected employees without a requirement to explain their strategy.

A pervasive issue, which emerged from the talk of the participants, was the possibility of leaving the company. In addition, one of the concerns of the senior management of the company was about graduate trainees leaving following the training period (see methodology chapter, chapter four, 'my association with the setting'). Although it may be that there is an expectation to move away from a first employer at some point in a career, this is not attended to **un-problematically**. The nature of the context of the interaction, with an outsider, sanctioned by senior management, may go some way towards explaining the careful management of

the possibility of leaving the company in this instance. Nevertheless, as the desire to be a 'good' self is essential to being a social self (Mead, 1934) the discursive business of attending to what we say 'says' about us takes precedence. This suggests that the participants are drawing on and deploying a way of being moral, which extends beyond the research situation yet is made visible through the analysis in the present study.

This goes some way towards suggesting that the academic literature which describes graduate careers as 'boundaryless' (Defillipi and Arthur, 1994 and Arthur and Rousseau, 1996), or 'portfolio' (Handy, 1994), does not yet operate without reservation as a dominant understanding for the graduate employees in the study. Otherwise the terms would have been available, as a common understanding, an ideology to be drawn on to 'explain' the possibility of leaving the company. What was evident in the talk was how a 'moral stance' was constructed through other common understandings. For example, one of the constructs drawn on to explain leaving the company, by some of the female participants, was to predict having a family. This would appear to provide a commonly understood explanation of leaving the company at some point in the future. Although the study has not attended to gender as an analyst's concern it is of note that gender became the participants' concern with regard to the issue of family choices, being placed as an alternative to career choices. This raises questions regarding the decision to 'bracket' gender. However, it also illustrates how issues of relevance to the participants may emerge using the methods adopted in the study and highlights that there are many alternative paths my analytic focus could have taken. Nevertheless, as not all of the female participants drew on this

'family' repertoire, it can be seen that, as an analyst's category, gender, and his associated membership rights and obligations, is a construct differentially drawn on by its members and made relevant to do discursive business in complex ways.

One other 'reason' constructed by the participants for leaving the company was located within the company, and described as 'norms' and 'cultures'. As an aside from discussing understanding gained about career, how these constructs operated in the talk as legitimate targets for criticism is of interest generally to businesses and individuals at work. Future research may look at how language from undergraduate business degrees seeps into language in the workplace. As a tool for criticism of the company the terms function by drawing on academia for their legitimacy. The ex-student may talk as one who knows about such things. From the business perspective it is useful to consider how 'norms' and 'culture' may be constructed as separate to individuals at work, allowing agency and responsibility to be denied. This understanding has the potential to address how culture operates on a rhetorical level in order to absolve the speaker from personal involvement.

Finally, leaving the company works as the ultimate challenge to the internal labour market presumption that promotion is the only, or predominant, goal of the members. As desirable employees the participants talked as people who have choices outside the company. This goes some way to questioning the tournament model (Rosenbaum, 1984) which speaks of the survival of the fittest. It may be that the fittest, the survivors, move out. There is emancipatory potential for company members in making visible how alternatives to the dominant career model are made plausible in interaction. However, although there was

competition for internal promotion, the system was constructed as 'fair' through assessment procedures by the participants. Despite competition the speaker was, largely, optimistic about the future. Future research could explore accounts of people who had been with the company for some time to investigate how individuals' justified their current positions within the company. One of the participants (see extract 9.10) in the study attends to this to some extent.

In the talk of the participants there was some consideration given to positioning themselves as similar and yet different to other company members. This was identified as one dilemma between the competing tensions of fitting in yet standing out to attract promotion. In addition, where the claim to fit in is strong there are implications for the potential for innovation that newcomers bring to the company. This dilemma of being unique yet typical has also been identified in other studies of managers (Watson and Harris, 1999 and Coupland, 2001). This has implications for career, or progression, as the tension is managed.

Finally, socialisation emerged in the talk as a company-directed process. It was constructed through a denial of its relevance, in the company of the study. However, it is in its denial that it functions as a commonly understood, company-legitimate process of individual change. In the talk of the participants identity was drawn on to resist it. What is of interest to business is how the participants drew on powerful resources, or repertoires, from outside the company to question the established way of behaving, and to resist potential for personal change. For example the identity of a 'young person' was deployed as a legitimate way of

questioning accepted practices (see extract 8.8). This has implications for encouraging the innovative potential of newcomers.

In summary, the findings of the study have led to some working assumptions, which are of relevance to people concerned with careers in contemporary workplaces. Clearly, the word 'career' is not always evident, but the theme is progression and the findings have practical relevance. In addition, the intertwining of content and form has led to a particular kind of analysis, which has enabled this version of the participants' accounts to emerge. In the following section of the chapter I consider how the present study may have indicated new areas for future research.

## 9.5 Future directions

Some suggestions for future directions have already been made during this chapter. In this section I reiterate and expand on how the present study has raised new questions about both career and identity, which may be addressed through future research. Further research may lead from the concepts or methods employed in the present study, or from the findings.

In conceptual terms, the constructionist perspective is increasing in importance in the social sciences. As part of the post-modernist movement the present study provides an example of how this perspective has enabled a focus on research which attends to multiple versions of reality. In respect of career research, this offers an opportunity to explore career as a multi-faceted concept. Career as relational (Collin and Young, 2000) sits comfortably with the social

constructionist call for self as relationship (Gergen, 1999). The present study applies the theoretical stance of the social constructionist in order to explore these two concepts through the methodology of discourse analysis. This has broad implications in that this approach to research may be applied in other areas.

Methodologically, the study has employed techniques used elsewhere; it is in the particular synthesis that it offers something new. By drawing eclectically on Billig's (1996) work on rhetoric and ideology from within a framework of discursive psychology, the method counters the usual charge of disregarding the role of wider discourses. However, by maintaining a close detailed analysis of the talk, how these discourses function in interaction has been made visible. Further research may adopt this methodology as one way of examining micro aspects of talk while retaining an interest in broader issues. In addition, the role of the interview in a study that is focused on interaction must be considered. Future studies in the area of career research should consider the naturally occurring data of the career counselling interview as a potential source of data.

Assumptions related to power and gender have been bracketed in the study. Gendered descriptions have only been attended to when raised as relevant to career issues by the participants. Future research could address these deliberate omissions by analysing the data in terms of how these concepts are oriented to in the talk.

Finally, the findings of the study suggest new areas to investigate. Other groups' accounts of their careers or sense of progression should be considered. For

example, sixteen-year-old school leavers at work would be positioned with certain expectations regarding their careers. What resources are available to them to resist an expectation of either having, or not having, a career? Furthermore, drawing on some of the 'family talk' in the present study, how can people's accounts of having a family constitute part of the career story?

The participants in the present study were near the beginning of their working lives; however, a follow-up study would enable an exploration of accounts of people who have been with the company for a longer time. In the light of expectations of graduates as people who are more able to choose what they do, how they explain and justify their positions would be of interest.

To sum up, in this section of the chapter I have outlined some ways that new research could draw on the present study. Through its concepts, method and findings it offers working assumptions that can be developed further to assess their relevance to other areas in the social sciences. More specifically, the relational nature of career and identity should be explored in terms of other groups and in different contexts.

## **9.6 Chapter summary**

In this discussion chapter the key findings have been considered with regard to how they have related to the research questions. In addition, their implications for theory and practice have been examined. As a contribution to elaborating on career theory the findings are of relevance. The practical implications of the findings are also significant. The thesis also makes a contribution to identity

theory by bringing a new perspective to the ways that are available to us to talk about our selves. This has potential for being adopted in other areas of research. Finally, some proposals for future research have been made. In the following chapter, chapter ten, I will explore some methodological issues, which have arisen during the course of the research.

## Chapter Ten

### 10.0 Methodological reflections and **findings**

#### 10.1 Introduction

This work has been a process of interpretative endeavour. However, from within the framework of the study this is not identified as problematic. Although my analysis is situated in the interactions between the participants, and myself, this is not to claim any 'bearing witness' to the truthfulness of the analysis. Rather, the talk is acknowledged as a resource, which is subject to my selection, interpretation and making sense of what was said. Nevertheless, by drawing on a large and credible academic literature in the discourse analytic vein, the study is positioned as valuable in terms of the understanding that may be gained from this kind of research.

#### 10.2 Methodological reflections

In chapter four, which considers the methodological approach, I have outlined some limitations and critiques of this kind of research. In this section of the current chapter I will consider some specific problems I would address if I were to repeat the research.

To reiterate a comment made at the beginning of the thesis, my role in the research, from the co-construction of the participants' accounts to the construction of the persuasive narrative of this thesis, is acknowledged along with my preconceptions and prejudices which have operated in and out of awareness throughout the period of the research.

With particular reference to the selection of extracts of data for detailed analysis in the thesis, I acknowledge that this is an area which attracts some criticism in other discourse analytic work (see Silverman, 1993; 2000). There is no alternative to selecting extracts on which to focus however, the transcripts of interviews and the group discussion would have been provided if this were a pure conversation analytic study. This would enable the reader to have access to the data in a full form and hence make his or her own decisions about my analysis. The size of the data set and the constraints of the thesis render this impossible. However, I intended to make the extracts long enough to provide surrounding detail, to place the analysed sections in context, in order to overcome the criticism to some extent. I am aware, however, that I have not used extracts from all of the participants in the thesis. This is not to suggest that they were less relevant, or important, merely that some selection had to be made and I hope to have aimed for clarity rather than to represent some aspect of everyone who has contributed to the research. Indeed I have, on occasions, returned to a participant's transcript in a chapter in order to highlight how the issue was returned to and therefore constructed as relevant by the participant. On making this decision I reduced the opportunity to include another participant's extract, a decision which clearly affects the kind of account I have produced.

After the first data collection phase I decided to include an explicit question about career in the second phase for reasons already outlined. Although some of the participants had already raised career spontaneously in their talk I wanted to look at how they responded to a challenge which positioned them as having a career. I acknowledge that this is a particular style of interviewing which takes a step

beyond letting issues arise in conversation (see Holstein and Gubrium's (1997) work on active interviewing). However, some structure had to be imposed. Another way of looking at this issue would involve some method of capturing naturally occurring conversations in the workplace. These would have to be extensive and fortuitous if I were to gain insight into a specific topic such as career, in talk. Naturally occurring data, which is from talk that would happen anyway, without researcher input, does represent the purest form of this kind of data. However, subsequent interpretation by a researcher through selection and making sense of what is said immediately creates a version. That said, I would like to explore the possibilities of recording career counselling sessions for future research.

In a similar vein I raised the issue of personal change since joining the company and between our meetings. I acknowledge that the constructions of change were largely brought about by my raising the topic, however, it was the detailed interaction which followed its introduction that was of sufficient interest to warrant its inclusion in the interview.

The selection of graduate employees as people who have careers may have foregrounded career, or progression, as an issue for people at work. For the study to have broader relevance other groups should be considered. While acknowledging that within the time frame allocated to the study this was not possible (Foumier, 1993), future research could be carried out which extends this exploration into other groups, such as, sixteen-year-old school leavers in their first workplace, for example. Would their accounts of work include constructions of career? And,

what resources would be available to them to resist an expectation of either having or not having a career? Clearly the study opens up many more questions about career than it answers. The selection of this articulate group has led to a particular version of career repertoires being drawn on and analysed. The limitations of these findings are therefore acknowledged. However, some tentative claims for a better understanding of how career may be mobilised as a resource in talk, in contemporary interaction about workplace experiences, suggest a limited generalisability to a broader sphere. In the following section, how the participants orient to the interaction-in-interview situation in their talk is discussed.

### 10.3 The **interview** situation

As the study has centred its analysis on the talk of the participants, some attention has been paid to how they orient to the nature of the interaction which was taking place. Three ways that the participants do this have been identified on exploration of the data. Firstly, by orienting to the second interview as one of a pair, secondly, by attending to unspoken expectations about their responses and, finally, by accounting for how the talk is structured. These examples have been described as 'precious' (Dingwall, private communication) as they 'show', without straying from the data, that the participants do not treat this as a casual chat. This is a specific kind of interaction, with mles and regulations stolen from other instances of interaction, and made 'do' in the context of the research interview.

In some of the second meetings between the participants and myself they referred to their own talk from the previous meeting.

#### Extract 10.1 Jane interview 2

615 Int right (.) erm (.) where do you see yourself in five years time  
616 (.)  
617 Jane I have a feeling you asked me last time and I can't remember what I  
618 said  
619 ((laughter))  
620 Int I did (.) everybody says that (.) but I can't remember what you said  
621 either  
622 ((laughter))

In the above extract the participant draws on an understanding that this is a particular kind of interaction. It is not unusual that a consistent account is sought but an explicit reference to it may be due to the recording being taken of the interaction. In the following extracts the participants explicitly attend to expectations of them in the interaction.

#### Extract 10.2 Lyn interview 2

6 Int first question then (.) how's it going (.) and what has happened since we  
7 last met  
8 (•)  
9 Lyn oh (.) god  
10 ((laughter))  
11 Lyn erm (.) I am actually still in the same place

In the above extract Lyn responds to an unspoken expectation that she should have moved (progressed?) in the time period between the two interviews.

#### Extract 10.3 Des interview 2

297 Des right (.) erm (.) five years time (2.0) erm (2.0) I think (.) how things  
298 go in the next two years will (.) determine where I'm at in five years  
299 if that isn't too much of a (.) an evasive answer=

In the above extract Des indicates that there is a particular un-evasive answer that is required. This works on the assumption of a shared understanding of an adequate answer. Although an interview situation may be described as a co-constmction, where the participants are treated as 'experts' with regard to their ovm experiences, the poshion of responder entails particular responsibilities. There is an expectation to provide the interviewer with the 'right' answers. That the interview has a particular agenda with leghimate topics for discussion is oriented to in the following extract.

#### Extract 10.4 Jane interview 1

89 Jane I have learned lots very quickly  
90 ((laughter))  
91 as an aside (.) one of my (.) my very last university lecturer said (.)  
92 your education starts the minute you put your pen down on your last  
93 final exam

The relevant part of the extract is on line 91 'as an aside'. This makes explicit how the following talk, while interesting, does not follow what the participant has decided is the appropriate path of the interaction. A space is marked which tells the two speakers that this new topic is something in addition to whatever the 'usual' business is.

#### Extract 10.5 Jordan interview 1

121 Int what have you enjoyed most (.) and what did you like least

122 (.)  
123 Jordan (2.0) am I allowed to say the courses

In this extract Jordan asks for more information before responding. Clearly, the participants are in the business of providing me with appropriate responses. Although this was something of a pattern, there were marked exceptions, as in the following extract.

#### Extract 10.6 Alan interview 1

6 Int so would you like to tell me something about yourself  
7 (.)  
8 Alan erm (.) I climbed Ben Nevis at the weekend

In a workplace situated interaction this serves as an unusual beginning. It would be interesting to consider just what Alan is doing with this kind of opener. But for the purposes of this section of analysis it indicates how the participants select their responses from many available. Another academic, who shares a passion for climbing, on reading the above extract began to interpret the above extract from a completely different perspective to mine. An illustration of how the data is manipulated through the analysts' hands. It also highlights the essential part that shared group analysis brings to this kind of research.

The final part of this short analysis section considers how the participants orient to the structure of the interaction as an interview. For example:

#### Extract 10.7 Gina interview 1

60 Gina all that kind of stuff (.) and that's my plan (.) forgot what the question was  
61 ((laughter))

However, answering questions was resisted in different ways, for example in the extract below.

#### Extract 10.8 Des interview 2

415 Des so I don't know what the other people have had to do to get the promotions  
416 (.) erm (.) so (.) yeah (.) I don't really feel qualified to answer that

The participant in the following extract constructed how she would 'normally' answer a question, which positions the interaction as something out of the ordinary.

#### Extract 10.9 Kate interview 1

11 Kate okay (.) erm (.) normally if someone asked me that question I would say  
12 Im from (.) Brighton

These extracts all indicate how the participants oriented to being in an interview situation. This is not to argue that the findings may be generalisable only to other interviews, rather it shows how context is made relevant through an exploration of talk. The argument still stands that even if these were all examples of what were deemed to be 'adequate' answers by the speakers, this in itself would be of interest. Although the interactions discussed here are in a particular context, the baseline assumption is that the conversational forms should be generalisable to the whole domain of ordinary conversations (Sacks, 1992; Perakyla, 1997). In a

situation where one person asks a question of another, the responses may attend to similar concerns as those outlined in the extracts analysed in this chapter.

#### **10.4 Chapter summary**

To sum up, a thread of reflexivity has been evident throughout the research. In the methodology chapter I have considered general critiques of the methods adopted. In this chapter I have addressed some specific issues, which have relevance for the kind of understanding generated through the work. In addition, the interview as a methodology has been discussed through extracts of data where the participants attend to the nature of the interaction. In the following chapter I will draw the thesis to a conclusion.

## Chapter Eleven

### 11.0 Conclusion

In this research I have attempted to bring a particular theoretical perspective to the area of career and identity. This is in line with a growing movement towards a more critical approach to the study of social science concepts. That is not to say that the work of the last fifty years in the area of career is to be disregarded; it forms the beginning of a particular version, or story, of career as a description of the individual in a relationship with work.

To refer back to my construction of the preceding career literature in chapter two as structure, strategy or construct, the findings of the present thesis may also be described in these terms. Within the form of the accounts of the participants 'career as structure' was made relevant through constructions of coherence, plausibility and legitimacy. In terms of the content, alternatives to dominant career models, of presumed goals of promotion, for example, were plausibly argued. 'Career as strategy' can be likened to how the participants deployed career talk in the accounts to provide consistency, to 'justify' work appropriate behaviour and to authenticate identity claims (in a reciprocal way identity claims were drawn on to authenticate career accounts). Finally, 'career as a construct' is right back where this thesis began in its attempt to add to and expand on understanding surrounding career from this perspective.

By assuming that the role of language is action and description this moves the focus of research to how career functions as a socially constructed concept in

accounts of workplace experiences. From this perspective I have examined the accounts of participants in one contemporary workplace in order to explore their versions of career. I was then able to investigate how common sense notions of career are drawn on. The relationship between career and identity was made relevant through the construction and deployment of identity in talk about career and progression.

In many ways what has been learned from this research harks back to the Chicago school and their initial understanding of career as a concept which can face two ways simultaneously (Barley, 1989). This description of career as having Janus-like potential may be an early attempt at describing a dialectical, or two-way, relationship. By focusing on inter-individual explanations in language, it can be shown that career resides in relationship. Fresh insight has been gained into the meaning of career from this study. However, new questions have been raised by some of the findings, which may stimulate further research in the area. The ongoing discussion provides 'evidence' that career has relevance in people's interactions.

I shall leave the final words to Alan, one of the participants in the study.

306 Alan and sometimes I (.) you know (.) awkward thing (.) ah (.)  
307 perception in my mind (.) erm (.) you're expected to have an  
308 interesting career (.) and you think (.) oh bloody hell  
309 ((laughter))

## References

- Adamson, S.J. (1997) Career as a vehicle for the realisation of the self *Career Development International*, 2 (5), 245-253.
- Adamson, S.J., Doherty, N. and Viney, C. (1998) The meanings of career revisited: Implications for theory and practice. *British Journal of Management*, 9, 251-259.
- Alasuutari, P. (1995) *Researching Culture*. London: Sage.
- Althusser, L. (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books.
- Anderson-Gough, F., Grey, C. and Robson, K. (1998) 'Work hard, play hard': An analysis of organizational cliché in two accountancy practices. *Organization*, 5 (4), 565-592.
- Antaki, C. and Widdicombe, S. (1998) Identity as an achievement and as a tool. In C. Antaki and S. Widdicombe (eds.) *Identities in Talk*. London: Sage (1-14).
- Arminen, I. (1996) On the moral and interactional relevancy of self-repairs for life histories of members of alcoholics anonymous. *Text*, 16 (4), 449-480.
- Arnold, J. (1990) From education to job markets. In S. Fisher and C.L. Cooper (eds.) *On The Move: The Psychology of Transition*, Chichester: Wiley (207-229).
- Arnold, J. and Mackenzie-Davey, K. (1994) Graduate experiences of organizational career management. *International Journal of Career Management*, 6 (1), 14-18.
- Arthur, M.B. (1994) The boundaryless career: A new perspective for organizational inquiry. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 15, 295-306.
- Arthur, M.B. and Rousseau, D.M. (1996) (eds.) *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organisational Era*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Arthur, M.B., Claman, P.H. and DeFillippi, R.J. (1995) Intelligent enterprise, intelligent careers. *Academy of Management Executive*, 9 (4), 7-20.
- Arthur, M.B., Hall, D.T. and Lawrence, B.S. (1989) Introduction. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence (eds.) *Handbook of Career Theory*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Arthur, M.B., Inkson, K. and Pringle, J. (1999) *The New Careers: Individual Action and Economic Change*. London: Sage.
- Ashforth, B.E. and Mael, F. (1989) Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (1), 20-39.
- Ashforth, B.E. and Saks, A.M. (1996) Socialization tactics: Longitudinal effects on newcomer adjustment. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39 (1), 149-178.
- Atkinson, J.M. and Herhage, J (1984) *Structures of social action: Studies in conversational analysis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Austin, J. (1962) *How to do Things With Words*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Bailyn, L. (1989) Understanding individual experience at work: Comments on the theory and practice of careers. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence (eds.) *Handbook of Career Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (477-489).
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Barley, S.R. (1989) Careers, identities and institutions: the legacy of the Chicago School of Sociology. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence (eds.) *Handbook of Career Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (41-65).
- Bamey, J. (1991) Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17, 99-120.

- Barthes, R. (1977) *Roland Barthes*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Belbin, M. (1981) *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail*. London: Heinemann.
- Bell, N.E. and Staw, B.M. (1989) People as sculptors versus sculpture: The roles of personality and personal control in organizations. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence (eds.) *Handbook of Career Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (232-251).
- Berger, P.L. and Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books
- Billig, M. (1996) *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Billig, M., Condor, S., Edwards, D., Gane, M., Middleton, P. and Radley, A. (1988) *Ideological Dilemmas: A Social Psychology of Everyday Thinking*, London: Sage.
- Brovm, A.D. (2001) Authority, Sensemaking and Authoritative Sensemaking in the Report of the Public Inquiry into the Piper Alpha Disaster. Paper presented at the Academy of Management Conference, Washington D.C.
- Boden, D. (1994) *The Business of Talk: Organizations in Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Brovm, D. (1990) Summary, comparison and critique of major theories. In D. Brovm and L. Brooks (eds.) *Career Choice and Development* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. San Fransisco: Jossey Bass.
- Bruner, J.(1986) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bmner, J. (1990) *Acts of Meaning*. Camb MASS: Harvard University Press.
- Burke, P.J. (1980) The self measurement requirements from an interactionist

- perspective. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44, 18-29.
- Burkitt, I. (1991) *Social Selves: Theories of the Social Formation of Personality*. London: Sage.
- Burman, E. and Parker, I. (1993) Introduction, discourse analysis: the turn to the text. In E. Burman and I. Parker (eds.) *Discourse Analytic Research, Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*, London: Routledge, (1-16)
- Burr, V. (1995) *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*. London: Routledge.
- Buttny, R. (1993) *Social Accountability in Communication*. London: Sage.
- Caldwell, D.F., Chatman, J.A. and O'Reilly, C.A. (1990) Building organizational commitment: A multifirm study. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 63, 245-261.
- Cameron, D. (1997) Performing gender identity: Young men's talk and the construction of the heterosexual masculinity. In S. Johnson and U.H. Meinhof (eds.) *Language and Masculinity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Carbaugh, D. (1996) *Situating Selves: The Communication of Social Identities in American Scenes*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Carroll, C. (1995) Rearticulating organisational identity, exploring corporate images and employee identification. *Management Learning Special Issue on Talk at Work*, 26 (4), 463-482.
- Casey, C. (1994) *Work, Self and Society*. London: Routledge.
- Chomsky, N. (1965) *Aspects of a Theory of Syntax*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Cochran, L. (1997) *Career Counselling: A Narrative Approach*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.
- Coffey, A. and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.
- Collin, A. (1998) New challenges in the study of career. *Personnel Review*, 27 (5), 412-425.

- Collin, A. (2000) Epic and novel: the rhetoric of career. In A. Collin and R.A. Young (eds.) *The Future of Career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (163-180).
- Collin, A. and Young, R.A. (2000) The future of career. In A. Collin and R.A. Young (eds.) *The Future of Career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (276-300).
- Collins, R. (1981) Micro-translation as a theory building strategy. In K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Towards an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*. Boston, MASS: Routledge and Kegan Paul (81-108).
- Coupland, C. (2000) A discourse analysis of accounts of 'doing well' in descriptions of workplace experiences: Identity projects in interaction. Paper presented at Conference '*Understanding the Social World 2: Constructions and Identity*', University of Huddersfield.
- Coupland, C. (2001) Accounting for change: A discourse analysis of graduate trainees' talk of adjustment. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38 (8), 1103-1119.
- Czamiawska-Joerges, B. (1995) Narration or science? Collapsing the division in organization studies. *Organization*, 2(1), 11-34.
- Davies, B. and Harré, R. (1990) Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20 (1), 43-63.
- DeFillippi, R.J. and Arthur, M.B. (1994) The boundaryless career: A competency based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 15, 307-324.
- Dex, S. (1985) *The Sexual Division of Work*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf
- Dingwall, R. (2000) Personal communication during Data Analysis Group meeting, Social Policy Department, University of Nottingham.
- Doherty, N., Viney, C. and Adamson, S.J. (1997) Rhetoric or reality: shifts in graduate career management? *Career Development International*, 2 (4), 173-179.

- Drew, P. and Holt, E. (1988) Complainable matters: The use of idiomatic expressions in making complaints. *Social Problems*, 35 (4), 398-419.
- Eaton, S.C. and Bailyn, L. (2000) Career as life path: Tracing work and life strategies of biotech professionals. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (177-198).
- Edley, N. (2000) *Truth in trouble: Psychology's turn to language*. Paper presented at the British Psychological Society, Social Psychology Section Conference, Nottingham Trent University.
- Edwards, D. (1997) *Discourse and Cognition*. London: Sage.
- Edwards, D. and Potter, J. (1992) *Discursive Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Evetts, J. (1992) Dimensions of career: Avoiding reification in the analysis of change. *Sociology*, 26(1), 1-21.
- Eysenck, H. and Eysenck, S.B.G. (1967) *Personality Structure and Measurement*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and Power*. Harlow: Addison-Wesley.
- Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fincham, R. and Rhodes, P. (1999) *Principles of Organisational Behaviour* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, L.F. and Betz, N.E. (1994) Career development in cultural context: the role of gender, race, class and sexual orientation. In M.L. Savickas and R.W. Lent (eds.) *Convergence in Career Development Theories: Implications for Science and Practice*. Palo Alto, California: CPP (103-117).
- Forbes, J.B. (1987) Early intraorganizational mobility: patterns and influences. *Academy of Management Journal*, 30, 110-125.

- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- Foumier, V. (1993) *The Psychological Adjustment of Graduates Entering Employment*, Unpublished Doctoral thesis, University of Manchester.
- Foumier, V. (1997) Graduates' construction systems and career development. *Human Relations*, 50 (4), 363-391.
- Foumier, V. (1998) Stories of development and exploitation: Militant voices in an enterprise culture. *Organization*, 5 (1), 55-80.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Eng Cliffs NJ:Prentice-Hall.
- Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K.J. (1985) The social constructionist movement in social psychology. *American Psychologist*, 40, 266-275.
- Gergen, K.J. (1999) *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Gergen, K.J. (2001) *Social Construction in Context*. London: Sage.
- Gergen, K.J. and Gergen, M.M. (1986) Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T.R. Sarbin (ed.) *Narrative psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Giddens, A. (1976) *New Rules of Sociological Method*. London: Hutchinson.
- Giddens, A. (1981) Agency, institution and time-space analysis. In K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Towards an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*. Boston, MASS: Routledge and Kegan Paul (161-174).
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Gill, R (1996) Discourse Analysis: Practical Implementation. In J.E. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods*. Leicester: British Psychological Society (140-155).
- Gini, A. (1998) Work identity and self How we are formed by the work we do. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 17 (7), 701-714).
- Goffee, R. and Jones, G. (2000) Career, community and social architecture: An exploration of concepts. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (256-272).
- Goffee, R. and Nicholson, N. (1994) Career development in male and female managers - convergence or collapse? In M. Davidson and R. Burke (eds.) *Women in Management - Current Research Issues*. London: Chapman (80-92).
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Goffman, E. (1961) The moral career of the mental patient. In *Asylums*. New York: Anchor (125-170).
- Goffman, E. (1979) Footing. *Semiotica*, 25, 1-29.
- Goffman, E. (1981) *Forms of Talk*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Greco, B. (1975) *How to Get The Job That's Right For You*. Illinois: Dow Jones-Irwin.
- Grey, C. (1994) Career as a project of the self and the labour process discipline. *Sociology*, 28 (2), 479-498.
- Guba, E. and Lincoln, Y. (1989) *Fourth Generation Evaluation*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.
- Guest, D. and McKenzie-Davey, K. (1996) Don't write off the traditional career.

*People Management*, February, 22-25.

Gunz, H. (1989) The dual meaning of managerial careers: organisational and individual levels of analysis. *Journal of Management Studies*, 26, 225-250.

Gunz, H., Evans, M. and Jalland, M. (2000) Career boundaries in a 'boundaryless' world. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (24-53).

Halford, S., Savage, M. and Witz, A. (1997) *Gender, Careers and Organisations: Current Developments in Nursing, Banking and Local Government*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

Hall, D.T and Associates. (1986) *Career Development in Organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Hall, D.T. (1976) *Careers in Organizations*. Palisades, California: Goodyear.

Hall, D.T. (1987) Careers and socialization. *Journal of Management*, 13 (2), 301-321.

Handy, C. (1994) *The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future*. London: Hutchinson.

Harmon, L.W. (1994) Frustrations, daydreams and realities of theoretical convergence. In M.L. Savickas and R.W. Lent (eds.) *Convergence in Career development Theories: Implications for Science and Practice*. Paulo Alto, California: CPP (225-234).

Harré, R. (1981) Philosophical aspects of the micro-macro problem. In K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Towards an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*. Boston, MASS: Routledge and Kegan Paul (139-160).

Harré, R. (1983) *Personal Being: A Theory for Individual Psychology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Harré, R. (1985) The language game of self-ascription: a note. In K.J. Gergen and K.E. Davies (eds.) *The Social Construction of the Person*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Harré, R. (1989) Language games and the texts of identity in J. Shotter and K.J. Gergen (eds.) *Texts of Identity*. London: Sage.
- Harré, R. and Stearns, P. (1995) Introduction, psychology as discourse analysis. In R. Harré and P. Stearns (eds.) *Discursive Psychology in Practice*. London: Sage (1-8).
- Heritage, J. (1984) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heritage, J. (1989) Current developments in conversation analysis. In D. Rogers and P. Bull (eds.) *Conversation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Herriot, P. (1992) *The Career Management Challenge: Balancing Individual and Organisational Needs*. London: Sage.
- Herriot, P. and Pemberton, C. (1995) *New Deals: The Revolution in Managerial Careers*. Chichester: Wiley.
- Herriot, P. and Pemberton, C. (1996) Contracting careers. *Human Relations*, 49 (6), 757-787.
- Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (1988) *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*. London: Routledge.
- Hollway, W (1984) Gender difference and the production of subjectivity. In J. Henriques, W. Hollway, C. Urwin, C. Venn and V. Walkerdine (eds.) *Changing the Subject :Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity*. London: Methuen.
- Hollway, W. (1989) *Subjectivity and Method in Psychology: Gender, Meaning and Science*. London: Sage.
- Holstein, J.A. and Gubrium, J.F. (1997) Active interviewing. In D. Silverman (ed.)

*Qualitative Research; Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage (113-129).

Hughes, E.C. (1937) Institutional office and the person. *American Journal of Sociology*, 43, 404-443.

Hughes, E.C. (1958) *Men and Their Work*. Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press Publishers.

Hutchby, I. and Wooffitt, R. (1998) *Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Jablin, F. (1982) Organization communication: An assimilation approach. In M.E. Roloff and C.E. Berger (Eds.), *Social Cognition and Communication*. Beverley Hills, California: Sage (255-286).

Jefferson, G. (1984) On the organisation of laughter in talk about troubles. In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds.) *Structures of Social Action; Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (346-369).

Jefferson, G. (1989) Notes on a possible metric which provides for a 'standard maximum silence' of one second in conversation. In D. Roger and P. Bull (eds.) *Conversation*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters (166-196).

Jefferson, G. (1990) List construction as a task and as a resource. In G. Psathas (ed.) *Interaction Competence*. Lanham MD: University Press of America (63-92).

Kirk, J. and Miller, M. (1986) *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Knights, D. (1992) Changing spaces: The disruptive impact of a new epistemological location for the study of management. *Academy of Management Review*, 17 (3), 514-532.

Knorr-Cetina, K. (1981) The micro-sociological challenge of macro-sociology: Towards a reconstruction of social theory and methodology. In K. Knorr-Cetina and A.V. Cicourel (eds.) *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology: Towards an Integration of Micro and Macro Sociologies*. Boston, MASS: Routledge and Kegan

Paul (1-48).

Kondo, D.K. (1990) *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

LaBier, D. (1986) *Modern Madness: The Hidden link Between Work and Emotional Conflict*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Laurent, A. (1983) The cultural diversity of Western conceptions of management. *International Studies of Management and Organisation*, 13, 75-96.

Leudar, I. and Antaki, C. (1997) Participant status in social psychological research. In T. Ibanez and L. Iniguez (eds.) *Critical Social Psychology*. London: Sage (273-290).

Lincoln, Y.S. and Denzin, N.K. (1994) Introduction: entering the field of qualitative research in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds.) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage (1-23).

Linde, C (1993) *Life Stories; The Creation of Coherence*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Louis, M.R. (1980) Surprise and sense-making: What newcomers experience in entering unfamiliar organizational settings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25, 226-251.

Mallon, M. (1998) The portfolio career: Pushed or pulled to it? *Personnel Review*, 27 (5), 361-377.

Mallon, M. and Cohen, L (2000) My brilliant career? Using stories as a methodological tool in careers research. Paper presented to fourth international conference on organizational discourse: Word-views, work-views and world-views, 26-28 July 2000, Kings College, London.

Malone, M.J. (1997) *Worlds of Talk; The Presentation of Self in Everyday Conversation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Mama, A. (1995) *Beyond the Masks; Race, Gender and Subjectivity*. London: Routledge.
- Marshall, H. and Wetherell, M. (1989) Talking about career and gender identities: A discourse analysis perspective. In S. Skevington and D. Baker (eds.) *The Social Identity of Women*. London: Sage (106-129).
- Marshall, J. (1989) Revisioning career concepts: A feminist invitation. In M.B. Arthur, D.T. Hall and B.S. Lawrence (eds.) *Handbook of Career Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press .
- Marshall, J. (2000) Living lives of change: Examining facets of women managers' career stories. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers; New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (202-227).
- Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.
- Maynard, D. and Zimmerman, P. (1984) Topical talk, ritual and the social organisation of relationships. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 47 (4), 301-316.
- Mayo, A. (1991) *Managing Careers: Strategies for Organisations*. London: IPM.
- McHoul, A. and Grace, W. (1993) *A Foucault Primer; Discourse, Power and the Subject*. London: UCL Press.
- Mead, G.H. (1934) *Mind, Self and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mirvis, P.H. and Hall, D.T. (1994) Psychological success and the boundaryless career *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 15, 365-380.
- Mirvis, P.H. and Hall, D.T. (1996) New organizational forms and the new career. In D.T. Hall and Associates *The Career is Dead, Long Live the Career: A Relational Approach to Careers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Moir, J. (1993) Occupational career choice: accounts and contradictions. In E.

- Burman and I. Parker (eds.) *Discourse Analytic Research: Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*. London: Routledge (17-34).
- Nicholson, N. and West, M (1988) *Managerial Job Change: Men and Women in Transition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nikander, P. (1995) The turn to text: The critical potential of discursive social psychology. *Nordiske Udkast*, 2, 3-13.
- Ochs, E. (1979) Transcription as theory. In E. Ochs and B. Schieffelin, (eds.) *Developmental Pragmatics*. New York: Academic Press. (43-72).
- Omstein, S. and Isabella, L.A. (1993) Making sense of careers: A review 1989-1992. *Journal of Management*, 19 (2), 243-267.
- Parker, I (1997) Discursive Psychology. In D. Fox. and I. Prilleltensky (eds.) *Critical Psychology: An Introduction*. London: Sage (284-298).
- Parker, I and Burman, E (1993) Against discursive imperialism, empiricism and constmction: Thirty-two problems with discourse analysis. In E. Burman and I. Parker (eds.) *Discourse Analytic Research, Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*. London: Routledge (155-172).
- Parker, I. (1992) *Discourse Dynamics: Critical Analysis for Social and Individual Psychology*. London: Routledge.
- Parker, P. and Arthur, M.B. (2000) Careers, organising and community. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers: New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (99-122).
- Peiperl, M.A. and Arthur, M.B. (2000) Topics for conversation: Career themes old and new. In M. Peiperl, M. Arthur, R. Goffee and T. Morris (eds.) *Career Frontiers; New Conceptions of Working Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (1-20).
- Perakyla, A. (1997) Reliability and validity in research based on transcripts. In D.

- Silverman (ed.) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage (201-220).
- Pomerantz, A. (1984) Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred/dispreferred turn-shapes. In J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds.) *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (79-112).
- Pomerantz, A. (1986) Extreme case formulation: A way of legitimising claims. *Human Studies*, 9, 219-229.
- Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987) *Discourse and Social Psychology; Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage
- Potter, J. (1996a) *Representing Reality; Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*. London: Sage.
- Potter, J. (1996b) Discourse analysis and constructionist approaches: Theoretical background. In J.E. Richardson (ed.) *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods* (125-139). Leicester: British Psychological Society.
- Potter, J. (1997) Discourse analysis as a way of analysing naturally occurring talk. In D. Silverman (ed.) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage. (144-160).
- Potter, J. and Edwards, D. (1990) Nigel Lawson's tent: discourse analysis, attribution theory and the social psychology of fact. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 20, 24-40.
- Preston, D. and Hart, C. (1998) A trail of clues for graduates. In C. Mabey, D. Skinner and T. Clark *Experiencing Human Resource Management*. London: Sage (205-217).
- Pye, A. (1995) Strategy through dialogue and doing: A game of 'Momington

- Crescent'. *Management Learning Special Issue on Talk at Work*. 26 (4), 445-462.
- Richardson, M.S. (2000) A new perspective for counsellors: from career ideologies to empowerment through work and relationship practices. In A. Collin and R.A. Young (eds.) *The Future of Career*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (197-211).
- Robinson, W.P. (1996) Preface. In W.P. Robinson (ed.) *Social Groups and Identities; Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel* Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann (xi-xii).
- Rock, P. (1979) *The Making of Symbolic Interactionism*. Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Rose, N. (1992) Governing the Enterprising Self In P. Heelas and P. Morris (eds.) *The Values of the Enterprise Culture*. London: Routledge (141-164).
- Rose, N. (1999) *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) London: Free Association Books.
- Rosenbaum, J.E. (1984) *Career Mobility in a Corporate Hierarchy*. Orlando, Florida: Academic Press.
- Rosenwald, G.C. and Ochberg, R.L. (1992) *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding*. New Haven, Yale: Yale University Press.
- Sacks, H. (1984) On doing 'being ordinary' in J.M Atkinson and J.Heritage (eds.) *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures on Conversation Volume 1 and 2* G. Jefferson (ed.) Oxford and Cambridge, MASS: Basil Blackwell.
- Sarbin, T.R. (1986) The narrative as root metaphor for psychology. In T.R. Sarbin (ed.) *Narrative psychology; The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*. New York: Praeger.
- Savickas, M.L. (1993) Career counselling in the postmodern era. *Journal of Cognitive*

*Psychotherapy: An International Quarterly*, 7, 425-433.

Scase, R. and Goffee, R. (1989) *Reluctant Managers*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Schein, E.H. (1978) *Career Dynamics: Matching Individual and Organizational Needs*. Reading MASS: Addison-Wesley.

Schein, E.H. (1984) Culture as an environmental context for careers. *Journal of Occupational Behaviour*, 5, 71-81.

Seale, C. (2000) Using computers to analyse data. In D. Silverman *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage. (154-174).

Sennett, R. (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Shaw, C.R. (1930) *The Jack-Roller; A Delinquent Boy's Own Story*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shotter, J. (1993) *Conversational Realities: Constructing Life Through Language*. London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (1993) Towards an aesthetics of research. In D. Silverman (ed.) *Qualitative Research; Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage. (239-253).

Silverman, D. (1998) *Harvey Sacks; Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Silverman, D. (2000) *Doing Qualitative Research; A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

Silverman, D. and Jones, J. (1976) *Organisational Work* London: Cassell and Collier Macmillan.

Stainton-Rogers, R., Stenner, P., Gleeson, K. & Stainton-Rogers, W. (1995) *Social Psychology :A Critical Agenda*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Stebbins, R.A. (1970) Career: The subjective approach. *Sociological Quarterly*, 11,

32-49.

Stenner, P. (1993) Discoursing jealousy. In E. Burman and I. Parker (eds.) *Discourse Analytic Research Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*. London: Routledge (114-134).

Symon, G. and Cassell, C. (1998) Reflections on the use of qualitative methods. In G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds.) *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research; A Practical Guide*. London: Sage (1-9).

Symon, G., Cassell, C. and Dickson, R. (2000) Expanding our research and practice through innovative research methods. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 9 (4), 457-462).

Tajfel, H. (1978) *Differentiation Between Social Groups; Studies in Social Psychology*. London: Academic Press.

Tajfel, H. (1981) *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, S.E. (1981) A categorisation approach to stereotyping. In D.L. Hamilton (ed.) *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behaviour*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ten Have, P. (1999) *Doing Conversation Analysis; A Practical Guide*. London: Sage.

Thompson, K. (1986) *Beliefs and Ideologies*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood.

Turkic, S. (1995) *Life on the screen; Identity in the age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Tumer, J.C. (1982) Towards a cognitive re-definition of the social group. In H. Tajfel (ed.) *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tyson, S. (1995) *Human Resource Strategy: Towards a General Theory of Human*

*Resource Management*. London: Pitman.

Van Maanen, J. (1977) Experiencing organization: notes on the meanings of careers and socialisation. In J. Van Maanen (ed.) *Organizational Careers; Some New Perspectives*. New York: Wiley (15-48).

Van Maanen, J. and Schein, E.H. (1979) Toward a theory of organizational socialization. In B.M. Staw and L.L. Cummings (eds.) *Research in Organizational Behaviour, Vol 1*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Walsh, J.B and Chartrand, J.M. (1994) Emerging directions of person-environment fit. In M.L. Savickas and R.W. Lent (eds.) *Convergence in Career Development Theories; Implications for Science and Practice*. Palo Alto, California: CPP (187-195).

Wanous, J.P. (1980) *Organizational Entry*. Reading MASS: Addison-Wesley.

Wanous, J.P. (1992) *Organizational Entry: Recruitment, Selection, Orientation and Socialization Of Newcomers* (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.) Reading, MASS: Addison-Wesley.

Watson, T.J. and Harris, P. (1999) *The Emergent Manager*. London: Sage.

Weedon, C. (1987) *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Weick, K.E. (1979) *The Social Psychology of Organising*. Reading MA: Addison-Wesley.

Weick, K.E. (1984) Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems. *American Psychologist*, 39 (1), 40-49.

Weick, K.E. (1995) *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Wetherell, M. (1996) Constructing social identities: The individual/social binary in Henri Tajfel's social psychology. In W.P. Robinson (ed.) *Social Groups and Identities; Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel*. Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann

(269-284).

Wetherell, M. (1998) Positioning and interpretative repertoires: Conversation analysis and post-structuralism in dialogue. *Discourse and Society*, 9 (3), 387-412.

Wetherell, M. and Maybin, J. (1996) The distributed self A social constructionist perspective. In R. Stevens (ed.) *Understanding The Self* London: Sage (220-277).

Widdicombe, S. (1993) Autobiography and change: rhetoric and authenticity of 'Gothic' style. In Burman, E. and Parker, I. (1993) *Discourse Analytic Research, Repertoires and Readings of Texts in Action*. London: Routledge (94-113).

Widdicombe, S. (1998) Identity as an analysts' and a participants' resource. In C. Antaki and S. Widdicombe (eds.) *Identities in Talk*. London: Sage (191-206).

Widdicombe, S. and Wooffitt, R. (1995) *The Language of Youth Subcultures*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester.

Wilensky, H.L. (1960) Careers, life-styles and social integration. *International Social Science Journal*, 12,553-558.

Wilensky, H.L. (1961) Orderly careers and social participation: the impact of work history on social integration in the middle mass. *American Sociological Review*, 26, 521-539.

Wittgenstein, L. (1967) *Philosophical Investigations* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) trans G.E.M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.

Woods, P. (1983) *Sociology and the school; An interactionist viewpoint*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Wooffitt, R. (1992) *Telling Tales of the Unexpected; The Organisation of Factual Discourse*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf

Yamall, J. (1998) Line managers as career developers: Rhetoric or reality?. *Personnel Review*, 27 (5), 378-395.

Young, R.A, Valach, L. and Collin, A. (1996) A contextual explanation of **career**. In D. Brown and L. Brooks and Associates *Career Choice and Development*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass (477-512).

Zimmerman, D.H. (1991) Structure in action: An introduction. In D. Boden and D.H. Zimmerman (eds.) *Talk and Social Structure*. Cambridge: Polity Press (3-21).

# Appendix 1

September 2000

Dear ((company A)) Graduate Trainee

## Research Project - Graduates Making Sense of the Organisation

I am currently looking at graduate development as part of my PhD programme at the Nottingham University Business School. In today's climate I am interested in how individuals make sense of their experiences in work organisations

### The Outcome

*For me* - The opportunity to explore the area of graduate experience from a relatively new perspective, while gaining data on which to base a PhD thesis.

*For ((company A))* - A business report which will highlight how individuals are interpreting or making sense of their experiences within the organisation.

*For you* - A copy of the report and the opportunity to take part in a new kind of research which attends to how individuals interpret their workplace experiences. What you bring to the organisation and how you manage your contribution are the key issues of interest.

### Your Role

I would need you to be available for one, possibly two, 30 minute interviews. The identity of the participants will not be revealed. Place names, incidents and other identifiers will be amended or omitted in order to ensure complete confidentiality.

If you would like more information please contact me through one of the following methods :

Email            [chris.coupland@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:chris.coupland@nottingham.ac.uk)

Telephone        the above number to leave a message.

Or contact the Graduate Development Manager, ((company A)).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Christine Coupland  
Teaching Assistant  
Nottingham University Business School

## Appendix 2

### Questions for participants

Phase 1 interviews (April/May 1999)

First cohort, first interviews

Would you like to tell me something about yourself?

What attracted you to ((company A))?

What made you choose ((company A))?

Can you describe for me the things you have been doing at ((company A)) up until now?

What did you enjoy most/least?

Going back to 'what attracted you to ((company A))?' has it been what you expected so far, if not, in what way is it different?

How do you describe yourself/your job to outsiders/insiders?

Can you explain the structure of the organisation with regard to you, your position?

How do you feel about that?

Is that a problem?

How do you get around/manage that?

How does your experience of the structure differ from your experience of the structure of your University? For example with regard to implicit rules, or is it okay to 'I don't know how to do that'

Some people see large organisations as impersonal places, which seem to make almost contradictory demands of their employees, how do you feel about this, from your own experiences?

Do you see yourself as a member of the organisation, or a member of a department, or something else?

In what way do you feel you can contribute to ((company A))?

In what way do you think ((company A)) has 'contributed' to you?

How does the relationship work, for example do you think it is a reciprocal arrangement or something else?

How do you go about finding things out?

Can you give me an example?

Who did/would you ask?

If not, why not?

Set of implicit rules/behaviour? Is it okay to say "I don't know?"

Do you think you have changed since joining ((company A))?

In what way?

What aspects of your current position do you enjoy most/least?

What would you change, given the opportunity?

Looking ahead, how/where do you see yourself in 5 years time and in the longer term?

## Appendix 3

Questions for participants

Phase 2 interviews, October/November 1999

First cohort, second interview

So, how is it going?

Tell me what has happened since we last met

Is this current position the kind of move you expected to happen?

Have you changed since we last met?

Has the organisation changed?

What would you change given the opportunity?

What is the best thing that has happened since we last met?

What is the worst thing?

What next?

Is that part of a longer term plan?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

Do you see the organisation as a fair place?

Is promotion based on ability or something else?

Would you say there were equal opportunities for everyone?

Do you think there is an ideal person for this organisation?

If so how do you think you measure up?

I've got two words down, one of which is career, do you think you have a career?

Have you thought about career?

The other word I've got written down is gender

Do you think gender plays a part in ((Company A)) as a workplace?

## Appendix 4

Questions for participants

Phase 3 interviews, November / December 2000

Second cohort, first interview

Would you like to tell me something about yourself?

What attracted you to ((company A))

What made you choose ((company A))?

Can you describe for me the things you have been doing up until now

Which did you enjoy most / least?

Going back to 'what attracted you' has it been what you expected so far, if not in what way is it different?

Do you see yourself as a member of the organisation, a member of a department of something else?

In what way do you feel you can contribute to ((company A))?

In what way do you think ((company A)) has 'contributed' to you?

Do you think you have changed since joining ((company A)), in what way?

Has the organisation changed?

What would you change given the opportunity?

How does the relationship work, do you think it's reciprocal?

Do you see the organisation as a fair place?

Is promotion based on ability or something else?

Do you think there is an ideal person for the organisation?

If so how do you think you measure up?

Looking ahead, where do you see yourself in 5 years time and in the longer term?

Do you think gender plays a part in ((company A)) as a workplace?

## Appendix 5

Questions / Issues raised in group discussion February 2000

First cohort

Introductions, wait to see if these are instigated, then explain why.

What opportunities do you have to talk cross functionally like this?

Do you meet people socially who you work with?

Current share price crisis

What one thing would you like taking back to the people who 'control' the graduate scheme?

Tentative conclusions from the interviews

Eg 'drop off the conveyor belt'

'us vs them'

'Big picture vs everyday targets'

role of mentors

Do you see yourself as a person of influence?

What has it been like taking part in research?

Where next?

Ask for feedback on interim report

## Appendix 6

Questions for participants

Phase four interviews, April/May 2001

First cohort, third interviews

So, how is it going?

Tell me what has happened since we last met

Is this current position the kind of move you expected to happen?

What is the best thing that has happened since we last met?

What is the worst thing?

What next?

Is that part of a longer term plan?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

Career, do you think you have a career?

Have you thought about career?

Do you think gender plays a part in ((Company A)) as a workplace?

Findings

Feedback on findings

Future plans for the research

## Appendix 7

Questions for participants

Phase five interviews, May/June 2001

Second cohort, second interviews

So, how is it going?

Tell me what has happened since we last met

Is this current position the kind of move you expected to happen?

What is the best thing that has happened since we last met?

What is the worst thing?

What next?

Is that part of a longer term plan?

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

I've got two words down, one of which is career, do you think you have a career?

Have you thought about career?

The other word I've got written down is gender

Do you think gender plays a part in ((Company A)) as a workplace?

Findings

Feedback on findings

Future plans for the research

