

What is the role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students?

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AUTHORISATION

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), no material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma or a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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Date: 27th November 2020

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ABSTRACT

Career decision-making is influenced by many factors. Culture and family influences are the main subjects of this research. Career decisions are made at different stages of an individual's life. The focus of this research is to explore the role of culture and family influence on the career decision-making experiences of tertiary students. The research specifically focusses on Asian New Zealand tertiary students. I chose this cultural group because, during my years of practice working as a student advisor and course counsellor, this group appeared to be highly influenced by family and culture influences when making career decisions.

This research utilised an interpretivist paradigm, alongside a qualitative methodology to discuss three sub-questions: positive and negative influences of family and culture, feeling empowered or disempowered towards family and culture, and personal interest in making a career decision. A face to face interview was conducted with six Asian tertiary students and voice recorded to gain their perspectives in regards to these questions. The research aims to focus on individual experiences and similarities, and differences amongst participants regarding their experiences of making career decisions. The main findings of this research were culturally respected or preferred career choices, style of communication and its influence and financial security. Some recommendations for career specialists and potential for further research in the area of career development are outlined.

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INTRODUCTION

The career decision-making process can be considered as one of life's most important decisions, and it is important to understand what factors influence this important decision. It is either influenced by environmental factors or sociological factors. Throughout my professional experience as a student hub advisor, I have seen many examples of negative and positive influences on students' career decisions. For Asian students, it is mainly cultural and family influences that have a strong impact on their career decisions. One reason for this may be because of the collective nature of Asian cultures.

Research rational

I chose to explore family and culture influences in my research because of my experience both professionally and personally. As a school leaver, I faced difficulties making a career choice. Although my parents did not put any pressure on me to select a career pathway, they did not give proper guidance on selecting a career option. All that was expected of me was to attain a degree. I relate this incidence to cultural and family influence, as in Pakistani culture and in some families, females' career choices are not given a lot of attention. Males, however, are expected to make careful choices. In my case, when my brother was selecting a career pathway, he was given full guidance and it was ensured that he undertook to study engineering. This career is a typical option for males in my culture. I would say this is due to the job opportunities and financial stability it provides, and that it is a well-known and respected career in our culture. My personal experience has influenced my professional experience (providing guidance to prospective students on their course options and career decisions), developing my understanding of different experiences. Additionally, while I was on a secondment as a postgraduate liaison manager, I was exposed further to career choices of postgraduate tertiary students. This also enhanced my knowledge of career options sought after by Asian tertiary students and developed an understanding of how they can be better assisted during the earlier stages of their career decision-making process. Hence, I wanted to explore the role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students; positive and negative aspects of cultural and family influence on career decisions, the role of personal interest in making career decision and feeling empowered or disempowered by culture influence when making career decisions. My focus was to find out what other people from Asian cultures thought about these influences and to hear their stories and experiences.

Overview of the research

The **first chapter** is a literature review which identifies and explains some main themes related to this research topic. These themes are psychological and sociological perspective, family and culture influence, collectivism and individualism, self-efficacy and theory of framework. The literature review unpacks how these influences are formed and why and how they impact people. The **second chapter** will explain the interpretivist research paradigm, the qualitative research approach, the research methods used to conduct the research, and ethics process and approval. The **third chapter** shows the results of the interviews and stories of all participants. The **fourth chapter** is the discussion of the findings chapter and the key themes revealed. It provides an in-depth analysis of participants' experiences and their relevance to the literature review. The **final chapter** is the conclusion and recommendations, and potential for further research.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will review the literature relating to the role of culture and family influence on the career decisions of Asian¹ tertiary students. The literature review provides an overview of family and cultural influences on Asians and an overview of collectivism and individualism. This chapter also provides an overview of the career decision-making process through psychological and sociological perspectives and Systems theory framework. The literature review will also examine the presence of self-efficacy and the importance of other influences, such as gender and family communication.

CULTURE AND CAREER

Culture plays a significant part for many individuals in making life decisions, including making career decisions. It is suggested that culture is a collective way of thinking or “shared mental programs” that assists individuals’ response back to the environment. (Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2015, p.49). Due to the shared mentality or shared cultural values, individuals make similar decisions hence, the concept of contributing to the society or family or making career choices that would benefit the society or family. According to Watson (2006), culture is according to an individual’s views and the influence of culture is adjustable according to how an individual gets involved in the cultural setting and how they set out their cultural experiences into patterns and relate to these in the developmental process. In contrast, Alfred (2001) states that “culture and identity are elusive phenomena that are socially and contextually constructed” (p. 108). Additionally, Brown (2002) explains that “culture is more explicit in career than in a single action” (p. 224). For instance, one might think of an action that could have similar meaning in different cultures whereas, when it comes to careers, it is difficult to find similarities in different cultures (Brown, 2002).

Cultural background influences the way individuals make decisions and how they select their occupation (Fouad & Byars-Winston, 2005). From an Asian cultural perspective, a job is a useful aspect in one’s life, through which individuals add to the society, culture and family by utilising their skills and work (Carter & Cook, 1992). This idea explains that an individual’s work and skills contribute to the wider society and culture, and not just the individual. This

¹ Asia in this study covers, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Western Asia and East Asia

also enables them to think about their career choices considering the cultural factors and how they can contribute to society and their family.

Collectivism and individualism

The concepts of collectivism and individualism are vital to discuss in this research as it helps understand the cultural values and how the way of thinking differs in terms of making decisions. Individualistic cultures present an independent way of thinking and are more focussed on individual interests. In contrast, collectivist cultures, the focus is more on shared responsibilities and thinking of the family before individual interests (Inkson, Dries & Arnold (2015). Similarly, in a study by Tao, Zhang, Lou and Lalonde (2018), it showed that students, aged 18-38, with an Asian background had a strong influence from family and were encouraged to undertake science subjects whereas, bicultural Asian Americans gave preference to their personal interests. Furthermore, bicultural Chinese students had more self-efficacy, and students with a Chinese background had financial and family factors highly influencing their subject choices. According to Dheer and Lenartowicz (2017) collectivist societies believe in maintaining relationships and maintaining group unity. While, individualistic cultures do not limit themselves to groups and place emphasis on individuals and independent views. Additionally, collectivism is term considered for a person who considers his or her decisions to have an impact on other people and who has a high level of involvement in others' lives. In contrast, individualists, have a high sense of autonomy (Hui & Villareal, 1989).

The research by Javidan and Dastmalchian (2003) shows Iranian culture is more on the collectivist side, due to their strong family and friendship ties. As a result of these strong ties, children know that they can rely on parents and other relatives. It is also stated that although the culture may be collectivist, the education system is very much individualistic (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). From the very beginning children's achievements are based on individual efforts rather than group work, and not much opportunity is given for achievements to be recognised as a group (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003), hence leading to making individualistic decisions when selecting a career pathway. Chinese, Korean and Iranian societies are also identified as collectivists (Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2017).

Psychological and sociological

Career decision-making can be viewed from two perspectives, sociological and psychological (Thomas, 2017). If a career decision is seen from a psychological perspective, it is constructed around what influences individuals to act and think a certain way to make career decisions.

These factors include one's personality, the satisfaction a job will provide, personal interests, and their skills (Thomas, 2017). In contrast, if a career decision is based on a sociological perspective then it is based around environmental and demographic factors (Ghuangpeng, 2011). According to Thomas (2017), the environmental factors include social aspects such as family, community or cultural values, influence of friends and family friends, the labour market and economical situation. The demographical factors include the family's social and economic status, gender, and ethnic or cultural background. Moreover, it is explained that when making career decisions students are now more concerned about careers that are in demand and whether there are job opportunities. Students are influenced by their family and their economic status and perhaps the interest in studying further, compared to being concerned about what their choice of career or interests are (Thomas, 2017). According to Kim et al., (2016), it is suggested that Western vocational psychology has conventionally focussed more on personal interest and personal values when it comes to career decision-making. In contrast, in other cultures, the emphasis may be more about sociological aspects when choosing a career pathway.

These two perspectives explain why there are many factors individuals consider when making career decisions. It depends on individual's way of thinking and what they value more, whether it is the environmental factors, or demographical factors or whether it is their personality and personal interest. It may also be seen that individuals base their decisions on both psychological and sociological factors. These factors influence the career choices either indirectly or directly.

Systems theory framework

The systems theory framework has been introduced by Patton and McMahon (2014) which is used as a tool for career planning. The systems theory framework provides support for career counsellors to identify influences on career decision-making. The system theory framework includes a range of influences that an individual might encounter while making a career decision, including environmental and sociological factors. This is similar to the psychological and sociological factors discussed above however, this theory describes specific examples related to career decision-making with all possible influences, that would be seen as either environmental or societal. The environmental influences include geographical location, peers, political decisions, family, historical trends, media, globalisation, community groups, socioeconomic status, workplace, employment market, and education institutions. The social influences include gender, values, health, sexual orientation, disability, ability, interests, skills, age, beliefs, personality, self-concept, ethnicity, physical attributes and aptitudes (Patton & McMahon, 2014). It is further explained that all these factors individually outlined in the theory

make it easier for individuals to identify the influences on their career development and career decision-making (McMahon and Watson, 2008). The system theory framework is included in this research to support the influences discussed and to narrow down the specific factors that impact career decision making process. The idea behind using this theory was also to ensure that other factors are also highlighted and how these factors indirectly influence culture and family, hence influencing the career decision making process.

FAMILY AND CULTURE

Family influence can be difficult to separate, when it comes to discussing the influences in collectivist culture. Rowe (1994) explains this as “limits of family influence” and states that socialisation science has emphasised on “family as the carrier of culture” (p. 220). Family and culture influence are supported by many studies. It is suggested that parents may not directly insist a child to choose a specific career pathway; instead they may have some restrictions around which options to consider (Payne, 2003). At a young age, children may also consider parents being the most significant source of guidance (Payne, 2003). Furthermore, studies show that cultures which are more collectivist have higher family influence on career decision-making (Fulgini, 2007). A research carried out by Kim, Ahn and Fouad (2016) supports that Asian, participants (college students) chose family as being important when making career decisions and the cultural ideology of selecting certain careers as another important aspect. This means they considered both family and culture as being important when making career decisions.

The focus of this research was to look at the career decision-making of Asian tertiary students. Culture and family are some of the main influences on Asian’s career decisions. A study by Okubo, Yeh, Lin, Fujita & Shea (2007) also shows that Asian parents either directly or indirectly “convey their career expectations to their children” (p. 441). Similarly, it is also seen in Asian culture that there are preferred options such as engineering, medical, law, etc, when it comes to selecting a career pathway or jobs, and those specific options would be respected more than others (Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999). Furthermore, in Korean culture economic factors are considered when making career decisions such as selecting medicine or law as career (Kim, 1993). In Chinese culture, family and cultural expectations are given priority over personal interests when making career choices (Okubo et al., 2007). In another study, a comparison showed that first grade Japanese students gave importance to family preferences whereas, American students preferred their personal interests when considering career decisions (Taylor, Wang, Van Brackle & Kaneda, 2003). In addition to this, Mau (2000) found that in comparison,

Taiwanese students depended on social aspects and preferred collective decision-making, and considering their own choices or interests was not a priority, whereas American students believed in making career decisions based on personal interests. In addition to this, career progression and success in Asian cultures differs from what is considered success in the US (Okubo et al., 2007).

Additionally, the study by Okubo et al. (2007) showed that some participants, aged 16-19, expressed that they would not select a career pathway related to “art” because their family or cultural concept of art is that it is not a financially stable career option. Some participants from the study by (Okubo et al., 2007) expressed that parents imposed a certain career option, such as going into teaching rather than nursing. In the same study, some participants also expressed that family would recommend a career that a relative is in, or they are familiar with, rather than selecting something that is new to them. Furthermore, in a study by Gokuladas (2010) it was revealed that individuals from a collectivist culture were influenced by social or interpersonal aspects that would value others’ opinions and would sacrifice their own interests for their family or their societal responsibilities. These social and interpersonal relations could be family, friends, teachers or society which is also derived from cultural values (Gokuladas, 2010). Another study showed that for American students, success is their skills or aptitudes, while Chinese students referred to their efforts or perseverance as their success (Mau, 2000). Additionally, Mau (2000) has explained that individuals who feel more balanced by influences around them feel more comfortable or find it easier to make decisions while those who are dependent on others to make choices feel less competent when making career choices. It is difficult for an individual who is highly influenced by culture or society, and is pressured to make an independent career choice or follow their own desire.

The research by Fouad, Kantamneni, Smothers, Chen, Fitzpatrick & Terry (2008) revealed that cultural values also place an emphasis on the expectation of children doing well at school, studying hard, and preferably choosing a medical career pathway. In addition to this, the research also revealed that in some Asian cultures gender inequality was apparent. In a similar study by Fouad et al, (2008) a participant from Japanese culture mentioned that her career choices were not considered important as she would be married, and the career would not directly benefit the family. This could be relevant to many Asian cultures and way of thinking. Fouad et al. (2008) also stated that all participants in the research mentioned gender discrimination, and pressure of representing a culture and keeping its values. Moreover, Singh and Sharma (2017), also support the idea of family, and specifically parents being major influencers on career decision-making. However, it is also explained that even in today’s world

where social media is one of the major influences, family and sociological factors are still taking the lead on influencing individuals in their career decision-making (Singh & Sharma, 2017).

Family's influence on selecting a career that is prestigious and guarantees an acceptable job is supported by some researchers (Bratcher, 1982). Researchers also support this aspect by stating that "career decisions for young adults may be directly influenced by the quality of family interaction" (Hargrove, Creagh & Burgess, 2002). In addition to this, Indian parents place emphasis on professions that will provide financial stability, when considering their children's future (Inman, Howard, Beaumont & Walker, 2007). Furthermore, children making career decisions as per their parent's choice are financially supported by their parents to achieve their studies (Roysircar, Carey, & Koroma, 2010). It is stated that, Asian Indian parents pressurise their children to have highly paid jobs, and this is related to their own desires and insecurities and is more connected to their immigration status rather than cultural values (Inman et al., 2007). This means that due to the parents' migration to another country, mainly due to wanting to provide a better future for their children, they expect their children to do well financially and find a career profession which offers job security. Moreover, this is also seen in Korean families. They also desire their children to have highly paid jobs, which also results in family conflict and their children not enjoying their chosen career (Roysircar et al., 2010).

Family communication

Family relationship is considered an important aspect in making career decisions (Fouad, Cotter, Fitzpatrick, Kantamneni, Carter & Bernfeld, 2010). Communication amongst families can have positive or negative influences on career decision-making. Segal (1991), states that communication amongst parents and children in Indian families was poor, as it was expected that children would listen, and parents would speak. Additionally, research shows that a "level of parental attachment also appears to play an important role in the career decision-making process, as higher levels of attachment are related to improved career related outcomes such as increased self-efficacy" (Fouad et al., 2010). Moreover, in past research undertaken by Fouad et al. (2010), the Asian American participants expressed that their career pathways were already chosen by their parents from a very young age. They were selected according to what is acceptable in their culture with consideration given to what was gender appropriate, or selecting it according to what could be expected from a child. According to Hwang (2006) "the active and passive choices that children make in retaining, changing or surrendering cultural values can place children at risk of developing relationship difficulties with their parents," (p.402). According to Leung, Hou, Gati and Li (2011), some traditional cultures in Chinese communities

maintain their traditional values. It is stated that "... especially young persons to fulfil their parents' expectations and obey their wishes to show respect to parental figures, and to maintain interpersonal harmony through their choices and actions. In contrast, Western cultural values often encourage individuals to be independent in their thinking, judgement and choices, and to pursue personal goals and career fulfilment" (Leung et al., 2011, p. 12). However, it is also seen that coming from a traditional collectivist culture, can cause a conflict in making important decisions, as due to migrating to a country that may follow the individualistic culture and by being exposed to the individualistic cultural values, yet meeting the cultural and family expectations of following a collectivist style of thinking (Hwang, 2009, as cited in Leung, et al., 2011). Additionally, in research which involved Chinese University students, findings showed that students who followed the traditional and modern cultural values faced the most difficulties when making career decisions compared to those who selected either the traditional or the modern values (Leung et al, 2011). Similarly, students whose parents had high expectations from them in terms of their academic achievement were also likely to have faced difficulty in career decision-making (Leung et al., 2011).

In Malaysian families, the younger generation are expected to show respect to family by obeying their decisions and also looking after the aging parents (Sumari, 2006). In a research carried out by Shah, Dwyer and Modood (2010), findings revealed that Pakistani children understood the value of education and considered it important in order to succeed. Families also stressed upon higher education and gaining qualifications to earn respect in the family. One of the participants mentioned, "You get a lot of respect if you've got a good job," (Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010, p. 1114). Another participant mentioned that she wanted her daughter to attend university because, "I think it's a kind of status that comes with it" (Shah, Dwyer & Modood, 2010, p. 1115). Through this study, it was also revealed that parents considered their daughters gaining education and choosing career pathways for their own financial security which is supported by the new norms in the society to make women more independent (Dwyer & Shah, 2009).

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is "a person's judgement of their ability to carry out particular actions or activities... the belief that one is competent, or potentially competent to carry out a particular job is likely to have a big influence on a career's direction towards or away from such jobs" (Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2015, p. 119). In addition to exploring forms of family interactions and making a career decision, Hargrove, Creagh and Burgess (2002) reveal in research carried

out on undergraduate student participants, that students with higher confidence levels came from families who stressed upon achievement in school, open communication, and involvement in other activities such as cultural activities. In contrast, lower confidence was mostly noted in students who belonged to families where the focus was more on religious, ethical issues, values, and expressing emotions like aggression and conflict existed (Hargrove, Creagh & Burgess, 2002). Inkson, Dries and Arnold (2015) also agree with this and state that those with “low efficacy beliefs across a range of different activities may have difficulty finding career options” (p.119).

According to Hall (2003), self-efficacy is highly affected by family values, rules, and the environment of a family. Additionally, it is states that parents’ judgment on children’s abilities contributes to them making those career choices (Sumari, 2006). According to Kerka (1998, as cited in Sumari, 2006), “The proponents of this approach stressed the interaction of personal attributes, external environmental factors, and behaviours in career development” (p. 28). If people believe in themselves and have set goals regarding their abilities to achieve something, they would put the same amount of effort in achieving those goals (Sumari, 2006).

Paternal influence

In a research carried out by Dunes, Cho and Kwak (2009) which explored college preferences and the influence of parents, it was shown that Asian female participants expressed higher paternal influence compared to male Asian participants. In addition to this, it is revealed that a father’s emotional attachment to a child predicts academic success (Chen, Liu & Li, 2000). Fathers as the main influence could be attributed to their working status, so their focus is more on education compared to mothers, who are housewives and their priority is more about care (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). Further, it is explained that “traditional Asian fathers hold the role of more authority as the family patriarch” (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008, p. 212). This may be the reason for adult children being more comfortable at expressing their disagreement to any decisions that may have been undertaken by the father, to their mothers (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008).

CAREER PRACTICE AND CULTURE

This system theory framework could be used for career counsellors to understand the influences surrounding an individual’s career decision-making. Fouad and Byras-Winston (2005) state that career counsellors should not only recognise cultural values of their clients but also their background and how society has shaped their way to success or if they consider themselves

unsuccessful. Though it is expected that career counsellors should have knowledge about the cultural values of their clients, they may not have full knowledge of cultures other than their own or might have limited knowledge. Furthermore, it is also explained that a finding revealed that individuals have same aspirations, but how they interpret these are due to different cultural or ethnic backgrounds, and it changes the experience (Fouad & Byras-Winston, 2005). In addition to this, it is also seen that some career counsellors might make assumptions based on stereotypes about Asians selecting engineering, science, teaching, etc. In relation to this, Leong and Grand's (2008) research showed that "Asians were stereotyped to be more likely to succeed as engineers, computer scientists and mathematicians" (p. 23). Furthermore, Shen, Liao, Abraham & Weng (2014) state that Asians are over-represented in science and technology career pathways and understated in social services and humanity pathways. Furthermore, Shen et al., (2014) explain that these stereotypes reflect that due to the importance of cultural values, they result in choosing these pathways.

CONCLUSION

The literature review in this chapter examined various aspects of culture and family influence on career decision-making. It outlines what factors a person from an Asian cultural background may consider when making career decisions. The literature review also explains that the Asian culture is a collectivist culture, and values sharing responsibility for the family and the wider community. Various researches in this section explained through a comparison that in a collectivist culture, individuals give importance to family and cultural values whereas, in an individualistic culture, personal values and interests are more important. It is also explained that there are specific career pathways in the Asian culture that are preferred amongst the society, and are considered more prestigious over other career pathways. Furthermore, family communication amongst families is another aspect discussed in this chapter and how this is a factor in increasing self-efficacy in individuals. This aspect also supports that Asians consider cultural values important in how a family communicates. For instance, respecting parent's perspectives and asking for their advice before making any decision, but specifically career decisions. The focus on family communication and self-efficacy is also discussed in this research to understand the link between them. Family communication can have an impact on the level of self-efficacy in individuals. Moreover, paternal influence is also discussed and the reasons behind this specific influence on a decision-making process of Asians. Other factors and some background on psychological and sociological perspectives are explained and how these career decisions are made by considering these perspectives. Systems theory framework

further explains and supports the environmental and sociological factors that individuals encounter while making career decisions. In addition to this, self-efficacy is discussed in this chapter, which supports a person's individuality and shows how their thoughts differ from the rest of the family's ideas or choices. Self-efficacy also supports an individual's ability to make and commit to a decision. The next chapter will outline the interpretivist paradigm used in this research and the qualitative approach, which best support this research and explains about the interview method used in the research.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research was to discuss the role of culture and family influence on career decision making of Asian tertiary students. This research will contribute to the career development existing knowledge base, specifically discussing culture and family influences on Asian's career decision making process. It will also improve services provided by career advisors in understanding Asian students, when discussing their career options. This research followed an interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach to carry out face to face interviews. The interviews explored the role of culture and family influence on the career decisions of Asian tertiary students. This chapter will also discuss the role of the researcher, the interview method and the recruitment process which was carried out in the research. I have also included my personal career-decision making experience in this section, to share how the role of family and culture influenced my career-decision making process.

INTERPRETIVIST PARADIGM

The research paradigm which best applied to my research topic was interpretivist paradigm. This research focussed on how individuals interpret influences around them and how it affects their career decision-making process. According to Scotland (2012), realities are built individually and every individual interprets their own reality. Similarly, Mack (2010) states that the idea of interpretivism is that research cannot be understood accurately through observing it from outside, instead it should be understood through people's direct experiences. Furthermore, Cohen et al., (2013) state that interpretivist research is understanding social reality through different participant's perspectives. This supports the role of family and cultural values that are analysed in this research. Scotland (2012) supports that "interpretive paradigm does not question ideologies; it accepts them" (p. 12). Furthermore, viewing this paradigm through ontological and epistemological conventions, Mack (2010) states that individuals would interpret and understand events their own way. There would be several different perspectives on one event and meaning is explained through individuals and their own personal experience and interpretation of the experience (Mack, 2010). Cohen et al., (2007) also state that the "social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are participating in it (p. 19).

The individuals who participated in this research have shared their stories and experiences in the social world to express how they interpret the role of culture and family influence in their career decision-making. As this paradigm allows and respects researchers own perspectives and allows individuals to express their experiences and accepts them, I have shared my experience in this research work. This was important in this research because the rationales for this research were my personal experience and my professional experience. I wanted to share and link both experiences in this research to help career specialists and student advisors, who assist tertiary students with their career or course decisions, to better understand different experiences and views of individuals.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

I specifically wanted to study the Asian culture because I am Asian (Pakistani). Also, during my professional experience, as a student advisor, Asians have identified a strong influence of culture and family on their career decision-making process, which interested me to expand this area further. I have briefly mentioned my experience in the introduction. I consider myself as highly influenced by both culture and family when I was making my career decision. This is part of the reason why I wanted to explore this area of career development and other Asians' career decision-making experiences. As a final year secondary school student, I was very confused as to which career pathway to select. My family did not help much in terms of choosing a career pathway. However, my father suggested that I should undertake further studies in science, but never enforced it or encouraged it. He recommended science because he considered this to be a respected profession in society and because he also studies science. The general concept in Pakistani culture and some families is that females can choose any career pathway, as they will be married later and what they choose as a career does not matter. This made me feel helpless and I felt that I should choose any subject, because then at least I would have a degree. However, in contrast in my culture, a male's career pathway will be carefully considered and career options such as doctors, engineers and teachers would be recommended.

When my brother was choosing his career option, he was strongly advised to select engineering. Even for females if a career option was suggested, it would most likely be science related. This is either due to ensuring financial security or to safeguard the family's reputation. Another reason why males have more pressure of carefully selecting a career pathway, which ensures financial security, is because Pakistani culture is also a collectivist culture and it would be expected of the boys in the family to be responsible or the main earners for the family. They also become the main carers of their parents in old age. I do feel that if my family had helped

me at the time of selecting a career pathway, I would have chosen a different pathway. Another negative aspect, I still face today, is that my sister chose to do architecture, which is a known field and financially secure, whereas the career I chose, is not a recognised pathway. When interacting with people from the Pakistani community, I have felt that my career pathway as a student advisor has no value or is not considered a “proper” pathway. But as for my sister, her career pathway and job is highly regarded. This could also be because in Pakistani culture, financial status is valued, and the known pathways are valued. The Pakistani culture and society consider the “known” pathways to be popular as mentioned above, and that everyone understands and is well earned. My personal experience helps me understand the way Asian families or students make their decisions and the importance of family and culture for them in making their career decisions. I can relate to their experiences and the students also feel comfortable expressing their thoughts to me because they know that I understand their situation and may be able to provide them with advice that would suit both them and their families.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The research approach that best applies to my research is the qualitative approach. Mack (2010) states that interpretivist paradigm also supports the qualitative methodology of research. According to Stake (2010) “qualitative research is sometimes defined as interpretive research” (p. 36). Merriam (2002) explains that qualitative research also focusses on individual’s experiences and how they understand their experiences. Furthermore, qualitative research enables individuals to express their opinions and share their perspectives about their experiences, reflecting upon them and analysing them rather than solely relying on data gathered in a form of numbers and then measuring it (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2011). Mutch (2005) explains some features of the qualitative research approach as lived experiences and several realities. In this research the participants have shared their own experiences and each experience is different and they have all shared their own opinion on the influences.

Newby (2014) shows that by employing qualitative methods, individuals are supported to make sense of the world their own way and how they deal with their emotions, relationships, and expressing how they feel about these emotions and feelings. Their experiences are drawn from the individuals and by using the qualitative method, it helps gather accurate information in its original form. This also supports that, as everyone has their own story to tell and own experiences to share and how they interpret their experiences, there is no single truth. Additionally, Newby (2014) states that the qualitative approach collects the evidence in any way

available or applicable, and classifies any patterns in the findings to provide reasoning and to provide what the causes are. Newby (2014) also identifies imagination and understanding, the main tools of qualitative research. This research also provides an understanding of the family and culture influences on career decision-making and the participants have expressed their feelings and emotions about their direct experiences and each experience is unique with some general similarities.

Role of the researcher

There is a slight point of difference in the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach, as explained by Mack (2005) that when referring to the role of a researcher. When using the qualitative research approach, researchers can become subjective because researchers do not use a hypothesis and involve themselves in the research. In contrast, in interpretivist paradigm, the researcher has an objective perspective when analysing the findings. They must carefully analyse the data by creating links to their assumptions, “so that the data informs the researcher about what is going in the environment, instead of the researcher’s own preconceptions” (Mack, 2005, p. 8). By using both interpretivist and qualitative approach, I believe I could be both subjective and objective in my analysis. I did not have a hypothesis, but I had my personal experience and professional experience to share and relate to, thus creating assumptions about what the participants might say. When analysing the findings, I wanted to find out what other people thought about the influences and then create a link to my own experiences or assumptions to understand how it was similar and/or different. In addition to this, the interpretivist approach not only looks at an individual experience, but also about understanding social realities and what is happening in the environment. In contrast, qualitative approach mainly focusses on individual’s lived experiences, emotions and feelings and how they view these experiences. The analysis carried out in the findings and the discussion chapter was performed through patterns that emerged from the descriptions and ideas from the participants in the interviews. The themes that emerged from the participants stories were; cultural respected or preferred career choices, style of family communication and its influence and financial security. As an Asian, my cultural influence has also helped me identifying patterns through the participants stories and analysing the themes. Furthermore, my professional experience as a Student Hub Advisor, which includes assisting prospective and current students with their course selection and as first point of contact also assisting them with their career choices, it enabled me to understand and analyse the participant stories because of my experience with Asian students and their career decision-making process.

INTERVIEW METHOD

In qualitative analysis, it is beneficial to have good communication skills in order to accomplish an in-depth analysis of the findings (Keegan, 2009). This is essential in this research, as I selected interviews to conduct my research so that participants could openly communicate their feelings and opinions. Interviews were conducted in a way that the participants can openly communicate their feelings and opinions. I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews to allow participants to feel comfortable in sharing their story or experiences.

Interviews

I conducted face to face, semi-structured interviews with current Asian tertiary students, enrolled in an undergraduate or higher programme and who had previously experienced a career decision related to their studies. I interviewed a total of six Asian students who agreed to participate in my research. I chose this method to understand the experiences better by respecting participants' emotions attached to their stories, as body language is part of how people communicate. Researchers also refer to interviews as dialogs, to reproduce the shared information in an informal manner (Keegan, 2009). According to Keegan (2009) the interviewing process can be conducted in groups or individually. I selected to interview the participants individually. Additionally, there are many ways interviews can be conducted such as face to face, by phone, or online etc. In addition to this, Stake (2010) explains that "it takes a really good interview or survey question for most interviewees to get deeply into the complexity of the thing being studied" (p. 97). During the interview, at times, I experienced that the participants would only answer briefly, and I had to ask other questions to get them to explain more or go into detail. When the participants appeared to not understand, I gave them examples from my work experience as a student advisor to help them understand what my question was trying to imply.

In addition to this, to better understand their views and experiences, I asked them how they would advise their children about their career choices. I asked them about this to understand how they might relate to this experience, if they were in the role of parent and how would they prefer to advise their children or others about giving career advice. I also asked them to elaborate on general cultural ideas about selective career options and what they thought about it. The semi-structured interview enabled the participant to feel comfortable that I understood the culture and their experiences. It was also a learning experience for me as a researcher to

develop strategies to better understand the participant's stories.

The interview was conducted in a comfortable setting of the participants' choice to ensure ease in expressing their opinions and experiences. Interviews were conducted in a private room or private spaces. All interviews were audio recorded, and transcribed. I made notes during the interviews on responses to the interview research question and the sub-questions, to analyse the similarities and differences, and the patterns. This is further explored in the findings and discussion section where the findings are compared and analysed with the literature review.

Open-ended questions

I chose to use a semi-structured format to allow a semi-structured interview and kept the interview informal and asked open-ended questions to allow participants to be open about their views. Scotland (2012) has recommended using open-ended questions, open-ended interviews and observations, as some of the research methods to be used for the interpretivist paradigm. Furthermore, it's recommended that researchers should try to find information that they are looking for or that is specific to the research, but at times it may be better to construct open-ended questions for the interview (Stake, 2010). Additionally, qualitative approach gathers information about individual's stories, opinions, etc. I asked participants questions relating to culture and family influences, which enabled them to reflect and consider how they made that decision and what influenced them to make those career decisions. The sequence of the interview questions was structured in a way to gather stories and for participants to fully express their experiences. The interview questions (Appendix A) below helped unpack the stories of the participants during the interviews.

Cultural influence

- *What are the positive and negative aspects of cultural influence on career decisions for you?*
- *In what ways did you feel empowered and/or disempowered by culture influence when making a career decision?*
- *What is the role of personal interest (as in contrast to collective) in making a career decision?*

Family influence

- *What are the positive and negative aspects of family influence on career*

decisions for you?

- *In what ways did you feel empowered and/or disempowered by family when making a career decision?*
- *What is the role of personal interest (in contrast to collective) in making a career decision?*

Quotations, first person and narrative styles were used in the findings chapter which is also a feature from the qualitative research approach.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited from the tertiary institute where I am currently employed. The recruitment criteria included students who self-identified as Asians, who were completing an undergraduate degree or higher, and who had experienced a career decision related to their studies. Some examples of a career decision were: considering further study, selecting a programme of study, selecting a major, minor and papers, or ideas for career options after study, etc. I approached relevant student Asian networks about the possibility of attending events to advertise my research. I emailed and distributed advertisements (Appendix B & C) to the university's diversity manager and to other people who organise events for the Asian community. Due to the nature of my role as a student advisor, I chose to advertise my research to avoid selecting students who I had seen in my role as a student hub advisor. I wanted to avoid any issues related to power, whereby clients might have felt obliged to participate in the research because I had supported them. This was another reason why I also did not recruit through my own department. The participants volunteered in response to the advertisement which included my contact details for potential participants to contact me. An email was sent to potential participants who contacted me about participating in my research, which included instructions on the consent form (Appendix D), and information about the project on the participant Information Sheet (Appendix E). Participants were also advised that they had full freedom to answer questions as they wished, expressing their own opinions and experiences, and that they were not under any pressure to answer all of the questions. All participants' names were kept confidential and participants were informed that only pseudonymous names would be used. I addressed the individuals with respect, during the recruitment process and subsequent interviews, and established hierarchies connected to age and status, which are deeply embedded in Asian culture. This created an environment in which individuals were treated with respect and dignity. The participants were also asked again at the interview, if they still wished to participate in the research. According to Lapan et al., (2011), participants

should be able to withdraw from the research without any consequences and participants were given the freedom to withdraw from research at any time. Once the participants agreed, they were given a consent form to sign.

Ethics approval

Ethics approval was sought and gained through ethics committee on 21st November 2019. Reference number 19/401

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

This table presents the names of the participants as pseudonyms, their ethnicity, age group they belong to, gender and the career pathway they relate to.

Table 1

Pseudonyms	Ethnicity	Age group	Gender	Career pathway
Alayana	Malaysian	20-30	Female	Completed Industrial Design degree
Lewis	Japanese	40-50	Male	PhD- Sports and Exercise
Leena	Iran	30-40	Female	PhD- Nutrition
Maya	Pakistani	30-40	Female	PhD- Sports and Exercise
Shilpa	Indian	30-40	Female	PhD
Tom	Malaysian/Chinese	25-35	Male	Completed Computing degree

CONCLUSION

Thus, the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach, both support this research. This research was designed to explore individual experiences and their social realities, to better understand how the participants' experiences have been influenced by their family and culture. Through the qualitative lens, the lived experiences of the participants and how they feel and view these experiences, were analysed. The recruitment process was carried out after the approval of ethics application. Face to face, semi-structured interviews were conducted, to gather participant's stories. The interviews were voice recorded and open-ended questions were asked to allow participants to express their experiences openly. The next chapter will examine the findings revealed through the

interviews and through participants' stories about their experiences during their career decision-making process.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will reflect on how my research questions were answered and the findings that emerged from these interviews. I will be sharing the thoughts and opinions of the participants and emerging themes from the findings. Each participant's response to the interview questions were described and analysed. The analysis was performed by establishing patterns through participants opinions and descriptions. The analysis is supported by qualitative and interpretivist methodologies and through my personal and professional experience with Asian culture. The findings are explored in this chapter under each interview question:

- *Positive and negative aspects of cultural and family influence on career decisions.*
- *The role of personal interest in making a career decision.*
- *Feeling empowered and/or disempowered by cultural and family influences when making a career decision.*

PARTICIPANT STORIES

Positive and negative aspects of cultural and family influence on career decisions

The participants were asked about what they may describe as positive or negative aspects of cultural and family influences on their career decision-making process and how they felt about these experiences.

Lewis's career has always been in education and in his culture, it is considered respected and he did not see any negative aspects of his career decision. He said:

"I've always been a teacher and I guess in my culture it's seen as a noble career. So, I guess it's all positive. I don't see any negative. The only negative of our culture on the teaching profession is that we don't get paid a lot."

In contrast, Tom considered it positive that Asians understand that those career pathways were financially stable. He said:

"On the positive side; I mean we Asians actually know that these fields [law, medicine,

engineering, IT] *actually earn the most income. At least we know which pathway is more stable.*”

“I’m from Malaysia and Chinese as well. So basically, Chinese people are, I mean, in their culture, the expectation is that it’s better that they pick up things [choose subjects] like engineering, law, medicine, my choices are just limited to those. Based on how much budget we have. I mean, I have 2 options, either I go to IT or engineering. But at least I have options. So I chose IT.”

A negative he mentioned was that for Asians it becomes a stereotype that we do not have the opportunity to explore other fields such as arts, design etc and are only limited to selecting the specific career choices (engineering, medicine, IT, etc.). He considered the stereotypes being a negative aspect of the cultural influence and agreed that these stereotypes existed.

On the other hand, Leena expressed that her family encouraged her to gain further education. She said:

“My family themselves were very encouraging in terms of me furthering my studies. My father is retired academic staff. He was one of the biggest motivations in my life. He was pushing me to do my PhD to further my career in research.”

She also expressed that at times, she felt pressure from her family to pursue further study. Although, she did not specifically say this was a negative influence but she expressed it in a way which indicated that it may have been a negative influence.

“When I was doing my Master’s in Malaysia, I felt pressured that maybe that’s not the way I meant to do things.... my parents they all wanted me to start my PhD immediately after my Master’s and I was feeling very pressured, but I didn’t, I started working as a volunteer interpreter for few years. During that time, I was just thinking and to see whether that’s the things I really want in my life to pursue my education or start working I finally came to conclusion that also my interest as well so I better to go and do my PhD and after that and start working as a nutritionist.”

Leena’s response was interesting as she mentioned specifically about family pressure. However, she took her time to take the decision to pursue further study. This also shows that perhaps, due to that earlier pressure from her family for Leena to undertake further study, influenced her strongly and she thought about following that advice rather than continuing to look for jobs. Thus, this shows that the cultural value of the role of her parents was important and she needed to follow their advice.

For Maya, the positive was that family helps you decide a pathway and the negative was that all your relatives and friends gave advice and professions such as becoming a doctor for girls or an engineer for boys were suggested. She said:

“The negative influence is they [family and friends] tell you to do something and not to do something. They think some of the professions are gender biased for example there is a general perception that all the girls have to be the doctors so that they can be that “Rishta material” (marriage worthy) and engineering is for the guys. Especially the marketing jobs are not recommended for the women.”

Maya mentioned a different perspective from other participants about the influence of gender in Pakistani culture. I personally can relate to this being from the same culture. These thoughts have been instilled in us from a very young age. Having gender biased selected professions, always made me feel very limited to options and if I did not want to choose any of the chosen career pathways (doctor, teacher etc), my career choice was just another degree or not valued. She also mentioned that in Pakistani culture females must select “doctor” as a profession, as that is something considered a culturally positive aspect, for when they have to find a match for marriage.

Maya expressed that her father was very supportive towards any career pathway she chose however, she specifically mentioned that her elder brother was not supportive.

“My father was always after whatever I wanted to become. Like he said okay I’ll go with you and support you financially... But my elder brother was like whatever profession [she]I would choose he’d say no no not the right profession then he would say, and I was very disappointed because of him... then I had to like take this hard decision and I stood for myself and do [chose] politics and international relations.”

While, Alayana said she considered herself lucky that her parents did not force anything on her. They did, however, ensure that she was confident in what she was choosing. They tried to convince her to choose something other than architecture or visual art degree, but she chose industrial design and it was her own choice. However, she did later mention that she always wanted to pursue a creative career pathway and that helped her convince her parents. This shows that although she considers this to be her own choice, due to parental influence, from a young age she wanted to pursue a creative career pathway.

“So, I think I always wanted to do a creative career. Which has sort of helped me convince my parents.”

She mentioned that her parents are both from a poor background, so their concern has always been around job security. So, when she was considering career options, she did a search on career pathways that were creative and offered good job opportunities. Her father believed that audiology was a good career pathway and tried convincing her towards health fields related to product design, saying that the future is going towards those career pathways. She said:

“They [parents] did kind of say oh are you sure? Like do you want to do this. Definitely pushed me towards something that they thought was a more tangible role/job so away from like architecture degree or visual arts degree.”

Alayana also mentioned her parent’s concern about job security for her.

“My parents come from Malaysia so they both have come from quite a poor background so both of their careers have been sort of around job security and finding a job that would provide for them and that they could rely on.”

In contrast to Alayana, Shilpa expressed that she found her parents pushing her, as a positive aspect. Her father specifically always pushed for being educated. She mentioned that being from South India, they emphasised education. She explained that her parents were different as they didn’t necessarily put pressure on what to study like medicine, engineering, etc. She said:

“They were like study whatever you want to study but be the best in it, people should come, and they should seek your advice, you should be an expert in whatever you want to pursue.”

Her father said that both his daughters must attain a Master’s Degree. Shilpa wanted to start working but her father said she must attain a Master’s before entering employment. She mentioned the strong influence from parents but did not consider this influence as negative. She said:

“I had actually thought of getting, starting work after my Bachelor’s Degree but he [father] said no you have to have a Master’s Degree and then you can do whatever you want after that and now I’m doing my PhD of course ‘cause I’m heavily influenced by what my parents said.”

This also shows that although she made her own decision of going into PhD, it is still influenced by parents and what they had advised her.

She mentioned that at her school, her friends would talk about science, but she was not doing well in science. Her parents also said she should take arts/humanities instead of science as her parents understood that she was not doing well in that subject. Like some other participants, she also mentioned father as her influence for pursuing further study in PhD.

“I was heavily influenced by my dad. He was like yes, do PhD, do the best, do whatever you want.”

The role of personal interest in making a career decision

The participants were asked to explain about the role of personal interest in contrast to collective, when making their career decisions. The purpose for this question was to explore if it their own choice based on personal interest or whether they considered it as a collective choice?

Lewis was in the family business initially, which was what his father wanted him to do and then he made his own decision to move towards teaching. He was influenced by his experience in teaching martial arts, which was also his personal interest. He expressed that he did not feel any cultural pressure from family. However, his father did want him to be in either business or law but later realised that Lewis wanted to make his own career choices. He said:

“Specifically, my father was pressuring me to be either in business or a lawyer but ultimately, he just let me do what I wanted. Initially I had that pressure from him. After a while he realised that you know I had my own mind and I made my own decisions.”

He further went on to say:

“My father especially, pretty much left me alone. When he realised or when he saw that I was really stirring towards this career and at that time, I wasn't really supporting my family.”

It was also interesting to know that although he considered his chosen profession as his own choice, it was reinforced in his culture as a respected career choice. This may have been a reason for him choosing this as his career option. This career option is one of the career pathways that

is respected in Asian culture and is a preferred career option in society.

Similarly, Tom expressed that in Chinese culture, it is an expectation to select career pathways such as engineering, law, medicine etc, so he felt limited to those choices and chose IT. He also explained that the career pathway he chose was also somewhat his own interest. He said:

“I do have personal interest.... Like if my first option doesn't go, I will go with the second option. So, becoming a biologist was my first option. But since so much stuff happening [in terms of deciding with family], I had to go with my second option. It is part of my personal interest like I kind of like the computer stuff like hardware software stuff, so I fix some of it myself.”

He also said that he considered his first choice (biology), which was what he wanted to do personally, as a hobby and he did not want to pursue his hobby as a career. It was interesting that he identified biology as his hobby. However, from the Asian cultural perspective, sometimes, people identify subjects that are their own choice or interest as a hobby or something they enjoy doing. He said:

“I do have this belief my own personal belief that I don't want to bring my hobby into my career. Because I won't be able to enjoy it as much.”

Perhaps, he thinks this way about his first preference or his personal choice, just to satisfy himself with the decision he had to make for the family. He also said that he feels that due to his parents being more experienced in life, their opinions are valued. This is also an Asian cultural value, which is further explained in the discussion chapter.

“Parents do live longer and see much more stuff than compared to us, so their opinions are quite valid. It's better that we try to understand what they are trying to say instead of trying to argue it out.... I mean they are trying to give whatever they can to you.”

On the other hand, although Leena said that her career choice was her own decision and personal interest, she considered her father being an influence from a young age, and this also impacted her decision. Leena mentioned feeling pressured as her family wanted her to start her

PhD right after her Master's Degree. However, she made her own decision and started working and after some time decided to start her PhD.

She said:

"I chose this pathway by giving it some thought. I didn't just start this without any thinking."

Family influence can also be seen in her career decision-making, as she expresses that her chosen career pathway was because her father was in teaching.

"Because my father was also teaching health sciences so I was introduced to this field of study from an early age..... I was always thinking that if I ever wanted to continue my studies to Bachelor and Master's, I would do it in some health sciences and that's why I studied nutrition in my Bachelor and Master's and of course now in my PhD."

Similarly, Maya expressed that her father was always supportive towards her decisions and supported her financially as well. But she mentioned that her elder brother did not support the professions she was choosing. She had to move away from home to study in another city and her brother did not approve of this. However, she stood by her decision and moved to pursue her studies. She expressed that:

"I wanted to become a doctor because that was something fed into my brain since childhood. But then I couldn't make it do the medical school. So, I changed my mind. I said why not look at some other things. Going into politics and international relations was my personal choice but after doing my Mphil, I wanted to do some job or go for a PhD but the time gap was not my choice. I had wait eight years to switch back to my studies."

This is also interesting as she mentioned that becoming a doctor was instilled in her from a young age, which is why she initially decided to go towards that pathway. However, she clearly mentioned that later she decided to pursue her studies in politics which was her own choice.

Alayana spoke of environmental factors being an influence and mentioned a strong influence

by her parents on her career decision. For example Alayana expressed that she grew up in an environment where her parents had a workshop to work in, which shows the creative side of her family, that may have influenced her to choose a creative industry as her career option.

“I think it’s also ‘cause I grew up in an environment that was what we did whereas a lot of people I know they’ve been building things and make things with wood in home workshops in a family environment they grew up in. Yeah so definitely on a smaller scale something creative but I’d rather do.... I think umm doing product design was actually probably quite heavily influenced by my parents in rich respect.”

She said it was mostly her personal interest, but parents agreed to her going into that profession. Although, they did mention other more known pathways such as architecture and audiology, but she convinced them she wanted to undertake industrial design, as this was her personal interest and she wanted to go into this field of study.

Similarly, Shilpa said that she knows parents from her culture who put pressure on their children to study medicine. In the job market in India, people are required to be qualified with the minimum of a Master’s to find a good job.

Shilpa expressed that she considers her career decision as her personal interest and believes that personal decisions have been a part in her life. There is a pressure now to complete her PhD and she is reminded that she is now twenty-eight.

“Personal decisions have been a major thing in my life so far. I ask my parents what advise they will give me? But they haven’t necessarily forced me. But there is always that, now as a PhD student and at this age there is that pressure, finish, finish soon.”

This also shows the importance of family communication and seeking advice from parents before taking any step.

Feeling empowered or disempowered by culture and family influences when making career decisions

Participants were asked about how they felt about their career decision overall. Whether

they considered it empowerment or disempowerment by the influences from family and culture on their career expression.

Lewis said that his culture *“makes him decide this way so it actually reinforces my career choice”*.

The career he selected was not on top of the list, which is created by people of that culture. He explained:

“It’s not on the top of the list right. Like being a lawyer or a doctor but maybe in the middle of the list. So, it’s still being reinforced I suppose by my culture. So, if I meet people and I tell them that I’m in education, they don’t look down on me.”

Although, he expressed that he does not feel financial pressure to support the family, his parents have always supported him financially. He felt relieved that he had family support financially and did not have the pressure of that. Lewis’s brother also chose education as his career pathway and neither of the two children chose to undertake law, which is what Lewis’s father wanted them to undertake. He also mentioned:

“My parents weren’t really typical Asian parents. They weren’t really showing off their children or comparing their children with other children.”

“It’s not as prestigious as a doctor but still it’s honourable.”

Lewis expressed that his parents wished for him to succeed in the career choice he makes. He said:

“My father, before he passed away, when he was sick and then he found out that I got a job here at AUT, just a part time job, he was so happy.”

In contrast, Tom expressed that he felt disempowered at first because he wanted to become a biologist, but his parents did not agree to it. He also expressed that he understands his parent’s perspective and considers it to be for his own good. The advice they are giving is based on their life experience, so it should be valued.

He felt empowered to choose a field that he is also good at. He mentioned that he argued with parents to express his choice of career. He said:

“I did actually argue with them pretty hard. So, I mean I did go through that kind of phase and I did take some time to realise everything to take it slow. I can’t really push this kind of stuff to my parents.”

However, he likes what they chose for him, which was a computing or IT career pathway, or perhaps he now developed an interest in that field because he has to work in that field. He said:

“I believe that if I really became a biologist, I would be more comfortable and more passionate about it.”

Tom also mentioned that he is the eldest of the siblings and said:

“I do think extra more before I take any decision. I have to become some kind of role model for them.”

Further, Tom expressed that in regard to empowerment, when he was deciding, he thought that if he chose what his parents wanted, they would support him but if he chose something else, he would be on his own.

“I mean in terms of empowerment, if I go the way they want so basically, if I want anything, they might willingly support me. So, if I go the other way, so I have to do the things the hard way.”

Similarly, Leena also expressed that she felt both empowered in some ways and disempowered in some ways. She said, once she made the decision to pursue PhD everyone in the family supported her. They supported her financially and emotionally. When she was younger, she wanted to learn music, but her parents disagreed. She expressed that:

“They didn’t like the idea and I think that stopped that and I think I didn’t want to continue then.”

She also mentioned that they didn't like the idea and said:

“Especially as a girl back in my culture around fifteen years ago. Now the situation is getting better and better.”

She said she sometimes feels that if she followed her dream of learning music and pursuing it as her career pathway, her life would've been different. She said:

“Sometime in my teenage years, I really wanted to go and learn some music instruments and have it as my career later on, I don't know. But when I just talked about it with my parents, they were just very different. They didn't like the idea and I think that stopped that and I think I didn't want to then.”

“In a good way maybe. Sometimes I feel like that but now I'm here. But I'm still happy from the choices I made.”

Furthermore, Leena mentioned the culture was changing in regards to gender equality in terms of career decisions. Supporting both genders with education, is now becoming the norm. She said:

“It used to be like that but now it's just getting equal. I mean the family are equally supportive like financially supporting both their girl and their daughters and their sons so it's just equal.”

Her brother is also in health science and she believes even for him, her father was the influence. Leena gave an example from her family that her aunty forced her daughter to take engineering instead of arts, saying arts is just a *“hobby not a profession”*.

Moreover, she said that in her high school days in Iran, when she visited the counsellors, they also encouraged towards pathways such as engineering, medicine, etc, and not so much towards arts or sports. She mentioned that her friends were also forced to go into medicine, and they were telling each other that they wished they had to opportunity to study arts or sports.

Leena expressed that those parents in her culture, who forced their children to go into medicine, thought that they were benefitting, but in fact, long term this does not make them happy.

In contrast, Maya felt disempowered because her husband was in the military and due to this, she

could not practice her profession in media. Initially, she thought of becoming a doctor. However, she did not enter the medical school, as she did not meet the entry criteria, and changed her career pathway to international relations. Maya said that she believes parents should discuss career choices with their children and they should also talk to career advisors and after considering options, choose from those options. She said:

“I’m one of those parents that would want children to attain excellence in whatever they do.”

Whereas, Alayana expressed, it was never the pressure but more the comments that made her feel disempowered by family and culture. She said:

“From my parents the pressure was on getting good grades at school and I guess sort of getting good grades now. [They’re] not as involved with my uni with my academia like they were in my high school. That was the thing that mattered to them I think.”

She felt disempowered when her parents or family would talk about her career because *“it’s not a career or an industry that they are very familiar with.”*

She also said:

“I was quite embarrassed to talk about it sometimes around my family and their friends, just cause it seemed sort of dumb, very hippy sort of thing, but it was something I really loved doing but trying to talk to them it was something else I was quite embarrassed about.”

She felt that it was difficult explaining things to them in such new career pathway. Alayana’s parents also thought that not having a *“prescribed route is actually insecure”*. Alayana’s parents sometimes say to people that they do not know what she is doing. She expressed that she feels pressured that she must find a job and work because her parents would prefer her to do that, but she wants to pursue a Master’s Degree. Her parents have always reminded her and showed her different job opportunities. Her family also had some general concerns about some of the professions when she was making her career decision such as, *“engineering is a male dominant field,”* and said the same about architecture, *“it’s hard to make your way up the ladder”*.

Alayana said, her parents have always supported her financially. Her parents have also disagreed on statements like:

“If you like doing something that’s all you should need and they have openly

disagreed with me in saying that yeah, but you, like that's not true like you could be doing something you like but you make no money, you won't be happy doing it."

Her brother is doing a Medicine Degree because he did not know which pathway to choose. Alayana thinks that her brother's only options were medicine or engineering because he was good at science. When he talked to their parents about pursuing his career in physics, they said there is no financial stability or job prospects in that field and then he ended up selecting medicine.

Furthermore, Alayana considers herself more of a "Kiwi Asian" as her parents have been here over thirty years. She also said that she can see the cultural concept of women staying home to raise children, changing in her culture and mentioned that her mother was the only woman in her father's side that was working. She said:

"Women are supposed to stay home and look after kids. But it's changing especially cause we grew up here so..."

Shilpa felt empowered because she feels different from most people around her who are either doctors or engineers. It makes her unique and she feels empowered by this. She said:

"My dad is very proud that we're Master's Degree [students] and we have pursued whatever we wanted. I would feel more empowered."

Shilpa said that when she was young and her career selection was changing, once she expressed to her parents that she wanted to be a flight attendant, she said "my dad was like, don't even think about that". She also expressed that in one of the semesters when she was selecting her electives, she wanted to choose fashion design, but her father did not agree to it. Instead of this option, she selected journalism and social philosophy. She thinks that it is a positive aspect that parents advise their children about career pathways, as they know better. She said:

"Given that my parents are educated, and university graduates they, I think your parents know you quite well."

Furthermore, she said, even if she chose music or dance, her parents would have not worried too much as they come from a family that values cultural dances and it is rooted in children. She said:

"[Get a degree] then do whatever you want to after that, so probably, If I had taken

Master's in Fine Arts they would've still be happy with the decision because it was my decision."

Shilpa gave an example of a family friend whose daughter wanted to take science but her "mum was like if you take BSc, I'm going to disown you. I want you to study engineering - it was for her."

She believes that some parents and students are not aware of career opportunities outside of engineering and medical industries. She also explained that careers outside of engineering and medicine may not pay as much but "if you are industrious, if you are really passionate about whatever you want to do and have the contacts, you can thrive in any kind of career". She also mentioned the importance of having hobbies. She said:

"Me being a dancer, I'm able to connect to people and I'm able to express myself better and also the fact that I come from a different culture, so that gives me different connections with different people."

She gave an example of her cousin who did not get the marks the mother was expecting to get into science, so she told him to take engineering instead so that after four years he can start working. The mother thought that her son did not have the dedication to continue in science.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this section, all participants shared very interesting experiences regarding their career decision-making process. All participants expressed how they interpreted the positive and negative family and cultural influence on their career decisions. It was also revealed through the findings that, although most of the participants felt that their career choices were their personal decisions, they were somehow influenced by family and culture. Perhaps, this is due to how much they value their culture and subconsciously it becomes part of their thought process. Some participants also expressed pressure from their family and culture when they were making their career decisions. The participants also expressed how and why they felt empowered or disempowered by the family and culture influence.

Although it was interesting to find out about all the negative and positive influences explained by all the participants, there was a major similarity which appeared in all interviews. All participants initially did not express that they faced any type of negative influence or direct pressure by their family or culture. Initially, they did not highlight any negative influence and said that they considered guidance from the family, a positive aspect. However, when proceeding further

into the interview and upon explaining their experiences, some difficulties and pressure they felt during the career decision-making process began to appear. Some themes that emerged from this chapter will be further explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the findings in detail by investigating the relevance to literature discussed in chapter one. The themes that emerged through findings were; culturally respected or preferred career choices, style of family communication and its influence (under this theme two sub- themes also emerged, self-efficacy through family interaction) and financial security. The themes that emerged through participants' stories and findings, will be discussed further in this chapter. There were some differences in the experiences that were individually based, which will also be discussed in this chapter.

It is understood by literature discussed in the first chapter that the two perspectives through which career decision-making is assessed, is through psychological or sociological perspectives (Thomas, 2017). If a career decision is considered from a psychological perspective then aspects such as personal interest and job satisfaction are considered whereas, if a career decision is considered from a sociological perspective then environmental factors are taken into consideration Ghuangpeng (2011). The findings in this research revealed that in some cases, individuals may be influenced by both psychological and sociological factors. The systems theory framework (STF) by Patton and McMahon (2014) also identifies and explains the influence of environmental and social factors in detail. Some of the influences include gender, skills, personality, self-concept are all present in the findings and will be discussed in this chapter.

CULTURALLY RESPECTED OR PREFERRED CAREER CHOICES

There are some career pathways that are respected in the Asian culture and are preferred career choices for Asian students. It is understood by literature discussed in chapter one, that Bratcher (1982) also refers to family's influence on selecting a career that is prestigious and guarantees acceptable jobs. It is supported that in Asian cultures there are preferred career options (engineering, medical, teaching, etc), that would be respected more than others (Tang et al., 1999). Lewis said "*I've always been a teacher. I guess in my culture it's seen as a noble career*". This is because in Asian culture, teaching is a highly respected occupation and we are taught to respect them in a same manner as we would respect our parents. He further explained that "*if I meet people and I tell them that I'm in education, they don't lock down on me*". This shows that in Asian cultures, reputation of a specific career pathway is considered when making career

decisions. The reputation of a career pathway comes from cultural values of how that pathway is seen from the cultural perspective or how the society sees it. Teaching is a noble profession in all Asian cultures. Although it is not a highly paid profession, it is a respected career pathway. This aspect argues that financial status may not always be the priority when making career decisions but also whether a profession or preferred career option is respected by the family's culture. For instance, teaching is not a highly paid profession but is very respected, therefore, culture and family would recommend it because of its prestigious status in their culture.

Moreover, some participants mentioned about some career choices they considered but were not supported by family or were discouraged. This creates limited career choices, especially in the changing world and the growing professions that may not necessarily be known fields but have good job opportunities. Tom expressed that "*we don't have much options. So, we can't really explore other sides like arts, design other stuff*". He also mentioned that he wanted to study biology and take that as a career option, but his parents did not approve the option. The reason behind this was that when it is compared to other professions such as IT engineering, it is not a preferred option. This may be because of the job opportunities it offers or that this field may be not fully known to Tom's parents and they were not comfortable with him going into that pathway. Preference is decided based on an occupation's job prospects or financial status whereas, respect is a general concept of how the culture perceives a profession. For instance, doctors and teachers are respected professions in the Asian culture, because of the reputation of these professions in the society and in others' perspective, ultimately making them a preferred option. In contrast, engineering or law are known professions in the society and are financially well paid. This could also be because of job prospects and financial stability. Similarly, Leena expressed that in her teenage years, she wanted to learn some musical instruments and undertake it as a career. She said "*when I discussed it with my parents, they were just very different. They didn't like the idea and I think I didn't want to then*". She briefly mentioned that it is not because they were strict, it was more due to the cultural value of music for girls. She said this was fifteen years ago "*now the situation is getting better but back then*". She also said that "*it was more a gender thing than a financial consideration*". Here the participant has also revealed that the reason behind discouraging music as a career option was more to do with a gender issue in the culture rather than the financial aspect of the career. This is because in the past, most Asian cultures would not prefer girls undertaking music or performing arts as a career option. From a cultural perspective, this was not seen as a respected career choice for women. Even today, in some Asian cultures, it is not a respected field. I am from Pakistan; I

have seen that even today this profession is not respected amongst most families. As Leena mentioned, it is however, changing with the presence of social media.

Leena also mentioned that her cousin was told that she needs to study engineering “*because just doing arts is nothing. We can have it as a hobby but not as a profession*”. Another participant, Alayana, also mentioned that she could hear the preferences in her parent’s tones when they were talking to friends. For instance, “*when they talk about other degrees like oh they are doing THIS like yea he’s becoming a DOCTOR,*” emphasising on the more known careers. Alayana also explained that her brother wanted to study physics and said, “*but my parents were like there is no money in there, no career in that*”.

In contrast, one of the participants revealed that in some cultures performing arts is a respected field. Shilpa expressed that “*my mom even now she says, you should’ve listened to me, you should’ve taken arts so that’s one thing*”. She further explained that “*if I had become a musician or a dancer, I don’t think my parents would’ve had a much a problem with that because I also come from a family that values “Karnatic” [cultural] music quite a lot. South Indians, we are generally rooted to our culture*”. This argues the fact that, while in many Asian cultures, art may not be a preferred option due to either financial security it provides or whether there is no respect for that profession, it is highly respected in other cultures and is promoted. However, there is potential to explore this aspect in further research, as I would like to know whether this mindset would be the same for a male in that culture or whether they would be encouraged to undertake this pathway. Another cultural perspective is that most participants explained that their family did not mind them taking these professions as a hobby but not as a career. Furthermore, Shilpa said that she feels that “*my responses have been a bit different from the general mass. Particularly from the Indian-sub- continent. Yeah, that was the kind of family that I was raised in*”. This shows that although there are shared cultural values, depending on the familial background, or the educational background of a family, this could have a difference in perspective and how the career decisions are made.

Furthermore, Alayana also mentioned that she applied for engineering but just as a backup option. She said, “*I think that engineering is a very male dominant field and they didn’t really want that for me*”. This idea is interesting because even in today’s generation the idea of gender biased career options still exists. This is also supported by Asian culture perspective that engineering is a field for males. Most participants in this research agreed with this perspective

and had shared perspectives on the field of engineering being recommended to males only. This idea may also come from her parents, as she mentioned that they didn't want this for her, so they might have expressed that this is a male dominant field. From my experience, two of my friends undertook engineering and they also expressed that this field is highly male dominant and for females to succeed, they must face many challenges.

STYLE OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND ITS INFLUENCE

Communication amongst families is vital when making career choices. The style of family communication differs in every culture. In Asian culture, communicating with family about all matters is considered very important and, in many cases, has a direct influence on career choices. An interesting finding from this study was that almost all participants dealt with some type of family expectation, but they did not consider this as a negative aspect. They considered the parental expectations as just an influence or genuine advice from the family. Lewis mentioned that he did not necessarily face any direct pressure but said that his father was putting pressure on him to either go into business or law. However, his father later realised that Lewis had his own interests, so he allowed him to follow these. It is interesting how the participant initially did not consider this a pressure but then realised and expressed that there was some pressure from the father to go into business or ideally wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. However, this did not necessarily convince Lewis to change his mind and would not necessarily be considered a pressure from the family but more from the culture and his personal choice of choosing education as a career. He was confident in his career choice, perhaps due to his cultural values supporting him to take education as a career option, which then overcame the family's first choices for him to go into business or law. Also, it may not have been the intention of the family to pressurise Lewis, rather it was how they communicated and advised him about his career decision. The literature in chapter one also supports this and states that Asian parents either directly or indirectly "convey their career expectations to their children", (Okubo et al., 2007, p. 441). Lewis also mentioned that the influence from his culture empowered him in his career decision. This is also due to the reputation of the career choice he made, of selecting teaching as his career pathway.

Similarly, Tom also expressed the pressure he felt from the family and it was interesting that he also did not consider this a negative aspect and more of a positive aspect. Tom said that when he expressed to his family that he wanted to study biology, they disapproved it, but he

did not consider this a negative pressure. He said “*it’s quite fair from their side of argument.... It’s for my own future.... So, I have to take it positively*”. Later, he also mentioned that he argued with them but ended up choosing what the family had decided. He also explained that he feels “*there is a reason to having cultural influence of the positive side, parents do live longer and see much more stuff than compared to us, so their opinion is quite valid*”. This is very common explanation children get from Asian parents. As an Asian myself, I have heard this from parents who try to convince their children to make decisions according to their will. Parents have lived longer and have had more life experience but they may not have knowledge of the current job market. However, Tom also chose to consider this a positive influence. Although, he admitted that it was pressure, he thought it was a positive influence, as he has not regretted that decision. This is also a type of family communication, as supported by Leung et al., (2011) that some traditional cultures in Chinese communities maintain their traditional values. It is stated that “... especially young persons to fulfil their parents’ expectations and obey their wishes to show respect to parental figures, and to maintain interpersonal harmony through their choices and actions” (p. 12).

Similarly, Leena from Irani culture, did not express any direct pressure from family communication but mentioned that she felt that family wanted her to start her PhD right after her Master’s Degree but she made her own decision and decided to work before starting her PhD. She also felt some environmental pressure that maybe she was not making the right choice. She said, “*my father is retired academic staff. He was one of the biggest motivations in my life. He was pushing me to do my PhD to further my career in research*”. Although, she mentioned that her father was pushing her to do her PhD, she considered this to be motivating. Here, it shows that her father is a direct influence on her career decision. In the literature above it is also suggested that in Iranian culture, the father is the most powerful relation in the family (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). In addition to this, it is revealed that father’s emotional attachment to a child predicts academic success (Chen, Liu & Li, 2000). The father as being the main influence could also be because they are working fathers, so their focus is more on education compared to mothers, who are housewives and so their priority is more about care (Tsai-Chae & Nagata, 2008). This inevitably becomes her own interest.

In addition to this, Alayana also expressed that she chose industrial design as her career option. Her parents did not directly force her to change her career pathway but gave her other options such as audiology and medical product design. This is because in their perspective, these career

options would offer more job opportunities. This is also a style of family communication where parents recommend some career pathways. She expressed that she felt uncomfortable when her parents would talk about what she was studying because they did not understand her subject area well. Alayana also mentioned that, *“It was never the pressure but a lot of comments. From my parents the pressure was on getting good grades at school”*. This highlights that doing well at school was a priority which is typically seen in all Asian cultures. Fouad et al., (2008) found that cultural values also emphasise on the expectation of children doing well at school, studying hard.

Familial pressure

Another interesting factor related to cultural and family pressure which Tom mentioned was that he had younger siblings and he had to be a role model to them. Although, this does not directly influence his career decisions, it does indirectly put pressure on him to make careful choices so that his younger siblings follow his example. This also typically seen in Asian cultures where elder siblings have the pressure of being a role model when it comes to making career choices. If they make the right choices or choices as per their parents’ choice, the younger siblings will not be able to argue and will follow in their footsteps. Lewis also mentioned that his younger brother also chose the field of education as his career pathway. Perhaps, this was also an influence of the older brother.

Leena mentioned that her friends faced pressure during their final year of high school, as their parents were forcing them to follow a career in medicine. So, this shows that while Leena did not face any direct pressure for choosing a pathway, her friends, from the same culture, were highly pressured to choose something, they did not want to do. Furthermore, Maya also mentioned the presence of familial pressure on her decision-making. Interestingly, this pressure has come from her brother. Her brother did not support her with her career choices, whereas her parents were fully supportive. In Pakistan, it is commonly seen that elder brothers in the family are given importance too, when girls are making choices. This is because Pakistani culture is a male dominated culture. According to Hakim and Aziz (1998) in the Pakistani culture, the eldest male in the family has the authority and is considered the most respected and superior. Also, brothers are guardians over sisters in this culture, they have the responsibility of ensuring that their sisters are keeping the cultural values and choosing careers that are respected in culture and society. A family’s patriarch is considered the leader and is responsible for the

main decisions in the family. The sons in the family are raised in a manner considered dominant and are protective of the family (Hakim & Aziz, 1998). Although, this concept is now changing, this idea still exists in some families. Although Maya's brother indirectly caused pressure for Maya, having the support of her parents proved to be empowering in her career decision-making process. This enabled her and gave her the confidence to follow her interest in politics and international relations. The literature review in chapter one of this research also supports that education is valued in the Pakistani culture and girls are encouraged to gain education to secure their future. In Pakistan it is also common that people would hold the minimum of a Master's Degree. Being highly qualified also gives you a respected status in the society.

Further to family pressure, Maya also mentioned that her daughter's friend, who is from India, faced family pressure and undertook a degree in New Zealand but later changed it to something he was interested in. He was worried about disclosing this to his parents as they would be upset to hear about his decision. This shows an extreme example of the family pressure faced by many students who are undertaking studies as per their parents' choice, which results in either failing or changing career pathways during studies. During the years of my professional experience, I have witnessed many examples, where students complete one to two years of their studies, and then change to a different pathway because of their continuous failure to complete. When asked why they are studying in that area, the response is that their parents wanted them to. I have also met with students who complete a degree for their parents and after graduating, undertake another degree which interests them, as they do not want to pursue a career in something that does not interest them. These are some examples of familial pressure, but the concept of negative family influence or pressure still exists. This is also supported in the literature review chapter one about familial pressure on career choices (Okubo et al., 2007).

Furthermore, Alayana mentioned that when her parents were talking about her studies with family and friends, she did not feel comfortable about her parents discussing her career pathway because she was embarrassed about it, as these conversations made her feel "*dumb*". She explained that product design was not considered a prescribed pathway in her culture, which may have made her parents feel insecure about her choosing that pathway. This shows that it does not put direct pressure on her from her family but indirectly it does make her feel insecure about her profession. This reminds her about her cultural values and whether her career pathway is a correct choice and respected in the society. This idea of a new and not a typical career option, and her family not fully understanding its value, also comes from cultural influence.

The mindset of talking highly about the known career pathways rather than encouraging children to go into a relatively new pathway, comes from cultural values and societal influences. She expressed that despite all this pressure and influences around her, she made her own decision to continue with the pathway she selected. She also feels that her parents' creative background has been an influence in her selecting a creative career option, hence her parents had to support her.

Similarly, Shilpa also mentioned doing well in studies and that her parents always pushed her to do well in whatever she does. Shilpa explained, *"They didn't necessarily exert the pressure that you study engineering or medicine or whatever, they were like study whatever you want to study but be the best in it"*. She further said, *"for my dad the cut off is, you have to have a Master's Degree"*. She also mentioned that she thought of working after her Bachelor's Degree, but her father enforced that she must attain a Master's Degree first. She also said, *"I'm heavily influenced by my parents"*. This is interesting as it reveals that the pressure may not necessarily be on selecting a career pathway but also on how well children are doing in their studies. This is also supported by the literature in chapter one. Shilpa's experience shows that she also did not consider her family influence to be negative and said, *"I think it is a good thing that parents' guide you, because they know better than yourself"*. Although, her parents did put pressure on her for her studies, she considered this a positive.

Self-efficacy through family interaction

Family interaction or communication also leads to another interesting finding, self-efficacy. It was interesting to see that most of the participants had high self-efficacy. The reason for this could be due to good family relationships and interaction. According to the literature review self-efficacy is found when an individual thinks differently from the rest of the family or makes other choices compared to family's ideal thoughts or norms (Hargrove, Creagh and Burgess, 2002). In this research Alayana, Lewis, Maya, Leena and Shilpa all had high self-efficacy hence being able to make their own career choices and being able to convince their families. Alayana, remained strong with her decision to undertake industrial design, despite all other options her parents were giving her and the discussions about other careers. She also mentioned that she considers herself to be a *"Kiwi Asian"*, which may have also contributed towards her career choice and having high self-efficacy. Similarly, Lewis was also determined to undertake education as his career pathway, despite his father pushing him towards law or business. Maya

was determined to undertake political studies despite her brother's discouragement. Leena decided to work after her Master's Degree despite the pressure from her family to continue immediately onto her PhD right after the Master's. These are all great examples of self-efficacy which shows that although they all belonged to Asian collectivist culture, where people make choices based on cultural values and what is best for family, they were determined to fulfil their own desires and follow personal interest. However, it is interesting that they did not necessarily go against family's decision rather, convinced the family through positive interactions and their relationship with them. The literature review also explains that self-efficacy makes a person believe in themselves, which eventually leads to confidence and fulfilling desires (Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2015).

The literature review in chapter one also supports that parental attachment with children plays a vital role in making career choices. Parental attachment and interpersonal relationships also increase self-efficacy (Fouad et al, 2010). All participants expressed having a good relationship and communication with their families, except when it came to career choices and options. Also, it is because of this good understanding that most participants in this research expressed that they were confident enough to make their own career decisions. Inkson, Dries & Arnold (2015) describe it as "a person's judgement of their ability to carry out particular actions or activities...the belief that one is competent, or potentially competent to carry out a particular job is likely to have a big influence on a career's direction toward or away from such jobs" (p. 119). Lewis explained that although his father wanted him to go into family business or choose law, he convinced him that he wanted to choose education. Alayana, also made her own choice but as she had a good relationship with her parents and with open communication, she was also able to convince them. Similarly, for Maya and Leena, they also followed their own desired pathway but with family's approval and support. This supports the idea that this is the way Asian families communicate and make decisions. As a cultural value, children must seek approval from the parents or family, and discuss their options before making any decisions.

The only case that was different from all others was Tom. He was unable to convince his parents to support his choice career. There are many factors involved in that. The literature review in this research suggests that in Chinese communities, young people are expected to maintain interpersonal harmony through choices they make, and respect cultural values and their parents' wishes (Leung et al. 2011). Regarding this Tom expressed that he was concerned for his elderly mother and he feels that everything she did was for his own good. This shows that although his

family did not support him for his interests, he has an attachment to his mother, which helped maintain that relationship and respect for the family. Hence, making choices accordingly. Also, for Shilpa, she was brought up with the idea that she had to do her best in whatever she does and attain the highest level. She was able to maintain this even until today, hence, she decided to complete her PhD. This also shows her respect and value for the family and culture that she was able to fulfil her father's decision.

Another interesting aspect appeared in Shilpa's experience, which portrayed parents judging their children's abilities when making career choices. Shilpa mentioned that her parents, specifically her mother told her not to take science, as she was not doing well in the science subjects. Her mother encouraged her to take arts because she judged her ability and thought she would do well in arts. She also gave an example of her cousin, who wanted her son to undertake medicine. However, as he could not obtain good grades, she told him that he should undertake engineering, as he does not have dedication to complete a medicine degree. These judgments from family also sometimes cause confusion for children and highly influence their decision.

FINANCIAL SECURITY

Financial security is one of the factors considered by Asian students and their families when considering career options. Most of the participants in this research expressed that from a young age, their career choices were either personal interest, considering job prospects, and some also mentioned that they made their choices based on what family chose for them and then developed an interest in that career. In addition to this, personal interest is a vast term and could be related to hobby and choice as well. In this research, participants were specifically asked about personal interest and they considered some of their personal choices as personal interest, and family choices eventually becoming personal interests. Payne (2003) supports that, at a young age, individuals may consider their parents being the most important source of guidance for career decision-making. When the participants expressed that they chose their career pathway based on parent's advice, they are considering parents as their main source of guidance. Hence, trusting their advice and later developing an interest because they are already in that field. Furthermore, when participants mentioned about considering job prospects when making career decisions, this is related to financial security. This is supported by Okubo et al., (2007) who revealed through their research that Asian parents do not recommend "Art" as a career option because of it lacking financial stability.

Findings revealed that most participants mentioned about financial security or receiving financial assistance from the family. Previous studies (Dheer & Lenartowicz, 2017; Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003; Inkson, Dries & Arnold, 2015) show that in Asian cultures, which is a collectivist culture, it is found that individuals add to the society and to the wider community. This refers to contributing to family financially and by adding to family's reputation, it indirectly contributes to the wider society. Due to shared cultural values, they make similar career choices, such as selecting similar pathways like medicine, engineering, law, teaching etc, as seen in other studies (Leong and Grand, 2008; Shen et al., 2014). Lewis mentioned in his interview that, the teaching field is not well paid. Tom also mentioned that *"we Asians actually know that these fields actually earn the most income. At least we know which pathway is more stable"*. He referred to the fields of engineering, medicine etc. Maya mentioned that when her stepdaughter was selecting a career pathway, she wanted to select psychology, but her father said she should go for something *"that has got more jobs"*. Alayana expressed that her parents were concerned that she should choose a career that would provide job security. She also expressed that after she graduated, she wanted to continue into a Master's programme but felt pressured to seek employment. The findings support the fact that financial security is an important aspect in the Asian culture when selecting a career pathway. This could be because in collectivist cultures, individuals share the responsibility of the whole family rather than just themselves. Through my professional experience, I have seen people who are working overseas and sending money back home to families to support them. They are more concerned for the family than supporting themselves. This concept also exists in my own family and culture, where parents are living in a different country, but their children send them money to support them or vice versa.

Through the findings, it is also revealed that families have also supported their children financially. It was also interesting that both male participants specifically mentioned about jobs and finances. This could also be because in most Asian cultures, the main financial responsibility is placed upon the male members of the family rather than the females. Lewis has categorised the teaching profession as a job that is not well paid and has considered this a negative aspect about his career choice. Similarly, Tom has categorised that engineering and IT are well paid professions, hence it is a preferred choice for him. However, the financial aspect for Alayana is slightly different and refers to job security due to her parents' background, and for her to secure her future in ensuring that she can financially support herself. In addition to this, the finding clearly shows that both male participants have shown concern for finance

whereas, for most female participants, finances were not the main concern or influence for their career decision-making.

All participants have mentioned that they have had financial support from the family throughout their studies. This is also related to cultural values, that family or parents would always help, even when children are employed and independent, parents will support their children. This also relates to the aspect that Asian cultures are collectivist and financially supporting each other comes from the cultural value of financially supporting each other. Lewis expressed that *“in fact up to now I turn to my mother for financial help”*. This supports that in Asian cultures, it is normal for children to live with parents even up to the age of thirty or over. I can relate to this with my own family and Asian friends. Also, through my professional experience, I have met students who are receiving financial support from their parents, even for their postgraduate studies. The collectivist culture supports the idea that parents would always support and mainly financially help is expected from parents in any way possible. Similarly, as a cultural value, children would be expected to support their parents at an older age. It was also interesting to know that if you decide to follow your personal interests, the family will not support you. Tom expressed that *“if I go the way they want so basically, if I want anything, they might willingly support me. So, if I go the other way, I have to do the things the hard way”*. This shows that if the child decided to follow their own desired pathways, they feel that they will not get financial or emotional support from their family. So, they feel they should follow what the family desires. Perhaps, this also shows the lack of confidence that may have affected the individual’s thinking impacting on their ability to make independent decisions. This comes from the strong influence of family and the culture surrounding the upbringing of the child. This is also supported in the literature (Roysircar, Carey, & Koroma, 2010), that children choose the options given to them by parents because parents are financially supporting them for their studies.

Additionally, it is also mentioned in the literature (Inman et al., 2007) that parents’ pressure to select highly paid jobs is also related to their own insecurities or because of their own experiences. Alayana mentioned this in her interview and said that her parents were both from a poor background and their main concern was job security. Hence, the advice they gave her was also that she should choose a pathway that gives her job security. This is because as a cultural value, thinking for their children’s future, they do not want their daughter to struggle as they did for jobs and financial security. However, she also mentioned that she was always supported financially by her parents and feels that she has *“safety net”* around her. From a

collectivist cultural perspective, this shows that parents or family want to always keep their children under their protection and keep supporting them while they can. This also shows that perhaps preferences for careers such as engineering, doctor and lawyers etc is more to do with the fact that these careers are financially secure and have good job opportunities compared to other pathways. Additionally, it also shows that parents want to ensure a secure future for their children and the wider family in long term. The importance of financial security may also be due to their own experiences of financial hardship, which in turn leads to encouraging children to choose a financially stable career option rather than selecting a pathway that does not guarantee a job.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this chapter, the main themes that were revealed through findings were, culturally respected or preferred career choices, style of family communication and influence, familial pressure, self-efficacy through family interaction and financial security. The differences in the experiences were analysed and explained and the shared experiences were also identified and analysed in this section. The culturally respected or preferred career choices outlined the existence of stereotypes about culturally preferred options for Asians and the reasons behind having these preferred or respected career choices. All participants expressed their experience related to this concept.

Style of communication and its influence was discussed in this chapter, which showed that cultural values and the way people communicate can sometimes be considered pressure but that may not necessarily be what the intention is. However, it is also explained further in the section that, there was also direct pressure from the family, experienced by some of the participants or the participants mentioned someone related to them, who faced the direct pressure from family in choosing a career pathway. Self-efficacy through family interaction outlined that family interaction can have an influence on an individual's personality and their career decision-making. The participant's stories showed family interaction and for some participants this enabled self-efficacy, hence allowing them the confidence to make their own career decisions. Finally, the financial security section revealed the importance of financial security or job security in the Asian culture and some of the recommendations by family to the participants for the preferred career choices were based on financial security.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will conclude this research by discussing the recommendations for career specialists, limitations of the research and further research in the field of family and culture influence in career decision-making.

SUMMARY

To summarise this research, the main reason for exploring this area for research was primarily because of my professional experience as a student advisor, and part of my job which includes assisting students with their course selection, by understanding and listening to students' experiences about their career decision-making process and my personal experience in the career decision-making process. All these factors encouraged me to explore this area further to find out the negative and positive family and culture influences, and whether people feel empowered or disempowered by them, and where does personal interest stand in their career decision-making process.

The literature review provided some past research in this area to explain and understand Asian cultures. The literature review also explains the main influences that impact Asians' career decision-making and Asians as a collectivist culture. Family and culture are difficult to separate, and one might consider them as the same, especially when it comes to expressing themselves about family and culture influences. Self-efficacy was one of the themes discussed in the literature review as that was one of the findings revealed in this research. The STF model by Patton and McMahon (2014) theory supports the findings and helps better understand how the environmental and social factors influence career decision-making.

I have used the interpretivist paradigm and qualitative approach for this research. This enabled me to also share my own experience and to value other experiences. This paradigm also helps understand that individual experiences should be respected and considered as separate views. Interviews were undertaken face to face but only voice recorded.

The findings chapter answers all questions individually by all participants. Initially, I have kept the findings based on individual experiences so their stories could be understood as individual experiences. Progressing into the discussion chapter, the analysis of these findings revealed some similarities in experiences and some differences. The main themes found were financial

stability, culturally respected and preferred career options, family and cultural pressure and influence, and self-efficacy and family interaction.

My main intention for this research is for people and specifically people of Asian descent, to receive the best career advice. This topic also has potential for further research, ideally focussing on high school students who are looking at potentially making their first career decisions. Asian students typically get a lot of advice from their family. However, understanding family and culture and giving advice, accordingly, is a challenge that career advisors need to overcome and improve.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CAREER SPECIALISTS

Career professionals need to develop strategies for working with Asian clients when making career decisions. As a student advisor, at times I feel that I may lack understanding of other cultures and how people value their culture when making career decisions. The same could apply to my colleagues, who may not understand the cultural values of Asians and the role it has in making their career choices. Intercultural workshops should be organised regularly to understand cultures in order to assist clients better, and to be able to understand their experiences. Workshops relating to career decision-making skills for student advisors could be organised for better understanding on career theory and its implementation. Although, this is only a part of a student advisor's role, as we are the first point of contact for the potential students, having career decision-making skills would be an added advantage and would be useful to the department. Career professionals could have some established questions regarding culture and family values, which they can perhaps ask the clients during the counselling session. This would enable them to understand if there is any impact on a client's career decision-making process rather than generalising, and help guide them better. The findings clearly show that participants have their own experiences and these experiences cannot be generalised. However, sometimes there are similarities because of shared cultural values or family values, but that does not mean that all Asians have negative influences from their families, or that they are forced to undertake a specific career pathway. At times, these are assumptions made by non-Asian career specialists and it shows the existence of stereotypes related to Asians and their career choices. Most of the time, these influences work out better for them and what they may have considered a negative aspect, may become a positive later in life.

Furthermore, career professionals need to understand clients' past experiences and understand their story, to analyse and assess any pressure they may be facing when making their career decision. This needs to be encouraged in my current role and to people in similar roles. Understanding cultural values for all cultures and how much these values mean to an individual is important as well, because sometimes, these can be indirectly conveyed but understanding them is important to guide clients' career decision-making. This also relates to working respectfully with clients and perhaps understands why a client is feeling empowered or disempowered by influences around them. This also relates to my rationale for undertaking this research, which was my own experience of making my career decision and feeling disempowered by influences around me and what I had experienced in my current professional role. Through my role, I have seen Asian students struggling to make their career choices and feeling disempowered by their family and culture, leading to confusion. I have also seen Asian students considering the cultural influence as empowerment when they are making their career decisions and feeling confident in these decisions. Additionally, career counsellors could involve the parents of Asian clients in the career decision-making process, so that the parents feel part of it. Career professionals can also provide information sheets about career pathways a client is interested in, and help families who are not familiar with that pathway. Especially, in collectivist cultures where decisions are made collectively, including the family in the decision may be important for the clients. Providing information, especially about relatively new career pathways, would also help family understand what that career pathway entails and what job opportunities it will provide.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

One of the limitations in my research was the range of my sample. I would have liked more first year students and male students to ensure a reasonable representative sample group. Ideally, my aim was to find participants that were in their first year of study as they would have had a very recent experience of career decision-making.

Most of my participants were PhD students, this also limited me in my findings and exploring different experiences. My recruitment of participants' process began in December, which was a limitation on recruiting and finding participants, due to the end of academic year. The restriction of only recruiting from the same university, also limited my chances of recruitment of participants from different age and gender groups. If I was able to recruit from other institutes, perhaps this may have given me more variety in the sample.

FURTHER RESEARCH

There are two areas I would recommend further research. Firstly, focussing only on tertiary students and secondly focussing on final year secondary school students. To create a comparison between the findings from first year students in tertiary study and final year students or postgraduate students. Research could also be carried out with final year secondary school students and the importance of cultural influences for them in making career decisions, and comparison of this with tertiary students. This would also analyse and assess the influences around them and their views on these influences. Additionally, an equal number of male and female participants would also reveal more details and experiences and how experience differs based on genders. The focus of this research was tertiary students and I was only able to get mostly PhD students and more females than males, which limited my findings. Further study in different cultural groups other than Asians, would also reveal some interesting findings to develop this area of study. Focus on specific Asian cultures, would go in-depth with understanding very specific cultural values and what it means for the career decision-making process.

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APPENDIX A

Research Question: What is the role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students?

Role and influence of culture on your career decisions

- What are the positive and negative aspects of cultural influence on career decisions for you?
- In what ways did you feel empowered and/or disempowered by cultural influences when making a career decision?
- What is the role of personal (as in contrast to collective) interest in making a career decision?

Role and influence of family on your career decisions

- What are the positive and negative aspects of family influence on career decisions for you?
- In what ways did you feel empowered and/or disempowered by family when making a career decision?
- What is the role of personal (as in contrast to collective) interest in making a career decision?

APPENDIX B: ADVERTISING EMAIL

Requesting research study participants

Research title: To find out the role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students in New Zealand.

I am studying in the Master of Education programme in the Faculty of Culture and Society, at AUT. I am working at AUT as a Student Hub Advisor. This research will contribute to me completing this qualification.

Please see attached flyer for info about this research and some additional details are below.

- I would like to interview current AUT students who self-identify as Asians, completing an undergraduate degree or higher and have experienced a recent career decision related to their studies. The interview will be conducted in a comfortable setting of your choice on campus to ensure ease in expressing your opinions and experiences.
- I expect the interview to take between an hour to an hour and a half of your time. Interviews will be conducted in English. All interviews will be voice recorded. In case of a follow up, I will email first to check your availability.
- I would like to carry out these interviews in January, so I would appreciate your response before then.
- Participants will be given a small gift voucher.
- If you're interested in participating, please contact me within a week of receiving this invitation on aafia.yasin@aut.ac.nz
- Upon receiving your interest, you will be sent an information sheet with all the details and a consent form.

Thank you and I really appreciate all your help in this regard.

Kind regards,

Aafia

APPENDIX C: ADVERTISEMENT

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

To find out the role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students in New Zealand.

Participants Criteria:

I would like to interview current AUT students who self-identify as Asians, completing an undergraduate degree or higher and have experienced a recent career decision related to their studies. Interviews will be conducted in English.

What is the research about?

Making a career decision is not a straight forward process. It is influenced by many factors, culture and family being two of them. Career decisions are made at different stages of one's life. Therefore, I am focusing on the role of culture and family influence in the career decision making of tertiary students. I am focusing on Asian New Zealand tertiary students, as during my years of practice working as a student advisor and course counsellor, this group is most obvious, when it comes to family and culture influences on career decision.

Please note: You will be asked if you have had any contact with either the supervisor of this research OR the primary researcher, as a student at AUT.

Participants will be given a small gift voucher.

If you're interested in participating, please contact me with in a week of receiving this invitation on aafia.vasin@aut.ac.nz

Upon receiving your interest, you will be sent an information sheet and consent form.

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Project title: The role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students in New Zealand.

Project Supervisor: **Dr Lynette Reid**

Researcher: **Aafia Yasin**

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 17th October 2019.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes No

Participant’s signature:

Participant’s name:

Participant’s Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 21st November 2019 AUTEK Reference number 19/401

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

17th October 2019

Project Title

The role of culture and family influence on career decisions of Asian tertiary students in New Zealand.

An invitation

My name is Aafia Yasin and I am studying in the Master of Education programme in the Faculty of Culture and Society, at AUT. I am working at AUT as a Student Hub Advisor. This research will contribute to me completing this qualification. As part of my research, I would like to interview current AUT students completing an undergraduate or higher programme and who self-identify as Asian, about their experiences in making recent career decisions.

What is the purpose of this research?

Making a career decision is not a straight forward process. It is influenced by many factors, culture and family being two of them. Career decisions are made at different stages of one's life. Therefore, I am focusing on the role of culture and family influence in the career decision-making of current tertiary students at AUT. I am focusing on Asian New Zealand tertiary students, as during my years of practice working as a student advisor and course counsellor, this group seem more influenced by family and culture when making a career decision. Cultural and family influences are often interrelated, when making career decisions.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

I have advertised my research through AUT diversity networks. I am seeking current AUT students who self-identify as Asian, are studying at undergraduate level or above and who have recently made a career decision, to take part in this research. You were invited to participate in this research because you saw my research advertisement, heard me speak at an event about my research or received an email regarding my research.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you agree to participate in my research, you will be emailed a consent form to complete. I will send this to you once you contact me with your decision to participate. Please find my contact details on the form below.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

Please note: during the recruitment process, any students of the applicant will be excluded from participation, in addition, any students with whom I have dealt with in my role as a student hub advisor, will also be excluded.

What will happen in this research?

I will be conducting individual face to face, semi-structured interviews to hear about your experiences of cultural and family influences on your career decisions.

The interview will be conducted in a comfortable setting of your choice on campus to ensure ease in expressing your opinions and experiences. I expect the interview to take between an hour to an hour and a half of your time. All interviews will be recorded, and transcribed. A copy of the transcript will also be emailed to you for further feedback. The interview questions will be related to your experiences of family and cultural influences on career decisions. The interviews will be conducted in English.

What are the benefits?

This research will assist me in obtaining a Master of Education and widen knowledge of research approaches and content. It will also give you an opportunity to shed some light on how you make career decision's, rather than perhaps only viewing this as a routine part of life. It will also give me the opportunity to find ways in which colleagues from AUT in a similar role to myself, could improve support we provide for Asian students making career decisions.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your identity will only be known to myself and the research supervisor. I will use pseudonym's in my thesis and any other publications. This means your name will not be used.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

As a thank you for participating in my research, I will be gifting a \$25 voucher to each participant.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have one week to consider this invitation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Transcripts will be shared with the participants for feedback. You will also be given a summary of the findings after the research is completed, if you request a copy.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Dr Lynette Reid* lynette.reid@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 8206

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz , 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:

Aafia Yasin Aafia.yasin@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Lynette Reid lynette.reid@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 8206