What kind of shoes does a social worker wear? A content analysis of four occupational prototypes

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Abstract

Evidence suggests that occupational prototypes have an impact on career decisions, through the mechanism of self-to-prototype matching, yet the literature provides scant information about the nature of these occupational prototypes. This study examines the prototypes of four common occupational choices of psychology students in the UK (social worker, primary school teacher, occupational psychologist and clinical psychologist). Data were gathered through four focus groups (*N*=24) and were analysed with a quantitative content analysis to produce descriptions of the four occupational prototypes. It was found that the occupational prototypes were detailed and multi-dimensional, incorporating a wide range of features not directly related to the job itself including information about clothing, leisure activities and home décor. Implications for career development theory and career practice are discussed.

Key words: social identity, occupational prototypes, career decision-making, social identity markers, self-to-prototype matching

Introduction

Identity, both personal and social, has been central to career theories in the form of the self-concept since it was introduced to the field by Super over fifty years ago (Super, Starishevsky, Matlin, & Jordaan, 1963). A growing tranche of career theories now acknowledges the important role that identity plays in career decisions, and identity can be seen at the heart of theories such as career identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Meijers, 1998), life design (Savickas, 2012), possible selves (Ibarra, 1999, 2005; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Strauss, Griffin & Parker, 2013) and role identity theories (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Ng & Feldman, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000). Central to these identity approaches is the notion that decisions about career are in large part decisions about identity. Rather than wondering 'What do I want to do?' these approaches suggest instead that those contemplating a career move are considering 'Who do I want to be?'. Implicit in this identity approach are two assumptions. First that a choice of occupation is also a choice of social identity: when an individual opts for teaching, they are making the choice to be a teacher, as well as to teach (Archer et al., 2010). The second is an acknowledgement of the holistic nature of career choices: the boundaries between work and non-work are not always clear cut, and decisions about occupations will inevitably accommodate and impact on life beyond the workplace (Savickas, 2012).

One career decision mechanism which recognises the role of identity is prototype matching (Niedenthal, Cantor & Kihlstrom, 1985), in which choices are based on the similarity between an

individual's self-concept and their conceptualisation of the identity of a prototypical group member of an occupation ('*Do I see myself as similar to a typical social worker?',* for example). Whilst a significant body of empirical evidence establishes the usage of this mechanism in career decisions (see Andersen, Krogh & Lykkegaard, 2014 for a review), little is known about the nature of the occupational prototypes on which these decisions are based.

In this section of the paper occupational identities are introduced, a summary is presented of the literature in which the nature of occupational prototypes has been explored, and the role which occupational identities play in career decisions and the current thinking around the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work identities are spotlighted. The literature which addresses these areas has not been well integrated within career scholarship (Peters et al., 2012) and the section that follows will therefore incorporate descriptions of key terms and an introduction to the underpinning theories and constructs.

Occupational identities

Social identity theory (SIT) was conceptualised by Tajfel and Turner (1986). The theory posits that identity is made up of different elements. Personal identity is the self-knowledge that derives from our uniqueness – the attributes and experiences that are unique to us and make us distinct from all others. Social identity derives from our similarity to others – the attributes and experiences that are shared with others in a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Simply being a member of a group is not enough to confer a social identity; the social identity is derived from the knowledge that you belong and the emotional significance of this membership (Hogg &Terry, 2000). Social identities are important, not just as a way to understand the world (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) but as a way to bring meaning to social life (Haslam, 2014).

The SIT literature offers an account of occupational identities which takes the perspective of those within the occupations themselves. This study concerns the role these identities may have in shaping career decisions. Rather than the occupational identities of those within particular occupations, it is the perception of an occupational identity held by those outside the profession, which is of greater relevance to career decision-making. Those making a decision about joining one particular occupation group will do so from a position in the out-group. It is therefore the occupational identity as perceived by those outside the profession which will have the impact on career choice, rather than the occupational identity as experienced by those within the in-group. One mechanism for storing and categorising perceptions of the world of work is stereotyping.

A stereotype is a belief about someone which is based on knowledge of the group they belong to and the process of stereotyping can provide a cognitive shortcut which helps to make sense of the overwhelming complexity of the world of work (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996). Stereotypes are the result of an information-processing strategy that facilitates quick judgements about others. They are thought to shape the knowledge, beliefs and expectations of others (Hamilton & Sherman, 1996), as they influence the perceptions and representations of people encountered. Stereotypes can have an assortment of features, including personality, behaviour and appearance (Kawakami, Young & Dovidio, 2002).

Rosch and Mervis (1975) suggested that the categories of different groups are better distinguished if the features of a group are put together in a single representation – a prototype. A prototype is a depiction of an average group member and is one mechanism which can explain how stereotypes are represented within cognitive structures. The prototype can represent all the key features of the stereotype of the group, and differences between one prototype and another are easier to notice than between one list of features and another (Brewer, Dull & Lui, 1981). Prototypes are not a list of attributes or defining feature, but are 'fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership' (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p.123) and can include a wide variety of features – values, feelings, behaviours, attributes. Prototypes are thus one particular form of stereotypes in which the most salient stereotypical characteristics and features associated with the members of a group are represented in an impression of a single individual as a prototypical social identity. Prototypes of occupations then reflect perceptions of the identity of a typical member of an occupational group, and it is these perceptions which are the crux of this study. Prototypes are thought to be stored in the form of cognitive schemata (Derry, 1996). A schema is a store of organised knowledge about a phenomenon which has been learnt through direct or indirect experience (Piaget, 1971). The schema acts as a framework within which individuals can store and organise the new relevant information which the encounter. MacKinnon and Langford (1994) suggested that there can be a significant volume of wide-ranging information which is associated with the occupational identity stored.

Consistent with the research into stereotypes in general, the research into occupational stereotypes has focused on demographic characteristics, predominantly gender (recent examples include Forsman & Barth, 2016; Janssen & Backes-Gellner, 2016) but also race (Rosado-Solomon, Porter & Pustovit, 2016) and age (Chiesa et al., 2016). Occupational stereotypes are known to encompass a range of factors, directly related to the role and moving beyond qualities needed for the job itself. Cheryan, Plaut, Handron and Hudson (2013, p.1048) have explained that they 'span multiple components, including traits, behaviors, and physical appearance'. Much of the organisational and career literature published in the latter part of the twentieth century has been grounded in the assumption that work and non-work are starkly divided parts of life (Kanter, 1977; Zelizer, 2005), but there is evidence that the boundaries between work and non-work, and between work and non-work identities seem to be blurring (Cutts, Hooley & Yates, 2015; Ramrajan & Reid, 2013). The breadth of attributes which can be observed in occupational stereotypes echoes the blurring of work and non-work boundaries, and the holistic emphasis within contemporary career theories described earlier.

A review of the research which has focused specifically on occupational prototypes, reveals a more limited range of research. One major study was conducted in 1967 (O'Dowd & Beardslee, 1967) and found that U.S. college students had clearer images of the non-work aspects of occupational prototypes than work-related features. More recently considerable relevant empirical work has been conducted on the occupational prototypes of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) careers. Prototypical occupational identities of computer scientists are of persons who prefer to work independently and who are intelligent, with an obsessive interest in code (Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010). As far as an occupational prototype is concerned, both the desire and the ability to develop good personal relationships is thought to be limited in computer scientists (Hannover & Kessels, 2004). Prototypical scientists are envisaged as brainy (Archer et al., 2010), hard

to understand (Sjoberg, 2002) and, 'dull, authoritarian, abstract, theoretical fact-orientated and fact-overloaded' (Taconis & Kessels, 2009 p. 1118), and prototypical accountants are thought to be structured, precise and solitary (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). The literature which examines these occupational prototypes however is patchy and does not offer a clear taxonomy of factors that are typically included.

In contemporary career scholarship, it is recognised that career decisions are holistic and that individuals consider factors beyond the nature of the job itself when making choices (Savickas et al., 2009). The prototypes used in some of the studies in this field indicate a holistic understanding of the work of work and include aspects of occupational identities which are not directly relevant to the particular job. Evidence has been found that participants believe that prototypical female scientists are unlikely to have a family (Packard & Nguyan, 2003) and are unfeminine (Kessels et al., 2006). The prototype of a computer scientist (Diekman et al., 2010) is that of a person who enjoys reading science fiction novels (Margolis & Fisher, 2002), has 'geeky' interests (Cheryan et al., 2013), and scientist prototypes are imagined to be pale, thin and bespectacled (Mercier, Barron & O'Connor, 2006).

This body of research suggests that prototypical occupational identities are conceptualised holistically, as these representations include activities and behaviour outside the workplace. This evidence which reflects the holistic nature of conceptualisations of occupational identities then has some synergy with the new paradigm of career theories, but is as yet neither well researched nor well integrated into career scholarship (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). It is this gap in the literature which this study aims to redress, offering as it does a more in-depth exploration of the non-work factors which are associated with particular occupational prototypes.

The role that occupational prototypes play in career decisions is addressed in Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, which emphasises the importance of occupational stereotypes in career decision-making (Gottfredson, 1981). Gottfredson contends that occupational information is stored in the form of occupational stereotypes which are organised into a cognitive map of occupations. She states that in this cognitive map occupations are classified primarily along two dimensions: gender and prestige, and that individuals assess their suitability for a particular role on the basis of the match between their self-image and their occupational stereotype.

More recently, the role of gender-occupational stereotypes in career decisions has taken centre stage in the theory of identity-fit dynamics (Peters, Ryan, Haslam & Fernandes, 2012). Proponents of this theory propose that women who perceive themselves as being more similar to their prototype of a profession are more likely to be motivated to apply for that profession. Their studies explore perceptions of the masculinity of particular professions (for example, marines and surgeons) and provide some compelling evidence that both women and men who perceive a significant difference between their own levels of masculinity and the levels typically imagined in the prototypes of those professions are less likely to choose to apply for those roles (Peters, Ryan & Haslam, 2015).

The cognitive processes which may underpin the influence of prototypes in career decisions has been explained through the mechanism of matching self to prototype (Niedenthal, Cantor, & Kihlstrom, 1985). Hannover and Kessels' model of the self-to-prototype matching process involves

two stages: (a) the individual imagines the prototype for each option under consideration, and (b) compares the defining prototype characteristics with those of the actual or desired self and chooses the best match (Hannover & Kessels, 2004). They report evidence from a series of studies which supports this theory suggesting that the low take-up of maths and science subjects at school can be explained by the gulf between the prototypes of maths and science students, teachers and professionals, and the self-prototypes of the students (Kessels, 2005; Kessels & Taconis, 2012; Taconis & Kessels, 2009).

Prototype matching has also been shown to have an impact specifically in relation to decisions girls make against studying science-related subjects (Rommes, Overbeek, Scholte, Engels & De Kemp, 2007; Ryan, 2014). Taconis and Kessels (2009) found that perceived fit between self and a prototypical science student predicted the likelihood that a group of Dutch and German students would opt for studying science. Research thus links educational choice with prototype matching, but the evidence for this process in occupational choice is more limited. One frequently cited exception is a study by Moss and Freize (1993), who found that students who rated themselves as similar to a particular occupational prototype were more likely, some months later, to state an intention to apply for jobs in that field, but more recent evidence which links the process to occupational choice is hard to find.

One possible reason for the limited range of evidence of the influence of occupational prototypes directly on occupational choice is the range of items used to describe occupational and individual identities in the studies (Andersen et al., 2014). The studies tend to be limited to gender and personality characteristics, most often associated with the job itself. Andersen et al. (2014), for example, used a list which included items such as: *scientists work in a team, scientists are men, scientists need to follow rules* and *scientists are autonomous at work*. The items on their list of characteristics were drawn from existing literature and included those that have been shown to be associated with prototypical scientists and those that have not. Participants were asked to select from the list those characteristics which were associated with their prototypical scientist. These authors have voiced concerns that the items used to measure the self-to-prototypes match may not have covered sufficient ground and suggest that further research should aim to establish the scope of the prototypes which are used in this decision-making mechanism. Our study responds to this call. Mindful of the recent focus on the holistic nature of career choice and identity which could support the proposition that the prototypes which influence career decisions might incorporate a wide range of non-work features, this study aims to make a contribution towards a broader understanding of the nature of the prototypes which may influence career choices.

It is apparent from the literature reviewed that occupational identities are conceptualised as prototypes and these prototypes can be used to make career decisions, but the literature currently furnishes us with no more than a limited understanding of the nature of these prototypical occupational identities. The boundaries between work and non-work are not always clear-cut yet there has been scant exploration to date which focuses on the non-work features which may be included in these prototypes.

This study constitutes a step towards remedying these gaps in the literature. In this study, we explore the nature and breadth of the occupational prototypes held by psychology undergraduates

in London, of four common occupations: social worker, primary school teacher, clinical psychologist and occupational psychologist. Our aim is to identify the social identity markers associated with each occupational identity and specifically focus on the social identity markers which are associated with the non-work aspects of these occupational identities.

Method

Data were gathered through a series of four focus groups, with 24 participants drawn from the psychology undergraduate programme at a university in London. The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim, and a content analysis (Berelson, 1952) was used to generate descriptions of the prototypes.

Participants

Participants for this study were drawn from students in psychology programmes at the University of East London, UK. The programmes provide a foundational training for a relatively small range of occupational choices, such as clinical, occupational or educational psychologists (Prospects, 2015) but psychology students also enter other related occupations such as social work and teaching (Higher Education Statistics Authority, 2014). As a result, students' career choices are likely to be relatively homogenous, but participants are expected to manifest different degrees of career decidedness (Smith, 2011). For these reasons, psychology students were considered to be suitable participants for this study.

Once ethical approval was granted, all undergraduate students in the School of Psychology were sent an email inviting them to take part in the study; 55 students responded to the invitation and 48 agreed to take part. The final number who attended the four focus groups was 24 and each focus group was formed of six students. The students were all female and ranged in age from 20 to 42 years. They were all enrolled in the BSc psychology programmes at the university. The majority (20) of the students were British, along with one participant from each of France, Germany, Portugal and USA.

Data Collection

Focus groups are a widely used form of data collection for qualitative research within the social sciences (Hyde, Howlett, Brady & Drennan, 2005). A focus group allows an insight into the group's collective experiences, and the discussion is structured to allow as much freedom and interaction as possible, whilst maintaining the focus on the topic (Bagnoli & Clark, 2010). Their widespread use has led to a perception that focus groups are a straightforward method for collecting data (Sherrif, Gugglberger, Hall & Scholes, 2014) but they can be complex and challenging and the decision to use them as the data collection method in this study was taken with care.

Focus groups are widely used for exploring new topics that we have little understanding of (Sim 1998) as a significant volume of data can be collected efficiently. The themes are constructed within the group setting (Gough, Fry, Grogan & Conner, 2009) and in this way focus groups are able to capture something of the essence of the 'social construction of experience' (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 172). Focus groups can homogenise views as people with extreme opinions are less likely to voice them in a group setting than within a one to one. This could be a methodological concern in some contexts,

as the views reported by participants may not accurately represent the participants' honest reflections. In this study, however, this could be considered advantageous, as it renders the focus group discussion more likely to constitute an effective route to a better understanding of typical behaviour or sociocultural norms (Sim, 1998).

Preliminary identification of occupations

The occupations selected for discussion were the four most common graduate occupational destinations for psychology graduates at the University of East London (HESA, 2014): primary teacher, social worker, occupational psychologist and clinical psychologist. It was thought that discussions focusing on destinations which might be of personal interest to the participants were more likely to engage the attention of participants. The HESA survey is conducted six months after graduation and identifies the first destinations of more than 80% of graduates from each course in each institution across the UK.

Procedure

A discussion guide provided a structure for the focus groups (Hyde, 2005), incorporating five key areas for discussion: work, family, leisure, material possession, values (Sherriff et al., 2013). The areas for discussion were based on previous literature which covered occupational prototypes, and in the absence of much published work, our own intuition of the kinds of topics which might lead to insightful conversations. Questions included '*What kinds of holidays would your prototype go on?*', '*What sorts of things might they do at the weekends?'* and '*What would they wear to work?*'.

A warm and informal tone was set for the discussions to encourage participants to contribute fully and authentically (Robinson, 1999), and as moderators we ensured that instructions were clear and gave plenty of time for questions. Issues of confidentiality and mutual respect were stressed (Tolich, 2009).

As there were four different occupations under scrutiny, it was thought that a minimum of four focus groups was needed. Participants may perceive the occupations differently depending on the sequence in which they are presented, so it was thought that having four groups would allow each occupation to be the first to be discussed once. This would then ensure that an impact on the validity of the data through order effect was avoided (Eisenberg & Barry, 1988). Each occupation was discussed first on one occasion, and each was discussed by two of the four groups.

Data Analysis

A quantitative content analysis was used to provide a description of the prototypes discussed. Content analysis is at its core a data reduction technique (Berelson, 1952). It is a system for taking large amounts of data and reducing it to meaningful and manageable codes (Rourke & Anderson, 2004). It is a 'systematic, replicable technique for compressing many words of text into fewer content categories based on explicit rules of coding' (Stemler, 2001, p.1). It strives for validity by ensuring that all units wherever they occur in a text are given equal weight in the analysis. The approach can therefore reveal trends and themes.

The process of data analysis followed the steps identified by Zhang and Wildmuth (2010). The data were recorded at the focus group and transcribed verbatim. Codes were based on 'referential units' which are words or groups of words which represent something in a particular way, as this is

thought to be especially useful for identifying attitudes, values and preferences (Stemler, 2001). The units were either single words or short phrases. A coding scheme was devised and categories developed. Codes can be developed from previous theories or other studies (deductive, a priori codes) or from the data themselves (inductive, emergent coding). The lack of existing theory in this field indicated that the codes for this analysis should be developed inductively from the data (Zhang & Wildmitt, 2010). Coding was semantic and included minimal interpretation or judgement. Some of the codes were devised to group synonyms together – for example, '*messy*' and '*chaotic*'. Other symbols were coded under a higher order construct: '*Eastenders'*, '*Coronation Street*' (two popular UK soap operas) and '*Soaps*' were all coded as '*soap operas*'. Codes were applied to the whole body of the text and were checked repeatedly to make sure that they adhered to the original definitions of the codes. The codes were analysed into meaningful categories which helped to make sense of the data.

Findings

An interview guide steered the direction of the conversation, but the structure was flexible and the questions were open (for example '*What else could you tell me about this prototype?*'), and the participants' contributions led to wide-ranging discussions. The breadth and depth of detail uncovered by the participants took us by surprise. On occasions, participants took a few moments to get the detail in focus (*'I'm not quite sure, it keeps changing from black to navy'*) but there was no example in any of the focus groups of a participant who was unable to generate an example from their own prototypical image on any topic, even though the talk focused on minutiae far removed from the occupation itself, including features which might be considered obscure such as what the prototype's partner looked like, the plants they might have in the garden and their favourite food.

The participants themselves too were surprised at the level of detail which they were able to envisage. A number of the participants said that they did not know what an occupational psychologist did, yet the prototypes that they described were as detailed, elaborate and salient as any. Participants who thought that they had no idea what an occupational psychologist did during the working day could still describe their wardrobes and homes, and identify their partners' occupations and pets.

We will now move on to the more detailed results for each of the prototypes. Each occupation was discussed in two focus groups, generating prototypes from 12 participants. Not all students generated items for each code. The codes reported below were mentioned a minimum of three times in the data. Each prototype was described in the focus groups in terms of their demographic features, their appearance, leisure pursuits, personality and political persuasion.

Primary Teacher

Table 1 presents the content analysis of the Primary Teacher Prototype data. The codes are grouped in line with the themes identified, and the number of times each code occurred in the data is mentioned parenthetically.

Table 1 near here

Socio-demographics. The primary teacher prototypes were reported to be mostly female (8) with just four males. They were the youngest of the occupational groups, with 10 students envisaging them in their 20s and two in their 30s. This age was reflected in their family set-ups, with five living in rented accommodation with flatmates, only four married and four with children. Their youth is emphasised with comments about spending leisure time with their parents (4 with just their mum and 3 with their parents). The participants envisaged their prototypes as middle-class, with seven comments on this.
Appearance: The primary teacher prototypes were reported to be dressed smart-casually (6) with flat shoes (5 'flat shoes', 2 'ballet flats' and 2 'comfy shoes').
Leisure: The most common code throughout the entire teacher prototype was 'friends' which came up 11 times in the discussions. Friends seem to play a significant role in the teacher prototypes' spare time, as they meet for a range of activities including going to a pub (4). The primary teacher prototypes enjoyed reading books (9), watching television (5) programmes such as Downton Abbey (4), or soap operas (4). Television was thought to allow the teachers to escape from real life, or as a background to the marking (grading) that they need to do. Holidays might entail lying on a beach (3) perhaps in the South of France, or city-breaks (3).
Personality: The most frequent personality descriptor was humour (6). Prototypical teachers were described as well-organised (4), nice (5) but dull (4).
Politics: Left leaning, politically, the teacher prototype was thought to be most likely to vote Labour (5) but could also be somewhat likely to support the Conservatives (3).

Social Worker

Table 2 presents a content analysis of the codes for the prototypical social worker. The codes are grouped in line with the themes identified, and the frequency of each code is included.

Table 2 near here

Socio-demographics: The social worker prototypes were reported as female (9) and were older than the prototypical teachers, in their 30s (5) or 40s (4). Family seemed to be important to the prototypes (6), including long-term relationships (3 mentions of husband and 2 of partner) and four occurrences of kids. Three were single and three were pictured with a cat.
Home: The most common code was 'chaotic' (10) which applied to the social worker prototypes' homes, although there were two occurrences of homes being described as 'neat'. The garden was seen to be important to four of them.
Appearance: Social worker prototypes were seen as casual dressers (5), more interested in practicalities (sensible 3) and comfort (comfortable shoes 5) than fashion (not-fashionable 3). Two were pictured with a necklace and two with short hair. Clothing might be bought from Marks and Spencer (4).
Leisure: Friends were thought to be important to the social worker prototypes, with six occurrences in the data. The social workers spend a good portion of their weekends engaged in domestic chores, cleaning (4), and shopping (5).
Politics: The social worker prototypes were thought to be left wing (5 voting labour).
Personality: The social worker prototypes' personalities were described as 'nice' (5) and 'warm' (4).

Clinical Psychologist

Table 3 presents a content analysis of the prototypical clinical psychologist codes. The codes are grouped according to the themes identified, and the frequencies are mentioned in parentheses.

Table 3 near here

Socio-demographics: Most clearly, the clinical psychologists were thought to be middle class, with every participant in the two focus groups which discussed this occupational prototype stating this explicitly (12). They could be female (6) or male (5), and most had or wanted to have children (9). The prototypes were generally reported to be a little older than the primary teachers, in their 30s (4) or 40s (4). They were described as likely to have a spouse (5).
Appearance: The phrase which summed up the dominant look of the prototypical clinical psychologists was 'conventional with a twist'. They were usually seen as fairly 'smartly-dressed' (3) or classic (4), wearing perhaps a suit (4) and shirt (3) or jeans (5), but would be fashionable (5) and they might make the outfit personal (3) with accessories (4).
Leisure: The clinical psychologists were considered likely to bring their work home with them (2), but were also thought to have a good social life (3), which might involve spending time with their family (2), and perhaps doing something active (4). When staying in, the clinical psychology prototypes might watch Scandinavian dramas (4) such as The Killing or might read. In terms of holidays, they might enjoy a city-break (3).
Politics: The clinical psychology prototypes were thought to be more likely to be left wing in their political leanings (3), supporting the Labour party (3) and reading the Guardian (3).
Personality: The participants described their clinical psychology prototypes as unconventional (5) and authentic (4).

Occupational Psychologist
The code frequencies for the occupational psychologist prototypes are presented in Table 4. The codes are arranged according to the themes identified, along with their respective frequencies.

Table 4 near here

Socio-demographics: Socio-demographically, the occupational psychologist occupational prototypes were mixed, with nine females and three males, five in their 30s, four in their 40s and two in their 20s. They were described as middle class (4), as being in relationships (4 with a partner and 2 with a girlfriend) or possibly single (3). Occupational psychologists might have partners who work in corporate settings such as banking (4).
Politically: Occupational psychologist prototypes were reported to be politically interested, with four enjoying a political discussion, but tended to be more right leaning than the other prototypes, with four right of centre and four Liberal Democrats.
Appearance: Image seemed to matter to occupational psychologist prototypes (6) with two going so far as to describe their work clothes as a 'uniform'. The image the prototypes wanted to portray was one that is competent (4). It was emphasised that care was taken with their appearance, with four described as 'well-groomed', three as 'polished', three as 'sharp' and five as 'smart'. Their clothes tend to be business-like (4) with six wearing suits, stylish (3 stylish and 3 sophisticated) and fashionable, with 11 occurrences of 'trendy', and three of 'designer'. Female occupational psychologists were likely to be seen in heels (5). At weekends, they were likely to dress down to casual (3). An attractive bunch, three of the occupational psychologist prototypes were specifically described as 'good-looking'.

Leisure: The occupational psychologists were likely to enjoy the outdoors (3), perhaps engaged in sports (3). Holidays might be to the Mediterranean (4) and would be likely to include some cultural activities (4). Occupational psychologists were thought to have an active social life (3) perhaps spending time with friends (4) and family (3).
Personality: The occupational psychologist prototypes were described as professional (7), approachable (5) but were also thought to be clever (3) and controlled (3).

Discussion

Recent developments in career theory highlight the importance of identity in career choice, and research draws attention to the increasing blending of work and non-work identities. Perceptions of the social identities of different occupational groups are therefore pertinent to those making career choices: If an individual is making a decision not just to *teach* but *to be a teacher*, then their understanding of what it means to be a teacher is likely to be important, and the holistic approach to career decision-making favours a holistic conceptualisation of occupational identities, which justifies exploring features beyond the workplace.

In this study, the conceptualisations that female, undergraduate psychology students held of the identities of four different occupational groups (social worker, primary teacher, occupational psychologist and clinical psychologist) were explored. Students were asked to describe their individual occupational prototype – their image of a typical member of each occupational group. Of specific interest were the nature and scope of these prototypes, and the aim of the study was to identify the range of features which might emerge and to see whether the participants' prototypes could incorporate features and details associated with their lives beyond work. Building on, and extending Cheryan et al.'s (2013) findings that prototypes are wide-ranging, the students in this study were asked to describe their prototypes in non-work contexts and a content analysis revealed that students' conceptualisations of occupational identities included appearance, personality traits, political leanings, lifestyle choices, home and family life, and leisure activities.

The prototypes contained a high level of detail. The female students were invited to imagine their prototypes both in work and out-of-work contexts and the descriptions of the prototypes focused on the person as a whole rather than just in the workplace, and the students provided extensive and wide-ranging details. As well as being detailed, the images were nuanced. The university (women) students in this study did not just describe shoes as flat, but differentiated between flat boots, comfortable shoes and ballet pumps. It was noted in the introduction earlier that prototypes are thought to be stored as cognitive schemata (Derry, 1996) and that MacKinnon and Langford (1994) suggested that there may be a significant volume of information associated with the cognitive schema of any given prototypical occupational identity. MacKinnon and Langford (1994) described the schemata of occupational identities as having 'an endless amount of information' (p. 233) which resonates with the high level of detail which the focus group participants offered.

As discussed, existing literature provides some empirical evidence about stereotypical perceptions of occupations. Many of the studies have explored stereotypical characteristics of members of the occupational group, rather than prototypical identities, and whilst there are some exceptions, the research has tended to focus on work-related characteristics. This current study, however, suggests a breadth of detail which has previously not been drawn out in the literature. The female psychology

students in this study were asked specifically to talk about their occupational prototypes more broadly, with questions which invited them to focus on their occupational prototypes both in work and out-of-work contexts. Women students identified a vast array of physical and behavioural identity markers, not limited to work-related features. These included details about what the prototypes would wear (both in the workplace and over the weekends), where they might go on holiday, what their hobbies were, what their homes were like and details about their friends and families. The students in the study seemed to be able to answer any question, and to take the narrative in a range of different directions. Participant prototypes were nuanced with details given about the colours of clothing ('dressed all in black'), the shops they might frequent ('Whistles, or maybe LK Bennet) or the height of the heels on their shoes ('flat boots'). This echoes the subtleties of dress markers that Elsbach (2004) has discussed, including 'the style, color, fabric and accessories of work clothes' (2004, p.102) which, she states, are both intended and interpreted as symbols of work identity. Previous research identifies that occupational prototypes incorporate a range of non-work features (Cheryan et al., 2013; Mercier et al. 2006; O'Dowd & Beardslee, 1967) but as this study explicitly requested information on non-work features, the depth and breadth of the female student perceptions of the occupational identities in this study extends the boundaries of the existing research in this field.

The focus on features beyond those directly related to the job itself is, arguably, a product of the questions the female student participants were asked. The aim of the study was to explore whether or not participants' prototypes were exclusively work-related, and therefore we directed the discussions towards the lifestyles, hobbies and homes of the prototypes. The female student participants were however given ample opportunities to redirect the conversation to more work-related arenas, and chose not to. Some students were explicit about their lack of knowledge about the nature of the occupations discussed, yet those who reported that they had no idea what an occupational psychologist did during the working day could still describe their wardrobes and homes, and identify their partners' occupations and pets. This echoes the observations of O'Dowd and Beardslee (1967) who noted that their participants seemed to have 'a more secure sense of the life-style features of an occupation than its on-the-job demands' (p.3). This study was conducted nearly 50 years ago, yet the findings of both that and the present study indicated that the female university students who participated had an existing cognitive store of information about a range of occupational identities, which was clearer and more elaborate than their knowledge about the jobs themselves. This may indicate that people who are engaged in making career decisions develop their own conceptualisations of the world of work which are based on identities as well as job duties.

The multidimensionality of the occupational prototypes described reflects the blurring of boundaries between work and non-work discussed earlier, which can be seen in career and organisational literature. Contemporary theories of career acknowledge the holistic nature of career choices, recognising that work is not usually considered as a discrete part of one's life (Savickas, 2012) and Ramarajan and Reid (2013) have argued that changes in the labour market have led to the blending of work and non-work, and work and non-work identities. The findings of this study indicate that conceptualisations of prototypical occupational identities too transcend the boundary between work and non-work: the identity of the participants' prototypical social worker encompassed their whole lives, homes, families, leisure pursuits and holidays. This is an interesting new lens through which to view the holistic nature of careers. It is already established that careers are holistic in terms of the

lives of those making the decisions. The findings of this study suggest that people's perceptions of occupations could be holistic too.

The notion of identities is quite well established as a core part of contemporary career theories, but the evidence about how exactly it has an impact on career choices is more limited. Some evidence has emerged of the self-to-prototype matching approach, but although considerable evidence has emerged for the link between prototypical identities and educational choices (for example, Pringle et al., 2010; Taconis & Kessels, 2009), evidence is more limited with regard to a link with occupational choice.

We introduced earlier the career decision-making mechanism known as self-to-prototype matching, in which individuals make career choices on the basis of the degree of match between their self-concept and their conceptualisation of the prototypical identity of the occupation under consideration. The findings of this study may indicate that a broader approach to research may be needed to explore this approach more fully. In previous research, this decision-making mechanism has been examined by asking individuals to rate themselves on a number of qualities which have been considered aspects of particular occupational prototypes. The current study suggests that the range of features of prototypical identities is considerably wider than has been previously imagined, including lifestyle, values, appearance and family as well as aspects of personality. Consistent with Andersen et al.'s suggestion (2014), the findings of this study indicate that a full examination of self-to-prototype matching could usefully consider a broader range of prototype features.

The theory of identity fit dynamics has begun to explore the influence of gender role prototypes on the career choices of women (Peters et al., 2015), and Gottfredson (1981) emphasised the role of occupational prototypes in terms of gender and prestige. This current study indicates that an even broader interpretation of occupational prototypes is needed.

Described in the introduction to this article were studies which demonstrated that occupational prototypes incorporate a range of non-work features (for example Cheryan et al., 2013; Mercier et al., 2006). Whilst there are some overlaps in the type of features identified (including aspects of appearance, family life and leisure pursuits), the specific features of the different occupational prototypes identified in this study are difficult to integrate with existing literature. This study reveals that the female student participants imagined typical social workers to live in chaotic households, primary school teachers to enjoy karaoke and clinical psychologists to live in Stoke Newington. Perhaps the specific details revealed make a less useful contribution than the nature of the details. The association between clinical psychologists and Stoke Newington will only be meaningful for the minority of people who have an internalised cognitive schema of that particular part of London and an understanding of what it means to them. More important perhaps, is the revelation that occupational identities are socio-geographically located in areas familiar to the participants and it would be interesting to explore how that may reflect or influence the career decision-making process.

As underscored already, previous research on occupational prototypes has not explored a wide range of different occupations and has generally focused on personality traits that are relevant to the jobs themselves. In the introduction, the lack of empirical evidence covering the broader features of occupational identities was noted. The multidimensionality of the occupational prototypes described in this study could suggest a new approach to the exploration of self-to-

prototype career decision-making, which could incorporate a wider range of features in the measures used.

Limitations and directions for future research

The focus group interviews aimed to allow the student participants the freedom to describe a wide range of features of their imagined prototypes which came to mind. The semi-structured nature of the discussions, however, meant that whilst the details were generated by the participants, many of the topics were pre-determined. The data could have been further skewed by the social nature of focus groups, which can lead to participants feeling reluctant to disclose information which they feel may be judged unfavourably by their fellow discussants or by the moderators. Caution too should be exercised in the interpretation of the content analysis, to ensure that the frequency of a code, which is what is reported, is not mistaken for significance.

The current study indicates that career decision-makers may have a significant occupational information in the form of occupational social identities which include myriad details pertinent to life beyond the working context. It is conceivable that this knowledge may play a part in occupational decision-making but further research is needed to find out more about the nature of these occupational prototypes and the impact they may have on career choice. This study focused on just four occupations, and collected data from participants all of whom were female and also studying together. Future studies could aim to identify whether the aspects of the prototypes described in this study are generalisable to other occupations or other participants.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions of occupational identities held by 24 female, undergraduate psychology students. Occupational prototypes have been shown to have an impact on career decisions through the mechanism of self-to-prototype matching and this study sheds light on the nature of prototypical identities. The findings indicate that these career decision-makers have clear, detailed and nuanced perceptions of occupational identities and highlight the multidimensional nature of the prototypes. The prototypical occupational identities which have previously been assumed to form the basis of the self-to-prototype matching mechanism were defined in narrower terms that those uncovered in this study, and the detailed and multidimensional prototypes examined here could be used to enhance our understanding of this decision-making mechanism. The findings of the study lend support to the contemporary paradigm of career theories, which conceptualises careers as holistic and intrinsically bound up with non-work roles and identities. The results imply that the notion of a holistic career could be applied to the identities of desired occupational groups, as well as to the identities of those making career decisions.

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Table 1: Primary teacher prototypes: code frequencies*

Socio-demographics	Appearance	Personality	Leisure	Politics
Friends (11)	Smart-casual (6)	Humour (6)	Books (7)	Labour (5)
20s (10)	Flat shoes (5)	Nice (5)	Bike (5)	Conservatives (3)
Female (8)		Dull (4)	TV (5)	
Middle-class (7)		Well-organised (4)	Pub (4)	
Flatmates (5)			Downton (4)	
Mum (4)			Soaps (4)	
Male (4)			Outdoors (4)	
Married (4)			Beach (3)	
Kids (4)			Football (3)	
Parents (3)			City breaks (3)	
Colleagues (3)				

* Numbers in brackets are the number of times the code was mentioned in the focus groups

Table 2: Social Worker Prototypes: code frequencies*

Socio-demographics	Home	Appearance	Leisure	Politics	Personality
Female (9)	Chaotic (10)	Comfortable shoes (5)	Friends (6)	Labour (5)	Nice (5)
Family (6)	Cat (3)	Casual (5)	Relaxing (6)	Children's charity (3)	Warm (4)
30s (5)		M&S (4)	Shopping (5)		
40s (4)		Not-fashionable (3)	Partner (4)		
Kids (4)		Sensible (3)	Garden (4)		
Single (3)			Cleaning (4)		
Husband (3)					

* Numbers in brackets are the number of times the code was mentioned in the focus groups

Table 3: Clinical psychologist prototypes: code frequencies*

Socio-demographics	Appearance	Leisure	Politics	Personality

Middle class (12)	Trendy (5)	Scandi drama (4)	Labour (3)	Unconventional (7)
Kids (9)	Jeans (5)	Social life (3)	Guardian (3)	Authentic (4)
Female (6)	Suit (4)	Reads (3)	Left-wing (3)	Quirky (3)
Male (5)	Active (4)	City-break (3)		
Spouse (5)	Classic (4)			
30s (4)	Accessories (4)			
40s (4)	Shirt (3)			
Family (3)	Smartly-dressed (3)			
	Personal (3)			
	Smart (3)			

* Numbers in brackets are the number of times the code was mentioned in the focus groups

Table 4: Occupational Psychologists Prototypes: code frequencies*

Socio-demographics	**Appearance**	**Politics**	**Leisure**	**Personality**
Female (9)	Trendy (11)	Right-wing (4)	Cultural (4)	Professional (7)
Relationship (6)	Image conscious (6)	Lib Dem (4)	Mediterranean (4)	Approachable (5)
30s (5)	Suit (6)	Political discussion (4)	Sporty (3)	Controlled (3)
40s (4)	Smart (5)		Outdoors (3)	Clever (3)
Middle class (4)	Heels (5)		Active social life (3)	
Partner in banking (4)	Well-groomed (4)			
Single (3)	Competent (4)			
Family (3)	Polished (3)			
Male (3)	Sharp (3)			
	Casual at weekends (3)			
	Good-looking (3)			

	Sophisticated (3)			
	Stylish (3)			
	Designer (3)			

* Numbers in brackets are the number of times the code was mentioned in the focus groups