Prepare and pursue: Routes to suitable (re-)employment

Koen, J.

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"A WHOLE NEW FUTURE"
MOTIVES AND METHODS OF BUILDING CAREER IDENTITY

"You take my life when you do take the means whereby I live."

– William Shakespeare

A major part of who we are is defined by what we do. Just as Shakespeare noted in the late 16th century, the question "what do you do?" remains the most illuminating question to ask someone at the first encounter (Brown, 1978). Work is a central component of most people's identity and can be essential for psychological health (Blustein, 2008; Jahoda, 1982) and this work-related identity, referred to as career identity, contributes to job seekers' chances on finding employment (Koen, Klehe, & van Vianen, in press; McArdle et al., 2007). In general, career identity reflects the value that people place on employment and acts as a cognitive compass that motivates people to actively adapt in order to realize (or create) opportunities that match their career aspirations –turning career identity into a key factor that drives people's employability (Fugate et al., 2004; McArdle et al., 2007). Compared to organizational and professional identity, career identity is not tied to a particular job, role or organization, but derives its meaning from the sequences of work-related experiences (cf. Ashforth & Fugate, 2001; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Fugate et al., 2004; Hall, 2002).

In the absence of work-related experiences, however, people's career becomes less central to their identity. In other words, people's career identity tends to weaken during unemployment (cf. Aaronson et al., 2010; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) provides a possible explanation for this phenomenon. According to this theory, people mentally place themselves and others into multiple, hierarchically organized social categories that together constitute their identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For example, people may define themselves in terms of social categories such as gender, nationality, and being a member of a certain organization. Important in this regard is that the extent to which someone identifies with each category (i.e., the salience of that category) is a matter of degree (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). As career identity can be viewed as one of those social identities, the strength of career identity thus reflects how central one's career is to one's identity (London, 1983; London, 1993). In the face of unemployment, people may decrease the salience of their career identity and increase the salience of an alternative social identity

in which employment does not take such a central place (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Indeed, unemployed people attempt to sustain their well-being by decreasing the value they attach to employment (Warr & Jackson, 1985). Likewise, Meeus, Dekovic and Iedema (1997) showed that as a consequence of failing to obtain a job, unemployed people tend to regard other factors, such as interpersonal relationships, as central to their identity.

Yet, very little is known about the dynamics of career identity when it comes to the reverse transition from unemployment to employment. We do know, however, that career identity is positively –and quite strongly– related to job search activities and to obtaining reemployment, and that career identity can provide guidance in an otherwise unstructured period of seeking reemployment (cf. Koen et al., in press; McArdle et al., 2007; Wanberg et al., 2002). Nevertheless, how people build their career identity after a period of unemployment and what motives underlie such a process of building career identity remains a black box. Given that career identity is a key driver of employability and of securing stable employment, it thus becomes important to examine *why* and *how* career identity is built.

The aim of the current study is to examine the motives and processes of building career identity. I attempt to answer these questions by examining unemployed young adults with interrupted career trajectories during their participation at a unique apprentice program (i.e., "Jamie Oliver's Fifteen"), as the program aims to promote regeneration into employment based on group socialization among disadvantaged unemployed youth (Mitchell-Lowe, 2008). In other words, this apprentice program may help disadvantaged unemployed young adults to build their career identity. Before discussing the findings on why and how these young adults build their career identity, I will give some information on the background and the unique context in which the study was conducted, as well as a brief theoretical overview of previous work on identities and career identities.

Disadvantaged youth

Disadvantaged young adults, typically described as socially excluded and a challenge to help finding employment, face numerous barriers to employment. These barriers can include a criminal record, the stigma of being disadvantaged, having medical needs and a lack of confidence, work experience, qualifications and/or

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education. In western societies, the profiles of disadvantaged and underprivileged young adults tend to look the same: predominantly young men with no or low income, low educational achievement and strained familial relations. Additionally, their career trajectories are characterized by various short-term unskilled jobs and many spells of unemployment (Bynner & Parsons, 2002; O'Higgins, 2001).

These interrupted career trajectories are the biggest factor in the distortion of disadvantaged youth. Many of them are not just marginal to the labor market, they are literally excluded from it – because of family history, restrictions on education and job choices, stigmatized reputations, and so on (White & Cunneen, 2006). A considerable proportion of this group of young adults fails to establish stable employment and faces a high risk of long-term unemployment, aggravating their problems even more (Bradley & Van Hoof, 2005). To illustrate, research indicates that (re)entering the labor market is particularly difficult for the long-term unemployed and for people with multiple barriers to employment (Koen et al., in press); (Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995; Wanberg et al., 2010), and that further material, social and psychological negative consequences may arise from prolonged unemployment (Paul & Moser, 2009).

The concentration of unemployed young adults in particular locations increases their difficulties of finding stable employment even more, but also fosters the social identification with other unemployed young adults (Schels, 2011). Specifically, exclusion from the labor market and from the possibility to build their career identity directs young unemployed adults' attention to alternatives to form their social identity, reinforcing the appeal of street culture and "culture of poverty" (White & Cunneen, 2006). Culture of poverty (Lewis, 1968) is the phenomenon that young adults place little value on employment when they experience many spells of unemployment and (long-term) unemployment among their friends and families (Bane & Ellwood, 1996). Arguably, the career identity of disadvantaged young adults needs to become more central to their identity for them to find their way to stable employment.

Fifteen

Fifteen, a project founded by chef Jamie Oliver and aimed to help disadvantaged young adults find jobs in the catering industry, seeks to effectively address the complex needs of this group in overcoming the aforementioned barriers and in providing them

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with an education. Fifteen is the name of the charitable foundation that uses its restaurants to provide unemployed young adults each year with the necessary training and education to become a professional chef. The foundation's mission is to inspire unemployed disadvantaged youth, including those with drug or alcohol problems, to believe in themselves and in the possibility of becoming chefs (Fifteen Amsterdam, 2012; Jamie Oliver's Fifteen, 2012). Apprentice programs such as Fifteen accommodate temporary paid work while improving employability in a supportive environment. The program includes training and personal development activities, which can help to build confidence and which give an experience of a genuine workplace for a genuine wage, with the reassurance that any criminal record or medical need will not exclude them from participation. In that way, it provides a supportive environment that understands the participants' background (i.e. disadvantaged, criminal record), but that does not exclude them for it.

Taken together, Fifteen aims to give disadvantaged and unemployed young adults the opportunity to participate in society and to stay away from the dangers of long-term unemployment by placing them into a genuine employment environment. Fifteen aspires to remove the factors that bind disadvantaged young adults to continue their previous lifestyle and interrupted career trajectories, by removing economic factors (giving them a real wage and the opportunity to achieve one), by removing social factors (placing them in an environment with others who want to work) and by removing personal factors (helping to change the lifestyle from boredom and frustration into achievement and learning) (Mitchell-Lowe, 2008). Thus, the context of disadvantaged youth participating in the apprentice program at Fifteen yields an excellent opportunity to examine the motives and processes by which career identity can be build.

Previous work on (career) identities

Previous work on identities and the formation of identities yield different assumptions concerning the construction of career identity among disadvantaged young adults with interrupted career trajectories. On the one hand, it is possible that career identity is a prerequisite for a successful reemployment process, as is generally assumed in reemployment and employability research. Fugate et al.'s (2004) notion of career identity as a construct that reflects "knowing why" competencies (DeFillippi & Arthur,

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1994) implies that career identity serves as a goal to direct behaviors aimed at reaching that goal. Indeed, career identity provides the resources to direct, regulate, and sustain behavior (cf. Fugate et al., 2004; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). According to Fugate et al., people assert 'whatever influence is possible' to fulfill desired career identities. Unfortunately, the construction of career identity is implied in employability research rather than being clarified. Employability research thus implies that career identity is or has already become salient to one's identity, but does not give much indication about why or how career identity can be built.

On the other hand, it is possible that career identity is built *during* the reemployment process –or in the case of the current study, during the apprentice program. Two streams of literature may give some indication about the construction of career identity. First, according to developmental theories in psychology, identity is formed through different stages and becomes more stable over time (e.g. Erikson, 1959; Super, 1955). Following Marcia's identity status paradigm (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1966), career identity can be built by exploring different employment options and by eventually committing to one particular career path. In essence, this paradigm holds that two critical dimensions may construct career identity: 'exploration' and 'commitment'. Whereas exploration refers to the conscious and reflexive deliberation of different options, roles and values, commitment refers to the consolidation of these options as probable courses of future action (Cote & Schwartz, 2002).

Although the identity status paradigm gives some indication as to how career identity may be built among the apprentices participating in Fifteen's program, it has predominantly been developed and tested among adolescents facing regular career perspectives. The construction of career identity among disadvantaged unemployed young people may not follow the same rules, as they have experienced interrupted career trajectories and face a high risk of long-term unemployment. For them, building career identity may entail more than exploration and commitment alone. Additionally, the dimensions exploration and commitment are predominantly intrapersonal and not connected to the social circumstances in which identity is formed (van Hoof, 2001). Thus, although the identity status paradigm gives some direction as to how career identity may be built among Fifteen's apprentices (i.e. by exploration and commitment), it fails to acknowledge the importance of the social context in identity construction. It is thus

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questionable whether the identity status paradigm applies to apprentices' particular situation.

The second stream of literature that may give some indication about the construction of career identity does take the social context into account (e.g. Ibarra, 1999; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Van Maanen, 1998). This research, that mainly focuses on professional identity construction, depicts that the construction process is an interactive process that is more complex than simply adopting and pursuing a (new) work role (Roberts, 2005). It entails a iterative process of adapting, elaborating and refining one's professional identity to accommodate work role demands and modify work role definitions (Ashforth & Saks, 1996; Ibarra, 1999). The mechanism behind professional identity construction relates to 'possible selves': ideas about who one wants to become, likes to become, or fears becoming (Markus & Nurius, 1986). These desired future selves are end states that drive identity construction and serve as a future, goal-oriented component of the self-concept. In that sense, the essence of identity construction lies in bridging the gap between one's current and desired identity, which is achieved by strategies such as identifying and imitating role models, experimenting with new behaviors and evaluating progress towards that desired identity (Ibarra, 1999).

The construction of career identity among Fifteen's apprentices may thus be driven by a possible self –presumably being a professional chef– and may be achieved by imitating role models such as chef Jamie Oliver, experimenting with cooking tasks and interpreting and judging progress towards that possible self. To date, however, this stream of research has mainly focused on how employees construct and revise their professional identities as they adapt to new work roles after a career transition. Notwithstanding, it might give some indication on why and how disadvantaged young adults with interrupted career trajectories build their career identity. After all, participating in Fifteen's apprentice program may also be regarded as a career transition: the transition from an interrupted career trajectory to the perspective of a future career with stable employment.

The current study

Though each perspective on identity construction provides important pieces of

the puzzle of how career identity can be built, they cannot merely be applied to the construction of career identity among disadvantaged young adults with interrupted career trajectories. Moreover, the above discussed research on the identity construction does not give much direction concerning the motives underlying such a process of building one's career identity –with the exception of the 'possible self'. In fact, very little research has been conducted on people's motives underlying identity construction (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2011). Because our current knowledge does not suffice when it comes to why and how constructing career identity, the current study takes an inductive and qualitative approach to build upon existing theories. A qualitative approach is particularly useful when studying the dynamics of career identity, because career identities are often articulated as narrative stories (Fugate et al., 2004; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; LaPointe, 2010). Moreover, identity narratives are strongly shaped by one's motives, possible selves and contextual selves (Fugate et al., 2004; Ibarra, 1999; Savickas et al., 2009), therewith providing adequate information to help us understand why and how unemployed young adults build their career identity. In doing so, this study is the first to investigate unemployed young adults' motives and processes of building their career identity.

Methods

Context

In order to explore why and how career identity can be built, I used a purposive sample of interviewees (Stake, 1995). To facilitate theory building, I chose a context that can serve as an extreme case, since the dynamics in extreme cases tend to be more visible than they might be in other contexts (Eisenhardt, 1989). The purposeful sample in this study was therefore a sample of disadvantaged youth participating in an apprentice program "Fifteen" (Fifteen Amsterdam, 2012; Jamie Oliver's Fifteen, 2012). The 1 year apprentice program starts with eight 4-day weeks of basic cooking lessons, in which theory is immediately applied in practice in the restaurant's kitchen. After these first two months, the remaining ten months consist of 3 days of on-the-job learning in the kitchen and 2 days of studying in small groups. After 12 months of extensive training, students graduate as qualified chefs and receive a licensed diploma. To take part in the

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apprentice program, prospective students have to apply and be selected by means of a simplified job interview.

Sample

All 30 students at a Fifteen apprentice program were asked if they would be willing to take part in an interview about their motivation regarding the apprentice program at Fifteen. Those who volunteered were interviewed during course days. Eventually all students agreed to participate, although one participant later asked to disregard the interview for this study. This resulted in a total of 29 participants. The demographic characteristics of the participant group can be found in Table 4.1. Overall, the sample consisted of 19 male students and 10 female students between the ages of 17 and 29 years (M = 22.21). The majority of participants (n = 27) had finished high school and about half of them (n = 16) had started basic training, vocational training or a bachelor afterwards, but only 4 of them had completed their degree. Length of unemployment varied from 3 to 60 months (M = 28.79 months), and working experience differed between 5 and 70 months *(M* = 28.62 months). One year after the interviews, 21 (72.41%) of the participants had successfully obtained their degree at Fifteen, from which 5 (17.24%) had consecutive temporary jobs since graduation and 7 (33.33%) had found stable employment.

Preparation

To familiarize myself with Fifteen's apprentice program and its participants, I reviewed all episodes of British documentary "Jamie's Kitchen", as well as the comparable Australian and Dutch television series. The documentary follows chef Jamie Oliver as he attempts to train a group of disadvantaged youth to be a professional chef at the restaurant "Fifteen". While reviewing the episodes, the focus lay on eliciting the key factors underlying success and failure in graduating from the apprentice program and in finding employment. However, one important theme that emerged from this material was students' increasingly positive attitudes towards work. Based on these observations, I decided to investigate students' emerging career identity by focusing on identity narratives regarding their past, present and future.

Data Collection

Data were collected through the use of face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interviews. All 30 interviews were conducted over the course of two months (approximately 4 interviews per week), one month after the program at Fifteen had started. On the days that I conducted interviews, I spent part of the day participating in apprentices' courses, small breaks and lunch break. Being part of the group allowed me to familiarize with Fifteen's program and more importantly, with the participants themselves. Participants were explicitly informed that the interviews were confidential and unrelated to their prospects at Fifteen's apprentice program. Interviews were conducted in a closed, soundproof room to ensure complete confidentiality. Before the start of the actual interview, participants were asked to fill out a short questionnaire with their demographic information. Interviews lasted approximately 1 to 1,5 hour and were audio-recorded. Although all participants were given the option that the interview would not be recorded, only two of them requested to pause the recorder for a short period during the interview itself. The interview protocol focused on the motives and processes of building their career identity by questioning students about their past, present and future. The interview protocol can be found in the Appendix. Prior to data analysis, the interviews were transcribed by five independent, paid undergraduate psychology students. Interviews were labeled with each respective recorder number to ensure full anonymity. Approximately one year after participants had graduated from the program at Fifteen, information was gathered through Fifteen's database on participants' graduation and employment status.

Data analysis

Data analysis consisted of two stages. In the first stage, the transcripts were reviewed by detailed reading and were manually coded to identify all information relevant to participants' application and participation in the apprentice program at Fifteen (i.e., their past, present and future). Although little conceptually new information could be gained from the last few interviews, all interviews were included in the current study. In the second stage, the qualitative data was analyzed again using computer assisted qualitative data analysis (NVivo 9), in order to identify emerging themes regarding the motives behind and processes of participants' emerging career identity.

Table 4.1. *Demographic Information.*

	Mean	n	% (N = 29)
Sex			
Male		19	65.52%
Female		10	34.48%
Age	22.21		
17-20		6	20.69%
21-25		19	65.52%
26-29		4	13.79%
Education			
elementary school		2	6.90%
high school		11	37.93%
basic training		4	13.79%
vocational training		11	37.93%
bachelor		1	3.45%
Length of Unemployment	28.79 months		
0-1 year		9	31.03%
1-2 year		5	17.24%
2-3 year		6	20.69%
3-4 year		5	17.24%
4-5 year		4	13.79%
Work Experience	28.62 months		
0-1 year		12	41.38%
1-2 year		3	10.34%
2-3 year		5	17.24%
3-4 year		4	13.79%
4-6 year		5	17.24%
Success rate Fifteen			
drop-out		8	27.59%
graduated		21	72.41%
Employment status 1 year later			
unknown (after drop-out)		8	27.59%
unkown (after graduation)		3	10.34%
unemployed		5	17.24%
unstable employment[o]		5	17.24%
stable employment[oo]		7	24.14%
further education		1	3.45%

[o]consecutive temporary employment with spells of unemployment since graduation

[oo]continuous employment since graduation

Results

Two main findings became apparent from analyzing the interview data, tapping into the motives behind (the 'why') and the process of (the 'how') building career identity. First, the data revealed that the majority of participants did not have a strong sense of career identity when applying for the apprentice program at Fifteen. Most of them did not make a conscious decision to participate in the program by reflecting upon their goals or possibilities, nor did they indicate to pursue a 'possible self'. In fact, only four of the participants indicated that they applied because they wanted to become a chef. The second main finding that emerged from the data indicated that participants experienced a stronger sense of career identity in the first months after Fifteen's apprentice program had started. As I further analyzed the data, it became clear that Fifteen's program provided most participants with the possibility to deploy a long-term focus and to build their career identity.

To complement the qualitative data from the interviews with the quantitative data on participants' employment status one year after graduation, I additionally compared the narratives of participants who remained unemployed, participants who had consecutive temporary jobs and spells of unemployment (i.e. unstable employment), and participants who had found continuous (i.e. stable) employment. In the following, the two main findings from the qualitative data are demonstrated and further elaborated upon through narratives of the participants, after which the additional quantitative analyses are discussed.

Motives of building career identity

The assumption that career identity reflects "knowing why" competencies and that it is 'a cognitive compass to navigate career goals' (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Fugate et al., 2004) implies that career identity can serve as a goal to direct behaviors aimed at reaching that goal. When transitioning from unemployment into employment, career identity should thus provide direction to engage in activities that may lead to stable (re-)employment, such as participating in Fifteen's apprentice program. Likewise, the notion of possible selves conveys that a desired 'future self' drives identity change and construction (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yost, Strube, & Bailey, 1992). However, when analyzing the interview data, there was little indication that participants had a cognitive

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compass or a desired possible self at the moment of applying for the program at Fifteen. Rather, the four main motives for applying at Fifteen that did emerge from the interviews were serendipity, diploma, work and a chance. Strikingly, almost two thirds of the participants indicated that their motive for entering the program was somewhat serendipitous, as is evidenced by the quotes below.

Serendipity

"Pfew, why did I apply... nothing in particular really. I just applied because I thought: it's better to do something than to do nothing. It wasn't like I thought at the time: I am very motivated, I want to work! It was more like: it seems like a good idea to do something instead of just sitting at home."(male participant, 19 years old, graduated, unemployed)

"So I thought, if this information brochure on Fifteen ends up in my mailbox, it must have some sort of reason. I just went to the introduction day because it sounded like fun. The more they told me and showed me about the program, the more I started to like it. And I could even see some sort of future in this." (female participant, 23, graduated, unstable employment)

Q: "Why did you choose Fifteen in particular, and not some other program or job?"
A: "Because this is the only thing that came along."(male participant, 23, dropped out)

"It was a bit of a coincidence, but I'm happy with that coincidence either way. I just liked the idea of the program, but I didn't really think about it, I didn't know anything about it." (male participant, 22, graduated, unstable employment)

"I never really wanted to be a chef or to work in the catering industry. But now that I'm here, I think, why not?" (female participant, 20, graduated, stable employment)

"I got the information brochure about the program and thought: let's try it. Let's see how it'll work out. (...) It was the first time I heard about Fifteen and I just thought: this sounds ok." (male participant, 22, graduated, stable employment)

For the majority of participants, participating in Fifteen's apprentice program was thus not a deliberate decision in order to find stable employment or to pursue a possible self as a professional chef. To the contrary, it *"just happened to come along"*. Participants also often indicated in their narratives that they did not regard Fifteen as an intrinsically attractive option in itself, but more as a means-to-an-end. Thus, although serendipity was a frequently occurring motive, participants also referred to other motives for participating in Fifteen's apprentice program. The three motives that were most salient in this regard were to obtain a diploma, to enhance the chance on future employment, and to have a chance to make something of their lives.

Diploma

"I applied for Fifteen because of the education, because you can obtain a degree. Finally a real diploma. The work experience that I have, or the other program that are out there, they don't give you a real degree. That is useless. This one though, this one is real. It's the best way to obtaining an actual diploma."(female participant, 22, graduated, unemployed)

"I never had a diploma, I never finished any education. So yes, that diploma is my motivation to stick around. Before, I never felt like it. I didn't care. I had something better to do than to go to school. But now, now I really feel like going, I want that degree."(male participant, 26, graduated, unemployed)

"I like the thought of having a diploma, to have somewhat of certainty in life. I really hope I will succeed in this."(female participant, 29, dropped out)

"This is the easiest way for me to obtain a degree. There is no other educational program or school that will allow me to follow a course, so this really is the easiest way." (male participant, 20, graduated, unstable employment)

Work

"This creates more chances for me to find a job. I would have a better position in the labor market. I think employers are more likely to consider you when you have an education and work experience at Fifteen."(male participant, 22, graduated, unstable employment)

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"I have been looking for work for the past ten months. After finishing my education, I thought I could get a job, but no employer is even considering me because I have problems and a criminal record. That's why I'm here." (male participant, 23, graduated, stable employment)

"Fifteen can give stability, and work. Stable employment. This is my second choice, because I want to work backstage in theaters. But there's not a lot of work there."(male participant, 18, graduated, stable employment)

"I just want to have a proper job. I don't really care where I work because I also have some hobbies that I like better. For now, a job in catering industry will do. From there and with the degree here I can always move on and find another job." (female participant, 18, graduated, unknown)

Chance

"It was a good chance to make something of my life."(male participant, 26, graduated, stable employment)

"This was my only chance. I didn't have a job, I don't have a degree. That makes it hard to find something you like to do." (male participant, 23, dropped out)

"I needed to do something, anything, to change my life. I cannot leave everything the way it is, nothing will change then. Fifteen is the one-and-only opportunity for me to get an education and achieve something."(female participant, 22, graduated, further education)

These quotes illustrate that the motive for participating in Fifteen's apprentice program was mainly instrumental: apprentices wanted to achieve a goal outside being trained as a professional chef. However, the quotes also indicate that participants' motives did not involve a specific long-term planning or future perspective: 'diploma', 'work' and 'chance' are rather general motives. Although some participants did regard Fifteen as a means to finding employment, it stands out that none of them had a clear sense of what it was exactly that they were striving for. The idea that career identity is a

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prerequisite for the reemployment process and that it steers behavior directed at finding reemployment –as is implied in Fugate et al.'s (2004) notion of career identity and the notion of 'possible selves'– does therefore not apply here.

Additionally, the prevalence of serendipity is not in line with the idea of conscious reflection upon alternatives and of commitment to probable courses of future actions, as depicted Marcia's (1966) identity status paradigm. To the contrary, participants often indicated a lack reflection upon their options and possible futures. When asking them what they would have done if it weren't for Fifteen, they often answered that they *"would probably still be at home on the couch"*, *"would hang around on the streets", "would lie in bed a lot"* or that they did not know nor could imagine. The findings thus suggest that participating in Fifteen's apprentice program was not a deliberate decision, nor was it directed by a pre-existing career identity or by a possible self.

The lack of a deliberate or employment-oriented motive for participating at Fifteen's apprentice program implies that participants did not have a strong sense of career identity at the start of the program. The motives behind building career identity can therefore not be found in participants' motives for applying at Fifteen's apprentice program, nor in their 'possible selves'. At the same time, however, most participants indicated that they did develop a stronger sense of career identity and a future career perspective in the first months of the program: they often referred to the increasing centrality of work in their present lives and future perspectives, as can be derived from statements such as:

"it's more like… being here has opened up a whole new future for me. A future with a career." (male participant, 18, graduated, stable employment)

"you know, I would never have expected to like this, to want to be a chef in the future. But I do" (male participant, 21, graduated, stable employment)

"[working is] something to live for again, something that I like doing" (male participant, 26, graduated, unemployed)

"I can see myself doing this type of work in the future"(female participant, 21, graduated, unemployed)

"I found something that I would like to do in the future. This is much better than sitting at home" (female participant, 23, graduated, unstable employment)

"This [being employed] is who I am and want to be. I don't want to depend on social benefits anymore"(female participant, 22, graduated, further education)

Methods of building career identity

The construction of career identity often seemed to underlie the newfound future perspective that participants referred to in their narratives. Specifically, I found that there were four broad methods that helped participants to build their career identity. The first method centered around changes in perceived competence in performing work-related tasks. The second method involved group identification, either by identifying with positively regarded others in the group or by distinguishing oneself from negatively regarded others in the group. The third method involved identifying with role models such as the chef at Fifteen's restaurant or Jamie Oliver. The fourth method involved comparing their current identity to alternative identities, such as their former identity as a stigmatized, unemployed young adult. In addition, some of the participants' narratives showed no signs of building a career identity. The four main methods of building career identity, as well as the lack of building career identity, are discussed in the below.

Building career identity through competence

One of the most common circumstances that helped participants build their career identity was by discovering their own competence. Participants often indicated that by engaging in and familiarizing with the tasks of being a chef, they had started to realize their potential and had started to value working as a chef. More importantly, the belief in their ability to become a professional chef enhanced their commitment to this career as a possible and preferred course of action.

"I would never even have wanted to work in a restaurant, but now I know that I can. Doing all this stuff here, learning how to cook, plan, cut, make something that my friends and family and other people might enjoy. Now that I know, I would love to become a chef." *(male participant, 18, graduated, stable employment)*

"I didn't know how to cook in a professional way, you know, with schedules and stuff. I didn't know what I was doing. But now, I learned how to work more careful, with a planning, and I know how to cut properly. I feel more and more like a real, professional chef. I like that feeling" *(male participant, 21, graduated, unemployed)*

"It's more like (…) you think you will never be able to succeeds and then all of the sudden, it's working out (…) you may have some competencies after all that you were unaware of before. Things you thought that you would never be able to do. It makes me want to try new things, and learn new things, because now I know that I might actually be good at this. It gives me confidence to do something that I'm good at, I never expected that." *(male participant, 24, graduated, stable employment)*

"I just didn't know that you could learn to be a professional chef, without experience I mean. If I had known this from the beginning, that even I could learn it and be good at it, I would have tried it already. But I didn't know, so I didn't try and stayed where I was." *(female participant, 21, dropped out)*

"They teach you how to be a real chef, how to act like a real chef. That even I can do what a professional chef can do. That's different from other places where I've worked. It also fits me, this is what I need." *(male participant, 22, graduated, unstable employment)*

"Fifteen, you know, it just came around. I didn't know much about it at first. Like, being a chef: what is a professional chef? I didn't know that. And now, what I learned here, that I can do it and how to do it, that's just perfect." *(male participant, 21, graduated, stable employment)*

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The importance of perceived competence has been widely acknowledged in research on (career) identities. According to Hall (1995), identities can change and stabilize as people's careers progress. Given that a new role requires new skills, behaviors, attitudes and social interactions, a transition is likely to change someone's self-definition and thus to influence his or her identity as well. Also according to Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), working on new tasks changes people's skills, behavior and attitudes, which may them to build their career identity. The role of 'working and doing' is therefore emphasized as an important factor in the construction of a (new) career identity (Van Maanen, 1998; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Indeed, the participants in the current study indicated that the new skills and behaviors they learned by doing changed their perspective on employment and contributed to building their career identity. Since 'working and doing' lies at the core of the apprentice program –it gives young adults a chance to gain work experience in a genuine workplace–, it is not surprising that apprentices' changing perceptions of competence played an important role in building their career identity.

Building career identity through group identification

Another general method of building career identity was via group identification. Participants either actively referred to being part of a stigmatized group that had the same objectives, or actively distinguished themselves from the stigma and the other group members. Remarkably, as I observed during small breaks and the lunch break, group identification also emerged in a more physical manner: participants attempted to stay close to those they wanted to be associated with, and to stay away from those they wanted to distinguish themselves from. The same themes emerged in the quotes below.

"It's like, it's what they tell you about the others. There are more people here like you, there have been others like you that are now working as a chef. It makes me believe that there is hope, because there must have been someone like me among them, the others are like me. And they made it or are going to make it. It helps me to believe that there is a chance for me as well. That I am like the others." (identifying; female participant, 22, graduated, unemployed)

"There are other guys here that really want it. That motivates me as well." (identifying; male participant, 29, dropped out)

"Everyone here has some kind of problem. So, you're not like, special. You're just the same. I like that. Because if you're somewhere else at work –and I know that I have done a lot of bad stuff– then you're working with people who do everything right, I can't handle that. It makes me depressed. You start to compare although you shouldn't. Here, we're all the same and most of us want the same." (identifying; male participant, 24, graduated, unstable employment)

"It's nice to meet people who also want to work, who also want to do something with their lives. But, who also have a background. But not in a way that they get stuck in it." (identifying; female participant, 29, dropped out)

"I have friends at home who are still unemployed, still sitting at home. But I'm not like that you know, that's not me anymore. What if you're thirty, or forty? Are you still going to sit at home? I just want to work, be a chef, have a salary, provide for my future family. You know, save money and stuff. Be able to do nice things in life." (distinguishing; male participant, 21, dropped out)

"Yeah, well, those people are (…) Those people are here and they can be demotivating, it's exhausting. They just talk all day, if the chef is teaching us something, then they talk through his story. It makes me wonder… why are they here? That's just useless. I don't do that. I listen and learn. I want this to be useful." (distinguishing; female participant, 22, graduated, stable employment)

"Sometimes it's like working with a bunch of children. Not everyone of course, but some of them… they are not serious about this. But I don't care, I'm here for me now." (distinguishing; male participant, 26, graduated, unstable employment)

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"Some of them just call in sick and stay at home, or hang around town. No, I won't do that, I have a responsibility now. If I don't come in tomorrow, I have a problem, and I want to come in, because I like it here. I want to learn how to be a chef." (distinguishing; male participant, 22, graduated, stable employment)

"There are some guys here who are just unwilling, who don't even try. And I think that is such a shame. Why are they even here? Give the people who do want to achieve something a chance. (…) I think they're here because they have to be. Because reemployment services forces them to do something. (…) I'm here because I want to be here. (distinguishing; male participant, 20, graduated, stable employment)

These two types of methods using group identification in building career identity bear similarities to social recategorization strategies as depicted by social identity research. Social recategorization strategies are strategies that people use to change the social category to which they are assigned, for example as a consequence of stigmatization (Roberts, 2005; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). One type of social recategorization strategies is 'assimilation', by which people attempt to reduce the salience of their stigmatized identity. Assimilation entails that people with stigmatized identities emphasize their similarities with other more positively regarded social identity groups and emphasize their distinctiveness from their own stigmatized social identity group (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Roberts, 2005). As evidenced by their quotes, participants in this study attempted to identify with positively regarded others in their group (*"we're all the same and most of us want the same")* and distinguished themselves from people who shared their stigmatized identity (*"I'm not like [unemployed friends at home] you know, that's not me anymore")*. Thus, although apprentices did not necessarily identify with other social identity groups –as is done with the 'assimilation' strategy–, they did identify with positively regarded others in their own group. Arguably, these two group identification methods were used to increase the salience of career identity and decrease the salience of the stigmatized unemployed social identity: participants identified with group members who also seemed to be building career identity and distinguished from those who remained part of the former unemployed identity.

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Building career identity through role models

The third method that emerged from the data was building career identity through role models, the most popular ones being either chef Jamie Oliver or the chef at Fifteen's restaurant. When talking about these role models, participants indicated that the role models reflected the essence of Fifteen in such a way that they helped them to 'make the shift' from the unemployed, stigmatized person to someone with a future and with the possibility to become a chef. Also, the role models serve as an example and give insight into a possible future self. Note that participants' references to role models were embedded in their narratives on the present and the future, and did thus not reflect their past motives for applying for Fifteen's program.

"It really just started here. The chef is showing us who we can be and what we can do. What we can achieve. And that makes you think: wow, that is actually quite a lot! Well, that gave me a future, an example of what I want to become. I also want to be a chef, a teacher." (7349, male participant, 21, graduated, stable employment)

"He is so much more than a teacher. Some people just see him as a teacher, but I can see more than that. He wants to achieve something, that is clear. He wants to be the best. I want to be like him." (male participant, 22, graduated, unstable employment)

"But Fifteen, you know, Jamie Oliver has founded Fifteen. No one has ever done that before, like he helps unemployed youth. I respect that. It makes me want to work harder, because, you know, Jamie Oliver has given me the chance. Others don't give you a chance because you have a stigma, and then you can never get a job. But Jamie Oliver doesn't care about that."(male participant, 21, dropped out)

"Jamie Oliver is the only one that gives us, people with problems, a chance, an opportunity. The others just look the other way or send you some place else." (male participant, 20, graduated, unknown)

The use of role models when building identities is well-established in research on building and revising professional identities. In fact, role models often provide concrete

knowledge of what is possible and desirable, thereby guiding the behaviors and attitudes necessary to become the preferred future self (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). Interestingly, participants did not refer to these role models when I asked them about their motives for entering the apprentice program. It thus seems that participants discovered role models in the first weeks or months of the program and subsequently used these role models to form possible selves, which may help to build their career identity.

Building career identity through comparison of alternative (former) identities

The last major method of building career identity was to compare alternative identities, especially the 'former' identity. Participants explicitly referred to their stigmatized identity as a disadvantaged, unemployed young adult and compared it to their current situation. By assessing the differences between both situations, they seemed to strengthen their newfound career identity.

"I am so happy to be here. I have thought about it a lot, about that I really didn't want that life anymore, I wanted to die, and then Fifteen came along. It made me so happy. That's why I have to persist. Otherwise I'll fall back into that routine, that misery, I don't want that. I just want to be cheerful, happy with life. Because life can be really good this way." (female participant, 22, graduated, stable employment)

A: "I want to get rid of it, I would really like to get rid of that stigma."
Q: "What stigma?"
A: "Of being disadvantaged, of being unemployed. Of course, I have had problems, but doesn't everyone? They have a mental picture of who I am. But I'm not anymore. I won't be that person anymore. I will become a chef, and I will have a future."(female participant, 22, graduated, further education)

"I don't need no kick in the ass anymore. I used to. I used to really need a kick in the ass to get out of bed. Now, I just get up. Because, you know, if I'll screw this up... what else would I possibly do then?"(male participant, 24, graduated, stable employment)

"If it weren't for Fifteen, well... to say it bluntly, I would fuck up my entire life again. Without Fifteen it would only get worse instead of better, and now it can finally go better instead of worse."(male participant, 17, graduated, unemployed)

"Why would I ever give this up? Why would I throw myself into that mess even further, instead of trying to climb out of it?"(male participant, 20, graduated, unstable employment) "I would have no future otherwise. That was the reason I was so depressed before."(female participant, 21, graduated, unknown)

"I need to finish this. I want to finish it, this time around. I have not made it through with so many other things. And now, you know, I can see a future. I have to, what else would I do? Work on the streets? That's not who I am."(male participant, 19, graduated, unemployed)

"I'm less insecure now. I tend to think too much, worry a lot. And well, eh, I do that less now. I feel like I belong a bit more to the normal society. Like I can pursue a career as a chef. That's how it feels for me." (female participant, 29, dropped out)

Based on social identity research (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), I argued in the introduction that disadvantaged young adults' career identity needs to become more central to their identity –they need to build their career identity in order to find their way to stable employment. In that regard, it is essential to reverse the process of a weakening career identity during unemployment (i.e., that unemployed people decrease the salience of their career identity and increase the salience of an alternative social identity in which employment does not take such a central place). The method of comparing alternative identities as described above taps into this idea. It seems that by comparing possible alternative identities, participants attempt to decrease the salience of unemployed- and past identities and to simultaneously build their 'new' career identity.

In general, the majority of participants used one or more of the described methods to build their career identity during Fifteen's apprentice program. It is important to note that this construction of career identity does not seem to be preceded by conscious reflection, a deliberate goal, or a possible self. Rather, it seems that building

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career identity was triggered by contingent events such as the possibility to participate in Fifteen's apprentice program, and later on evolved through methods that helped to further build the newfound career identity.

Lack of building career identity

Although most participants indicated that Fifteen had helped them to deploy a future perspective and build their career identity through one or more of the above described methods, not all of them showed signs of building career identity. In fact, some of the participants came across as rather passive and uncommitted to the apprentice program. Their narratives showed no signs of any of the methods of building career identity. Instead, they did not refer to an emerging career identity at all:

"I don't have a clear picture of what I want in the future. For now, I just want a degree, a place to live on my own, no debts, that everything runs smoothly. I don't know if it is going to work out, you never know. It might be that I have to quit because it'll become too hard. It should be my dream to work 7 days in a 5-star restaurant of course, and earn loads of money, but well, that is never going to happen because I cannot do that physically. It doesn't really matter. The moment is now, the future comes later. I would have done nothing otherwise, so it is nice to be able to do something."(female participant, 21, graduated, unstable employment)

 "It just started, you know. I just started to see a future for myself. With what I'm doing here."(male participant, 21, dropped out)

"I'll see what happens. I'll just let it happen. I'll decide somewhere next year, maybe." (female participant, 22, graduated, unemployed)

"I need to see what will happen to me first. Maybe... well, I don't really feel like studying anymore."(male participant, 17, graduated, unknown)

The motives (the 'why') and the methods (the 'how') of building career identity have been discussed in the above. The narratives of the unemployed young participants show that most of them did not have a strong sense of career identity when applying for

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the program at Fifteen. In fact, serendipity emerged as one of the main motives for applying. However, participants' stories revealed that they were building their career identity after a few weeks or months of 'working and doing' (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) through one or more of the described building methods. In addition to the qualitative data from the interviews, I collected information on participants' employment status one year after graduation. To examine patterns that may serve as a first indication of the implications of building career identity, I compared the narratives of participants who remained unemployed after graduation (n = 5), who have had consecutive temporary jobs and spells of unemployment after graduation (i.e. unstable employment, n = 5), and who had found continuous employment after graduation (i.e. stable employment, n = 7). Although no conclusions can be drawn from this quantitative data, it does suggest some interesting patterns. Note that only participants for whom information was available on their employment status one year later were included, that the reasons for participation are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that the amount of references also depends on the number of participants per category.

Additional analyses

Regarding the motives of building career identity, the qualitative data showed that serendipity, diploma, work and chance were the main reasons behind the application for the program at Fifteen. The number of references to serendipity indicates that serendipity was the most prevalent motive in applying for the apprentice program. Although one would expect that 'work' would be a fruitful motive for building career identity and for successfully obtaining employment –whereas 'serendipity' would be a less fruitful motive– the quantitative data shows differently. In fact, participants who had found stable employment indicated Fifteen as a coincidental event just as much, if not more, than participants who had unstable employment or were unemployed (see Figure 4.1). Strikingly, there were more references to 'diploma' as a motive particularly among those who had unstable unemployment since graduation. Given this reversed pattern, it seems likely that 'diploma' as a motive for participation may be less fruitful for finding stable employment after graduation. One possible explanation may be that participating in the program at Fifteen mainly for obtaining a diploma reflects a rather extrinsic motivation that can hinder the construction of and commitment to a career identity (Soenens & Vansteekiste, 2011). Indeed, when I asked participants why

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obtaining a diploma was so important to them, they often indicated that it was needed in society or that others expected them to have some sort of education (e.g., *"society requires you to have a stupid paper")*. Consequently, such an extrinsic reason may come with a poorly developed career identity that does not suffice in securing stable employment, whereas a neither intrinsic nor extrinsic reason (i.e., serendipity) may leave room to build career identity that subsequently contributes to finding stable employment (Koen et al., in press; McArdle et al., 2007).
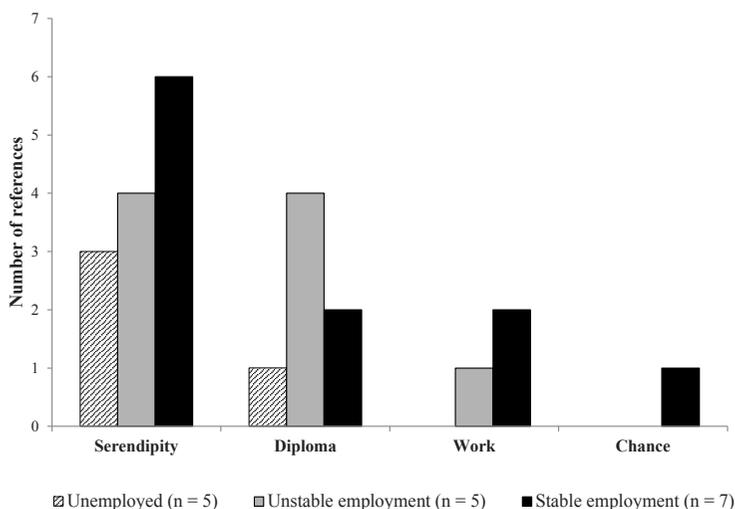

Figure 4.1 *Number of references to application reasons in participants' narratives, divided by employment status one year later. Note that references are not mutually exclusive and depend on the number of participants per category.*

Regarding the methods of building career identity at Fifteen's apprentice program, the three most salient methods among stable employed participants were competence, distinguishing from other with their stigmatized identity and comparing alternative identities (see Figure 4.2). The fact that these three methods were most often referred to by participants who had found stable employment after graduation may imply that these are fruitful methods. Remarkably, the method of identifying with the

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group showed the opposite pattern from the other methods used to build career identity: particularly apprentices who remained unemployed after graduation had referred to identifying with the group. It seems that emphasizing one's distinctiveness from others with the same stigmatized identity is a more fruitful strategy for building career identity than identifying with others in the group –even if those others seem motivated to pursue stable employment. Additionally, it is worthy to note that none of the participants who had found stable employment portrayed a lack of career identity construction in their narratives. Taken together, these quantitative findings underline the idea that building career identity is essential for successful reemployment.
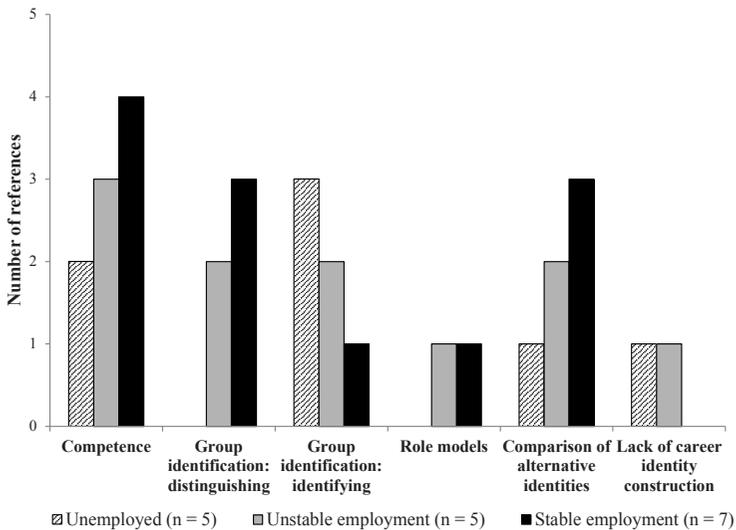

Figure 4.2 *Number of references to career identity construction strategies in participants' narratives, divided by employment status one year later. Note that references are not mutually exclusive and depend on the number of participants per category.*

Discussion

The role of career identity in today's dynamic world of work is becoming increasingly important. Not only is career identity the key driver of employability (cf.

Fugate et al., 2004), it is also an important predictor of job search activities and obtaining reemployment (cf. Koen et al., in press; McArdle et al., 2007; Wanberg et al., 2002). Unfortunately, people's career identity tends to weaken during unemployment (cf. Aaronson et al., 2010; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012). When unemployed, people tend to decrease the salience of their career identity and increase the salience of an alternative social identity in which employment does not take such a central place (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Yet, our knowledge about the reversed process of building career identity is scarce, nor is it clear what motives may trigger this process. Therefore, this study took an inductive and qualitative approach to investigate *why* and *how* career identity can be built among those with career trajectories characterized by spells of unemployment.

Summary of findings

Motives. This study helps us to better understand the motives and processes of building career identity. The results reveal that disadvantaged, unemployed young participants of Fifteen's apprentice program did not have a pre-existing or strong sense of career identity when applying for the program at Fifteen. In fact, their motives for applying for the apprentice program were often serendipitous and not with such a deliberate and long-term perspective as one would expect from research on employability and identity construction (e.g. Fugate et al., 2004; Marcia, 1966). Additionally, there was little evidence that apprentices had a 'possible self' (Ibarra, 1999; Markus & Nurius, 1986) that functioned as a goal-directed component in building their career identity: most apprentices were not aiming to be a professional chef and were thus not directed by a possible self when applying for Fifteen's apprentice program. Rather, the motive for participating in the apprentice program at Fifteen was, if not serendipitous, mainly instrumental. Apprentices indicated that they wanted to achieve a goal outside of being trained as a professional chef, although these goals were not very specific: obtaining a diploma, finding some sort of employment, or having a chance to make something of their lives. At the same time, however, participants' stories revealed that they were building their career identity through one or more methods since the apprentice program at Fifteen's apprentice had started.

Process. I identified four main methods that helped participants build their

career identity during the first months of Fifteen's apprentice program. The first method comprised a change in participants' perceived competence in performing work-related tasks. Participants indicated that the new skills and behaviors they had learned while participating in the program changed their perspective on employment and strengthened their career identity. The second method comprised group identification, from which two sub-methods emerged from the data. Apprentices either identified with group members in the program with a seemingly positive outlook on employment, and/or distinguished themselves from those who remained part of their former stigmatized identity. Arguably, these methods were used to increase the salience of career identity and to decrease the salience of the stigmatized unemployed social identity. The third method comprised emerging role models, such as the chef at Fifteen's restaurant or Jamie Oliver. It is important to note that participants did not refer to these role models when asked about their motives for entering the apprentice program, but indicated that they had discovered these role models during Fifteen's apprentice program. The fourth method comprised the comparison of participants' current situation to alternative identities, such as their former identity as a stigmatized, unemployed young adult. This method seems to indicate that participants attempted to decrease the salience of their former unemployed identity and to simultaneously increase the salience of their emerging career identity.

The qualitative data furthermore revealed that some apprentices did not show any signs of building their career identity. Remarkably, the quotes and quantitative data showed that none of these participants had found stable employment one year later. Thus, it seems to be essential for the apprentices to build their career identity in order to secure stable employment in the long run. This notion underlines the idea that career identity plays a crucial role in finding (re-)employment today's society (Fugate et al., 2004; cf. Koen et al., in press; McArdle et al., 2007; Wanberg et al., 2002).

Theoretical Implications

Taken together, the findings of the current study add to the literature by shedding light on the motives and methods of building career identity, a process that has largely remained a black box in reemployment research to date. Two findings of the current study stand out in this regard. First, this study shows that building one's career

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identity is not necessarily a consequence of a deliberate goal, conscious reflection or possible future self –at least not for the group of disadvantaged young adults with interrupted career trajectories. Rather, career identity construction may be triggered by contingent events, and may later on evolve through methods that help to build career identity. Second, the findings underline the crucial role of the social context in which career identity is built: it seems to be essential for disadvantaged unemployed young adults to move away from their stigmatized identity in order to build their career identity (i.e., by distinguishing from that identity and comparing the current situation with that former identity). I will highlight and elaborate on these two main findings in the below.

Motives. In the current study, I have examined the motives of building career identity. Previous work on identities and career identity renders that there are goal-oriented and conscious motives underlying identity construction. For example, research on possible selves conveys that a desired 'future self' drives identity change and construction (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Yost et al., 1992), and Marcia's (1966) identity status model regards exploration and commitment as conscious and deliberate processes. Employability research even states that career identity in itself can be regarded as a goal to direct behaviors aimed at reaching that goal (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994; Fugate et al., 2004). Yet, there was little indication in the current study that participants had goal-oriented and deliberate motives for building their career identity. They were not consciously exploring and committing to their options, their narratives did not reflect a strong sense of career identity when applying for Fifteen's apprentice program, and they did not refer to a possible self that led them to participate in the program. To the contrary, participants often portrayed a lack of reflection upon their options and future perspectives. Moreover, the prevalence of serendipity as a motive for applying for the apprentice program is not in line with the idea of goal-oriented and deliberate motives for building career identity.

The lack of goal-oriented, conscious motives or possible selves may be somewhat counter-intuitive. After all, there is a wide consensus in psychology that success of any kind largely depends on deliberately chosen or given goals. Goals provide a sense of direction and purpose, and goal setting leads to better performance because goals can focus attention towards relevant activities, induce greater effort, affect persistence, and

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help people to cope with the situation at hand (Locke & Latham, 2002). It would therefore make sense that apprentices with clear motives or possible selves are the ones to build their career identity and succeed in finding stable employment. This, however, did not emerge from the interview data. It seems that among the group of apprentices, the motives that emerged from the data were of less influence for the subsequent process than one would expect from the literature.

This idea is more or less in line with that of Ibarra (1999), who claimed that identity construction is not just a process of pursuing possible selves, but that people also craft provisional constructions of possible identities that are revised with experience (i.e., provisional selves). She described that people often develop a repertoire of multiple possible selves *during* career transitions, and that these new identities are often provisional until they have been rehearsed and refined with experience. This line of thought fits well with the findings in the current study, especially since there was no evidence of a possible self that directed the construction process from the beginning. Rather, one could argue that a 'provisional self' was discovered in the beginning of Fifteen's program, and rehearsed and refined during the program. Thus, career identity may be triggered by contingent events that may lead to the discovery of a 'provisional self', which may later on evolve in a 'possible self'.

Process. Ibarra's (1999) provisional selves may thus be applicable to the process by which career identity is built. She describes how people adapt to new, unfamiliar work roles by experimenting with provisional selves that serve as trials for possible selves. This adaptation involves observing role models to identify provisional identities and subsequently experimenting with provisional selves. In that sense, building career identity is similar to constructing a new professional identity: role models may yield provisional selves, and experimenting with these provisional selves may lead to a changing perception of one's competence. Despite these similarities, the idea of 'provisional selves' cannot fully account for the construction of career identity among the disadvantaged unemployed youth that participated in the current study. In order to build their career identity –and to 'make the switch' from interrupted career trajectories to stable employment– it seemed essential for apprentices to decrease the salience of their former unemployed identity.

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The importance of the social context fits well with social identity research stating that the centrality of employment (i.e., career identity salience) is partly influenced by one's chances to find employment (Mean Patterson, 1997; Meijers, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In other words, among young unemployed people, expectations of future employment may influence the construction of career identity. Indeed, most participants indicated that they developed a stronger sense of career identity and future career perspective in the first months of Fifteen's program. Social identity research furthermore states that the centrality of employment is reflective of social identification (Mean Patterson, 1997; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Accordingly, identifying with others in the apprentice group who are pursuing stable employment should be a good method for building one's career identity. However, the findings in this study indicate otherwise: participants who had found stable employment often referred to distinguishing themselves from the group, whereas identifying with the group was more often referred to by participants who remained unemployed after graduation. It thus seems essential for disadvantaged young adults to actively withdraw from their unemployed, stigmatized identity to be able to build their career identity.

It is surprising that identifying with positively regarded others of the social identity group turned out to be disadvantageous, because research shows that social recategorization (i.e. reducing the salience of a devalued social identity) can be achieved both by emphasizing similarities with more positively regarded social identity groups and by emphasizing distinctiveness from their own social identity group (Ellemers et al., 2002; Roberts, 2005). One explanation for this surprising finding may be that identifying for positively regarded others in one's own group does not suffice for successfully building career identity. Additionally, the research on social categorization strategies mainly focuses on reducing the salience of unchangeable social categories such as gender, race or sexual orientation, and may therefore not equally apply to permanently changing one's social identity.

Another explanation for the fact that identifying with others turned out to be disadvantageous may be found in minority socialization, whereby group members share their (negative) experiences with finding (re-)employment (cf. Heslin et al., 2012). Such group identification may lead people to believe that their efforts in pursuing (re-)employment are futile, thereby diminishing their self-efficacy –an essential factor in

pursuing employment. Likewise, for Fifteen's apprentices, messages about what it means to be a stigmatized unemployed young adult –including bleak career prospects–, may induce apprentices' belief that they will never reach employment. Thus, although apprentices' career identity may be built through identification with positively regarded others, their self-efficacy and belief to find stable employment may decrease due to that same group identification.

Practical Implications

As qualitative data cannot determine causality, any practical implications may be read with some caution. Still, the results of the current study offer some suggestions on how to help disadvantaged young adults build their career identity.

Bynner and Parsons (2002) underlined the importance of professional intervention programs that aim to move unemployed young adults' careers off the exclusion path toward fulfilling occupations. The findings of the current study may provide some direction on essential characteristics of such intervention programs. Given that the salience of career identity in disadvantaged unemployed young adults' identity can be rather low due their interrupted career trajectories with many spells of unemployment, intervention programs may want to aim for increasing the salience of their career identity and decreasing the salience of an alternative social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In that regard, the results of our study suggest that it is crucial to help unemployed young adults not only to build their career identity, but also to actively withdraw from their former social identity in order to secure stable employment.

Additionally, Heslin (2012) wondered whether and why these intervention programs for stigmatized groups –such as Fifteen's apprentice program– may be effective or unintentionally unhelpful for participants' (re-)employment success. He questioned whether these intervention programs may cultivate stigmatized identity, therewith negatively impacting participants' career prospects, or whether these intervention programs may foster career prospects by building career identity and providing inspiring role models. The data revealed that Fifteen's apprentice program could both be effective and unintentionally unhelpful at the same time. To illustrate, the methods of identifying with positively regarded others in the apprentice group may have cultivated the stigmatized identity and may therefore not have contributed to

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apprentices' career prospects. At the same time, distinguishing from others with the same stigmatized social identity may have fostered apprentices' career prospects by allowing the possibility to build career identity. Additionally, providing inspiring role models (i.e. possible selves) outside apprentices' stigmatized identity may also have helped them to build their career identity and pursue stable employment. These findings imply that promoting regeneration into employment based on group socialization –as is done in Fifteen's apprentice program– bears some hazards and that group socialization should be carefully monitored.

Furthermore, apprentices often indicated in their interviews that they did not have goal-oriented and deliberate motives for applying for the Fifteen's apprentice program. Entering the program seemed to be a rather serendipitous event, and did not seem to bear many consequences for the remainder of the program. This finding is, albeit surprising, important to be aware of in reemployment practice. It essentially suggests that a clear employment goal is not always a necessary requirement for the success of an intervention program. At the same time, however, it did seem essential that apprentices build their career identity to be able to secure stable employment. This again suggests that it is crucial to help unemployed young adults to build their career identity.

All in all, building career identity turned out to be a less goal-oriented and deliberate process than I expected. In line with LaPointe's (2010) approach to career identity as a discursive process, it seems that the construction of career identity can be a step-by-step process. Career identity may thus be stimulated by an intervention program that approaches the 'switch' from interrupted career trajectories to stable employment with one step at the time –for example by providing a safe environment in which apprentices can discover their potential and provisional selves, revise and refine these provisional selves by 'working and doing', and where they can actively withdraw from their old, unemployed identity to build their career identity.

Limitations and future directions

A qualitative study like the current study only allows for in-depth investigation of the narratives of a select group of individuals. One disadvantage of this form of research is that the data collected are unique to the participants interviewed and the context in

which the interviews were conducted, and can thus not be generalized to a larger population. For example, the motives and methods of building career identity may be rather different for regular job seekers, older unemployed people or among discouraged workers. I do believe, however, that the results have uncovered some interesting themes that could not have been found by the sole use of quantitative methods. For example, it may be interesting to examine the consequences of a lack of clear employment goals or possible selves in future studies with larger samples and quantitative methods. Likewise, it would be interesting to further investigate the suggestion that withdrawing from one's former identity is crucial in building career identity.

On a similar note, the current study cannot determine the causality or a possibly temporal course of the findings. It would therefore be worthwhile to investigate the relationships, if any, between motives, processes and employment outcomes. These relationships may be best understood by examining the course of the (re-)employment process of disadvantaged young adults over time. Such a temporal approach may also provide insight on the order of the methods of building career identity: the order may be more hierarchical than described in the current study. Since the interviews took place in the same time span and participants were only interviewed once, it was not possible to examine this in the current study. It might be the case, however, that participants would first have to discover competence, can then pick a role model, and subsequently withdraw from their former identity to build their career identity. This remains something to be tested in the future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current study shows that a rather serendipitous event may help disadvantaged unemployed young adults to 'make the switch' from interrupted career trajectories to stable employment, by providing the possibility to build their career identity. The findings in the current study suggest that career identity plays a crucial role in finding (re-) employment, but also suggest that it is essential to actively withdraw from one's former social identity in order to build one's career identity and secure stable employment.

Appendix. Interview guide

(Part I – Past)

1. Can you tell me a little about your life before you started at Fifteen? (What did you do before Fifteen?)

    - Which type of education do you have?
    - What kind of work experience do you have?
    - Have you ever participated in similar projects? If so, can you tell me a bit more about that?
    - Why do you receive unemployment benefits?

2. What prompted you to apply for Fifteen?
    - How did you hear about Fifteen?
    - How did you get here? (Who made you aware of this possibility? What happened after that?)
    - Why did you apply? (What was your reason to apply at Fifteen?)
    - Why do you think you were selected for the program at Fifteen?

(Part II – Present)

3. I would like to know about your experiences at Fifteen. What do you think of it so far?
    - What do you do during the week?
    - What are the things you love about the program at Fifteen?
    - What things do you not like about the program at Fifteen?
    - Have you ever had a fight with anyone here (or disagree)? Tell me about it.

4. Fifteen is focused on learning how to be a chef, right? After all, you are going to get a chef's degree after this.

    - What have you learned here so far?
    - What do you expect to learn in the future?
    - What things have you learned here that could come in handy in the future? Why are those useful?

5. What do you tell people when they ask you "what do you do"?
    - What do other people (friends) think about you participating in this?
    - How important is working at Fifteen for you?
    - Why do you come to Fifteen every day?
    - Do you feel that you are obligated to be here? If so, by whom?

6. It seems like hard work to me, and sometimes quite difficult to stay motivated and keep coming here. Can you imagine that?

- Do you ever think "I want to quit"? When?
- What tricks do you use (if any) to persist when it gets hard? (What do you say to yourself?)

7. I can imagine that your life is suddenly quite different than before Fifteen. Can you name some things that are different in your life since you started at Fifteen?

- Why did these things change?
- Has the way you see yourself also changed since you started at Fifteen?
- Are there other things you now think differently about (about Fifteen, working, learning, cooking), than before you started at Fifteen? Can you elaborate on that?

(Part III – Future)

8. Let's talk about what happens when you're done here. Tell me a bit about what you think will happen when you have completed your education here.

- What will you do next? (What's going to happen after this?)
- If everything would be possible, what would you like to do?
- What do you find most important in a job?
- How would you have tried to achieve that without Fifteen?

9. Fifteen is a program that should eventually lead to a job as a chef. How do you picture that?

- What do you want to accomplish?
- How can Fifteen help you with that?
- How is Fifteen different from other educational programs?
- What does Fifteen provide that you can not accomplish on your own?
- What things do you learn at Fifteen, which might be useful in the future?