«Im kind of a big deal»

A qualitative approach to understanding the potential prevalence of elitist attitudes among psychology students and how it could compromise on the quality of psychological practices.

Master thesis by: Ørjan Rasmussen (20092476)

Aalborg university

Written in collaboration with supervisor and professor of psychology: Brady Wagoner

**Abstract**

The following thesis seeks to shed light upon a much neglected, but still highly significant tendency of our time that has come about so silently that its implications to the psychological profession to a great extent have been overlooked. Over the past couple of decades, psychology has become one of the most popular and desirable study programs to attend across Scandinavian universities according to official listings, making the average grade point needed to enroll in a psychology program record high. As such, it is timely to argue that the exclusive circle of enrolling psychology students constitutes an *academic elite* with a higher average grade-point from high school than ever before. In the wake of this tendency, the following thesis seeks to address the possible prevalence of elitist attitudes among modern day psychology students and to reflect upon the possible effects this contemporary inclination could have on how psychology is practiced, how psychology is perceived by the public eye and how the discipline will advance.

The thesis provides a qualitative approach to the research question at hand by conducting two semi-structured interviews with psychology students at the University of Oslo. The interviews are analyzed by the use of *thematic analysis* and a theoretical backdrop based on *humanistic notions* are offered to provide a possible understanding of how elitist attitudes could influence the way psychology is practiced in the 21st century.

This thesis is passionately and wholeheartedly dedicated to anyone who opposes established truths.

**Special thanks to**

Brady Wagoner

For encouraging me to follow my heart.

Linn Christine Finstad

For kindly offering her assistance in my search for interviewees.

Linn, Kaja, Andrea, Thea and Maria

For never failing to put a smile on my face

Contents

[Setting the scene 5](#_Toc388479462)

[Conceptual clarification 8](#_Toc388479463)

[Epistemological reflections 10](#_Toc388479464)

[Theoretical backdrop 14](#_Toc388479465)

[A Bourdieuian framework 14](#_Toc388479466)

[A humanistic heritage 17](#_Toc388479467)

[Opposing authority (Carl Rogers) 19](#_Toc388479468)

[How to offer constructive help (Edgar H. Schein) 24](#_Toc388479469)

[Methodological reflections 29](#_Toc388479470)

[The interview-guide 29](#_Toc388479471)

[Methodological quandaries (generalization, reliability & validity) 30](#_Toc388479472)

[Ethical quandaries 31](#_Toc388479473)

[Thematic analysis 32](#_Toc388479474)

[Phase #1 – familiarizing yourself with the data 33](#_Toc388479475)

[Phase #2 – Generating initial codes 34](#_Toc388479476)

[Phase #3 – searching for themes 34](#_Toc388479477)

[Phase #4 – reviewing themes 34](#_Toc388479478)

[Phase #5 – defining and naming themes 35](#_Toc388479479)

[Phase #6 – producing the report 35](#_Toc388479480)

[The interviewees 36](#_Toc388479481)

[Practical implications 36](#_Toc388479482)

[Analysis 37](#_Toc388479483)

[Main theme #1: Prestige 38](#_Toc388479484)

[Sub-theme #1: Appraisals and recognitions 38](#_Toc388479485)

[Sub-theme #2: The law of Jante 40](#_Toc388479486)

[Sub-theme #3: at the top of the food chain 42](#_Toc388479487)

[Interpretation of main theme #1 44](#_Toc388479488)

[Main theme #2: Safety 45](#_Toc388479489)

[Sub-theme #1: approval from friends and family 45](#_Toc388479490)

[Sub-theme #2: the easy way out 47](#_Toc388479491)

[Sub-theme #3: a lesser evil 49](#_Toc388479492)

[Interpretations of main theme #2 50](#_Toc388479493)

[Main theme #3: Widespread notions 51](#_Toc388479494)

[Sub-theme #1: obliviousness 52](#_Toc388479495)

[Sub-theme #2: “good-laced girls” 54](#_Toc388479496)

[Sub-theme #3: determining relevant competence 56](#_Toc388479497)

[Interpretations of main theme #3 58](#_Toc388479498)

[Theme #4: concerns 61](#_Toc388479499)

[Sub-theme #1: Being good enough 61](#_Toc388479500)

[Sub-theme #2: fear of being arrogant 63](#_Toc388479501)

[Interpretations of main theme #4 64](#_Toc388479502)

[Discussion 67](#_Toc388479503)

[An evil of our time? 68](#_Toc388479504)

[How psychology is perceived 69](#_Toc388479505)

[How psychology is practiced 70](#_Toc388479506)

[How psychology will evolve 71](#_Toc388479507)

[Conclusion 73](#_Toc388479508)

[List of references 75](#_Toc388479509)

[Online links 77](#_Toc388479510)

[List of appendixes 77](#_Toc388479511)

# Setting the scene

I.

I can honestly say that I remember it like it was yesterday. The sun stood high on the sky this summer day and tickled my bare feet as I was still lying in bed; too drowsy to get up, but still too uneasy to fall back into sleep. After a great deal of yawning and stretching however, I was finally awakened by an all too familiar sound approaching my bedroom window. It was the sound I had been waiting for; a diesel engine, undeniably French. I still remember how my heart started racing as I approached my bedroom window and got my suspicions confirmed. A little red Renault with the yellow postal-logo on the side, glistening in the sun. I didn’t even bother to put on shoes as I anxiously ran out to the mailbox. I still recall how the pavement was burning my feet as I flicked through papers and commercials to find what I was looking for. To my great surprise, the letter was about an inch thick, the size of an acceptance letter. After years of striving for the grade point needed to enroll into a psychology program and after a few more years of accepting that I would possibly never be able to enroll, this letter came to mark a defining day. Even before I had time to fetch the letter opener, in my mind, I had already started to decorate my office with a Chesterfield-lounge and a mahogany bureau to match. To this very day, I can still recall how feelings of joy, ecstasy, and disbelief amalgamated in a blissful fog as I read the letter and truly started to comprehend the more-than-welcoming message.

Five years down the line, I am however able to look back on this day and recognize another feeling being just as prominent - perhaps a feeling too ambiguous to understand for an aspiring teenager, or perhaps too forbidden to embrace. After the joy and ecstasy had settled, there was undoubtedly something ambivalent lurking underneath the surface that from time to time came to manifest itself as what I today recognize as smugness or perhaps even arrogance. As time went by, I noticed how such manifestations became all the more evident as I was basking in appraisals from family and friends, which happened more often than I would like to admit. Unlike the feelings of joy and ecstasy, the feelings of *pride* and *pomposity* that was enclosed with the acceptance letter seemed to linger. I don’t think - and I certainly don’t hope – that I changed outwardly, but in my quiet mind, I took pride in flaunting my newly acquired status as a cand.psych.-student. I quickly learned how it provided legitimacy for my actions, magnitude to my opinions and how it could trigger curiosity and even admiration at dinner parties and social gatherings. Curiously, I noticed that society was not reluctant to recognize my place in an exclusive circle of students with an apparent knack to analyze social situations and childhood traumas. On this note, I do not know how many times I have jokingly been attributed telepathic or clairvoyant abilities in the wake of revealing my study program or how many intimate and confidential toilet-stall conversations at home parties I reluctantly have engaged in. Such banal observations might seem humorous and lighthearted, but on some level, it can also be considered timely to address such conventions and in turn ask why they exist, and perhaps more importantly, how such assumptions could possibly influence the psychological profession. The curiosity to look closer at these mechanisms derives from personal experiences as exemplified above, but also from observations and discussions with fellow students who often describe similar scenarios. As psychology-students of the 21st century, it would seem that we are somewhat spoiled with admiration from our peers and the society by large, whereas we humorously disregard wrongful (and sometimes even supernatural) assumptions about the psychological profession as ignorance. Rarely, however, do we question why such assumptions have come to pass, to what extent admiration and approval potentially could beget internalized pride or how such pride could possibly affect our professional working life. Importantly, my intuitive understanding of these questions as highly relevant are not grounded solely on intuition. In an article published in the Journal of the Norwegian Psychological Association, psychologist Bjørnar Olsen (2011) refers to empirical studies claiming that a mere 4 % of Norwegian psychologist consider themselves as being average level psychologist, whereas the majority considered themselves as being among the 20% best practitioners within their field. Curiously, despite the extensive knowledge psychologists should have on Gaussian distribution, not a single informant reported being competent below average. Such findings could highlight important tendencies of our time and should for that reason not be undermined merely as humorous observations, but perhaps rather as a potential foreshadowing of en elitist coterie that, as we will see, potentially could come to compromise on the quality of therapeutic practices.

It is timely to argue that certain elitist attitudes among psychologists and researchers have been present for as long as the field have existed. Professor of psychology, Karl Halvor Teigen (2008, pp. 101-119) comments on how early-days psychoanalysts often diagnosed, treated and also institutionalized clients based solely on their self-declared expertise and also how psychiatric wards of the 19th century more often than not was governed with an authoritarian iron fist, fashioned by prevailing notions put forth by psychiatrists and doctors. Psychology is however a cultural and historical activity that that to a great extent is reflected by shifting tendencies along with social and institutional changes of our time, much as it is described by both Kvale (2003, p. 579) and Brinkmann (2008, p. 86). As such, it is timely to examine the elements that begets the self-righteousness of our time, suggested by Olsen (2011), and in time consider the possible consequences of this tendency.

On this note, it is sensible to address the birthplace of every psychologist, namely the educational institutions that enrolls more psychology-students than ever before. From the year 2000 to 2007, the Danish Psychological Association experienced a membership growth of a good 100% and in the United States, psychology as a profession is rated among the ten fastest growing career tracks (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, 2007, p. 11; Kvale, 2003, p. 597). Despite its popularity, the average grade point needed to enroll in these courses is higher than ever before. At the University of Oslo, psychology has the second highest grade point average of all courses and a similar tendency is evident at the University of Copenhagen as well as at Stockholm University[[1]](#footnote-1). Consequently, out of 989 applicants, only the 30 students with the highest grade point were offered to enroll in psychology during the fall-outtake at the University of Oslo in 2013, creating a whopping average grade point of 6,5 (Norwegian grade scale)[[2]](#footnote-2). Importantly however, a number of theoretical notions give good reason to question this popularity as not merely fortunate, as they illuminate possible consequences and concerns behind the enrollment of such an academic elite in psychology programs across Scandinavian universities. As we will see, it is also possible to provide a theoretical understanding of why the cand.psych.-title possibly could provide for elitist attitudes among psychology students of our time.

To illuminate the research question at hand, two semi-structured interviews have been conducted with psychology students at the University of Oslo. In the wake of elaborating on the theoretical backdrop, these interviews will provide an insight to the contemporary relevance and possible applicability of these theories.

**Research question:**

**To what extent can the increasing average grade point for enrolling into psychology courses elicit elitist attitudes among psychology students and how could such attitudes potentially influence psychological practices**.

Importantly, the following thesis is structured in terms of six main chapters: *introduction, theory, method, analysis, discussion* and *conclusion.* Accordingly, in the wake of *setting the scene* and providing both a conceptual clarification to the research question along with epistemological reflections, a *theoretical backdrop* will be provided that acknowledges the impediments that the possible prevalence of elitism could have within psychological practices. As such, this theoretical backdrop will strive to provide a greater sense of legitimacy to the theses at hand and to demonstrate the relevance and applicability of the subsequent qualitative data. A chapter on *method* will follow that will introduce the reader to the practical and ethical quandaries related to the interview-process along with the chosen procedure for coding and analysis. The extended *analysis* of the data will follow subsequently of the methodological reflections. Here, the prevailing themes identified in the interviews will be presented and analyzed in the wake of the theoretical backdrop. Based on these interviews, an extended *discussion* of the possible challenges the psychological discipline face will follow before the final comments are presented in terms of a *conclusion*.

## Conceptual clarification

It is timely to elaborate on the research question at hand in order to get a firmer grip on what the thesis seeks to illuminate, as well as to make clear what is understood by terms such as “elitist attitudes” and “psychological practices”.

First and foremost, the “increasing average grade point”, as it is used in the research question, refers in this context to a general tendency seen at most Scandinavian universities that offers a psychology program that lead to a cand.psych.-title. Nearly all universities that have been referred to, show tendencies of certain fluctuating grade point averages from year to year. However, the general tendency suggest a popularity-burst that has manifested itself as a gradually increasing number of applicants over the past 20 years, whereas the number of slots has not been correlated with this number, leading to a higher grade point average needed to enroll in these courses[[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4).

“Elitism” is defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology as a belief or attitude that certain individuals, who form an elite - a select group of people with a certain intrinsic quality or worth, higher intellect, specialized training or experience, or other distinctive attributes - are those whose influence or authority is greater than that of others (Colman, 2008, p. 245). A definition like this provide for a clearer understanding of what it entails to showcase elitist attitudes, but the epistemological backdrop of this thesis – a backdrop that hews more closely to a social constructivist framework, as it is described by Gergen (2005) - should offer a broader perspective on elitism that in many ways surpasses any singular definition. By acknowledging the diverse understandings of how elitism can be perceived and by embracing the tacit knowledge we carry with us regarding this very topic instead of rejecting it, the thesis will strive to look somewhat beyond the confines of a pre-defined classification. As emphasized in the succeeding *theoretical backdrop*, elitism is a broad term that could be considered closely tied to the tendency of refraining from humble approaches and exerting untimely expert-knowledge in the wake of specialized training, distinctive accomplishments or attributes. Importantly however, exponents within humanistic psychology emphasize that such tendencies more often than not are unconscious and therefore unintentional (Schein, 2009). Accordingly, it cannot be sufficiently emphasized that the purpose of this thesis by no means is an attempt to reveal elitist attitudes among psychology students for the sake of revealing them, but rather to investigate to what extent the aforementioned grade point average could contribute to such unconscious (and conscious) tendencies and how this in turn could influence the way psychology is practiced. In the following, elitism as a term will therefore not refer back to a concrete definition, but will rather function as a humanistic umbrella term that implies potentially untimely attitudes that the interviewees exhibit in the wake of enrolling into a psychology program or in the wake of studying psychology by large.

Lastly, the element of the research question that addresses the potential consequence elitist attitudes could have on *psychological practices* refers in many ways to the psychologists’ capability to establishing the helping relationship, as it is described by Edgar Schein (2009). Schein comments that the establishment of a constructive helping relationship lies as a cornerstone of all successful helping behavior whether its therapy, coaching, consulting or teaching, all of which are occupations relevant to the psychologist of the 21st century. As pointed out by “Psykologkampagnen 2013”[[5]](#footnote-5), the contemporary psychologist are in fact entering a plethora of occupational sectors, some of which detach the psychologist from the therapy room and provide them with a new set of jobs where competence within the psychological field is wanted. Curiously, Scheins description of the helping relationship shares a great deal of common ground with Brinkman and Tanggaards (2007, p. 30) description of the therapist/client alliance, but importantly, Schein supersedes the confines of the therapy-setting and acknowledge the significance of this helping relationship as equally important in any setting where helping is involved. Taking into consideration that a whopping 30 % of the therapeutic outcome could be ascribed the alliance between practitioner and client, it is timely to consider this element as a crucial cornerstone in *all* psychological practices, hence creating a parallel between the practicing psychologist and the capability of establishing a constructive helping relationship (ibid.).

## Epistemological reflections

It is timely to look closer at the epistemological foundation that in many ways pertains the following thesis and as such provide a set of guidelines on how to approach the research question at hand.

Largely based on observations and personal experiences, the following thesis is to a large extent inspired by a particular curiosity to understanding the possible effect elitism, or elitist attitudes, could have on psychological practices and whether such attitudes could be evident among modern day psychology students. As we will see, the importance of refraining from any kind of such attitude in psychological practices does seem to be embedded in a number of theoretical and practical approaches that largely favors a far more humble stance when engaging in helping behavior; a notion that seems to ring true based on personal experiences. Accordingly, the following thesis is to a large extent inspired by personal experiences from everyday life; an arena that can in fact be considered to contain rich sources of data which indeed can be analyzed, according to Svend Brinkmann (2013). Accordingly, while we are living life, undergoing a number of situations and interpreting these, we are already carrying out qualitative research. All we need to do is to have an astute eye for specific subjects of interest and attempt to gain insight through a process of analysis (ibid., p. 13). By acknowledging my relative unfamiliarity on the field of elitism and the consequences thereof, the thesis will seek to embark on somewhat of a pragmatic journey that will come to a conclusion as the concepts of elitism may transform into something more comprehensible which in turn can contribute to an understanding of its relevance in psychological practices. This pragmatic approach could become more comprehensible by turning to the words of Dewey (in: Brinkman, 2013, p. 65), and also by seeing it in contrast to scientific principles deriving from quantitative research. In everyday life, we seldom approach an object of interest with a distinctive goal in mind and a conviction that we must find the ultimate means to achieve this goal. In stark contrast to mainstream research that often commence with a concrete presentation of well-defined problems, Dewey’s notion hews closer to how we engage problems in everyday lives, as problem solving very often involves a procedure of getting to know the character and nature of the problem at hand before anything else (ibid.). Such a pragmatic standpoint will also be of particular interest in the pursuit of avoiding *methodolatry,* as it dismisses the stringent distinction between scientific- and personal acknowledgment and by such amplifies the significance of everyday research, advocated by Tanggaard (2013) and Brinkmann (2013).

The uncompromising use of quantitative research has formed somewhat of a void in the middle of variables, numbers and claims about objectivism, whereas the ingenuity and originality needed to shed light upon this void has been considered moot for a long time. Labelled by Brinkmann (2013, p. 77) as a profound adoration for spesific methods as the only valid methods of research, *methodolatry* makes up a thought-provoking shortcoming of western psychological research with the potential power to bottleneck innovative and pioneering science. Accordingly, this tendency is likely to encourage a profound mistrust that we learn to place in our individual ability to detect and apply insightful research, a proclivity described by Mills (1959, in: Brinkman 2013, p. 78) that could cause a methodological fetishism and in turn an unfortunate lack of originality within psychological research. Not until recently has this untimely tendency been rightfully addressed by a number of exponents that has brought about a new wave sweeping the psychological research field (Gergen, 2013, p. 1). After an era of quantitative supremacy, we are gradually witnessing the commencement of creativity and ingenuity, mainly represented by different qualitative investigators (ibid.). Such a global expansion of perspectives and methods of inquiry do not only oppose a long scientific tradition. It also brings about a new horizon of valid knowledge and challenge us to rethink what we assume we know about knowledge to begin with. As commented by Brinkmann (2013, p. 12), we are witnessing a sudden burst of qualitative research that strives to light up the voids that the quantitative paradigm has not yet managed to illuminate.

In the wake of these concepts, the following thesis will also seek to avoid the tendency of making ones method arrange for the field of interest, rather than letting ones field of interest suggest the best method possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 332). Rather than pursuing pre-described methodological plans, Lene Tanggaard (2013) states that such plans more often than not are re-written throughout the research and that a number of descriptions of methodological practices are in fact of a retrospective kind, being a post-rationalization of what was actually done throughout the process. As stated by Gergen (2005), the empirical methods that have been constructed and developed from a scientific epistemology and ontology, in which the criterion for success are data that can bring about generalizable and valid results, are problematic. Gergen questions the trust we put in “objective truths”, as he comments the following:

*“Is the human existence not better off with a certain amount of humility towards what we surrender ourselves to rather than an illusory certainty about justification? It is exactly when we know what is true and real, and that this God is the only one, that the bloodbath begins” (Gergen, 2005, p. 8, own translation).*

Accordingly, Gergen stresses how social constructionism seeks to represent a radical, non-objectifying and non- institutionalizing metaorientation against all claims about rationality, knowledge, objectivism and truth (Gergen, 2005, p. 8). As states by Gergen, for the past centuries, the western part of the world has viewed and presented itself as superior to the rest of the world, and has displayed budding tendencies of hegemony. Due to globalization and budding criticism from exponents representing alternative perspectives and understandings of human life and knowledge, Gergen suggests that a sense of self-reflection on the beliefs and values, which are embedded in the western attitude, is necessary in order to form “less sharp edges” and to open up more space for other perspectives to be taken into the limelight. In a still unpublished article, Gergen comments the following:

*“Psychological science is now in a period of major transition. After almost a century of dominance by a foundational view of empirical science, a new pluralism is sweeping the field. We witness the rapid and global expansion of perspectives, visions, and goals of inquiry. Partly owing to the traditional distinction between quantitative and qualitative research, these pluralistic pursuits are typically gathered under the qualitative umbrella.” (Gergen, 2013, p. 1)*

In the wake of the notions put forth above, the following thesis will represent a qualitative and somewhat pragmatic approach on how to examine the possible effect an increasing grade point average could have on psychology students and to what extent this possible development could elicit elitist attitudes and in turn influence once professional work life.

# Theoretical backdrop

#

II.

To provide a sense of legitimacy and relevance to the personal experiences from everyday life, it is necessary to see them in the light of applicable theoretical notions. In the following, a number of relevant exponents will be presented to provide a relevant theoretical backdrop to the research question at hand. Notably, this backdrop will also provide for the theoretical foundation of the subsequent analysis. The following chapter will commence with an introduction to Pierre Bourdieu depiction of the educational system as a contraption to sustain relations of social dominance. By turning to a Bourdieuian framework, the thesis seeks to provide an understanding of how enrollment in a prominent study program could elicit elitist attitudes to begin with. Subsequently, a humanistic framework is provided to highlight the possible effect this contemporary tendency could have on psychological practices. This humanistic framework is represented by two central exponents of the humanistic movement, these being Carl Rogers and Edgar Schein; both having greatly contributed to the advancement and applicability of humanistic psychology.

## A Bourdieuian framework

As commented in the introduction, it is appropriate to address the role of the educational institutions and how such institutions theoretically could contribute to the dawning of a potential coterie of elitist students. On this note, it is sensible to view these institutions in somewhat of a different light than what is provided by prevailing notions, which to a large extent consider the educational institutions as a neutral provider of science and culture between generations and as an establishment to diminish social class differences (Esmark, 2006, p. 71). As we will see however, by turning to a Bourdieuian framework, the educational institutions could very well hold a significant responsibility for the possible dawning of an elitist coterie suggested above.

As emphasized by Esmark (2006, p. 71), Pierre Bourdieu would not contradict that educational institutions does in fact provide knowledge and competences for the people engaging in the educational system, but for Bourdieu, the educational system is first and foremost an institution that reproduce relations of social dominance through cultural - and often hidden – mechanisms (ibid.). By large, Bourdieu recognizes the educational system as a complex apparatus to guarantee a proper distribution of academic titles, cultural capital and by such, a contraption that reproduces the prevailing social order (ibid.). These drastic notions derive from Bourdieu’s own empirical studies on social recruitment and cultural attitude among French students of the 20th century, and by such represent a highly critical perspective on the educational system at large (ibid.). At the kernel of this notion resides the concept of *symbolic violence*; a complex form of violence that is exercised on a social agent with his or hers own support and collaboration (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 92). The power to implement symbolic violence entails any kind of power that manages to uphold its own lawfulness as legitimate by concealing the power balance that enables this sovereignty to begin with. On this note, Bourdieu exemplifies how there is a consensus among the working class and the middle class that greatly favors the middle class as better suited for running operations, that they are more deserving of higher pay and that they in general are more capable (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2006, p. 76). Consequently, such consensus sustains symbolic violence in a completely legitimate position and is as such never considered violence per se. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2006, p. 77), the government endorse monopoly on this kind of power, and intrinsically, the government have the power to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate. They are therefore able to define their own dominating culture as worthy of being coveted and to establish this truth as the basis for knowledge in the educational system. As such, the primary purpose of the educational system is cultural reproduction, meaning the reproduction of the culture found in the dominant classes of society. Bourdieu refers to ownership of the dominant culture as *cultural capital*, because through the education system this culture can be translated into wealth and power. Importantly however, cultural capital is not evenly distributed throughout the class structure and this is largely due to class differences in educational attainment (ibid.). As Bourdieu comments that success depends on earlier accomplishments in life, people who come from an upper class background will therefore have an innate advantage in school as they have been socialized in the dominant prevailing culture that pertain the educational system at large. Consequently, this provides for a strong tendency within the scholastic system to favor the cultural legacy of the upper class, resulting in higher education and prosperity for these social agents. Conversely, the social agents from classes with less social capital becomes somewhat alienated and gain far less from scholastic principles as the educational institutions provide more of a cultural reorientation than actual education for these individuals (ibid., p. 76). On a relevant note, Bourdieu emphasizes that a combination of educational possibilities for different social classes and the chances of subsequent success, which is closely connected to certain schools and study programs, makes up the mechanisms of *elimination* (ibid., pp. 198, 199). The social function of elimination entails in many ways a reorientation of a *social* dissimilarity to an *educational* dissimilarity, which consequently conceals the different possibilities to gain access to higher education - an illustrating example of symbolic violence.

Importantly, Bourdieu did not merely postulate that different social classes have different prospects within the educational system, but he also studied the everyday life within the university-walls and found a peculiar tendency to *why* and *how* cultural heritage could play such a significant role in favoring students from the upper class (Esmark, 2006, p. 82). Curiously, his own research suggested that an *irrational mystification* pertained all aspects of the university-life; from lectures, to written work and visits to the library. By this, Bourdieu suggested that both teachers and students nourished a certain charismatic ideology, which came to consider intellectual competence more as a “gift” for the privileged, rather than something that could be attained though methodical and rational means (ibid., p. 83). By large, intellectual competence is to a great extent concealed in a veil of high cultural ambiguity that in turn beget a role-play among students and professors; a game of reciprocal validation of their roles, where lectures seemed more like a theatrical display where ambiguous concepts where presented to an applauding audience. As such, Bourdieu considered the university-life as a high cultural playground where actual competence took a significant backseat to the feeling of engaging in an academic atmosphere. In stark contrast to prevailing notions that placed the universities at the kernel of sense and reason, Bourdieu found a great deal of ambiguity, misinterpretations and a pedagogical communication gone haywire (ibid., p. 87). Curiously, Bourdieu comments that it resides a certain comfort in the mysterious fog that enshrouds the university-life as the teachers never had to doubt their inadequate pedagogy and the students never had to succumb to the strict study program (ibid.).

As we have seen, a Bourdieuian framework offers a radical approach on how to understand the role and purpose of educational institutions, and consequently, it would be wise to view these notions with an astute eye for their contemporary relevance and applicability outside the university-life of Parisian students of the 20th century. In this context however, the relevance of these concepts are found in their fascination of what a higher education potentially *could be* and what it potentially *does*. A further elaboration on the applicability of the Bourdieuian framework will follow in the subsequent chapters.

## A humanistic heritage

The latter part of the research question address the possible effect elitist attitudes could have on psychological practices, here defined as the ability to establish a helping relationship with the client at hand (see chapter on *conceptual clarification*). On this note, it is timely to include a theoretical framework that acknowledges the effect of such possible attitudes and that understands such attitudes in the light of more comprehensive and widespread terms.

As it is described by Dahl and Juul (2009, p. 124) *humanistic psychology* emerged in the midst of the 20th century as a counterstrike to oppose prevailing behavioristic and reductionist notions along with the grave focus Freudian psychology had had on the sickly and ill-fated individual. By emphasizing our inborn potential for healthy growth and development, humanistic psychology defined a new psychology with a new agenda, highlighting positive and uplifting human qualities. This new breed of psychologist questioned the great negligence psychology had had on constructive qualities like happiness, satisfaction, friendliness and generosity and wanted to bring these qualities back in the light where its existence and potential was recognized (ibid., p. 125). As such, humanistic psychology represented the dawning of a new psychological tradition that to a great extent rejected the concept of a superior and prescient psychotherapist on whom the “patient” passively depends for shrewd interpretations, as it is described by Ewen (2003, p. 198). Quite on the contrary, humanistic psychology brought life to a more humble approach to therapeutic practices that challenged any possible sanctimoniousness among psychotherapists with a clear mantra; no one but the *client* can truly know and choose their direction in life. Curiously, by addressing the vanity of our knowledge and expertise, this humanistic notion can be traced a century back in time and could also be more easily understood in the words of Søren Kierkegaard. In his work “En ligefrem meddelelse” of 1859 (in: Dahl & Juul, 2009, pp. 42-43) he comments on the role of the *expert* as somewhat misjudged by society and also by the expert himself. Curiously, Kierkegaard places the true expert in an *inferior* position stating that the role of the expert is not to preach, but rather to serve; it is not about being superior, but more about being attending and understanding. Attentively, he states that all useful advice come from a state of *humility*, as true experts should acknowledge his inferiority to the question at hand and recognize his position as a servant for the inquirer (ibid.). In the wake of these words, the vanity of our knowledge has been addressed on several occasions. Albert Einstein notoriously stated that a true genius admits to knowing nothing. Mahatma Gandhi have postulated that it is unwise to be too sure of ones wisdom, while Stephen Hawking claimed that the greatest enemy of knowledge, is not ignorance, but the illusion of knowledge[[6]](#footnote-6). It can be argued that such statements in many ways encase a paramount aspect of humanistic psychology, namely the rejection of the conventional role of *the expert* in favor of looking beyond the medical model of psychology in order to open up to a non pathologizing view of the client at hand. As such, it is not the role of the therapist to analyze the clients’ demeanor or behavior, but rather to downplay pathological aspects, provide empathy, listen attentively and to focus on the healthy and constructive aspects of the client (Dahl & Juul, 2009, p. 126). On a relevant note to the research-question at hand, humanistic psychology has not just inspired new ways of thinking within the confines of a therapeutic setting. As we will see, the notions put forth by this new wave is easily applicable to other arenas where *helping* in its purest form stands a cornerstone, whether its schooling, coaching, parenting, counseling or consulting. Both Carl Rogers (1973) and Edgar Schein (2009), as we will soon turn to, comments on the fact that helping is a fundamental human relationship that lies at the very heart of a number of occupations and that the path to the establishment of a helping relationship is not found in expert knowledge, licensing or traditional psychological theories. Accordingly, a number of prospering psychological practices like *consulting* and *coaching* derive from the humanistic tradition as they have found great potential for development and growth in the humble stance that the tradition beget (Gjerde, 2012, p. 42; Dahl & Juul, 2009, p. 126). In the wake of these notions, it is timely to see the competence of the psychologist in the light of his/hers capability of establishing the helping relationship with the client at hand.

### Opposing authority (Carl Rogers)

Commonly described as an even-tempered, patient and compassionate human being, Carl Rogers is today know as one of the founding fathers of the humanistic movement. By correcting Freud’s pessimistic outlook of human nature by showing that our innate potentials are fully positive and by stressing the importance of *equality* in all human relationships, Rogers passionately strived to set a new agenda for psychological practices (Ewen, 2003, p. 196). Notably, despite his deep care and compassion for human beings, Rogers did not care much for institutions, credentials, social class or appearances, and importantly, he questioned every authority, including his own (ibid., p. 197). On a relevant note to the research question at hand, Rogers was highly critical of the prevailing concept of professionalism and expertise within psychological practices, which he claimed was a great shortcoming that deprived the psychological discipline of creativity, contemporariness and *human touch.* In an article from 1973, Rogers illustrates this distrust by suggesting radical alterations in terms of how psychology should be understood and how it should be practiced (Rogers, 1973, p. 382). To put the constructive and positive aspects of the human being back in the limelight where its existence is once again recognized, Rogers comments on a number of challenges that face the psychological discipline – challenges that, according to Rogers, threatens the progress and development for the discipline by large. In the following, we will have a closer look at these challenges, how they potentially oppose psychological practices and how they could be met.

Initially, Rogers comments on a challenge that cannot be considered particularly new, but still unmet; does the profession dare to cultivate a new conception of science which, according to Rogers, is necessary if we are to have a *true psychological* science (ibid., p. 379)? On this note, Rogers highlights that modern-day psychology to a large extent has been molded by highly statistical measures, enormous enterprises, electronic equipment, laboratories and white rats and have for this reason been slipping backward as a substantial science. In the pursuit of scientific legitimacy, Rogers suggests that the psychological discipline is forgetting the individual and is rather sculpting itself after outdated physics. It has unwaveringly tied itself to a timeworn Newtonian conception of science, seemingly oblivious to the alterations in the views of science that have taken place both in physics and in various *soft* and *hard* sciences over the years (ibid.). As such, what psychologist have come to know as science is actually just a fraction of how science should be understood. Accordingly, Rogers argues that an openness to experience should be considered just as important a characteristic of the scientist as his understanding of research design. Science as we have learned to know it can for this reason be seen as only a small portion of a great field of knowledge in which truth is pursued in many equally meaningful ways, conventional science being only one of these ways (Coulson & Rogers, 1968, p. 8). The importance of this scientific paradigm shift is reflected in a principal humanistic notion; a new perspective of science will strive not to thrust the individual into a forced situation to investigate a hypothesis that is imposed on him. Instead, it will strive to open our minds to learn *from* the individual and consequently start seeing *man* as something greater than an object of investigation (Rogers, 1978, p. 380). On this note, Rogers suggests the following:

*“I believe that until we develop this authentic human science, we are but developing a technology for the use of planners and dictators, not a true understanding of the human condition.” (Rogers, 1978, p. 380)*

Curiously, Rogers attributes this conservative scientific view to the traditional ways of the educational institutions that provide the professional and much sought-after credentials needed to practice as a psychologist. Rogers clearly insinuates that to oppose the prevailing, conservative view of science, it is necessary to address the ways of the educational institutions that sets the psychological agenda. As stated by Rogers, these bastions of traditionalism bottlenecks potentially pioneering work by focusing primarily on dated concepts of professionalism and psychological theories past its prime (ibid.). In the following, we will have a closer look at how Rogers considers these graduating departments as disparaging on creativity and modernization.

*“Will the school psychologist be content with the attempt to diagnose and remedy the individual ills created by an obsolete educational system with an irrelevant curriculum, or will he insist on having a part in designing an opportunity for learning in which the students curiosity can be unleashed and in which the joy of learning replaces the assigned tasks of the prison we know as schools”? (Rogers, 1978, p. 381)*

These words kernel around another great challenge that face the psychological profession; do we as psychologists dare to set a new agenda an develop an approach which has its focus on constructing the new, rather than repairing the old? Moreover, do we as psychologists dare to sweep away our procedures for professionalism and credentials in favor of opening up to new understandings of what defines a competent psychologist? By *constructing the new,* Rogers imply that psychologist have so much more to offer than what the prevailing majority occupy themselves with; to lessen the pain of individuals crippled by social factors, for whom letdowns and failures has become a daily routine (ibid.). As a result of the educational system that primarily reproduce timeworn theories of psychopathology, psychologists have learned to see their tasks in such an undignified way that it makes it difficult to lift the view enough to see the functions that psychologists possibly *could* be serving; the function of designing a society in which problems will be less frequent. However, Rogers emphasizes that to work in such a proactive way demands significant changes; psychologists must be able to leave the secure confines of their office and start working in collaboration with school administrators, community leaders and teachers to design and plan contemporary learning environments. On this note, Rogers questions why psychologists are not found at the very heart of designing environments (i.e. homes, cities, workplaces) that nourishes enhancement and utilize technology rather than becoming its slave (ibid.). Due to the conformist and dated view psychologists have on their own profession, purpose and expertise, which is provided by the graduating departments, such proactive measures is highly neglected and takes a substantial backseat to treatment of the ill-fated – treatment which ironically in many cases derive from decade-old notions.

However, how do we meet the challenge of overcoming the time loop that encases the psychological profession, and how did we end up in a dated time capsule to begin with? Rogers once again addresses the educational institutions and their standards for professionalism as a significant limitation (ibid.,p. 382). Accordingly, the most effective way of freezing a profession in a past image is by setting up criteria for what defines professionalism and qualification within that very profession to begin with. The intention behind this conception is found in the strict examination-process that safeguards the certification needed to practice once field of interest. Rogers exemplifies this in the following excerpt:

*“What can you use for examinations? Obviously, the questions and tests that have been used in the past decade or two. Who is wise enough to be an examiner? Obviously, the person who has 10 or 20 years of experience and who therefore started training 15-25 years previously.” (Rogers, 1973, p. 382).*

Despite a number of attempts from this group to update their criteria, Rogers suggests that they always will be lagging several laps behind, so that the certification process to a great extent is rooted in the past and therefore defines the profession in decade-old terms. Accordingly, Rogers suggests that the certification process puts a stranglehold on creativity and contemporariness and therefore nourishes both arrogance and ignorance rather than competence (ibid., pp. 382-383). Moreover, in the wake of such certification procedures, Rogers argues that the PhD-thesis of our time to a large extent has become a caricature of its true purpose, as we as psychologist have learned to settle for mediocrity and frown upon creativity (ibid., p. 380). Rogers describe the *true* picture of the PhD as to follow ones interest into the mysteries of a certain aspect of human nature and out of that arduous, independent search come up with a contribution to knowledge. This is a picture that hews far off most contemporary psychological doctoral dissertations which largely is grounded on a Newtonian concept of science and therefore reproduce already established truths for the sake of scientific legitimacy and personal academic advancement (ibid., p. 380). On a curious, but highly relevant side note, Norwegian scientist Jørgen Bølstad[[7]](#footnote-7) comments on a similar tendency of our time that he refers to as “publish or perish”. He comments that throughout the 20th century, the number of published scientific articles in the OECD countries has been doubled every 15 years and from 1998 to 2008 the number of doctorates within the OECD countries increased with a whopping 40%. Accordingly, to stay competitive and up-to-the-minute, no contemporary scientist can afford to ignore the gradually increasing demand for publishing as much as possible as fast as possible and unsurprisingly, the need and desire to do so comes at a high price (ibid.). Often solely molded by one’s personal desire to contribute *something* to the prevailing scientific paradigm, Bølstad comments that PhD thesis and scientific articles of our time suffers greatly from biases, as this publicity-pressure contributes to a number of rapports that deceptively cry statistical significance based on confounding variables and a great number of personal biases. Moreover, this inflation of PhDs creates a form of *opportunism,* as researchers strive to climb the academic ladder by focusing on the “least publishable unit” – splitting up ones work in smaller sections to be published separately, leading to a greater list of published records for the researcher at hand (ibid.).

It is curious to see this contemporary tendency in the light of Rogers’s fervent article from 1973 where he insinuates a concern for such unfortunate tendencies ahead of his time. Importantly however, it is timely to view Rogers critique of authority, credentials and institutions in the wake of his compassionate nature and humanistic framework as it is described by Ewen (2003, p. 196). By firmly acknowledging peoples positive direction and purpose, as stated by Rogers in an article of 1995 (p. 21), he does not condemn or in any way impugn the motives or the integrity of any person aiming towards certification, official recognition and all that follows from it (Rogers, 1973, p. 382). Importantly, Rogers addresses the faults of the system, *not* the people engaging in it, all of whom are likely to have genuinely positive intentions. However, conservative educational institutions along with the necessity for credentials and the lack of a *true* human science easily warp these intentions into a conform understanding of what psychology is and how it should be practiced. On a final note, Rogers states the following:

 *“The question I am humbly raising, in the face of what I am sure will be a great shock and antagonism, is simply this: Can psychology find a new and better way? Is there some more creative method of bringing together those who need help and those who are truly excellent in offering helping relationships? […] I am quite aware that the position I am taking has disadvantages and involves risks, but so does the path to certification and licensure. And I have slowly come to the conclusion that if we did away with “the expert”, “the certified professional”, “the licensed psychologist”, we might open our profession to a breeze of fresh air, to a surge of creativity, such as it has not known for years” (Rogers, 1973, p. 383).*

### How to offer constructive help (Edgar H. Schein)

Whether it’s a mother helping her infant, a spouse who helps to make something happen, a consultant helping to improve organizational functioning or a therapist helping a client, *helping* in its purest form should be considered a fundamental human relationship with the potential power to move things forward and make change happen (Schein, 2009, p. IX). Importantly, we are not talking about therapy, psychoanalyses, rehabilitation or psychological treatment. The elegance of the word *helping* lies in its relative lack of a hierarchical structure; in a germane humanistic manner, it insinuates a certain irrelevance of credentials, academic titles and expertise. As emphasized by Edgar Schein (2009, p. IX), it is simply a basic human relationship that we all engage in on a daily basis, but regrettably, it is also a relationship that we too often take for granted and for that reason is commonly misunderstood and undermined. Schein (2009, p. IX) firmly believed that the psychological and social dynamics of helping really are the same whether we are talking about facilitating meetings, helping a patient or giving directions. As such, there is a breath of fresh simplicity at the heart of Scheins notions that, as we will see, somewhat emasculates the power balance often found between psychologist and patient in the confines of a therapeutic setting. Accordingly, Schein would argue that a consultant who offers constructive help or a parent offering aid to their child operates much under the same conditions as a psychologist helping his client and that the helping relationship that precipitate constructive help is just as applicable either way. In the wake of Rogers fervent criticism of credentials and institutions, Schein revives the idea of professional and constructive help as *not* solely belonging to certified professionals, but as a human relationship that anyone can tap into by acknowledging the emotional dynamics of the helping relationship, instead of taking this relationship for granted. In the following, we will have a closer look at Scheins work, his contribution to humanistic psychology and how his work exemplifies that *less* expertise could in fact be *more* in psychological practices.

In the wake of the aforementioned humanistic movement, a number of prospering occupations, like coaching and process-consulting has seen the light of day (Gjerde, 2012, p. 42). Schein represents for a great part the latter domain as he for the last part of the 1980s initiated somewhat of a revolution in certain areas of consulting and is today acknowledged as one of the founding fathers of *organizational development*, as it is described by Dahl and Juul (2009). As described by Schein himself however, his expertise does not primarily derive from the professional arena. As a helper, he emphasizes that he has been a husband, a parent to three children, a teacher, been consulting both individuals and organizational clients and have taken care of his wife during her several years with cancer (Schein, 2009, p. XII). These seemingly banal situations might seem irrelevant, but it is through seeing the connections and similarities in these very different situations that it is possible to generate a demystifying and general theory of helping.

Regardless of the situation, Schein places a great focus on what he refers to as *the helping relationship,* a bond that is to be established between helper and “client” (hereby used as a general term for the person being helped) where trust and understanding for both parts are of vital importance for the helping process to evolve constructively (ibid., p. X). Furthermore, in order to establish such a helping relationship, it is essential to recognize the social dynamics when helping is at play. Much in line with Kierkegaard’s aforementioned description of a professional helper, Schein stresses the unfortunate effect *power balance* could have in the process of helping, a power balance that is often ignored, despite the fact that it is present every time someone is in need of help. Schein describes this dynamic as the “one-downness” of needing help:

*“Helping situations are intrinsically unbalanced and role-ambiguous. Emotionally and socially, when you ask for help you are putting yourself ‘one down’. It is a temporary loss of status and self-esteem not to know what to do next or to be unable to do (ibid., pp. 31-32)*

Accordingly, Schein suggests that being alert of this “one-downness” allows the helper to pay attention to the feelings of the client at hand, regardless of the situation. Importantly however, the askew power balance is not just made up of the clients “one-downness”. Also the superiority of the helper plays a significant role to this imbalance (ibid.). Curiously, the helper will immediately, and often unconsciously, gain power and status when asked to provide expertise and wisdom to resolve the inquiry at hand, thus becoming “one-up”. As emphasized by Schein, it is likely that the helper does in fact have a degree of expertise and knowledge that intuitively could be of great help, but paradoxically, this knowledge could do more damage than good in this phase of the helping process. Accordingly, at the commencement of the helping process, the awareness and respect of the clients position of being “one-down” is of utter most importance in establishing the helping relationship (ibid., p. 34). When asked to help a client who feels inferior, expert knowledge and a greater focus on the skills and expertise of the helper could for this reason constitute a damaging element to the helping relationship and could potentially bottleneck the helping process already in its initiating phase. Schein exemplifies this in the following excerpt:

*After the help has been asked for, the client takes on the passive, dependent audience role and puts the helper-to-be into the actor role. The ball is suddenly in the helper’s court – what will the helper do with it? It is important to recognize this nuance because it provides the potential helper with the possibility of taking advantage of the situation – either selling something or in other ways exploiting the situation rather than providing help. One may realize that one cannot really help but be seduced into using the power granted for personal gain. It is psychologically hard to give up such granted power, to say with humility, “I don’t know if I can help or not” or “I cannot really help you” (ibid., p. 34)*

Accordingly, the humble recognition of these social dynamics lies at the kernel of the helping relationship, along with the helpers lack of self-focus and submission from ones superior position. In accordance with the abovementioned imbalance of power, Schein stresses a key feature that presents itself as somewhat of an incongruity when offering help to a client, namely to deal with the imbalance by accessing areas of ignorance and lack of knowledge. By acknowledging the ignorance that resides in both parts in the initiation of the helping process instead of hiding ones feelings of cluelessness and doubt behind a veil of expertise, the helper may commence with a clean slate as he/she gradually maps the needs and desires of the client at hand. Accordingly, Schein (ibid. p. 49) stresses that the procedure of taking a moment or two to dwell in the aspects of the inquiry we do not fully understand, and by such fathoming our areas of ignorance, is more often than not found indispensable when mapping a suitable way forward in the helping process. As such, our innate tendency to act upon intuition and seemingly applicable expertise can often constitute a grave pitfall for the helping-process that follows. Schein comments that it is not only the *helper* who must map his area of ignorance, also the client could be struggling with areas of ignorance that barricades relevant information needed to advance in the helping-process. Notably, the interaction between helper and client is often paved with tacit ignorance and misconceptions, as the helper habitually believes he can grasp the inquiry based on information provided by the client, whereas the client often struggle to explain the inquiry to begin with and could also be oblivious to significant details that could steer the process in a constructive direction. From both sides, the instinctive yearning for the helper to undertake the classic “doctor-role” is prominent; a role that not only will make the helper provide expertise, but a role that also will provide a diagnosis along with a prescription to the problem at hand. However, this role could potentially make the client not only abdicate responsibility for making a diagnosis himself, but by undertaking this role, it is insinuated that an outsider can come into a complex situation, identify problems and remedy them, much like a plumber, carpenter or doctor. As the helper becomes empowered by the expertise ha can offer, whereas the client is given the impression that the problem is being taken care of without having to contribute much in the process, the appeal and popularity of undertaking the doctor-role is indisputable. Regardless, Schein stresses that we all probably have experienced the irrelevance of a helpers advice or how offensive it can be to be told what must be done, even when help has been asked for. For these reasons, Schein advocates a timelier role to play at the initiating segment of the helping process - the role of the process consultant (ibid., p. 81).

Despite its name, the role of the process-consultant should not be misjudged as solely applicable to consulting practices or professional facilitation. Once again, Schein stresses the surprisingly broad applicability to the role of the process consultant and emphasize that the helping-process that could emerge in the wake of adapting this role is just as relevant to a therapist as to a teacher. It is curious to see this concept in the wake of the humanistic perspective offered by Rogers, who clearly insinuates that psychologist should take notice of other occupations and start to look beyond the notions offered by the graduating departments (Rogers, 1973, p. 383). By being less arrogant, Rogers believes that psychologists can learn a lot from “the uncertified helpers” who is often surprisingly adept in the area of human relationships, as they are not tied down by dated scientific paradigms or obsolete licensing procedures (ibid.).

Certainly, the content of the clients inquiry should never be ignored, but as a process consultant, it is implied that the helper from the very beginning focuses on the *communication process* and how the actual interaction is unfolding by having an astute eye to tone of voice, demeanor, body language and alike. The purpose is simply to refrain from going “one-up”, by such create a climate with the capability to eradicate any ignorance, and in time promote a constructive helping process. In contrast to the “doctor-role”, the role of the process consultant can be demonstrated in terms of “humble inquiry”, a questioning procedure that aims to keep the client in the driving seat at all times to allow them to regain status by actively participating in the helping process (Schein, 2009, p. 83). At the heart of this role lies the supposition that he client at all times must be encouraged to remain proactive by retaining remedial and diagnostic initiatives as only the *client* can identify the true complexity of the problem at hand and only the *client* owns the problems identified; a notion that hews closely to the aforementioned humanistic concept put forth by Ewen (2003, p. 198). As such, the role of the process consultant is to a large extent about letting go of ones intuitive assumptions and not assume too much about the inquiry at hand, a paradoxical role to play, as it is exceptionally easy to describe, but highly challenging to do reliably.

On a final note, it is important to emphasize that Schein (2009, p. 83) does not intend a complete abolishment of expertise when asked to help. Constructive help involves a proper understanding of the psychological and social dynamics involved when someone seeks help and being alert of the emotional impact that different kind of questions have on the client’s mental process. Importantly, the choice of when to engage in different helping positions depends on circumstances, the events of the story as it unfolds and perhaps most crucially, the helpers astute calculation of when the client is no longer feeling “one-down” (ibid.). Accordingly, in the earlier stages of the helping process, the role of the process consultant is often highly relevant as it has the potential to elicit the expectations of the client and allow the helper to offer support and acceptance. In a manner of timing and alertness to the developing helping process, once the client gain status as an active problem solver, deeper levels of both confrontational and diagnostic inquiry become possible (ibid., p. 84).

# Methodological reflections

#

III.

By conducting two semi-structured interviews with a male and female psychology student at the University of Oslo, the thesis seeks to examine the relevance and applicability of the theoretical backdrop in a more contemporary light. Moreover, the interviews have been executed to provide insight to the research question at hand by hopefully pointing towards certain proclivities showcased by the candidates in the wake of enrolling in a psychology program. The following chapter consists of reflections on method and will as such touch upon practical and ethical quandaries related to the interview-process. Importantly, the following chapter also includes the procedure for coding which lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis, along with a presentation of the interviewees.

## The interview-guide

The interview-guide was generated to provide the best possible insight to how an increasing grade point average could elicit possible elitist attitudes, as the term can be understood from a humanistic perspective. As such, it seeks to unveil some of the questions and concerns put forth by central exponents of the humanistic movement to see whether these concerns could in fact be of relevance some 50 years after the commencement of this movement. Accordingly, the interview-guide was fashioned with an astute eye for the theoretical framework offered by exponents within humanistic psychology and sociology (Bourdieu) and each question can for this reason be traced back to these very notions. The guide was created in terms of a semi-structured interview, as Dr. Darren Langdridge describes it (2007 p. 65). As a trade-off between consistency and flexibility, it allows new ideas to be brought up during the interview in the wake of the dynamic development of the conversation. Accordingly, 15 questions were generated, but with the possibility not to enforce the schedule rigidly if questions are answered earlier or if a relevant topic emerged that have not occurred to the researcher during the making of the interview-guide. In the wake of supervisors’ approval, *Piloting* was executed in collaboration with a fellow psychology student, leading to minor structural changes. The Interview-guide is found as “Appendix 3”.

## Methodological quandaries (generalization, reliability & validity)

Taking the epistemological backdrop of this thesis into consideration, the interviews at hand does not intend to provide a universal generalization of how to understand the attitudes and behavior of psychology students of the 21st century. Much in line with the words of Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 288), the methodological approach seeks to acknowledge the vast diversity of realities represented by each single case and to recognize the uniqueness of these individuals. Importantly however, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, pp. 288-289) emphasize that the knowledge acquired in the aftermath of a qualitative interview can be transferred onto other relevant and similar situations. As such, interviews of this kind can have the potential power to imply certain tendencies and to view such tendencies in the wake of theoretical notions, but this should be done with an astute eye for knowing when the epistemological principles are being compromised.

The challenge of consistently assuring *reliability* and *validity* within a qualitative framework is undisputable. On this note, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 272) stresses that an excessive focus on such quantitative terms could compromise on the creativity and innovation offered by the qualitative domain, as improvisation, personal flair and a knack for following once intuition are aspects that could beget a greater playing field and thus potentially pioneering findings. Nonetheless, it has been strived to implement measures to reassure a certain degree of both validity and reliability in the interviews at hand. As emphasized by Kvale and Brinkmann (ibid.), the validity of an investigation depends largely on the consistency of the theoretical soundness that underpins once inquisitiveness to begin with. The humanistic notion that underpins the researcher’s curiosity represents a decade-old heritage which has spurred a number of empirical investigations relating elements of person-centered therapy to prosperity and constructive development for the client at hand (Ewen, 2003, p. 208). These findings have also lead to the dawning of new professions, like coaching and process consulting, that effectively have proven the value and practical applicability of humanistic psychology (Gjerde, 2012, p. 44). As such, the questions found in the interview-guide has been modified to address such humanistic concepts, and have in time been acknowledged as theoretically relevant by fellow psychology students. Furthermore, the use of control questions during the interviews were used to assure credible responses, which could safeguard a more valid interpretation in the succeeding phases (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 132).

As emphasized by Langdridge (2007, p. 67), the interview-guide is not just a schedule to enable the researcher to do his/her work effectively, but also reliably. As such, the interview-guide was constructed to create a relatively reliable interview-process that for the most part remained intact from one interview to the other. Importantly, certain follow-up questions were fashioned as *leading questions* to assure reliable answers as well as reliable interpretations on behalf of the researcher, but as emphasized by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, pp. 194-195, 271), when used unconsciously, leading questions has the power to influence the interview to a large extent. During the transcription, certain examples of unconscious use of leading questions were detected, making these questions inapplicable for the succeeding analysis.

## Ethical quandaries

The process of conducting an interview should beget moral and ethical obligations, not only to assure professional legitimacy, but also to safeguard the privacy and integrity of all involved parties. The research question at hand in combination with the chosen method raises certain ethical predicaments that will be highlighted in the following paragraphs.

Defined as a belief or attitude that certain individual who form an elite, based on intellect, experience or training, are those whose influence and authority is greater than that of otters, *elitism* can be said to be linked to both arrogance and superiority, qualities that are commonly recognized as unflattering. Herein lies an ethical quandary that should not be undermined, namely the possibility of attributing such characteristics to the interviewees at hand. On this note, it is timely to reemphasize that the purpose of this thesis by no means is an attempt to reveal elitist attitudes on behalf the interviewees for the sake of revealing them. Importantly, a humanistic understanding of human nature resides in its positive and constructive potential, with its genuinely positive intentions as a clear mantra. As emphasized in the theoretical backdrop however, the potential of these intentions can become constricted by a rigid educational system that to a large extent dictates how this potential is best put to good use. Accordingly, the following interviews seeks to address this possible tendency by seeing the responses of the interviewees in the light of enrolling in a psychology program, *not* as personality traits or personal inclinations.

Regardless, the common-sense understanding of *elitism* as a negative term makes up a challenge when generating relevant questions. To minimize *social desirability bias*, as it is described by Langdridge (2006, p. 58), none of the questions addresses or mentions elitism, arrogance or similar terminology. All questions in the interview-guide revolve around the interviewees’ personal understanding of the study program, the psychological profession, their personal experiences with fellow students and other people outside the study program as well as their ambitions and desires. In accordance with this, the research question was not presented to the interviewees and they were not informed that elitism was a central element of the thesis. Importantly however, this was done after cautious consideration to minimize social desirability bias, which could have greatly compromised on the quality and overall applicability of the interviews.

Importantly, both interviewees signed a contract of confidentiality assuring them complete anonymity, and with the power to withdraw from the interview as they pleased without having to explain why. To properly pledge the confidentially of the interviewees, these contracts are not found as appendixes. Accordingly, both interviewees are provided pseudonyms in the transcripts and all data are contained within a password-accessed file to be deleted ultimo May 2014. As both interviewees are over the age of 18, no parental acceptance notice was needed.

## Thematic analysis

As emphasized by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 4), it can be argued that qualitative methods are somewhat divided into two camps. Within the first of these, we find methods like *interpretive phenomenological analysis,* stemming from a specific epistemological or theoretical position. Second, we find methods that are principally independent of epistemology and theory and can for this reason be applied across a range of approaches. Spurred by the desire to apply a pragmatic and flexible approach to the interviews at hand, *thematic analysis* - with a firm base in the second camp – represents a flexible and useful research tool that offers theoretical freedom and by such is compatible with a constructionist epistemology. Thematic analysis, as Virginia Brown and Victoria Clark (2006) describe it, is a poorly demarcated, yet widely used analytic method within social sciences, conceivably due to its great flexibility and diverse applicability. Importantly, it represents a method for analyzing, identifying and reporting themes within a given data, with the potential power to organize and describe this data in rich detail (ibid., p. 6). As there is no universal consensus on how one goes about executing a thematic analysis, it could possibly be considered a “poorly branded” method as it does not exist a “named” analysis in the same manner as certain other methods (i.e. grounded theory, narrative analysis). However, Brown and Clark (ibid., p. 7) argue that a lot of analysis is essentially thematic, but is often claimed with another name or not identified as any particular method at all. Since thematic analysis currently has no formal status as an analytic method per se, it is often wrongly acknowledged as a method of investigation used by investigators lacking proper knowledge of more kudos-bearing and branded form of analysis like IPA or grounded theory. As such, transparency and clarity around the methodological use of thematic analysis is found as a vital component of the method. The lack of such clarity could potentially impede other researchers to carry out related projects and could also make it difficult to evaluate the research at hand and compare it with other studies on the topic. As such, it has been strived to execute the analysis through a systematized six-phase process, as it is suggested by Brown and Clark (ibid., p. 16). In the following, these phases will be presented to arrange for an overview of the analysis and to provide insight to *how* and *why* the relevant themes used in the analysis was chosen.

### Phase #1 – familiarizing yourself with the data

###

It was strived to submerge oneself with the data to the extent that the researcher is familiar with the depth and width of the content before the coding process. This involved a repeated reading of the data and a process of witnessing the data in an *active way,* where the purpose is to search for patterns, meanings and alike. Before the initiation of the coding process, the complete data set was thoroughly read through as this process contributes to shaping the researchers ideas, identifications and general outlook on the dataset. As a final step of the first phase, it was generated a brief list of ideas about what can be found in the data along with the elements that can be said to be interesting about them.

### Phase #2 – Generating initial codes

###

As the name implies, the following phase involves the production of the initial codes from the data set. These initial codes are found by striving to give full and equal attention to each data item and are identified as a feature of the data that appears interesting to the researcher. As such, these codes represent the most basic segment of the dataset that can be assessed in a meaningful way. By taking notes in the marrow of the transcripts, this manual coding process seeks to identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns or themes across the dataset. It was strived to code liberally for as many potential patterns as possible, as it often can be difficult to have an eye for what might be of interest in the succeeding phases.

### Phase #3 – searching for themes

As the data have been coded, this phase re-focuses the analysis at a broader level of themes rather than codes. As such, it involves sorting the different codes into possible themes and collecting all relevant coded data within the identified themes. At this point we are starting to analyze the codes and consider how different codes may amalgamate to form an overarching theme. Here, the use of mind maps and simple tables helped to create a visual representation of how to sort different codes into themes.

### Phase #4 – reviewing themes

As a devised set of potential themes have been set, this phase involves the refinement of these. Some themes might not function as themes at all, other themes might amalgamate into each other, whereas some themes might need to be broken down into separate themes. As such, it is found necessary to read through all the collated extracts for each theme and carefully consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. Also, phase #4 involves a consideration of whether the candidate thematic map truthfully reflects the meanings evident in the data set as whole and as such consider the *validity* of the individual themes in relation to the data set. Accordingly, by the end of this phase, it should be possible to have a fairly good idea of the relevant themes, how they fit together and the overall story they tell about the data.

### Phase #5 – defining and naming themes

As a satisfactory thematic map begins to take shape, it is timely to refine and define the themes that are to be presented in the analysis and analyze the data within them. As such, we strive to find the essence of each theme and determining what aspects of the data each theme captures. By going back to the collected data extracts for each theme, organizing them into a coherent and internally consistent description with accompanying narratives, it is strived not to make the themes too complex or too diverse.

### Phase #6 – producing the report

###

As the name implies, the concluding phase involves the final analysis and write-up of the report. The challenge herein is to tell the complicated story of the data at hand in a way that convinces the reader of the validity and merit of the analysis. It is strived to provide the analysis with a coherent, logical, concise, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell, both within and across themes. In this phase, it will be strived to provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data by offering adequate and vivid data extracts that capture the essence of these. The analysis of the thematic map is found in the subsequent chapter.

## The interviewees

The male informant (alias: “M”) is 20 years old and is attending his 4th semester at the University of Oslo. As such, he enrolled in psychology in the fall of 2012. He is born and raised in a relatively small municipality (population < 10.000) in the southern parts of Norway and moved to Oslo the same year he graduated from high school due to enrollment.

The female informant (alias: “F”) is 22 years old and is attending her 2nd semester at the University of Oslo. Accordingly, she enrolled in psychology in the fall of 2013. She comes from a relatively big city (population > 200.000) boarding the Norwegian west coast and have spent three years after high school pursuing other interest before enrolling in psychology at the University of Oslo.

Both interviews were conducted primo Mars 2014 in locales at the University of Oslo. A seminar room, familiar for both interviewees, with a minimum of disrupting components was used for both interviews. At completion, a gift certificate of 200 NOK were given each of the interviewees as a token of appreciation. Importantly, the interviewees were not informed of this gift beforehand.

## Practical implications

As both interviews were executed in Norway with Norwegian interviewees, it is found sensible to offer the subsequent excerpts in the native tongue of the interviewees. An initial attempt to translate the experts into English demonstrated the difficulties of doing so with respect to the responses offered by the interviewees. Moreover, this initial attempt proved that a translation could greatly compromise on the reliability of the transcripts and could cause a great deal of meaning to become lost in translation. The reader will find a brief summary of the excerpts offered in English after each respective sub-theme is presented.

# Analysis

IV.

In accordance with the forgoing methodological reflections, the following chapter entails the analysis of what is considered to be the prevailing themes of the conducted interviews. Accordingly, these themes have been fashioned through the aforementioned six-step process of read-throughs, familiarization, coding and refining. Importantly, the four themes that have been identified contains a number of *sub-themes* that will be the vocal point of the analysis and will as such demonstrate the prevalence of the main-theme they belong to.

The analysis follows a consistent structure that typically will open each main-theme with a description of why the theme is found significant. Subsequently, each sub-theme will be presented with an explanation of how it is found relevant as a sub-theme, followed by a description of how the sub-theme is evident in the interviews by the use of relevant excerpts. After the presentation of each sub-theme, an interpretation of the main theme will be presented. This interpretation will seek to connect the main theme and sub-themes to relevant theoretical notions. An overview of the four identified main themes with their corresponding sub-themes can be found in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Prestige**Appraisals and recognition The law of JanteAt the top of the food chain | **Safety**Approval from friends and familyThe easy way outA lesser evil |
| **Widespread notions**Oblivious peers“good-laced girls”Determining competence | **Concerns**Being good enoughFear of being arrogant |

*Table 1: An overview of the identified main-themes along with their corresponding sub-themes*

The transcriptions will be referred to in the following manner:

Appendix 1 = male interviewee (M)

Appendix 2 = female interviewee (F)

## Main theme #1: Prestige

Throughout the transcriptions, it is possible to identify several passages that relate the role of the psychology student to *prestige*. In this context, prestige is identified as a reputation or influence arising from success, achievement or other favorable attributes, much as it is described by the Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (Colman, 2008, p. 596). The prevalence of this theme will be demonstrated by looking to three sub-themes that is considered to encapsulate how prestige is associated with the role of the psychology student and how the element of prestige could be considered relevant to the research question at hand.

### Sub-theme #1: Appraisals and recognitions

At a number of occasions, the aspect of receiving appraisals and recognition from significant others in the wake of enrolling in a psychology course came up as a recurring theme. As seen in the excerpts below, both interviewees recurrently referred to how significant others related the role of the psychology student to “something worth flaunting”. The aspect of appraisals and recognition is considered to be closely connected to the element of prestige and is for this reason chosen as a sub-theme.

When the interviewees were asked about whether they remembered the day they received their acceptance letter and how both themselves and their family members responded to this news, M states the following:

*Jeg kan huske jeg var på en messe, en utdanningsmesse, der det var noen fra (-) fra (-4) fra profesjonsstudiet i Trondheim som sa nesten rett ut at jeg ikke kom til å komme inn, fordi det var et halvt år før og da hadde jeg ikke like gode karakterer, så jeg følte på en måte jeg hadde klart noe som var litt stort da […] og når jeg lissom videre skulle fortelle folk hva jeg skulle gjøre og hvor jeg kom inn og sånne ting, er det jo rart å høre ”wow, har du kommet inn der?” og ”så flink du er” og sånne ting (appendix 1, line 340-355).*

M elaborates on how he experienced such compliments in the following excerpt, after he was asked if he found such compliments surprising or curious:

*Kanskje litt overraskende men samtidig også ikke så veldig. […] jeg hadde jo på en måte andre venner som hadde søkt og som ikke kom inn og når man da å en måte til slutt kom inn, så var det kanskje ikke så overraskende at folk synes det var bra. […] Den måten når de sier at du er flink, samtidig som de på en måte sier at du er mye flinkere enn det dem er, det er en rar måte å få et komplement på. ”åj, du kom inn, du gjorde det ja, tenk at du hadde karakterer til det, gratulerer, shit det er jo ingen som får til det” (-) det er jo veldig hyggelig da, men (-) (appendix 1, line 358-371)*

When asked whether he believed such appraisals in any way contributed to empowering his self-confidence, M states the following

*Ja […] men jeg tror mye av selvtilliten min lå i skolearbeid fra før av. Da vi møttes til sommeravslutning og sånne ting, så var jeg ikke akkurat flau over å si hva jeg skulle studere, det må jeg være ærlig å si (Appendix 1, line 379-387).*

When asked how friends and family reacted to Fs enrollment, she states the following:

*Altså, mamma poppet champagnen hun hadde hatt i kjøleskapet et helt år, så det var DER da, hehehe […]så det var egentlig annerkjennelse og støtte (-3). glede på mine vegne (appendix 2, line 253-257)*

Other than this, F does not comment much on her friends reactions to her enrollment. However, when asked if people around her has changed outwardly or acted differently around her after she enrolled, F states the following:

*og av å til og i sånne fest-settinger og i sosiale sammenhenger kan man høre sånne overfladiske kommentarer som ”ja, du skjønner vel alt av det alle tenker” og sånn […] folk blir sånn ”å, ja, guri, nå må jeg passe på hvordan jeg sitter” det kan jo være jeg gjør meg noen ekstra bemerkninger som andre ikke gjør, men jeg har jo ikke lyst til å bli forhøyet på en eller annen måte […] Det har faktisk overrasket meg litt, hvor mange sånne type kommentarer som finnes (-) (appendix 2, line 312-330)*

**Brief summary of “appraisals and recognition”**

Both interviewees indicate that a certain degree of appraisal were noticeable in the wake of enrollment, both among friends and family. Whereas M comments that such compliments might not be very surprising, he still explains that he finds it somewhat strange to be considered “more capable” than his peers. F comments that her parents popped a bottle of champagne when they received the news and that certain friends have commented that “she must know everything of what people are thinking” as she studies psychology.

### Sub-theme #2: The law of Jante

At a number of occasions, the interviewees recurrently implied the relevance of the *law of Jante[[8]](#footnote-8)*, as they both explained how they had experienced the possible downsides to the aforementioned appraisals that could follow in the wake of enrolling in a desirable study program. Importantly, the interviewees does never comment on “the law of Jante” or mentions this term in particular. As exemplified in the excerpts below, the term is used to indicate passages where the interviewees imply that other people have criticized their academic achievement as inappropriate or unworthy.

When asked how friends and family reacted to M being accepted into a psychology program, he states the following:

*Men det jeg hørte var noe som at, nå må ikke du, indirekte sagt, bli ”høy på pæra”, når du kommer tilbake igjen må du huske (-) eh, fremdeles synes det er hyggelig å være med oss og du må ikke komme tilbake som en ”snobb” […] (appendix 1, line 394-398)*

Furthermore, when asked if he had ever been in a social situation where he has hesitated to say that he studies psychology, M states:

*det var en gang det var snakk om... jeg tror det var Alzheimers eller demens eller noe sånt noe, eh, også tror jeg at jeg hadde et innspill også tror jeg at jeg ble sånn delvis avfeid fordi det var noen andre som visste noe om det. Noen andre som hadde jobbet på en omsorgsbolig eller noe sånt noe, så prøvde jeg på en måte å ja, jeg vet ikke/ kanskje ikke/ jeg hadde jo ihvertfall lest noe om det i uka før og jeg følte det var spennende og hadde lyst til å bli med, men da følte jeg på en måte at jeg ble litt sånn (-) eh, ”du må ikke tro at du vet det bare fordi du studerer...” ja, litt sånn (-) i etterkant av det da, så har jeg vært litt forsiktig med å uttale meg som psykolog-student (appendix 1, line 496-507).*

When asked what Fs long-time friends thought about her enrolling in psychology, F insinuates that her friends have shown a concern that she potentially couldn’t keep her feet on the ground after enrolling, as it is exemplified in the following except:

*for de vennene og sånn som jeg har fått som går med sånn (-) hva skal jeg si, litt mer kunst og teatervitenskap og litteratur og sånt så tror jeg de kanskje kan ha tenkt at det er kjedelig, altså et steg bort ifra deres området da og ting som jeg også har vært interessert i da, men de har uttrykt at så lenge jeg klarer å holde bena godt plantet på jorda, så er de jevnt over positive (appendix 2, line 268-274).*

Also, F indicates that she has experienced what she refers to as somewhat sarcastic remarks at parties and social gatherings in the wake of reveling her study program:

*Jeg har hørt kommentarer på fester der der folk sier litt ironisk ”jasså, du driver å analyserer alt vi sier og gjør i alle situasjoner” og den slags. Det er overraskende ofte/ altså det er mye fordommer ute å går (appendix 1, line 126-129).*

**Brief summary of “the law of Jante”:**

Both interviewees provide examples of how other people potentially have attribute an element of pretentiousness to the role as psychology-students, and has for this reason been advised either to refrain from “getting cocky” or to “keep their feet on the ground” in the wake of enrollment. Accordingly, M comments that his family hoped that he would not return as a “snob” and that fellow students have indicated that “he shouldn’t think he is smarter than them” just because he studies psychology. F states that her friends advised her to “keep her feet on the ground” after enrolling and that other people have mockingly insinuated that “she must be going around analyzing everything that is said and done in every situation” because she studies psychology.

### Sub-theme #3: at the top of the food chain

As one of the more significant sub-themes, this theme addresses the passages where the interviewees comments on enrollment as something that is highly sought-after. The theme-name “at the top of the food chain” is inspired by an excerpt where M explains that being a psychologist is much like being on the top of the healthcare hierarchy. As such, the theme includes a selection of passages where the hierarchical position of the psychologist and the psychology student is addressed, often in relation to other study programs or occupations.

Accordingly, when asked what is was in particular about the psychological profession that intrigued the interviewees, M states the following:

*Det blir feil å si at det ikke på en måte/ det var status og sånne ting på en måte (appendix 1, line 46-47)*

He later elaborates on these thoughts when he is asked why he thinks the psychology program has become so popular the last couple of decades:

*jeg tenker det er to ting (-3) til det med status: det er nesten som å være lege, bare at man slipper alt blod og du slipper lissom all sykdom og alt det som på en måte.. mange ikke ønsker å ta i da, men du kan allikevel ha på en måte følelsen av å være, eh (-) en person som hjelper andre samtidig som du har på en måte en anseelse for å gjøre det, i motsetning til ja/ eller ikke i motsetning ti, men i høyere grad enn mange andre yrker innenfor helsevesten da. Jeg tror på en måte det som det skiller psykologi fra de andre samfunnsfagene er at du blir en helsearbeider på toppen av hierkarkiet da. (appendix 1, line 528-538)*

When asked directly whether this hierarchical position had a definite impact on the choice of study programs, M states:

*ja men det tror jeg at det hadde da. At det på en måte at det er veldig lett da å tenke (-3) det er sikkert dumt da, men hvis du har på en måte gode karakterer fra videregående så finnes det disse status-yrkene; du har lege, advokat, psykolog, noen tilfeller av økonom (-) som da byr seg som muligheter for deg og ikke for alle andre […] I tillegg så (-) så (-) jeg vet ikke (-) det er jo på en måte noe i det at det i disse høy-utdannede yrkene, eller høy-status yrkene også på en måte har en, kan ha en stemme i offentligheten. Så da vil man/ selv om man ikke er/ Jeg stod mellom journalistikk og det å gå denne veien, og både advokat og lege og psykologer og andre høy-utdannelser så har man på en måte en mulighet til å skrive kronikker å sånne ting da, fordi man har en viss anseelse på bakgrunn av det man studerer (appendix 1, line 73-100)*

F also recurrently addresses this hierarchical position. When asked whether she ever considered to study other social sciences than psychology, she comments the following:

*Eh, psykologi er jo blitt mer og mer (-3) ehm, (-4) dette at psykologien har fått litt flere elementer som på en måte mer/ ikke konkret eller vitenskapelig, men litt dette med nevropsykologi og/ det har på en måte blitt litt mer høyere kurs da. Altså statusen til sosialantropologi og statusen til psykologi er jo ganske forskjellig (appendix 2, line 89-94).*

When asked how it felt to be accepted into the psychology program, F states:

*det føltes, altså, det føltes som en anerkjenelse fordi det er jo et studium, altså profesjonssutdannelse står jo høyt i kurs, så det var litt sånn, litt deilig følelse sånn sett/ stolthet kanskje litt? (appendix 2, line 244-247).*

**Brief summary of “at the top of the food chain”**

Based on the excerpts above, it can be argued that the interviewees are consciously aware of the element of hierarchical positioning and that this element could in fact have had a certain impact on the interviewees choice of study program. Whereas M suggests this quite bluntly, stating that “being a psychologist is much like being a doctor, but that you don’t have to deal with blood and diseases”, F seems more reluctant to attributing her choice of study program to prestige or hierarchical positioning, despite that she acknowledges the germaneness of hierarchical positioning in the context of studying psychology. Accordingly, she states that the role of the psychologist is far more prestigious than the role of a social anthropologist. She also states that she experienced a sense of pride in the wake of enrolling.

### Interpretation of main theme #1

The three sub-themes seeks to illuminate the prevalence of prestige in the context of studying psychology from three different angles. The excerpts above clearly implies that both interviewees seem to acknowledge that they attend a study program that is much sought-after and have as such experienced both appraisals and recommendations implying that they should refrain from superciliousness or snobbery in the wake of enrolling in a prestigious study program.

By turning to the theoretical backdrop, it can be argued that the aspect of prestige in the context of university-life lies as a cornerstone in the Bourdieuian framework. In accordance with this framework, Bourdieu refers to ownership of the dominant culture as cultural capital, because through the education system, this culture can be translated into power and wealth (theoretical backdrop, p. 12). As cultural capital is not evenly distributed throughout the class structure, it is possible to see a parallel between capital and the interviewees description of prestige; both being objects of desire and both attainable through certain educational programs. In the wake of these notions, it is timely to consider the enrollment into a psychology program as a means to consciously or instinctively attain prestige/capital. As such, the warnings provided by family and friends not to become “snobbish” or “forgetful of their roots” could insinuate that they are aware of the capital that comes with a desirable education.

Moreover, it is timely to consider the element of prestige in the context of establishing “the helping relationship”. By turning to the words of both Søren Kierkegaard and more recently, Edgar Schein, it can be argued that the element of prestige can be considered contradictory to the role of the genuinely professional helper (Theoretical backdrop, p. 23) as it can be closely related to the concept of superiority. Accordingly, Kierkegaard states that that all useful advice derives from a state of *humility*, as true experts should acknowledge his inferiority to the question at hand, recognize his position as a servant for the inquirer, and *refrain* from superior attitudes. Furthermore, Schein stresses the possible downsides of the helpers superiority by commenting on the “one-up/one-down-hypothesis” (theoretical backdrop, p. 21). Schein comments that superiority creates a distance between helper and inquirer, leading the helper to become “one-up” and the inquirer to become “one-down”, potentially creating a troublesome helping process. Notably, these notions contribute to illuminating the possible difficulties that is associated with the prestige and hierarchical positioning that the psychology program seemingly beget.

## Main theme #2: Safety

Throughout the transcriptions, it is possible to identify a number of passages relating to an element of *safety.* Accordingly, the interviewees recurrently comments on their study program as being a very safe, and at times even a cowardly choice. The following sub-themes will seek to map the prevalence of safety in the context of studying psychology. As we will see, this theme includes certain excerpts and passages that hews closely to the element of prestige, as studying psychology seemingly is a safe way to attain prestige, according to one of the interviewees. However, when talking about safety, the interviewees use articulations that are more negative and sometimes even shameful, oppose to when they address the sub-themes that refer to prestige.

### Sub-theme #1: approval from friends and family

Approval shines forth as a recurring theme, in particular for one of the interviewees. Importantly, whereas appraisals refer more to an enthusiasm or celebration of ones achievements, approval refers more to whether or not family and friends accept and approve of the study program of the interviewees choice.

Accordingly, when asked what inspired M to study psychology, he states the following:

*Og jeg må jo innrømme at jeg ønsket å få uttelling for de karakterene og når jeg visste at på en måte/ det var også noe mamma og pappa anså som ganske viktig. Det var et studium som på en måte ga begge deler, og i tillegg ville tilfredsstille alle parter (appendix 1, line 34-38).*

When asked why she decided to study psychology oppose to other social sciences, F comments:

*Antroplogi og sosiologi blir jo sett på som litt mer sånn (-) ikke tullefag, men (-) men, du skjønner (-) […] ja (-) eh, og foreldre har nok å spilt litt inn […] altså min far har altså sverget mye til realfag og jeg har også en stefar som jeg bodde med en del år som også er en sånn realfagsmann tvers igjennom da. Eh (-) så de har vel på en måte å akseptert psykologien som”akkurat innenfor” (appendix 2, line 96- 110)*

she elaborates:

*og min mor har vært støttende til psykologien, for henne betyr det mye at det skal være en trygg og solid utdanning (appendix 2, line 113-114)*

later on, when asked how her family responded to her enrollment, F comments the following:

*min far og var anerkjennende og ”hvis det er dette du vil, så er det flott”, så det var egentlig, egentlig annerkjennelse og støtte (-3). glede på mine vegne. Ingen ting (-) negativt egentlig. Annet enn at den tanken jeg nevnte at ”nå gir jeg opp alt annet; journalistikk, litteratur og alt dette andre som jeg også bryr meg om” (appendix 2, line 254-260)*

On this note, F comments that the enrollment had been somewhat of a byrocratic battle, due to a number of formal blunders that made the application-process very demanding and stressful (appendix 2, line 219-223). In the wake of this stressful process, F was asked how it felt to finally become accepted:

*Jeg tørr påstå jeg var ekstra glad, men jeg tror også mine foreldre var ENDA mere glad og det gjorde også sitt til at jeg (-) overhodet aldri revurderte muligheten til å takke nei da. I og med at det var et sånt/ ikke press, men nå hadde vi liksom ventet på dette en stund (appendix 2, line 228-232).*

**Brief summary of “approval from friends and family”**

Based on the excerpts above, the element of approval seem to have had a certain impact on the interviewees choice of study-program. Whereas M describes that psychology was a program that would “make his grade-point count” and thus satisfy all parties, F stresses that her parents did have a certain influence on her choice of study program, as her father acknowledge psychology to be “scientifically legitimate” oppose to other social sciences. Moreover, due to the troublesome enrollment-process that F went through, she implies that it wasn’t really an option to decline when she finally got accepted, as it potentially could disappoint her parents. She comments that the only negative side to her parents approval was the idea of “giving up everything else she was interested in, like literature and journalism”.

### Sub-theme #2: the easy way out

This theme refers to the passages where the interviewees refers to psychology as being a convenient and straight-forward choice, oppose to other study programs that to a greater extent emphasize “networking and relevant work experience to get you somewhere”, as one of the interviewees explains it. This sub-theme encapsulate how the interviewees describe such convenience as a form of safety and as a noteworthy appealing factor.

Accordingly, when M was asked why he chose psychology before any other study program, he stated the following:

*også gikk jeg også litt for det jeg visste var (-3) på en måte forutsigbart hva gjaldt å få jobb og få jobb som hva/ man vet jo at man får jobb gjennom mange utdannelser, men man vet jo ikke akkuratt hvilke jobb man får før man begynner. Det var kanskje et litt trygt valgt. […] og det har jeg på en måte lurt på, om det var på en måte, ja/ skal ikke si feigt, men det var enkelt å gå for det trygge (appendix 1, line 122-134)*

Moreover, when he was asked why he thinks psychology have become such a popular study program the past couple of decades, M states:

*[…] Du kan gjøre det uten å ha tatt realfag å måtte på en måte fordype deg/ De er mange som er litt allergiske eller som er lissom skolelei ja, mot realfag, enzymer og biologi, men som er veldig/ som kan da se psykologi som på en måte en litt annen vei til på en måte samme lønn og status og samtidig samme ikke at hverken leger eller psykologer bare går etter det, de går jo også etter på en måte den følelsen av at de er viktige i en folkehelse-sammenheng (appendix 1, line 540-547)*

Also F point towards such safety factors when asked what it was a about the psychological profession that was appealing:

*Hm, jeg hadde tatt litt litteratur, litt politikk og andre ting, men det var vel egentlig tanken om at psykologiutdanningen er såpass trygg da, på et viss. At det er et seks-årig løp der du er sikret jobb, god lønn og litt sånn (-) jeg vil ikke si feighetsfaktorer, men du vet... altså, som bidro da (Appendix 2, line line 16-21).*

F elaborates on these thoughts when she is asked what *safety* means to her:

*når jeg tok litt andre fag og sånt så går du hele tiden med en følelse av at du må bygge CV, velge de riktige eller relavnte jobber, frivillige verv, mens her er lissom kursen staket ut og du er liksom/ så lenge du står på eksamen og liksom er med da, så er du, ja trygg sånn at du/ ja, sikret en god solid utdannelse og jobb (appendix 2, line 29-34).*

F comments on safety-factors a number of times during the interviews, like in the following excerpt, where she ponders over whether psychology really was the right choice for her:

*det er definitivt noe jeg gikk og tenkte mye på; om det var ”feighet” som gjorde at jeg valgte psykologi fordi det liksom er tryggere med tanke på penger og liksom/ (-4) (appendix 2, line 116-118).*

On a final note, F recalls the relief it was to enroll in the psychology program and not having to think about networking or job-concerns:

*det også en litt sånn lettelse over å være inne på et løp da, og ikke lengere ha den tankegangen om liksom hvilke fag man skal velge, og (-) og nettverksbygging og jobb, altså alt disse bekymringene du får når du går bachelor eller årsenhet (appendix 2, line 234-238).*

**Brief summary of “the easy way out”**

The excerpts above proves to show the impact of certain safety-factors and how both interviewees comments on psychology as somewhat of a “cowardly choice” due to the straight-forwardness and benefits that the program beget, seemingly without having to go through networking and resume-building. M states that it is “comforting to know what kind of job you will have at the point you enroll” and F states that it is “convenient to know that you don’t have to put a lot of work into networking like you have to on other study programs”. As such, it would seem that both interviewees to some extent still dwell over the possibility that they chose to study psychology partly for the sake of such safety-factors.

### Sub-theme #3: a lesser evil

This sub-theme addresses passages where psychology is addressed in comparison to other social sciences and will as such include passages where the interviewees refers to psychology as a more renowned discipline oppose to other social sciences. The name of this sub-theme is inspired by Fs description of psychology as one of the more prestigious of the social sciences, some of which she refers to as being anything but prestigious (appendix 2, line 90-98). The theme is found relevant as a sub-theme of safety as it can be argued that it resides an element of safety in choosing “the lesser evil”, oppose to choosing ones primary field of interest regardless of prestige.

Accordingly, when M was asked if he ever considered studying any other social science than psychology, he states:

*jeg vurderte både (-) filosofi (-) og jeg tror/ ja (-) jeg hadde sosialogi på den prioriteringslista (-) skal vi se (-) hva annet vurdte jeg? (-5) hmm, det som/ også tror jeg medievitenskap vurderte jeg. Det som var, var jo kanskje det at psykologi skilte seg litt ut som/ (-3) noe som virket litt mer forlokkende (-) (appendix 1, line 107-112).*

He elaborates:

*Så tenkte jeg at filosofi/ ja/ også gikk jeg også litt for det jeg visste var (-3) på en måte forutsigbart hva gjaldt å få jobb og gode lønnsbetingelser (appendix 1, line 122-124).*

When asked the same question, F states:

*ja. Jeg hadde (-) introduksjonskurs i sosiologi og sosialantropologi, likte det veldig godt (-) journalistikk hadde jeg også veldig lyst til å gå (-3) også i forhold til det jeg lærte i antropologi og sosiologi så var det vel egentlig det at (-) eh, psykologi er jo blitt mer og mer (-3) ehm, (-4) dette at psykologien har fått litt flere elementer som på en måte mer/ ikke konkret eller vitenskapleig, men dlitt dette med nevropsykologi og/ det har på en måte blitt litt mer høyere kurs da. […] Antropologi og sosiologi blir jo sett på som litt mer sånn (-) ikke tullefag, men (-) men, du skjønner (-) (appendix 2, line 85-97).*

Furthermore, F comments on psychology as being somewhat of a compromise between her interests and her need for safety-factors:

*så innenfor alle de samfunnsvitenskapelige fagene så da, bortsett fra kanskje sånn som journalistikk og økonomi sånn, så er psykologi som et, på en måte et skjæringspunkt mellom det som interesserte meg, men OG det som ble tatt litt mer seriøst og det som førte til en jobb og var litt mer (-) ja, mmm. Litt mer fornuftig på et vis (appendix 2, line 97-103).*

On a final note, it is timely to recall Fs description of her fathers impression of psychology as “barely passing as a legitimate science” (appendix 2, line 110) and therefore an acceptable study program.

**Brief summary of “a lesser evil”**

The excerpts above exemplifies how the interviewees consider psychology to be a more “enticing, legitimate and serious” business oppose to other social sciences and also how it offers a sense of predictability and prosperity after graduating. Accordingly, M states that he considered enrolling in both philosophy and sociology, but ended up with psychology because “it seemed more enticing than the other social sciences because of general benefits and wage-level”. F states that she considered other social sciences like sociology and social anthropology, but ended up with psychology because it is to a lesser extent is considered a “nonsense subject”. The interviewees imply that this more legitimate position potentially could have affected why they chose psychology before other social sciences.

### Interpretations of main theme #2

###

The element of safety emerged somewhat unexpectedly through the coding process, but its relevance and applicability is still evident by turning to the three sub-themes. Accordingly, it is curious to see the element of safety in the wake of considering the prevalence of prestige, as both interviewees imply that psychology emerges as a very safe and straightforward way to attain a respected job, without having to go through the process of networking, relevant job experience and “resume-building”. On this note, M stated that psychology is an alternative path to hierarchical positioning that do not require skills within mathematics or science, whereas F states that it is reassuring to know that as long as you pass your exams, you are pretty much safe and still guaranteed a good job. As such, the element of safety could be considered and unexpected contribution to the popularity of the study program, which in turn have affected the grade point average for enrolling.

It is curious to see the interviewees’ description of psychology as a pre-arranged road that leads to a safe and predictable job in the wake of certain humanistic notions. Notably, Carl Rogers comments on this safety-aspect as a *hindrance* for the constructive development of the profession. In accordance with the theoretical backdrop, Rogers imply that psychologist have much more to offer than what the prevailing majority occupy themselves with. He questions why psychologists are not found at the heart of designing environments that nourishes enhancement and why psychologists don’t work more closely with school administrators, community leaders, teachers and a number of other occupations for the sake of enhancing proactive measures. Instead, psychologists are taught by graduating departments to adapt a conformist view of their own profession and overall purpose, making it difficult to lift the view enough to see the functions that psychologists *could* be serving (theoretical backdrop, p. 17). When the interviewees imply that their academic path is already pre-paved with the acknowledgment that a predictable and secure job will be waiting for them after graduation that does not require “networking or mathematical skills”, this could potentially outline the tendency suggested by Rogers.

## Main theme #3: Widespread notions

In the following, we will look closer at three sub-themes that encapsulates seemingly widespread notions about the psychological profession and about students studying psychology. As we will see, some of these notions can be considered plain misconceptions, whereas other notions hews more closely to how things really are, according to the interviewees. It is chosen as one of four main-themes as both interviewees recurrently referred to such widespread notions about the study program among peers, family and themselves.

### Sub-theme #1: obliviousness

Both interviewees commonly referred to people around them being oblivious about what the psychological profession and the study program at large really is. As we will see in the following excerpts, the interviewees express a certain frustration when confronted with such obliviousness. As both interviewees refer to obliviousness as seemingly being quite common, it is chosen as a sub-theme under the umbrella theme that address widespread notions.

On this note, M states the following when he is asked if it was surprising for him to receive appraisals in the wake of enrolling:

*(-5) det var jo på en måte (-) kanskje litt overraskende men samtidig også ikke så veldig, fordi at det var mange som visste like lite om det som det som jeg gjorde. Alt de visste var at det var vanskelig å komme inn (appendix 1, line 358-361).*

Furthermore, when asked if he had ever hesitated to say that he studied psychology in a social setting, M comments:

*ja, jeg har forsåvidt det […] Jeg vil tro at det er litt truende da. Det er litt dumt, mange er av den oppfattelsen av vi er litt ”høy på pæra”/ Om ikke truende, så er det litt sånn, ja/ og at man er mer approachable hvis man ikke sier det (appendix 1, line 468-479).*

M was also asked to what extent the high grade point average could have on society’s perception of the psychological profession, to which he responded:

*det er en irriterende tanke, med det er overraskende ofte mange som samtidig tror vi er litt sånn... wannabe-leger, at vi er på en måte det samfunnsfaglige der vi, som, som tror vi på en måte har en opphøyet status som på en måte i større grad vitenskapelig fordi vi er i større grad naturvitenspelige, at vi på en måte strekker oss litt opp mot legene og naturvitenskapene og litt bort fra samfunnsvitenskapene (appendix 1, line 632-638)*

When F was asked if she ever had experienced that people close to her had ever treated her differently after enrollemnt, she replied the following:

*ja, eh, Absolut […] Det er overraskende ofte/ altså det er mye fordommer ute å går da blant folk om at liksom jeg driver å leser rett gjennom dem, men og som/ senest her når jeg snakket med min far på tlf i forrige uke, der han hadde en konflikt med sin søster og sa sånn ”ja, så det får bli en case for deg når du kommer hjem” da blir jeg litt sånn ”ååå, frustrerende” (appendix 2, line 126-134).*

She elaborates when she is asked the same questions as M, namely if she has ever hesitated to comment on her study program in a social setting:

*og av å til og i sånne fest-settinger og i sosiale sammenhenger der man hører sånne overfladiske kommentarer som ”ja, du skjønner vel alt av det alle tenker” og sånn, da blir jeg også litt frustrert, altså/ da tenker jeg at da vet man ikke så mye om profesjonsutdannelsen og da kjenner man ikke mye til psykologifaget (appendix 2, line 312-317).*

on a final note, F is asked why she thinks the older generations beholds more skepticism towards the psychological profession (as stated by the interviewee prior to this follow-up question). F states:

*de har noen av de gamle fordommene eller noe sånt, at det blir liksom det ”svada”-faget som de søte, flinke jentene velger som ikke har mestret matematikk eller ingeniør eller realfag eller sånne fag da, eh ja (-) også merker jeg også at litt, sånn at den eldre generasjonen som bestemor og (-) der har jeg opplevd litt sånn/ ja, om ikke akkurat mine besteforeldre, så andre sine at der (-) litt mer skepsis for psykologifaget (-) […] bestemoren til min stebror som sa sånn ”hjernevrenger” lissom et par sånne ting (appendix 2, line 355-374).*

**Brief summary of “obliviousness”**

The excerpts above exemplifies how the interviewees comments on obliviousness towards the profession as “somewhat annoying” and seemingly also quite common. On this note, M comments that he was oblivious to the profession himself before enrolling, but that its still “sort of annoying to hear other people assume that they are wannabe-doctors”. F states that the amount of prejudice towards psychology students is surprisingly high and implies that she is frustrated with people who assume that “she knows what they must be thinking”.

### Sub-theme #2: “good-laced girls”

The term “good-laced girls” is an attempted translation of the Norwegian proverb “flink pike”, which was a term that recurrently came up for both interviewees when asked to describe the typical psychology student, also when asked to do so on behalf of others. The term typically refers to a seemingly capable girl who typically plays by the rules, earns good grades, lives up to society’s expectations and rarely fails to meet her achievements. As such, it can be argued that the “good-laced girl” is outwardly seen as the epitome of faultlessness[[9]](#footnote-9). The following excerpts will seek to demonstrate the prevalence of this concept in the context of studying psychology. According to the interviewees, the concept of “good-laced girls” among psychology students is seemingly common and widespread. However, the concept is by no means formally recognized, which is why the sub-theme is found under the umbrella-theme at hand.

When M was asked how to describe the typical psychology student, he states the following:

*den typiske profesjonsstudent... hmm (-) jeg vi si at hun har mange jern i ilden (-) en av disse flinke pikene, hehe. Er på en måte med på mye i form av aktiviteter enten i ulike studentforeninger eller i ulike politiske verv eller i slike aktiviteter […] samtidig så vil jeg også beskrive profesjonstudenten som i noe grad elitisk (appendix 1, line 176-188).*

M elaborates as he ponders over what other people might think of psychology students:

*Man finner jo også de som synes det er helt latterlig hvor mange flinke piker det er her (appendix 1, line 268-269).*

When asked the same questions, F states:

*eh, den typiske profesjonsstudenten er en jente, eh, begynnelsen av 20-årene om ikke rett fra videregående, så er det ett år etterpå. Dyktig, flink, intelligent, høye karakterer fra videregående, men også snill, omsorgsful, forståelsesfull, samtidig som at man trenger den disiplinen og ansvarsfølelsen for å komme seg gjennom et sånt studie, og som har ført til at man er på et sånt studiet i det hele tatt. (-) og litt dette med konforme (-) ja (-) ehm, ja, generelt kan man vel si det er en del ”flinke piker” her (appendix 2, line 185-193).*

she elaborates when she is asked to describe how it is to study psychology at the University of Oslo:

*ehm (-) veldig mange jenter. Eh, det er lissom veldig mange snille søte, forståelsesfulle jenter, men og (-) litt homogent, går det an å si det? Det ser du både i klesstil og oppførsel (appendix 2, line 160-163).*

On a final note, F comments that she think its tiresome to be considered one of these girls when she is asked if she has ever hesitated to say that she studies psychology in a social setting:

*Jeg var til en fest der det var veldig mange gutter, men sånn økonomi, realfag, også kommer hun jenta med lyst hår og sier hun studerer psykologi. Da føler jeg jeg faller noen ganger i dems syn, eller (-) det ihvertfall ganske kjedelig (appendix 2, line 348-352).*

**Brief summary of “good-laced girls”**

In accordance with the excerpts above, the sub-theme sheds light upon the seemingly common perception of psychology being a study program that dominantly is made up of a coterie of “good-laced girls”. Accordingly, Whereas M states that some people think the amount of “good-laced girls” studying psychology is “ridiculously high”, F states that these girls make up a somewhat homogeneous culture and that she personally thinks it is tiresome to be associated with such qualities when she attends social settings with people outside the study program.

### Sub-theme #3: determining relevant competence

###

This sub-theme refers to the passages that address the element of how it is possible to determine relevant competence of a psychology student and practicing psychologist. As such, the following excerpts will kernel around how relevant competence can be measured and whether the interviewees consider a high average grade point from high school as an appropriate tool to identify the best possible candidates to enroll in a psychology program. As the interviewees for the most part agree that the grade point from high school is a valid tool to determine relevant competence, this sub-theme is found relevant under the umbrella-theme that addresses widespread notions about the study program.

When M was asked to what extent he imagined the high grade-point average guaranteed for the quality of practicing psychologists, he states the following:

*Ja (-) jeg tror det på en måte/ det er to ting jeg tenker, det ene er at snittet er på en måte et mål på evne til kunnskapservervelse i løpet av videregående. Du skal lese masse i mange fag eller du skal på en måte ha mange fag og du skal få ting inn, og det skal du på en måte i psykologien og, det er på en måte en psykolog/ det er en person som sitter på kunnskap da og den måten han erverver/ det kan man hvis man har et gode karakterer (appendix 1, line 577-584).*

Later on, he elaborates on whether the high-grade point average is a valid measure for selecting the best possible candidates to the study program:

*jeg tror på en måte at man ikke klarer å spesialisere eller, rette seg godt nok mot den gruppen som kanskje er best nok egnet, og/ men jeg vet ikke hvilke annen måte man skulle gjøre det på, men (-) jeg vil si at det er et greit mål på hvor hvorvidt man er en egnet psykolog (appendix 1, line 606-610).*

Furthermore, when asked how he would define a professional psychologist, M states the following:

*jeg vil si at en profesjonell psykolog er en hjelper i større grad enn en rådgiver og at man på en måte ikke skal, at man ikke skal, ehm (-) på den måten opptre ehm (-) ydmykt og ovenfor en pasient. En profesjonell psykolog er på mange måter en psykolog som følger de etiske retningslinjer og møter klienten med aksept (appendix 1 line 672-678).*

he elaborates:

*men jeg tror det viktigste er at en profesjonell psykolog har pasienten i (-) i (-3) setter den først da (appendix 1, line 691-693).*

when F was asked to what extent she imagined the high grade-point average guaranteed for the quality of practicing psychologists, she states the following**:**

*ja, jeg tror at det absolutt gjør det. Jeg tenker jo ihvertfall det selv; at folk som har høye karakterer er dyktige mennesker og derfor kommer til å gjennomføre løpet på best mulig måte og vil være best kvalifisert da (appendix 2, line 416-419).*

When asked if she thought the high grade-point average influenced society’s expectations of the psychological profession, F states:

*ja (-) og det håper jeg egentlig og, at det blir sett på som en mer seriøs profesjon som fremstår (-) som, altså/ (-) enhetlig da, ja (-4) ja. At det blir mer annerkjent (appendix 2, line 405-407).*

When F is asked if she has benefited from having a high grade-point average in high school when she enrolled in the psychology program, she states:

*ja, ja, helt definitivt. Og det kommer nok ikke fra de konkrete faglige erfaringene vi gjorde på videregående, men den helheten med at/ rutiner, hvor mye arbeid som skal legges ned for å prestere, men også denne litt kyniske erfaringen med hvor man skal legge inn støtet da på et vis (appendix 2, line 457-461).*

On a final note, F is also asked how she would define a professional psychologist:

*da vil jeg på en måte forvente et menneske/ eller sånn som har gjennomgått og som sitter på grundig og på god og lang erfaring da […] når du sitter der sammen med en klient, så tror jeg det medmenneselige komponenten veier litt ekstra. Det har jo ndersøkelser og forsking vist at det viktigste er den alliansen da, eh og hvor sentralt det er er fremfor akkuratt hvilke teoretisk retning du liksom anlegger og så videre, så selv om jeg ser for meg en som sitter med mye erfaring så ser jeg også for meg en som tar med det medmenneskelige som viktig da, den relasjonsbyggingen (appendix 2 line 489-506).*

**Brief summary of “determining relevant competence”**

Notably, the sub-theme at hand addresses how relevant competence can be measured and whether a high grade point average is a proper tool for distinguishing the best candidates to enroll in a psychology program. M states that a high grade-point average provides for a decent tool to determining the competence of a potential candidate. He suggests that because the psychologist has to attain a lot of knowledge, a high grade point average indicates his ability to do so. However, when he is asked how he would define a professional psychologist, he rather emphasize the psychologist’s ability to be humble, attentive and present. F states that a high grade point is a good measure for determining proper candidates as a high grade-point correlates with good qualifications. She also consider her high grade point average from high school to be of great value when studying psychology as she is used to putting down a lot of work and also know what to prioritize and how to create work routines. When asked how she defines a professional psychologist, F emphasize experience and the capability of establishing a constructive alliance with the client.

### Interpretations of main theme #3

###

The umbrella-theme that covers *widespread notions* is relatively diverse and encapsulates the interviewees description of common assumptions about the study program, some of which can be considered misconceptions, whereas others hews more closely to how things really are, according to the interviewees.

From a theoretical perspective, it is curious to see the element of obliviousness in the wake of Bourdieu’s descriptions of ambiguous study programs. As the interviewees described such obliviousness as something that is quite common, it is also timely to ask *why* such assumptions have come to pass. Notably, Bourdieu suggested that there is indeed an *irrational mystification* that pertains all aspects of the university-life and conceals intellectual competence in a veil of high cultural ambiguity (theoretical backdrop, p. 12). By turning to the excerpts above, it can be argued that such irrational mystification manifests itself as obliviousness and creative remarks about what psychology really is among the people *not* studying psychology, much as the interviewees describe it. More importantly however, the potential damaging aspect of this tendency can be found in the interviewees frustration over such obliviousness and how such frustration potentially can disturb the already fragile power-balance in a helping relationship, as it is described by Edgar Schein (theoretical backdrop, p. 21). Accordingly, due to the recurring descriptions of how the interviewees found such obliviousness as both common and somewhat annoying, it can be appropriate to question whether the psychological profession is in fact considered by the common man as being too mysterious, too unfathomable or, in the words of Bourdieu, too high-cultural.

As the element of good-laced girls is by no means formally recognized, it is difficult to vouch for its relevance in the context of studying psychology. However, due to this concept’s recurrent nature, it is interesting to see this potential phenomenon in the wake of certain humanistic notions and how the concept of good-laced girls potentially can mold the way psychology is practiced in the 21st century. Notably, the prevalence of the good-laced girl, as it is described by the interviewees, stand in stark contrast to the more rebellious generation of psychologist needed to oppose the educational bastions of traditionalism that bottlenecks creativity and modernization, as bluntly suggested by Rogers (theoretical backdrop, p. 16). As such, it can be argued that the pervasiveness of the good-laced girl is in many ways a manifestation of the disciplined, methodical and meticulous student that does her best to live up to the standards set by the graduating departments. In the pursuit of credentials and official recognition, she has little motivation to follow her own innate interests into the mysteries of human nature, nor the time to question the procedures and scholastic principles put forth by the universities. Much in line with the words of Rogers, it can be argued that this generation of highly competent students have learned to see their tasks in an undignified way that makes it difficult to lift the view and see the possibilities and the uncharted terrain that they *could* be mapping, instead of reproducing timeworn theories. As such, the prevalence of this phenomenon could potentially contribute to the lack of revitalization and creative thinking within the psychological discipline by large.

As both interviewees claim that the average grade point from high school is indeed a valid tool to determining the best possible candidates to enroll in a psychology program, there seems to be a certain consensus among the interviewees on how to determine and measure relevant competence among psychology students. Accordingly, they both associate a high grade point with high competence. However, it is curious to witness these statements in the wake of how they define a professional psychologist, namely as person with the capability of establishing a constructive alliance, a person who sees the client and a humble person who is attentive and present; qualities that does not necessarily relate to a high grade point average. Notably, the qualities they refer to hews closely to the qualities of the “process consultant” as it is described by Edgar Schein (theoretical backdrop, p. 23). Accordingly, Schein comments that the qualities of a good helper does indeed reside in his/hers ability to construct a helping relationship with everything it entails, whereas he downplays the relevance of theoretical understanding or expert knowledge within a defined discipline to be of help. This notion is much in line with the interviewees description of a professional psychologist, but the interviewees still acknowledge a high grade point as an important predictor of relevant competence. It is timely to consider whether this potential inconsistency could derive from a state of *cognitive dissonance[[10]](#footnote-10)*. Accordingly, Rogers recurrently comments on how graduating departments emphasize the perceived importance of credentials, examinations and educational accomplishments (theoretical backdrop p. 17). It is appropriate to question whether this misplaced focus could influence psychology students to mistake *relevant* competence with educational accomplishment and in turn make them believe that educational accomplishment, indicated by a high grade point, is synonymous with genuine proficiency. This potential tendency can be seen in both interviewees as they claim that a high grade point (educational accomplishment) does in fact provide proficiency, but that they still acknowledge the humble role of the process consultant (relevant competence) to be the epitome of a professional and capable psychologist. As such, the possible prevalence of cognitive dissonance can be found in the interviewees desire to attribute their own grade point average to proficiency, while still being aware that there could be other factors that define such aptitude.

## Theme #4: concerns

The interviewees did recurrently address a number of concerns primarily regarding the fear of not being capable enough and a concern of being perceived as arrogant. By turning to two sub-themes that kernels around the element of concerns, we will have a closer look at the prevailing concerns exhibited by the interviewees.

### Sub-theme #1: Being good enough

The following sub-theme refers to passages where the interviewees imply a concern of “not being good enough” both as students and future psychologists. As we will see, the interviewees recurrently refer to descriptions like “feeling inadequate” and “not being able to live up others expectations”, and is for this reason considered a sub-theme under the umbrella-theme of concerns.

After M has postulated that psychology students typically have very high expectations to own achievement (appendix 1, line 231), he is asked if this is a tendency he can see clearly in his own class. M comments:

*ja, det er selvfølgelig litt varierende da, men hvis vi snakker om de stereotypiske psykologistudenten så vil jeg tro det. Og det vil jeg tro gjelder for veldig mange områder da og ikke bare det at man har høye faglige krav til seg selv […] Man har krav til at man skal på en måte/ Man kan jo si at det gjelder mange steder da, men at man skal trene og se bra ut, men også det at man skal ta samfunnsansvar og, og/ det er jo mye som skal leves opp til, og (-) høye adgangskrav gir jo høye forventninger (appendix 1 line 239-248).*

Later on, he elaborates on how he positioned himself to such demands after he enrolled.

*Jeg følte på en måte på en form for utilstrekkelighet selv da, akkurat da. med tanke på å være kultivert og kunne ha på en måte noe (-3) ja, både lissom smart å si og noe i ulike sammenhenger og det å på en måte... det er jo noe jeg tenker innimellom nå også (appendix 1, line 313-318).*

On a final note, M comments on what he would like to do after he graduates, and states that it seems “scary” to start working immediately after graduating, as he fears that he might not have the proper competence needed:

*jeg vet ikke (-) jeg synes faktisk at det er litt skummelt det å gå ut som helsearbeider. Jeg er ganske ung, jeg er 20 år, jeg vet ikke om jeg kommer til å ha tyngden til å ta på meg det ansvaret (appendix 1, line 815-818).*

F also comments on such concerns, like in the following excerpt after she is asked how she usually respond to appraisals from peers and family:

*Jeg er lissom redd for å/ at jeg skal tillegges mer forventninger og mer evner enn det jeg egentlig har (-) og kunnskap. (-) ehm, også merker jeg og en generell forventing om at du er/ hva skal jeg si (-) mer forståelsesfulle, altså snillere. Siden det krever så mye å komme inn føler jeg folk setter veldig høye krav (-) (appendix 2, line 140-145).*

she elaborates subsequently, after she is asked how she responds to people approaching her with their personal problems in need of a “therapeutic talk”:

*for meg er det jo viktig å gjøre klart jeg vet jo egentlig veldig lite enda, altså de føles jo som ingenting sånn i forhold til det jeg skal kunne føler jeg, men jeg forsøker jo allikevel å bidra (appendix 2, line 301-304).*

**Brief summary of “being good enough”**

The excerpts above seeks to shed light upon the element of feeling inadequate or “not feeling good enough” in the context of studying psychology. On this note, M clearly states that he has felt a sense of inadequateness a number of times after enrollment and that he finds it “scary” to start working directly after graduation as he fears he might not have the competence needed. F implies that she finds it unsettling that others associate her study program with a set of competences that she don’t necessarily feel that she has acquired and that others have high expectations to psychology students due to the high grade point needed to enroll.

### Sub-theme #2: fear of being arrogant

###

Considered to be closely related to the element of concerns, the interviewees recurrently commented on a fear of being perceived as arrogant or bigheaded. As we will see, one of the interviewees also dwell on whether such perceived arrogance could influence their professional working life. Accordingly, “fear of being arrogant” have been chosen as a sub-theme to illuminate the passages that relates to this fear. Importantly, some of the passages used in this sub-theme have been used previously to illuminate other themes, but is considered applicable also in the context at hand.

On this note, it is timely to turn to Ms experience as being perceived as arrogant after he commented on a subject where he referred back something he had learned in his study program, an experience he clearly did not enjoy. Notably, the following excerpt has been referred to previously under the sub-theme that addressed “the law of Jante”.

*jeg følte det var spennende og hadde lyst til å bli med, men da følte jeg på en måte at jeg ble litt sånn (-) eh, ”du må ikke tro at du vet det bare fordi du studerer...” ja, litt sånn (-) i etterkant av det da, så har jeg vært litt forsiktig med å uttale meg som psykolog-student. […] men så har jeg samtidig LYST også. […]det er vansklig å si det uten å høres på en måte ”cocky” ut... men på en måte, uvitenhet ikke er bra (appendix 1, line 503-514).*

Moreover, when M is asked how his friends and family reacted to him getting accepted, he elaborates on his most profound memory of what they told him:

*Det var ihvertfall en følelse av at jeg ikke måtte bli annerledes og ikke måtte bli elitistisk selv da, av å gjøre det. At det var viktig å være jordnær og sånne ting (appendix 1, line 408-410).*

M was asked if his family and friends had noticed if he had changed outwardly after he enrolled, to which he answered:

*ja, det har jeg fått høre, uheldigvis (appendix 1, line 436).*

Also, when asked to what extent the high grade point could influence societies expectations to the psychological profession, M states:

*jeg tenker at det på en måte skaper en viss distanse de på en måte vi skal jobbe med. At vi (-) på en måte, det er jo det man sier at man, det er ofte det psykiatre har fått høre da, at det er vanskelig å forholde seg til person som (-) eh, er over en selv og at mye som kansje ikke/ noe kan være ment som det og noe kan ikke være ment som det, men det kan oppfattes som en ubalanse (appendix 1, line 614-620).*

On this note, it is timely to look back on Fs answer to whether friends or family changed outwardly or acted differently around her after she enrolled. To this question she replied:

*ja, at folk blir sånn ”å, ja, guri, nå må jeg passe på hvordan jeg sitter” det kan jo være jeg gjør meg noen ekstra bemerkninger som andre ikke gjør, men jeg har jo ikke lyst til å bli forhøyet på en eller annen måte eller, eh (-) ja (-) gjort annerledes (appendix 2, line 324-327).*

other than this, F does not further elaborate on the concern of being perceived as arrogant.

**Brief summary of “fear of being arrogant”**

The excerpts above seeks to shed light upon the concern of being perceived as arrogant among peers and family in the wake of enrolling in a psychology program. On this note, M states that he has experienced to be “put in place” by friends after having stated his professional view on a subject matter and that he found this experience somewhat unpleasant. Moreover, he comments that his family implied a concern that he might become elitist after enrolling and that they did in fact insinuate that he had changed when he came back to visit his home town about a year after enrolling, much to M’s dismay. F comments that even though she might be more astute to body language and demeanor than others, she hopes that she is not made different or will be respected any differently than before.

### Interpretations of main theme #4

The concerns that the interviewees exhibit evolves primarily around a concern of not being good enough and a concern of being perceived as arrogant. Despite both interviewees considering the study program as a *safe choice*, the element of concerns proves that the interviewees are still not freed from worries related to their study program. Curiously, it would seem that such concerns are located at the flip side of appraisals and recognition, as both interviewees imply that appraisals and the high grade-point needed to enroll generates extreme expectations for the interviewees and a personal pressure to meet these expectations. As such, the interviewees description of how they do not feel as capable as they would like to be and how they don’t feel ready to take on the responsibility of practicing after graduation can be considered reasonable.

It is possible to shed light upon the possible consequences of such expectations by turning to the theoretical backdrop. First and foremost, Rogers comments on the expectations that is set by the educational institutions to pass the required exams and in turn receive a diploma as a certificate that demonstrates the students understanding of the curriculum. As the grade point needed to enroll in psychology is higher than ever before, it is timely to assume that the expectations to the individual students have increased in accordance with the grade point, much as the interviewees exemplify it. For this reason and as commented by Rogers, the grave and misplaced focus on credentials, validation and dated theories could become empowered by the nourishment of these expectations, as the students to a great extent strive to live up to the prevailing standards of right and wrong (theoretical backdrop, pp. 17-18). This tendency is already evident by turning to the concept of “publish or perish”; a tendency for contemporary scientific work to be molded solely by the desire to contribute *something* that is considered scientifically legitimate by the prevailing paradigm, *not* by personal interest (theoretical backdrop, p. 18). As such, the concern of not being good enough could potentially nourish a mistrust to one’s own creativity and rather promote a tendency for wanting to rely on already established truths, for the sake of meeting the aforementioned expectations.

It is timely to see the concern of being perceived as arrogant in the wake of a Bourdieuian framework. M in particular showcased this concern by implying that his family would frown upon him becoming *elitist* after enrolling, something his family claimed he had in fact become to a certain extent, much to Ms dismay. By turning to the concept of cultural capital, it would seem there is a common belief in both M and his family that the study program does in fact contribute to increased cultural capital, which in time can be translated into power and wealth (theoretical backdrop, p. 11). As such, it can be argued that both M and his family are aware of how such attained capital in time could potentially cause him to distance himself from his family.

Importantly, the element of arrogance also stands as a cornerstone in the “one-up/one-down” hypothesis presented by Edgar Schein (theoretical backdrop, p. 21). In line with this hypothesis, M exhibits a concern for the increasing grade-point average to create a distance between therapist and client, as the client might feel inferior to the helpers expertise; the exact predicament suggested by Schein. Accordingly, Schein comments that the humble recognition of such social dynamics lies at the kernel of the helping relationship and will be of great help when engaging in helping behavior. By acknowledging these dynamics, it will be easier to focus on the communication process rather than “giving advices” often associated with the “doctor-role”. Furthermore, such acknowledgments could in fact minimize the possibility to be perceived as arrogant and will as such create a climate that promotes a constructive helping process (theoretical backdrop, p. 23).

# Discussion

V.

After having charted the thematic map that emerged in the process of analyzing the interviews, the following chapter will seek to discuss the relevance and applicability of the research question in the wake of these findings. For practical reasons, the research question is rendered below.

**To what extent can the increasing average grade point for enrolling into psychology courses elicit elitist attitudes among psychology students and how could such attitudes potentially influence psychological practices**.

As commented in the introduction to the thesis, the desire to look closer at the possible link between elitism and the grade point needed to enroll in a psychology program derives largely from personal experiences from everyday life along with an acknowledgement of the uncanny negligence that this possible connection has received. Notably, very little research can be found on similar topics, despite the decade old notions presented by Bourdieu and Passeron (2006), which links prominent educations with prestige, cultural capital and superiority, which according to both Rogers (1973) and Schein (2009) are qualities that to a large extent contradicts the elements that constitutes *the helping relationship*. For this reason, it can be argued that the increasingly high grade point needed to enroll in a psychology program beget somewhat of a paradox that has received remarkably little attention. Based on these notions and the subsequent interviews, I ask; can a new generation of psychologists that enrolls partly because of prestige, benefits and exclusiveness do justice to a discipline that to a great extent relies on humility, unpretentiousness and an acceptance of one’s own ignorance to achieve promising results? Is it possible that the grade point needed to enroll attracts a generation of obedient achievers and high-fliers that excels at reproducing theories and live up to the expectations set by the graduating departments, but *fails* to revitalize the discipline and to think anew? Moreover, do we dare to face the possibility that this grade point could potentially fashion an elitist coterie of psychologists who to a greater and greater extent safeguards their authorizations, frown upon unlicensed helpers and lack incentives to oppose conventions of right and wrong for the sake of rejuvenation and advancement of the psychological discipline? These questions deserve a place in the limelight as they address a prevailing and unfortunate tendency of our time that has come about so silently that its implications seemingly have been ignored. However, this neglect is perhaps *not* very curios considering that the psychologists themselves have very little to gain from undermining their authorization and questioning the ways of the graduating departments who provide these authorizations with exclusive benefits to match. After all, which psychologist would devalue their years of schooling to the acknowledgement that their much sought-after authorization represents a dated discipline that could in fact be lagging several laps behind, as suggested by Carl Rogers (1973, p. 382). In the following, we will have a closer look at how elitism among psychology students could be considered *a necessary evil* of a contemporary and individualized society that favors competence, accomplishments and self-actualization.

## An evil of our time?

As stated by Brinkmann (2008, p. 160), the commencement of the 21st century can be said to mark the age of the *accomplishing and competent individual*. Long gone seems the days of Christian modesty and Victorian moral. Over the course of the past century, timeworn concepts of godly obedience have taken a substantial backseat to the dawning of a new era that favors another set of qualities. Where we once looked for a divine answer to our greatest questions, Bauman (2000) suggests that we now seem to turn to the new gods of society; the engineers, the doctors, the therapists, *the experts,* to provide us with objective information and empirical evidence to the questions we seek answers to.In the wake of “Gods demise”, the role of the expert seems to be progressively prominent, as the amount of doctorates and highly educated Americans has skyrocketed over the past 20 years[[11]](#footnote-11). As stated by Brinkmann (2008), the desire to go further, to challenge ourselves and to attain new competence is easily reflected in a contemporary mantra that encourages self-actualization and personal development: “what a man *can* be, he *must* be”.

In the wake of such tendencies, a number of educational programs have experienced a burst of applicants, causing the grade point needed to enroll to increase dramatically and as such, create a climate that encourages greater competition among the candidates. As only the candidates with the highest grade point from high school is allowed to enroll, whereas rejected candidates must settle for other study programs, this process can be seen in the light of Bourdieu’s description of *social elimination* (theoretical backdrop p. 11). Accordingly, this practice entails a reorientation from a *social* dissimilarity to an *educational* dissimilarity, which consequently conceal the very different possibilities these applicants have to gain higher education. Much like *law* and *medicine*, psychology have come to represent a study program that for the last decade have been represented by what can be referred to as an academic elite, much as it also exemplified in the foregoing interviews. Curiously, this tendency could misleadingly present itself as solely constructive and beneficial as it guarantees the enrollment of only the most capable and academically enlightened students to bring the psychological discipline forward; a widespread notion that is also observable in the interviews. As we will see, and as suggested by the theoretical backdrop, this tendency could however potentially have unforeseen consequences on how psychology is perceived by the public eye, how psychology is practiced and how the psychological discipline will evolve.

## How psychology is perceived

By turning to the interviews, it is possible to spot a number of excerpts that relates to other people’s perception of psychology and how the discipline is perceived by the public eye. Notably, both interviewees refer to a great deal of obliviousness regarding what the study program entails and insinuates that there are a number of misconceptions regarding what a psychologist can and cannot do. Curiously, both interviewees refer to such obliviousness as a being somewhat irritating and choose to dismiss it as ignorance when they are confronted with such fallacies during social gatherings. It is curious to see this tendency in the wake of the Bourdieuian framework which stresses the significance of this “ambiguous veil” for the sake of upholding the legitimacy of the discipline (theoretical backdrop, p. 12). Accordingly, he stresses that an irrational mystification pertains all aspects of prestigious educations and that intellectual competence is often referred to as a “gift” for the fortunate few, rather than something that can be attained by rational and methodological means (ibid.). Despite the vintage of this notion, the somewhat “supernatural” and otherwise oblivious assumptions about the psychological discipline that the interviewees refer to, could very well be examples of how the psychological discipline is perceived as being a “high cultural playground” that to a great extent lacks transparency and thus have been unsuccessful in bringing the discipline to “the masses”. The consequences of such tendencies could potentially become more problematic than most contemporary psychologists would like to acknowledge, as it could amplify the already askew power balance between therapist and client and place the inquirer in an even more inferior position when placed before a psychologist. Accordingly, by not being transparent about what the discipline can offer and by not bringing psychology to “the masses”, a potential gap could emerge between the inquirers and the discipline that could greatly harm the disciplines reputation and overall applicability in the eye of the public. In the context of a humanistic framework, the importance of refraining from being perceived as a discipline solely for the academic elite should not be undermined, as it represents a potentially severe shortcoming that sadly has received little attention in the wake of the significantly increasing grade point needed to enroll in psychology programs across Scandinavian universities.

## How psychology is practiced

Being used to working hard, creating disciplined work routines and living up to the standards set by the educational institutions, the interviewees clearly indicates a concern for everything they have not yet learned in their years studying psychology. One of the interviewees in particular (F) states that there is so much to learn that she is concerned how she will ever be able to grasp over the entire curriculum and how she will be able to take use of the knowledge she attains (appendix 2, line 305-307). It is curious to see this tendency in the wake of Edgar Scheins acknowledgement of *less* expertise, being *more* expertise when it comes to psychological practices (theoretical backdrop, p. 20). Accordingly, Schein stresses that our innate desire to flaunt our attained expert-knowledge represents a common pitfall, but also a deeply rooted reflex that could be amplified by the amount of knowledge we believe we possess (ibid., p. 21). Accordingly, the desire to attain as much knowledge possible for the sake of helping could potentially represent an untimely consequence of a new generation of psychology students that is used to relaying on their academic achievements and theoretical knowledge and accordingly have a great desire to take use of attained expertise and master it to perfection. As emphasized by Schein, the intentions of doing so is more often than not well-meant, but as we have seen in the theoretical backdrop, such tendencies could lead to unfortunate consequences in terms of establishing the helping relationship. Moreover, it can be argued that the nurturing of this doctor-role, as it is described by Schein (theoretical backdrop, p. 23), could also be considered the product of a vicious circle of our time. As described by both Brinkmann (2008) and Bauman (2000), we live in a time where academic expertise and claims about objectivism represents the hallmarks of proficiency; a contemporary tendency that could easily encourage misuse of the doctor role in psychological practices. Accordingly, by persistently undertaking this doctor-role, this contemporary tendency is further reinforced, making it difficult to break free from established patterns and undertake the timelier role of the “process consultant”, as Schein would suggest (theoretical backdrop, p. 23). These notions exemplifies how a new generation of psychology students could influence the way he discipline is practiced and how imperative it is for contemporary psychologist to have an astute eye for influential tendencies of our time.

## How psychology will evolve

##

As described by both Kvale (2003, p. 579) and Brinkmann (2008, p. 86), psychology should be considered a cultural and historical activity that to a great extent is reflected by contemporary tendencies. As such, it is timely to assume that shifting cultural premises will influence styles of both psychological research and practice, as it is exemplified above. On this note however, Rogers stresses the vital importance of occasionally “lifting the view” for the sake of being consciously aware of how such contemporary tendencies influence the discipline and to speak out and oppose these when it is found necessary (theoretical backdrop, p. 17). As such, the importance of the “rebellious psychology student” should not be undermined for the sake of questioning established routines, and opposing untimely and rigorous traditions set by the educational institutions. By turning to the excerpts that relates to the concept of “good laced girls”, it would seem that the new generation of psychology students to a large extent lacks this element of rebelliousness and have very few incentives to change the discipline or challenge prevailing conventions. It can be argued that the benefits, the straight-forwardness of the program and the safety-elements that the interviewees refer to, constitutes a troublesome comfort zone that eradicates any incentive to oppose potential shortcomings and untimely tendencies. This assumption is further reinforced by the interviewee’s description of psychology being an exceptionally safe and convenient choice of study program that will guarantee a well-paid job and positive prospects. Moreover, the interviewees description of the “good laced girl” being a disciplined student used to studying hard, perfecting knowledge and obeying authority for the sake of doing the right thing, underpins the assumption about the lack of “rebels” that enrolls in modern day psychology programs. From a humanistic perspective however, this tendency could be considered somewhat worrying for the sake of the *development* of the discipline. Notably, Carl Rogers emphasize that we as psychologists must dare to set a new agenda for the sake of *creating the new,* rather than repairing the old, and that we must find courage to sweep away our procedures for authorization and credentials in favor of opening up to new understandings of what defines a competent psychologist (theoretical backdrop, p. 16). At the heart of this notion lies the assumption that we must dare to look to other disciplines for the sake of rejuvenation and not frown upon “unlicensed helpers” as we have much to learn from disciplines that is not tied down by rigid certification procedures (theoretical backdrop, p. 17). Accordingly, we must find the courage to see the possibilities that the modern day psychologist *could* be serving instead of becoming frozen solid in a discipline that defines itself in decade old terms. By not braking free from this frozen state, psychology could potentially remain a discipline that focuses on remedying the ill, rather than proactively engaging in the designing of a new society in which problems will be less frequent.

# Conclusion

VI.

Notably, the desire to look closer at the possible prevalence of elitist attitudes among psychology students derived from personal experiences from everyday life and an personal understanding of elitism as a significant hindrance in psychological practices where the element of *helping* is involved. By providing a theoretical backdrop to these assumptions, which is based on a humanistic framework, we have seen the possible consequences of elitism in psychological practices and how the grade point needed to enroll in psychology programs could elicit such attitudes among modern day psychology students.

By conducting two semi-structured interviews with psychology students at the University of Oslo, four overarching themes were identified that relates to the role of the contemporary psychology student. By investigating these themes in the wake of a humanistic framework, it can be argued that elements of elitism is reflected in a number of these themes. Accordingly, the interviewees emphasize the element of prestige and recurrently comments on appraisals and recognition from peers and family as appealing factors for enrolling. Moreover, by commenting on the prevalence of “the Law of Jante”, the fear of being perceived as arrogant and by describing psychology as somewhat superior to other social sciences, it can be argued that the bursting popularity of the study program has indeed influenced certain attitudes, not just among the students, but also in the eye of the public. This latter statement is based on the interviewees description of how significant others have commented on the psychological profession; comments that indicate that psychology could be presenting itself as a discipline solely for the academic elite and the fortunate few. As a great deal of psychological practices relies on the constructive establishment of the helping relationship which again is dependent on the flattening of the power balance between helper and inquirer, this tendency should *not* pass unnoticed as it have the potential power to greatly compromise on the quality of psychological practices in the future.

On a final note, the thesis seek to highlight how the prevalence of elitism could compromise on the importance of questioning established truths and traditional conventions set by the graduating departments for the sake of rejuvenation and development of the psychological discipline by large. As such, it is suggested that the great array of convenient benefits that the interviewees refer to, which comes with formal authorization, constitutes an untimely comfort zone that strip the modern day psychologist of any incentives to speak out and oppose untimely tendencies of our time.

# List of references

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity.* Cambridge UK: Polity press

Bourdieu, P. (1999). *Den maskuline dominans.* København: Tiderne skifter. Herfra: Indledning og kap. 2

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron J. (2006). *Reproduktionen. Bidrag til en teori om*

*undervisningssystemet.* København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using Thematic Analysis in psychology.* Qualitative research in Psychology , 3 (2).

Brinkmann, S. (2008). Identitet. Udfordringer i forbrugersamfundet. Randers: Klim

Brinkmann, S. (2013). *Kvalitativ udforskning af hverdagslivet,* København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Brinkmann, S. & Tanggaard, L. (red.) (2007). *Psykologi: Forskning og profession.* København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Colman, A. (2006). *Oxford Dictionary of Psychology (2nd Ed.)*. Oxford University press Inc.

Coulson, W. R., & Rogers, C. R. (1968). *Man and the science of man.* Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1968.

Dahl, K. & Juhl, A. (2009). *Den Professionelle Proceskonsulent*. København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Esmark, K. (2006). *Bourdieus Uddannelsessosiologi.* I: A. Prieur & C. Sestoft (red.): *Pierre Bourdieu. En introduktion.* København: Hanz Reizels Forlag

Ewen, R. B. (2003). *An Introduction to Theories of Personality (6th Ed.)*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc.

Gergen, K. J. (2005) *Virkeligheder og relationer:* Viborg: Dansk Psykologisk Forlag

Gergen, K. J. (2013). *Pursuing Excellence in Qualitative Inquiry***.** Draft copy still unpublished.

Gjerde, S. (2012). *Coaching – hvad, hvorfor, hvordan*. 1st edition. Fredriksberg: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur.

Kvale, S. (2003). *The Church, the Factory and the Market: Scenarios for psychology in a Postmodern Age*. Theory & Psychology, 13, 579-603.

Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2009) *Interview, Introduktion til et håndværk.* København: Hans Reitzels Forlag.

Langdridge, D. (2006). *Psykologisk forskiningsmetode, En innføring i kvalitative og kvanitative tilnærminger*. Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag.

Langdridge, D. (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology. Theory, Research and Method.* Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Olsen, B. (2011). *Ydmyke terapeuter søkes.* Tidsskrift for Norsk Psykologforening, vol 48, nummer 11.

Rogers, Carl R. (1973). *Some New Challenges*. American Psychologist, Vol. 5 (may edition).

Schein, E. H. (2009). *Helping.* San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers.

Rogers, Carl R. (1995). *What understanding and acceptance mean to me*. Journal of humanistic psychology, 35.

Tanggaard, L. (2013). *Troubling Methods in Qualitative Inquiry and Beyond*. Europe’s Journal of Psychology. Vol. 9(3)

Teigen, K. H. (2006). *En psykologihistorie.* Fagbokforlaget

## Online links

Samordnaopptak.no, studieoversikt 2014

www.samordnaopptak.no/info/pdfer/studieoversikt\_2014\_laerested\_endelig.pdf

Samordnaopptak.no, rangert førstevalg 2013

www.samordnaopptak.no/tall/2013/mai/foerstevalg/rangert

Studentum.dk: Find din uddannelse:

www.studentum.dk/uddannelse/bacheloruddannelsen-i-psykologi-56079

Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation: psykologutbildning

www.saco.se/yrken-a-o/psykolog/

Psykologkampagnen, Dansk psykolog forening

www.dp.dk/fag-politik/psykologkampagnen/

Goodreads.com

www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/knowledge

1. NRK.no: Diagnose: Flink Pike

http://www.nrk.no/programmer/radio/radiodokumentaren/5050176.html

Aftenposten.no: I hurtigforskingens tid

www.aftenposten.no/viten/I-hurtigforskningens-tid-7424856.html#.U0UFm5o4Vet

Nature.com: Education, the PhD factory

http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110420/full/472276a.html

## List of appendixes

Appendix 1: Transcription “M”

Appendix 2: Transcription “F”

Appendix 3: interview guide

**All appendixes can be found on the attached CD**

1. Samordnaopptak.no, studieoversikt 2014

<http://www.samordnaopptak.no/info/pdfer/studieoversikt_2014_laerested_endelig.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Samordnaopptak.no, rangert førstevalg 2013

http://www.samordnaopptak.no/tall/2013/mai/foerstevalg/rangert [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Studentum.dk: Find din uddannelse:

http://www.studentum.dk/uddannelse/bacheloruddannelsen-i-psykologi-56079 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation: psykologutbildning

http://www.saco.se/yrken-a-o/psykolog/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Psykologkampagnen, Dansk psykolog forening

http://www.dp.dk/fag-politik/psykologkampagnen/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Goodreads.com

http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/knowledge [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Aftenposten.no: I hurtigforskingens tid

http://www.aftenposten.no/viten/I-hurtigforskningens-tid-7424856.html#.U0UFm5o4Vet [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The common notion that there is a pattern of group behavior among individuals within Scandinavian communities that negatively portrays and criticizes individual achievement and success as unworthy and inappropriate (Colman, 2006, p. 415). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. NRK.no: Diagnose: Flink Pike

http://www.nrk.no/programmer/radio/radiodokumentaren/5050176.html [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Defined by the Oxford Dictionary of psychology as psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously (Colman, 2006 p. 144). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nature.com: Education, the PhD factory

http://www.nature.com/news/2011/110420/full/472276a.html [↑](#footnote-ref-11)