

Focus group with three women exploring career choices and challenges.

Key:

Ab: Abby, 33; speech-language pathologist, private practice

De: Delyth, 32; Occupational therapist, NHS

Uv: Uvi, 29; business management

Interviewer in bold/interviewees in plain font

		Does anyone have any questions before we begin? Ab: No I don't think so Uv: Nope De: Nope Great, no problem. Just to remind you that you are free to answer any questions asked today to the extent that you wish. If you have nothing to add at certain points, or don't want to answer a particular question then please feel free to say that. All: Ok	
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Ok, so you're aware that for the purpose of this study I am interested in exploring professional women in work and their choices over time. As a way to begin, can you please share a little about what it is you currently do and how you ended up in this career?

Ab: Can I start?

Uv: Go ahead...

Ab: Ok so I work as a speech-language pathologist for with the [...] – sort of private practice, I suppose, rather than NHS based. I sort of flitted between one office job to the next for a long time and eventually decided that I wanted to do something that MEANT something to me. So I looked into language therapy, went back to uni to study and fell into it from there.

Uv: You have two degrees?!

Ab: [laughs] When you say it like that it sounds impressive – I have two undergrad degrees, yeah, and then my masters is in language therapy.

Uv: That's bloody hardcore, girl!

		Ab: [laughs] De: We need to have a proper chat after this I think [laughs]. I actually work in occupational therapy now and also studied occ therapy in uni! Where did you study? Ab: [.....] De: Oh my god, so did I! That's fascinating! Ab: What a small world! Uv: I feel a bit left out here.. [laughs]. Uvi do you want to explain to us what you do? Uv: I just work in business management... De: JUST?! That's wicked... Uv: [laughs] it's alright I guess. It wasn't where I thought I'd end up but I do enjoy it. I sort of fell into work here almost by accident, maybe – my dad worked with a guy who worked with a guy, you know? I studied education studies at first at university and was convinced I'd go into a job as	
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		soon as I left ... musings of a student! [laughs]. It's definitely not an easy job and my office is full of men, but it pays the bills and I like it. I always thought and expected that I'd work with children in some way, but that didn't quite happen... Ab: Lots of men... children... is that not the same thing? [laughs] Uv: [laughs] I am a bit like mother at times! Which is odd considering I'm at least 20 years younger than most of them! De: Means nothing – they don't grow up! Uv: [laughs] no I guess you're right! Anyway I work alongside some great people and I've learned a lot about business and about myself in this job over the last few years. I don't know if I'll be there forever [shrugs] but it's not a bad place to be! Delyth, you've said you work in occupational therapy – can you explain a bit more about that? De: Of course. I work within the NHS covering occupational therapy for a number of different types of people with a variety of different issues, problems, etc. Basically it's my job to try and help people manage their daily life – irrespective of what they've got going on around them. Uv: That sounds intense!	
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De: It can be. I mean, I've worked with some really challenging people – not challenging as in they were a nightmare patient [laughs], but tough in, like, there are people out there living with some real issues and they're not always necessarily treated in the best way. And it's shit, to be honest, but that's life I guess, isn't it? I always knew I wanted to work with people in some way and to work in an area that allowed me to HELP others – and I guess I'm on the frontline for that. But there are still too many people who don't get that help...

Ab: You can clearly see you're passionate about your work!

De: [smiles] yeah I do love it. I love it when people ask me what I do and I say 'I'm an occupational therapist' and I just know they have to ask what that is [laughs] – is that a bit conceited?!

Uv: [laughs] I wouldn't say so!

De: Sometimes I feel like there are certain jobs or professions that have such cool titles to them and it makes it sound cooler than it is, you know? 'I'm an occupational therapist' – it sort of has a kind of status to it when in reality I just work with people to help themselves.

		Ab: Yeah I understand that! I like that, too. The explaining of what an SLP does – because I have the word pathologist in my title it kinda sounds a bit posh and doctor-y... but it isn't at all [laughs]. But yeah that sort of status is nice, I guess. Thank you all for that, you're all doing some really interesting things! So most of you have already sort of touched upon this, but can you each explain a bit more about how your current career matches with where you expected or wanted to be? De: I'm where I wanted to be. But it took a LONG time to get there. I mean, I'm 32 now, been there 3 years-ish and I finished my degree at 21. I knew I wanted to work in occupational therapy from the get go but, my god, it's not an easy career to get in to! I'd like to think I'll be in this career for a long time – but who knows? Uv: I didn't expect to be working in business management [laughs]. I used to think of HR as boring, mundane, monotonous work that old men who no one likes do [laughs]. I mean maybe I am just a boring woman – oh god I hope not! De/Ab: [laugh] De: I'm sure you're not boring!	
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		Uv: I honestly need to go back to work and do something fun to make sure everyone knows I'm not old and boring now! [laughs]. I digress – basically no I'm not where I thought I'd be but I'm not unhappy about it. I've faced and made my own choices so I'm ok with that. De: Good for you! Uv: I've said I wanted to work with children and I'm not there – but I guess I still could one day! I forget sometimes that I am only 29 and my life is nowhere near mapped out yet! There's so much uncertainty in jobs these days, isn't there, and I just need to accept what happens and when! But at the moment I'm fine where I am and I'm not unhappy about it. And you, Abby? Ab: Yeah I'm where I wanted to be, I guess, but it wasn't necessarily where I thought I'd be ten years or so ago. I think life changes so much and what happens to you and others around you can have a big impact on where you go yourself.. does that make sense? Like I made a choice off the back of something else that happened – and I'm in a good place... yeah. Thank you all for your honesty there. Now that we're all reasonably acquainted I'd like to introduce something a little bit different for five or ten minutes. [Hands out paper]. So on this paper you'll see just one thing I'd like you to think about. Can you have a think about any significant life events and/or decisions that you've made in your life or in your career that you'd	
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		like to talk about. Remember that this can be anything at all that you think is relevant to you, your life, and your career choices. De: I am so up for this! Ab: Bring it on. Uv: How many can we write down? You can write down as many as you think are relevant or important to you, but I'd like to discuss maybe one or two of them with each of you throughout the rest of the interview. Ab: Cool, I can do that. [participants chatting – not recorded – personal discussions between participants]. I can see you've all put your pens down so are you happy to carry on with the interview? All: Yep... Ok, so I'll start with you, Abby, if that's ok?	
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		Ab: Absolutely fine! Can you describe to me the event or choice that you would consider to be the most significant in having an impact in either your life or in your choice of career/career in general? Ab: It's more a life event than anything even remotely related to work, but my little brother had some significant problems when he was really young – he was born early and had various issues because of that, but it seemed to be never-ending for him from there on in. He actually saw a speech-language therapist when he was just about to go into secondary school because he could not have a conversation that <i>meant</i> anything – does that make sense? Like cognitively he wasn't quite <i>there</i> and it was really hard for him to integrate and get involved in any social situations because of that. Abby please only share what you're happy to share. Ab: Oh it's absolutely fine, it's nice to talk about it. He was ten years younger than me so I think I understood from the get go that he was never going to have a good life. I also had to grow up very quickly as he had such significant needs that my parents had to spend a lot of time with him. My mum more so than my dad. I became quite independent quite quickly and I think that really shaped me and has turned me into the person I am now. I don't need no man and all that [laughs]. Anyway <i>Liam</i> died when I was 24 – he'd just turned 14 and had been ill for such a long time...	
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		De: I'm so sorry Uv: Abby I'm really sorry Ab: Thanks – I mean, that's life. It really knocked me back and that was the final straw for me to be, like 'right f--- this – I want and need to do something that 1. Makes me happy and 2. That he could be proud of me for'. He was my little brother and I bloody loved him. De: [muffled] can I have a tissue, please? Ab: I'm so sorry I didn't want to make you cry! Honestly this is a positive thing for me to speak about – I don't want anyone feeling sorry for me because I'm not hard done by at all. It was basically my brother who gave me the kick up the arse I needed to do what I wanted to do. I made the decision to start again, in essence, and that was the best decision I've ever made. Abby that's a really brave and honest thing for you to share, so thank you for that. Ab: [smiles] it's nice to have an outlet to remember him sometimes, so thank you. Delyth? What about you? What event or choice has been significant for you?	
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		De: Easy one for me. I had a baby [laughs]. If that isn't a major life event I'd like to know what is! In terms of how having <i>Jonah</i> impacted my life and career – well it completely turned both upside-bloody-down, to be honest with you. He's nearly two now and I swear down I still don't know how to actually be a mother [laughs]. I could literally talk about him all day. I suppose a good place to start with this 'life event' is that it was never an event I had ever planned for. I didn't want kids. I don't even like kids [laughs]. Uv/Ab: [laugh] De: I still don't like kids. I like my own because he's alright I suppose and he's like my little friend [laughs], but having him was a massive shock to the system in more way than one. Can you elaborate a little bit on that? De: I had a shit pregnancy, to be honest with you. Hated every second of it. I was absolutely petrified of telling my boss I was pregnant. My boss – guy in his late-50's with no wife or children of his own. I just didn't think I'd get a good reception. Not because he had ever made me feel like that – but, like, it's just still sort of a difficult thing for women in general, I think. Anyway I was bricking it telling him and eventually I was just like 'look. I'm gonna have a baby but I promise nothing will change with my work or my commitment to this team'. And he was like this is amazing, congratulations and all this. And there was one thing that he said that has just never left me and I think, beyond the massive shake up of having a baby anyway, this one thing really	
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		helped me cope with coming back after maternity. He said ‘Delyth, your life is about to change in many ways and I would hate for you to think that I want you to have work at the forefront of your mind when you have a little human to raise. Enjoy your baby and your work will not suffer.’ Ab: to be fair, he sounds decent. Uv: He sounds great! I hate to sound like I’m jumping on the bandwagon but I get the whole ‘men wouldn’t understand’ thing – they just don’t go through the same things, do they? I felt like that when I had my daughter. De: No, they really don’t! But then I was always very ‘manly’ in my approach to my life – I wanted the education, then the career to be sorted and set in stone and THEN I’d consider a partner, marriage. Never considered children. But now it’s like having <i>Jonah</i> has made my life fall into place and I have had to physically and mentally separate myself from work at the end of the day. What do you mean by that? De: I mean like – for example, I would think nothing about staying in work until gone 7 or 8 at night finishing off a report or whatever. Or getting in for 7am to get ahead of the day. But now I don’t have the choice or option to do that. My time is more or less dictated – and it’s actually nice. I don’t have a choice but to leave work at work because I get home and I have this little	
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		maniac running headfirst into my crotch when I walk through the door and he expects me to be on lego-building duty! Uv: [laughs] I love lego! Ab: [laughs] my niece is around the same age and she's an absolute whirlwind. It's such a good age for playing but I can imagine its knacking! De: Yeah it is but millions and millions of women have children and have a career and I was a bit like I'm gonna show everyone that I can stick two fingers up to the expectations of mothers and carry on being as passionate and interested in my work as I always was! I just drink a bit more coffee now to make sure I have energy left to run around, play hide and seek and act out the grand old duke of f---ing York fifteen times a night. Ab: [laughing hard] the grand old... [laughs] my god Uv: [laughs] do you feel sometimes like you have to make that choice between being a mother and being a hard worker? De: I mean, yeah absolutely I used to think that having children meant you had to choose between being a mum and working, and I was sort of in a bit of a rut for a while when I was on maternity and it was like what if I go back and I'm really crap at my job .. or the other extreme of	
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		what if I go back and I don't want to be a mum?! And now it's like I can do both and I don't know why I felt like that because it's such, like, caveman thinking isn't it? The woman has the kids and the man goes out and works to get money and is the breadwinner. I hate that s---. I'm bloody tired and there are days that I want to put my head in a hole – but I'm doing it! Uv: You are definitely killing it, Delyth, and you can tell you love your job – and your family! De: I think I've been one of the lucky ones in that I haven't really had to sacrifice a lot in my 'pursuit', I guess you could call it, in having a family and a career. My partner is really supportive and helps A LOT which was also something I was worried about, you know? Ab: That's an interesting concept isn't it? Sacrifice. I feel like a lot of what we do as women is sacrifice one thing or another for our careers, or even on the flipside for our families. Uv: Yeah you're completely right there. I went through just that, in a way, when I had my daughter. This isn't really the life event that I wanted to talk about but am I ok to say this? You can say whatever is relevant to you, Uvi. Please carry on. Uv: Great, thanks. Yeah so I had my daughter when I was 19 – half way through my second year of uni. My boyfriend at the time was a bit older and quite... persuasive, shall we say... and I got pregnant and I had <i>Ellie</i> and at that time it was like – right this is my life now. And everyone let	
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		me feel like that. I say 'let' me feel like that and sort of touching on what you just said, Delyth, that having support from your partner – whether it be emotional, financial, them just being there to give you a break – it's something you sort of expect but then never question... sorry I'm rambling a bit now... De: No I know what you mean. Like you both make a baby, in most cases you both make the decision to have the child and raise the child together so it <i>should</i> be 50/50 but, like, it's not always the case... I get that. What happened with your boyfriend? Uv: Oh he was a waste of space [laughs]. I was loving uni and I was so adamant that I would have the baby and try not to let it have such a massive impact on my being able to finish my degree. Load of crap really because as soon as I had left that hospital I knew I wasn't going back and I was more or less on my own. Emotionally more than anything else, I think. I didn't have that support – I never felt like I had it. I was 18 and thought I had my life mapped out and then all of a sudden I was 19 with a kid having no freaking clue what I was gonna do next. Ab: that's really shit, Uvi, I'm sorry you had an asshat man who made you feel like that. De: [laughs] Abby! Ab: What? He sounds like an asshat.	
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		Uv: [laughs] he was an asshat. Ab: See. Uv: [laughs]. It didn't last too long after that and I think we broke up when <i>Ellie</i> was around 8/9 months old. He was an absent dad after that – again emotionally, but literally physically and financially too. So I went back to dead end jobs just to make ends meet. Luckily I had family around so I wasn't forking out for childcare and that, but I was effectively just working to pay the bills. And I HATED that feeling. I really wanted to feel like I <i>could</i> achieve something and do something with my life – but it took some time to get there for me. And that does move me on to my life event I think [laughs] – I met this really great guy and he made me want to be that great person that I thought I could be all those years ago. And long story short – I went back to uni to do business and here I am! And that's me really. Ok that's great, thank you all for that. Would any of you like to add anything else at the moment? Uv: No I think I'm ok for now. Ab: Nope De: No I'm good.	
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		Great, ok. So what I'd like you to think about now is – while still focusing on that one major life event – can you describe any challenges or conflicts that you experienced that were related to this life event or decision, and explain how you resolved these? Abby would you like to start? Ab: Sure. Ok so I suppose there were obviously a load of challenges that I faced when I lost my brother. Not just losing him but, like, in the time leading up to that too, I guess. It's horrible watching someone you love drift away but it really made me evaluate what the hell I was doing and I started to think, like, life is too god damn short for me to be stuck working somewhere that I don't want to be. I wanted to make a career out of something that I could be proud of – feel like I could or was able to give something back, you know? It was tough with my family for a while. Grief is a strange thing, isn't it, and I quickly learned that my way of dealing with grief was very different to my parents. Are you happy to elaborate on that a bit? Ab: What I mean is, like I've said, I saw <i>Liam</i> dying as the kick up the arse I needed to grab life by the balls and do what I wanted to do. He would never get that chance – although he did live his life to the fullest in the best way that he could – but it was cut short. Mine hasn't been cut short and, as far as I'm aware, I'm not likely to be going anywhere anytime soon. So I dealt with my grief by throwing myself back into uni and working on assessments and projects. And my parents couldn't understand that. I think they saw me as being a bit cold – like I didn't care. But I did care.	
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		I really did care. I just interpreted <i>Liam's</i> death as something different to them. They lost their son; I gained a perspective on life that I hadn't previously has. Uv: That's really lovely, Abby. You're right that grief can affect people in such different ways and it is hard. Ab: Yeah it is. So the challenge was his death, of course, and the conflict was between my parents and I. But it's all good now and they understand why I was like that, I think. I feel like I'm at a place in my life where I'm good at what I do and I LIKE what I do. I made my own decision then to pursue this career in memory of <i>Liam</i> and I make my own decisions now in terms of what I do in my job. And that's benefitted me massively. Thank you for sharing that, Abby. Uvi how about you? Uv: Um what was the specific question again? I'd just like to explore what challenges or conflicts you experienced during the significant life event you described – so what did you go through that relates to your career when you met your current partner? Uv: Ah yeah! Right well I'm not entirely sure I can answer the question correctly but I'll have a go.	
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		There aren't any right or wrong answers to any of these questions, so don't worry about that. Uv: ok cool. Um well, yeah, I met <i>James</i> in the bar that I was working at at the time and, like, he was so fit [laughs]. Really suave, you know? He'd come in from work once a week in his suit and I'd just be like oh my god. Totally out of my league, of course. Anyway I was just a part-time barmaid so I never thought anything of my ogling him – window shopping, right? [laughs]. One day one of the girls I was on shift with gave me a business card with his details on it and I was like I don't want that. And she was like well he just gave it to me and asked me to give it to you, so I think you do want it. Ab: that's such a business man thing to do [laughs] Uv: Wasn't it! And at first I was like who does he think he is handing out his <i>business</i> card as if that'll get my attention. It did like [laughs] but still! De: Did you ring him? Uv: Did I hell! I put the card in my purse and forgot about it until he came in the next week. Then of course I was beetroot when he walked up to the bar and asked why I hadn't text. I'm rambling on here about my romantic love story [laughs] but I swear it is relevant Uvi please say whatever you want to.	
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Uv: I'll cut a long story short – we went out, I fell head over frigging heels for this bloke and then one day I just had this realisation of, like, he's too good for me. I'm JUST a barmaid, a single mother – and he's this cool as a cucumber, fit as a roman God guy who I have no business being seen with.

Ab: You're joking right?!

Uv: I wish I was [laughs]. The conflict for me was my own personal worth, I guess, and I pushed and pushed the poor guy away. A lot. And he just kept coming back and eventually he made me feel like I was good enough. Or at least that I *could* be good enough because I did have ambition and I wanted to be something and make something of myself – I just wasn't there yet! After he met my daughter I knew that I was screwed [laughs] – she loves him as much if not more than I do and he's been my rock in terms of giving me the confidence to 1. Go back to uni and further my education. At my age then – 22 – I felt like it was a big step to decide that I didn't want to give up and I wanted to keep going and get into a tidy profession. I didn't want to be a statistic. I didn't want to be one of those... teenage mums you hear about with no goals... I needed to graduate and make a life for my and do what I had always planned on doing. And 2. To allow someone else to make some sacrifices sometimes, too! I was able to go back to work almost full-time because of him coming into my life and I never ever thought I'd get to that.

Thank you Uvi. Delyth? What about you with baby *Jonah*?

De: Um well I sort of mentioned that I didn't have to sacrifice a lot but I suppose there were still so many challenges and conflicts when it came to work. I did cut my hours and at the time it was, like, I'm doing this to be able to be a good mother, and spend time with *Jonah*. But as time went on it became a big issue and an argument that always seemed to rear its head. I was, effectively, just a part time worker. And I know there's nothing wrong with working part-time but there is kind of a stigma isn't there? Like what else could you possibly be doing that you can't work full-time? Anyway we argued A LOT about how I was the one who had given up hours at work, and therefore given up pay etc but I was still the one who would take *Jonah* out each week, I'd be the one spending money on the food shop because I was home and all that. I started to take my personal problems on other people at work and that was a low point for me I think. Maybe the lowest point. And I realised then that I needed to get a grip. Working part-time is FINE. It was my inner conflict that made part-time working a problem, nothing else.

One of the questions I wanted to ask later on was about working patterns and working hours, but as you've touched upon your experience or feelings with part-time working, Delyth, would you all mind if we continue with that just for now?

De: no of course not!

Ab: That's fine by me

		Uv: Yeah absolutely fine. Great. Well the question I wanted to ask was regarding working hours and influence on womens' careers – specifically what do you think the relationship is between the hours women work and their careers? These can be positive or negative. Ab: I think both Delyth and Uvi have hit the nail on the head, really, in regards to part-time working. There's nothing wrong with it at all. But everyone has this thing about it. It's as if having other life commitments makes you less of a worker ... when really it's a bloody hard thing to balance work AND a life! I'm going to hold my hands up and admit that I am proud of working full-time. Not because I want to spend all my time in work or because I love what I do that much – but because, again, it's sort of a status thing. But... I don't have a child, or a partner or a husband or a parent that needs caring for or a dog or a cat that relies on me. I have nothing BUT work. I made that decision a long time ago and I've had to accept that I do live to work. De: don't you ever get bored? Or lonely? Ab: [laughs]. Yeah sometimes, I guess. I think you said earlier that like you used to not think anything of staying in work late or going in early. You had to change that mind set because you had a baby. I've not had to do that – I stay in late or go in early because I still can and, basically, I have nothing else to do. But then on the flipside of that I feel sometimes like I do get better training opportunities, or I'm the first one that gets asked if I need any development. So I guess	
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		that's a positive? I mean in answer to your question of the relationship between working hours and careers... I am able to take full advantage of courses and conferences and that because I am there all the time.... Uv: I think you are right there, Abby – I think there maybe is a link between how much you work and what you get offered. I've been on a few training courses, been on a couple of trips abroad with work looking to secure new contracts – but I'm not top of the pecking order when it comes to that kind of stuff. I'd never really thought about it too much but you are right. It's like when you are a 'full-time' worker you're seen to be more committed? Maybe? And therefore you get offered more? I dunno.... De: Yeah I agree with both of you, as well. I technically work part-time – 30 hours a week – which is ridiculous that that is considered part-time anyway! But effectively that is what my contract says. And now that I'm thinking about it I haven't really been given that many options when it comes to going on courses and all that since I came back from maternity.... So what you're all saying is that you consider full-time working women to be preferred to women who work part-time – is that right? De: Yeah I think so. I think it's a weird one because women <i>do</i> go back to work now after having kids and that, and there aren't many women who can afford to stay off and play housewife. Life is too expensive – kids are too expensive! And then there's this expectation that women should be	
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		the primary caregiver as well as rushing back to work to also contribute to the money in the house... Uv: I agree in that I think part-time working women aren't viewed as positively as those who work full-time. I read this article not so long ago about this female doctor who had gone 'part-time' at her surgery and how she felt stigmatised because she was 'JUST' a part-time worker, and her colleagues actually said to her, like, oh I heard you only work part-time now. And it was something like she was doing extra work outside the GP surgery in clinic and with charities or something... so basically she was working full-time, maybe even more than full-time hours, but because her workmates only saw that she was working part-time with them she had a bit of stick. Ab: What the bloody hell. The fact that there was an article written about, really, how she felt she needed to explain herself for 'only' working part-time tells you everything about how part-time workers are viewed really, doesn't it? De: That's just ridiculous. She's doing additional work but still feels like she's being judged for only doing part-time at surgery. Absolutely ridiculous. Uv: Tell me about it. But yeah it does highlight this issue – would that have been a story if it was a man? Do all male GP's work full-time and only full-time? Like it's beyond.	
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		So in terms of your own individual working hours, what is the relationship between the hours you currently work and your personal circumstances? So, for example Delyth you have <i>Jonah</i>, did that impact upon your working pattern? De: Yeah definitely. I went back to work after like 8 months I think which is maybe a bit less than the average time women usually take off... and I went back with the full intention of picking up my full-time, five day a week working hours. And I did that for a while and it was okay.... But it wasn't ideal. I just felt a bit different, you know? I wanted to be at work – but I also wanted to be with <i>Jonah</i>. I'd just spent 8 months with the kid all by myself and then all of a sudden I have zero time with him by myself. It was weird. Not bad weird, not good weird – just weird. And I decided quite quickly that I didn't like it. We didn't have family available to take care of him – either because they were also working or weren't well enough – so we decided he would go into childcare. He was fine in nursery and we could afford the costs between us with me being back in work, but I chose to speak to my manager and say, like, I really am struggling with this and I didn't expect it, but this is how it is and what can I do? So it definitely impacted upon my working hours – I decided to drop a day and now I have every Wednesday off with <i>Jonah</i> and I love it. Ab: it's really cool that you had the opportunity to make that decision as well, though. De: Yeah it is because I know of other 'mum' friends – ugh mum friends [laughs] – that didn't and don't have that option. They're either stuck working working working or they've had to give up a lot of hours and be on a, like, .5 contract. I can't imagine the impact of that on your financial	
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		situation. And, for me anyway, I'd feel a bit like I've made this massive sacrifice, given up work for whatever reason – whether I HAD to make that decision in terms of saving on childcare or because it simply wasn't feasible to work whatever hours I felt like – and I just know that I'd end up resenting my husband for that. Whether he was involved in the process or not I'd be looking at him like 'look at you with your dad bod, no stretch marks, still working your five day week moaning about how hard you have it when you get to have a hot lunch every day...' Like I'd resent him [laughs]. I'm laughing because I know that I've been lucky – but there are women who are not that lucky and I say women because it IS the woman who tends to end up being the one to lose out, you know? Thank you Delyth. What about you Uvi? Same question for you – what's the relationship between the hours you work and your circumstances? Uv: I mean if you'd been asking me this question 8 or 9 years ago then I'd be giving such a different answer – I'd be saying that having a baby obviously decided for me that I could not work full time anymore and I simply had to take what I could get. Quite literally! But talking about the here and now – I more or less have had it easy in that after I left uni I was able to commit to full-time working. We had my mum and <i>James'</i> mum around to get Ellie from school and she was like 5 by then so she was in all day anyway – it made no real sense for me to be at home. And now she's in comp so she's even more independent and I'm just not needed [laughs]. I said that meeting <i>James</i> gave me that opportunity to go back to work and I still believe that. Not to be all	
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		like 'he was my knight in shining armour' [laughs], but having a stable relationship really allowed me to get back to me again. And ME is a woman who likes to work! Ab: hear hear! And Abby, what about you? Ab: Well I don't have any commitments that impact on my working hours.... But I guess that is an answer to that question, isn't it? Of course – I don't want you to say something has made you choose your pattern of working if it hasn't. Ab: cool. Yeah I make my own decisions, more or less. I have a sort of 9-5 I guess but I work whatever hours I want – or maybe need to. I don't have to think about anyone else other than me so it's not like I have pressure to stop working, or finish at a certain time. But then, like, I guess my over-commitment to my career has had an impact on me building relationships. I haven't had a boyfriend in such a long time. I haven't been near a man I don't work with in years [laughs]. And I've been in situations where I've blown off social events because I've needed to work to get a report finished, or because I wanted to have an early night to get in a bit earlier the next day. That's really sad isn't it...	
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		Uv: It's not sad. I can understand that. It's easy to do what you know and love – and clearly you know and enjoy your work more than anything. Ab: Yeah I guess so. Yeah, so, no real influence on my working hours [laughs]. Thanks everyone. Ok so I just have a couple of questions left – and for now what I'd like you to think about is the values of a profession for a woman. I know a couple of you mentioned briefly earlier about status and titles of professions, so maybe related to that in some way. But what do you think of when you think of the values of a profession for women specifically? Feel free to use examples specific to you to explain, if you want to. Ab: so profession as in like what we currently work as? Yeah, either in your career or job area now, or in general. Ab: Well, yeah, sort of like the status thing is important for me. I don't even know why, really – and it's really not a bigheaded thing, honestly. I like saying what my job is. Although as a woman I think that being a speech-language pathologist fits – do you get what I mean? Can you explain?	
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		Ab: Like.... If I didn't know what an SLP was I would just assume that it was more of a woman's job... Uv: ah I get you. So like same thing as when you say soldier you think man? Ab: Yeah, like that! It's not a woman's job at all, of course, but it sounds like it would be. So in terms of, like, what the values of that profession are I think they are quite feminine... I don't know if I'm even making sense here. Can you explain a bit more? De: I think you mean like what do we think the predominant value is in having a 'career', don't you? Being in a career where you can go somewhere rather than the weekend jobs you used to have when you were in uni sort of thing? Yeah, exactly that. And how being a woman has an impact on, perhaps, your choice of career and development in that area. Ab: Ah! Gotcha! De: let's be honest – we've moved on a lot in the last few decades and I think women nowadays are in professions that we never used to be in. And that's great, it is a real step forward. But there is still some stigma in a lot of roles, too. I don't particularly feel like I'm viewed as anything other than <i>a professional</i> in my job – woman or not – and that's important. But I do know that some of	
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		my friends do have that problem. One of my older friends, think she's around 45 or so now, she's a cardiothoracic surgeon and it took a LONG time for her to qualify and get into a regular or permanent position at the hospital. She's Dr <i>Banner</i> and for some reason everyone always thinks she's a man. Like I don't know how just a surname can give an indication of someone's gender – so it's either the surgeon part or the doctor part. And that's kinda crap, isn't it? Like the fact that you're a doctor or a surgeon gives people the idea that you're automatically a man! Uv: So before patients or other doctors meet her they assume she's a man? De: Yeah she gets it a lot – patients will outright say to her 'oh I thought I was coming in to see a man'. How that's even ok to say, I don't know mind. Ab: I agree with you that it is mental – but I have been guilty of that in the past. De: Oh I think we all have! I have! I had a male midwife when I gave birth to <i>Jonah</i> and I couldn't get used to it. But of course men can be midwives! You just don't see it very often... Uv: Yeah men can be midwives and I hate to be the one to say this – but, like, do you ever wonder why they would want to be a midwife? Like in that nursing sort of profession you'd expect someone to be compassionate, sympathetic, empathetic. Men can't really be empathetic to a woman in labour [laughs]. I'd have been afraid that I would have wanted to punch him [laughs].	
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		Ab: [laughs] why would you want to punch a midwife? Uv: [laughs] not because he was a midwife but because he would be just a man! And a man basically causes all that pain of labour [laughs] and they can never understand it. De: I didn't even think of that [laughs] but you have got a point. Ab: I suppose you could say that same as like, I dunno, a female electrician. If I phoned an electrician I'd be expecting a man. And if a woman turned up I'd be like ummm I'm not sure about this... Uv: Yeah it works both ways, doesn't it! There are still careers that are just automatically associated with one gender or another. Uvi you said earlier that you feel like your job is more male-oriented? Uv: Yeah it definitely is. And I think I said like when I think of HR I think of old men [laughs], and I do. I don't even know why. Like I didn't even know what HR was before uni so I don't know where that... prejudice I guess... even came from. I think working in a mostly male environment also lets me see like the differences in men and women to some extent as well. What do you mean by that?	
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		Uv: I mean like, for example, career breaks. Women tend to be the ones who take career breaks Whether it be for maternity leave, or to take care of a family member – it's mostly the woman who does that. Unless a man is off through illness, of course. And when you work in a place where there are, like, 6 women and 60 men it becomes noticeable when one of the women aren't there for a period of time, you know? De: you're so right there. Women do tend to be the ones who take those breaks in their career, they allow something else to become important for a period of time, and then they go back when they can or need to, and just pick things back up. In most cases, I suppose, not a lot changes but if you think of maternity leave then quite a bit can change in a period of 9 months, or a year if you take that long off. Do you think that career breaks have an impact on a woman's career, then? De: God yeah! Whether it's an intentional change or something you never expected – taking time off work for whatever reason can be tough. I've said that after maternity I made changes and I had to make a few tough decisions and at the time I felt a bit resentful that I had to make those decisions, I guess. Like why is it me who has had to cut hours – I gave birth! I should be able to do whatever I want from that point forward [laughs]. And again that stigma of being a part-time worker was in the back of my mind, as well. Simple fact of the matter is – employees prefer full-time workers. That's a value, I think, that's important.	
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Ab: I've never really taken a break from work but...

Uv: no?! I'd never believe it [laughs].

Ab: [laughs] ha ha. A few of the girls in my team have. Mostly through maternity to be honest. But there was one woman who was off for a good 14 months caring for her dad. Her mum hadn't long died and her dad needed round the clock care, so she decided that she was going to take a break and go and do that, which of course I think is an amazing and admirable thing to do. Anyway when she came back there had been, like, a massive shift and change in the structure at work and her role was, effectively, redundant. Obviously they couldn't just fire her while she was off caring for her terminally ill dad, and I'm assuming they had a plan in place for her but, yeah, she technically didn't go back to her 'job'. She was in an admin role and on top of her actual job not being available, the job they wanted her to do she wasn't actually qualified for. It was weird. She's fine now, like, but just an example of women taking a break for genuine reasons. It's really odd how things work in some companies and how they don't really contact you, as the person who it is going to effect....

Uv: that must have been rubbish for her. You do hear that a lot though – I mean like women going back to work and having to do something different from what they did before they left and that... and your attitude to work or your commitment doesn't alter really. I mean maybe it does but I wouldn't think so, you know?

		De: Yeah I know what you mean. Like you'd assume that women going back to work after any form of break go back with the intention of picking up where they left off as much as they can and just getting on with it – like they used to do before. Uv: yeah – and sometimes that isn't possible. De: Yeah I get you. But I do think that you can have the most commitment and the best attitude towards work but when you have children your values do change a bit. Sorry I keep banging on about my kid but I don't have a lot else going on [laughs]. Ab: No I understand what you're saying and I don't even have children. Your values are bound to change – you have another human to look after and work really just becomes something you need to do during the day – or night whatever – and then you have to have that off switch to get on with your other job of mother. De: Yeah that's exactly it! I love my job, like I absolutely love it. And before <i>Jonah</i> I would do this, or I'd do that and I'd think that I was going to do this training course to get to this level by this age or whatever. They were important to me – they were my values and they were... I dunno welcomed? I guess?.... by my boss. But those values have changed. I still want to do training, I want to develop – but does it matter if it's not by the age I thought? Not really..	
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Thank you everyone. Now – the penultimate question! If there was one thing you could have done differently in your pursuit of your current career, what would it be?

De: Ooo juicy.

Ab: I'd have gone travelling. And maybe let a man near me for long enough to say I was in a relationship.

Uv: [laughs] that was quick! And stern...

Ab: [laughs] No I mean it. I'd say I'm content in my current life, and I think I've achieved what I wanted to achieve – my plans or goals, I've achieved them. I dunno if this was a bit of a trick question and we're supposed to say 'no I'm so happy I wouldn't change anything I accept all my choices blah blah' [laughs].

[laughs] that's definitely not what I wanted!

Ab: I'm just kidding. I'm not being ungrateful but, yeah, I would do more for me I think. I suppose the problem is that I was just used to being independent and making my own decisions, and then after *Liam* I became even more, like, make a decision and run with it! And people have been like 'oh that's great, look what she's doing now and how good is that'. And I'm at the point where I'm like what exactly have I done that HASN'T been work related, you know? I don't have a boyfriend.

		Not that I want a boyfriend right now but it's nice to have someone to go home to sometimes, surely? I emphasise the sometimes – can you get part-time boyfriends? Is that a thing? De: [laughs] put that in your dating bio and they'll be flocking! Ab: [laughs] Hi guys, I'm Abby, 33, likes to work and is looking for a part-time boyfriend to be there when I get in from work to run me a bath two to three times a week. DM me. [laughs] De: [laughs] you can have my husband, if you want? [laughs] So, as well as having someone to share time with, you would have spent some time travelling? Ab: Yeah 100%. When I was young I was right into geography in school and I used to see pictures of these beautiful places and think I can't wait to be old enough to just jump on a plane, a boat, in a car and go and see these places. And how many of those places have I seen? Zero, that's how many. And I don't blame anyone. I don't even 'blame' myself. My focus shifted and I'm generally happy in my life with work – but I don't feel like now would be the time to take some time off and go off on my travels. Uv: Why not? Why couldn't you take some time and go away for a few weeks or months?	
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		Ab: umm.. well I mean... I suppose I don't really have an answer for that. I could.... I don't tend to do a lot with my leave – when I take leave [laughs] – yeah, maybe I could. De: I think you should! If you've always wanted to do it then go and bloody do it! Who says you can't go now and do those things you wanted to do? You've worked so hard to get where you are surely it's time to take something back for you? Ab: I'm doing it [laughs]. Croatia here I come... Uv: [laughs] What about you, Uvi? If you could change one thing what would it be? Uv: I mean, I could answer that with something like 'I'd have made sure not to get pregnant at 18 and I would have finished uni' and that. But I think going through all of that has made me the person I am today, and effectively has allowed me to be in the job I'm in now and be as happy as I am now, you know? I had a plan. Everyone has a plan, don't they? And my plan just didn't go as.. planned [laughs]. I feel very happy where I am at the moment. If I had to say one specific thing then I'd probably say that I would have had another child or two [laughs]. I always wanted more than one and I most certainly wanted to be done with newborns by the time I was 30! And seeing as my 30th birthday is 7 months away I'm not sure that'll be happening [laughs].	
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		De: Oo you want another one?! Uv: Yeah I'd love to have a baby with <i>James</i>, definitely. I'm in a far more secure place now – with work and within myself – so I feel like I'd have more to offer at this point in my life. There were definitely a few years where my life was a bit up in the air, where I didn't know what was going to happen to me or to <i>Ellie</i>. But it seems like its all fallen into place ... finally. So even though I'd have liked to have another kid, I'm not sure I would change anything, really. Again, I could romanticise it and say what I would have liked to have happened in my ideal world – but to say I'd have changed it now, in hindsight – I'd be lying. Everything has fallen into place and I do believe things happen for a reason. I'm happy with my friends, my relationship and my job, so that's a win. And if I get pregnant in the next few months then cool [laughs]. Ab: Fair play, Uvi. Thank you Uvi. And Delyth? De: I sort of feel the same as Uvi in that I'm not sure I would change anything, looking back. <i>Jonah</i> wasn't planned – but my life didn't end because I got pregnant. I had planned my career to work out a certain way and it didn't – but I'm still in the career I wanted to be in and I'm happy... so.. yeah. I know now that having a child doesn't end your career – and that is genuinely how I felt before. I don't know if I would have or want another baby – maybe... one day.... I dunno. But if I	
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		did I feel like I'm armed with more knowledge about work and about life that would help me make that a bit easier this time, if you get me? Ab: What do you mean? De: I mean, like, I'd know that I could go back to work and I'd just be accepted back. Unless something dramatic happened and I didn't have a job or whatever. And I feel like I'd make a point of being a bit more prepared for being off work, financially I mean. Maternity pay is ... well to put it politely it's bull. You're off work for that period of time and you're living on like 25% of your normal pay with the same bills to pay?! It's barbaric. I make a point of saving some money each month now just in case – for a rainy day, you know. Uv: Maternity leave is hard. You're trying to get used to this new human and the best thing you can do is go out and socialise to pass the time a bit – but you have no money to do that! My sister is currently on maternity leave and she's said this more time than I can count! It's an odd one.. so – final question ladies. Where do you see yourself in five years with regard to your education, your career, or your relationships? Ab: Well I hope I have a relationship [laughs]. I think I'm ready for one now. I feel like I'm settled as much as I can be at work and I'm not getting any younger so I need ... want... to do more for my own well-being and sanity. I think I'm starting to realise that I can have both. Clearly you two	
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		have it nailed and I just don't know why I ever thought it had to be one or the other, really. I can have a good job, and be good at my job, and have a boyfriend or at least a personal life. Maybe then I'd have a reason to go home at a reasonable hour and take some weekends off [laughs]. Uv: [laughs] when you're committed to your career it's hard to look beyond the blinkers. I sort of had it the easy way round in that I had the relationship before the career, and he actually made me focus more on the career that I wanted and pushed me to give everything that I could to achieve my goals, really. You might even like sharing your time and space with someone else! [laughs] De: Guys – my husband is still available, I'm just saying. Ab/Uv: [laugh] De: Nah I'm just kidding. He's a goodun. I agree with you, Uvi, in that I think my focus on my career was wholly supported by <i>John</i> and even when I felt like I couldn't do it he was like 'yes you can, stop being so negative and get on with it'. And I needed that sort of support – that push. I feel like even though I have a husband and I have a baby I'm still this really independent woman. I think that if I turned around tomorrow and said, like, right I've had enough of occ therapy now and I'm going to go back to uni and do something else – he wouldn't even bat an eyelid. He'd be like 'yeah cool go for it'. I essentially get to choose what I want to do over the next year, the next five years even, in response to your question. So I suppose an answer to the actual question would be – I don't see myself going back to education and I want to stay in occ therapy for some time yet. If there came a time where promotion was available, I would jump at it and allow	
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		everything to fall into place – it always does. A lot of people spend so much time focusing on 50 different reasons why they should or shouldn't go for something and for me it's like – if it's on offer and you want to do it, do it and sort the rest out later. It always eventually works out. Ab: I really like your mindset. I appreciate that kind of forward thinking, fair play. De: it's so easy to get caught up in the day to day when you've got a lot going on and, at the end of it all, you need to do what you're happy doing, You choose a partner you're happy with and you aspire to choose a job you're happy doing – so why wouldn't you also choose to do the most that you can in every aspect of your work and home life that makes you happy, too, you know? Uv: Love that. I actually think we needed to hear that today. Uvi where do you see yourself in five years? Uvi: In my fantasy land, in five years I'll be working as a teaching assistant – at least! Preferably a teacher – working with special needs or disabled children under the age of 7. I really like kids and I love the idea of being able to help out children who need a little extra help to enjoy their time at school. My daughter had some great teachers and teaching assistants going through primary school and she used to really enjoy getting up and getting ready to go to school. Children with disabilities don't necessarily have the easiest time integrating into school, in general, and I'd like to think that I have the compassion and patience to be able to help them do that.	
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		De: That's really lovely. So – why don't you do it? Uv: [laughs] what do you mean? De: What's stopping you doing it? You've said you like your job but don't see yourself there forever. You've said <i>James</i> is supportive. <i>Ellie</i> is growing up and able to get herself to school and that. Why don't you go back into education, get your PGCE and do it? Uv: umm... you know I don't even know how to answer that question. Like I know you're right – and everything you've just said is spot on. I don't know why I haven't looked into PGCE's to be honest, I really don't. Ab: Delyth's right, you know – if you want to do it then you just have to grab the bull by the horns and do it. The only person you're gonna be spiting is yourself if you're sitting there in 5 years' time thinking of this conversation and being like 'I said I wanted to be working with kids by now and I'm still in HR working with old men'. Uv: [laughs]. So I guess my 5 year plan is to go and get my PGCE and work in a school then! That is my plan - yeah. I'm glad you've all had a chance to give each other some advice and guidance today [laughs]. Does anyone want to add anything else? De: No I think I covered what I wanted to say.	
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		Ab: I'm good. Uv: I just want to say thanks to the 3 of you for today, really. Thank you all! If there's nothing else to add then that is the end of our focus group. Thanks again and I really wish you all the best of luck with everything!	
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