This thesis concerns itself with how professional poker players construct their identities and chosen career via the use of language. The theoretical framework for this paper is social constructionism, with the methods of analysis being discourse analysis combined with a rhetorical approach. During the last five or so years poker's popularity has exploded and the image of the game has undergone a radical metamorphosis. These changes can largely be attributed to the advent of internet play and the numerous poker television programmes which have recently sprung up. Surprisingly, however, no academic research which focused on poker players could be found. The aim of this paper is then to be a preliminary study into how those players who derive all or the majority of their income from poker talk about the subject and themselves. The data set consisted of semi-structured interviews with five professional players. The results show that the discussion over poker players in this data set can be classified into five different themes. The themes found were: cowboy, normal worker, gambler, sportsman and intellectual combatant. The cowboy repertoire centred around living on the outside of polite society and etching out a living by using one's cunning and wit. The normal worker approach then saw poker as being similar to most other jobs, involving long hours and hard work. The gambler theme viewed poker players more like traditional gamblers where everything is always placed on the turn of a few cards. The sportsman approach saw professional players more along the lines of other top athletes and considered them to have entertainment value on television. The intellectual combatant theme considered poker as way of measuring one's mental capacities and money was considered a secondary goal. An ideological dilemma was also found in the data. It revolved around whether professional poker players were moral, worthwhile members of society, or alternatively amoral, drains on society. The themes mentioned above were all used when taking a stance on this dilemma.

Key works in this paper were those texts by Jokinen, Juhlia and Suoninen which dealt with discourse analysis and those by Potter and Wetherell.