

**THE MEANING OF WORK FOR SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN GRADUATES:A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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I declare that

The meaning of work for South African women graduates: A phenomenological study

Is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
DECLARATION	iii
<u>CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY</u>	1
<u>1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION</u>	1
<u>1.1.1 The feminisation of employment</u>	1
<u>1.1.2 Limitations of research on the meaning of work for women</u>	2
<u>1.1.2.1 Lack of research on the meaning of work for women</u>	2
<u>1.1.2.2 Limitations and impact of male centred research</u>	3
<u>1.1.2.3 Limitations of contemporary women centred research</u>	4
<u>1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT</u>	7
<u>1.2.1 General problem statement</u>	8
<u>1.2.2 Problems to be explored through a review of current literature</u>	8
<u>1.2.3 Problems to be explored through a phenomenological study</u>	8
<u>1.3 AIMS</u>	8
<u>1.3.1 General aim</u>	8
<u>1.3.2 Specific aim of the literature review</u>	9
<u>1.3.3 Specific aim of the phenomenological study</u>	9
<u>1.4 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE</u>	9
<u>1.4.1 Disciplinary relationship</u>	9
<u>1.4.2 Psychology paradigm</u>	9
<u>1.4.3 Metatheoretical concepts</u>	10
<u>1.4.4 Models, theories, concepts and constructs</u>	10
<u>1.4.5 Central theoretical hypothesis</u>	11
<u>1.4.6 Methodological convictions</u>	11
<u>1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN</u>	11
<u>1.5.1 Type of research</u>	11
<u>1.5.2 Unit of analysis</u>	13
<u>1.5.3 Methods to ensure reliability and validity</u>	13
<u>1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</u>	15

<u>1.6.1 Phase 1: Literature Review</u>	15
<u>1.6.2 Phase 2: Phenomenological Study</u>	15
<u>1.7 CHAPTER DIVISION</u>	18
<u>1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY</u>	19
 <u>CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW</u>	 20
 <u>2.1 THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF WORK</u>	 20
<u>2.1.1 Defining “work”</u>	21
<u>2.1.2 Defining “meaning”</u>	22
<u>2.1.3 The primary human activities of working and ascribing meaning</u>	23
<u>2.1.3.1 Working as a primary adult activity</u>	23
<u>2.1.3.2 Ascribing meaning as a primary adult activity</u>	24
<u>2.1.4 The meaning of work as subjective, fluid and transcending the instrumental</u>	24
<u>2.1.4.1 The meaning of work as both subjective and fluid</u>	24
<u>2.1.4.2 Work as transcending instrumental needs</u>	26
<u>2.1.5 The meaning ascribed to work</u>	27
<u>2.1.5.1 Work as a providing a sense of identity and self-worth</u>	28
<u>2.1.5.2 Work as social connectedness and relatedness</u>	29
<u>2.1.5.3 Work as intrinsically satisfying</u>	29
<u>2.1.5.4 Work as contributing to and serving the greater good</u>	30
<u>2.1.5.5 Work as shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority</u>	30
<u>2.1.5.6 Conceptualisation of meaning of work</u>	30
<u>2.2 THE MEANING OF WORK FOR WOMEN</u>	33
<u>2.2.1 The meaning women ascribe to work</u>	33
<u>2.2.1.1 Female mythology and male-centred research on the meaning women ascribe to work</u>	33
<u>2.2.1.2 Contemporary qualitative research on the meaning of work for women</u>	36
<u>2.2.2 Economic, material and instrumental meaning</u>	40
<u>2.2.3 Sense of identity and self-worth</u>	41
<u>2.2.4 Social connectedness and relatedness</u>	43
<u>2.2.5 Intrinsic satisfaction</u>	46
<u>2.2.6 Contributing to others and serving society</u>	48

2.2.7	<u>Impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority</u>	50
2.3	<u>CHAPTER SUMMARY</u>	53
<u>CHAPTER 3 : PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY</u>		54
3.1	<u>REQUIREMENTS FOR A SOUND QUALITATIVE STUDY</u>	54
3.2	<u>SAMPLE AND POPULATION</u>	55
3.2.1	<u>Age</u>	57
3.2.2	<u>Race</u>	57
3.2.3	<u>Career guidance process in place</u>	57
3.2.4	<u>Postgraduate degrees</u>	57
3.2.5	<u>Current job title and organization</u>	58
3.2.6	<u>Length of service in current role and full time employment</u>	59
3.2.7	<u>Family history</u>	59
3.2.8	<u>Marital status</u>	59
3.2.9	<u>Number of children</u>	59
3.3	<u>DEVELOPING THE MEASURING INSTRUMENT</u>	59
3.3.1	<u>Choice of measuring instrument</u>	59
3.3.1.1	<u>Importance of the choice of measuring instrument</u>	59
3.3.1.2	<u>The self as instrument</u>	60
3.3.2	<u>Development of the measuring instrument</u>	61
3.3.2.1	<u>Development of broad, unstructured questions and probes</u>	62
3.3.2.2	<u>Sequencing of questions and the development of an interview guide</u>	63
3.3.2.3	<u>Development of a biographical interview within the unstructured interview</u>	63
3.3.2.4	<u>Planning the venue and duration of the interview</u>	64
3.3.2.5	<u>Planning the administration and data collection method of the interview</u>	64
3.3.2.6	<u>Development of an interviewer feedback form</u>	64
3.3.2.7	<u>Use of a pilot interview</u>	65
3.3.3	<u>Objective of the measuring instrument</u>	65
3.3.4	<u>Rationale of the measuring instrument</u>	66
3.3.5	<u>Administration of the measuring instrument</u>	66
3.3.5.1	<u>Planning the introductory briefing</u>	66
3.3.5.2	<u>Planning the completion of the biographical personal data form</u>	67
3.3.5.3	<u>Planning the unstructured interview</u>	68

<u>3.3.5.4 Planning the completion of the interviewer feedback form</u>	69
<u>3.3.6 Reliability of the measuring instrument</u>	69
3.4 CONDUCTING THE DATA GATHERING	70
<u>3.4.1 Agreement to participate in the study and appointment scheduled</u>	70
<u>3.4.2 Introductory briefing</u>	70
<u>3.4.3 Completion of the personal data form</u>	71
<u>3.4.4 Unstructured interview</u>	71
<u>3.4.5 Completion of the interviewer feedback form</u>	71
<u>3.4.6 Transcribing interview protocols</u>	71
<u>3.4.7 Reliability of the data-gathering process</u>	72
<u>3.4.7.1 The researcher</u>	72
<u>3.4.7.2 The participants</u>	73
<u>3.4.7.3 The measuring instrument</u>	73
<u>3.4.7.4 The context</u>	74
<u>3.4.7.5 Internal consistency</u>	74
<u>3.4.7.6 Theoretical validity of the measuring instrument</u>	74
3.5 DATA PROCESSING	75
<u>3.5.1 Processing of the data</u>	75
<u>3.5.1.1 Transcription of the interview protocols</u>	76
<u>3.5.1.2 Identification of emerging themes and patterns</u>	76
<u>3.5.1.3 Description of emerging themes or patterns</u>	76
<u>3.5.1.4 Moving themes from the specific to the general</u>	77
<u>3.5.2 Validity of data processing</u>	77
3.6 ASSESSMENT OF THE SCIENTIFIC RIGOUR, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY	78
<u>3.6.1 Review of the scientific rigour of the phenomenological study</u>	78
<u>3.6.1.1 Review of the study's reliability</u>	79
<u>3.6.1.2 Review of the validity of the study</u>	81
3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY	83
CHAPTER 4 : RESULTS	84
4.1 DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS	85
<u>4.1.1 The activity of ascribing meaning to work and an expectation of meaningful work</u>	85

<u>4.1.1.1</u>	<u>The act of ascribing meaning to work and the expectation that work should be meaningful</u>	86
<u>4.1.1.2</u>	<u>Commonality, diversity, fluidity and changeability of the meaning of work</u>	87
<u>4.1.1.3</u>	<u>The importance of meaning being ascribed to work</u>	88
<u>4.1.1.4</u>	<u>The importance of meaning being ascribed to other domains of life</u>	89
<u>4.1.1.5</u>	<u>General assertions about the experience and meaning of work</u>	90
<u>4.1.2</u>	<u>Economic, material and instrumental needs</u>	91
<u>4.1.2.1</u>	<u>Work as meeting instrumental needs</u>	92
<u>4.1.2.2</u>	<u>Work as both meeting and transcending instrumental needs</u>	92
<u>4.1.2.3</u>	<u>Meeting instrumental needs experienced as meaningful in the provision of independence and control</u>	94
<u>4.1.2.4</u>	<u>Summary of the instrumental meaning of work</u>	95
<u>4.1.3</u>	<u>Sense of identity and self-worth</u>	95
<u>4.1.3.1</u>	<u>Work as providing important components of identity</u>	96
<u>4.1.3.2</u>	<u>Work as providing an independent, autonomous self</u>	98
<u>4.1.3.3</u>	<u>The importance of recognition and approval</u>	99
<u>4.1.3.4</u>	<u>Work as providing self-worth and feeling valued</u>	104
<u>4.1.3.5</u>	<u>Summary on the sense of identity and self-worth</u>	107
<u>4.1.4</u>	<u>Social connectedness and relating at work</u>	108
<u>4.1.4.1</u>	<u>Experience of positive relationships at work</u>	109
<u>4.1.4.2</u>	<u>Experience of negative relationships at work</u>	110
<u>4.1.4.3</u>	<u>Summary of social connectedness and relating at work</u>	114
<u>4.1.5</u>	<u>Work as intrinsically satisfying</u>	115
<u>4.1.5.1</u>	<u>Work as intrinsically satisfying</u>	115
<u>4.1.5.2</u>	<u>Summary of work as being intrinsically satisfying</u>	119
<u>4.1.6</u>	<u>Contributing to and serving society through work</u>	119
<u>4.1.6.1</u>	<u>Work not seen as work</u>	120
<u>4.1.6.2</u>	<u>Work as contributing to and serving society</u>	120
<u>4.1.6.3</u>	<u>Summary of serving and contributing to society</u>	122
<u>4.1.7</u>	<u>Shaping and impacting the world through exercise of power and authority</u>	122
<u>4.1.7.1</u>	<u>The experience of exerting authority</u>	123
<u>4.1.7.2</u>	<u>Discomfort regarding the exercise of power</u>	125

<u>4.1.7.3</u>	<u>Experience of powerlessness at work</u>	127
<u>4.1.7.4</u>	<u>Summary of shaping and making an impact on the world through the exercise of power and authority</u>	130
4.2	<u>INTEGRATION OF THE RESULTS AND LITERATURE</u>	131
<u>4.2.1</u>	<u>General findings on the meaning of work and emerging themes</u>	131
<u>4.2.2</u>	<u>The activity of ascribing meaning to work and the expectation of meaningful work</u>	133
<u>4.2.3</u>	<u>Women's meaning of work as transcending economic and instrumental needs</u>	135
<u>4.2.4</u>	<u>Women's experiences and meaning of work as providing a sense of identity and self-worth</u>	137
<u>4.2.4.1</u>	<u>Work as providing essential components of identity</u>	138
<u>4.2.4.2</u>	<u>The importance of recognition and approval</u>	139
<u>4.2.4.3</u>	<u>Work as providing a sense of self-worth and value</u>	140
<u>4.2.4.4</u>	<u>Summary of sense of identity and self-worth</u>	141
<u>4.2.5</u>	<u>Women's experiences and meaning of work as attributed to social connectedness and relatedness</u>	142
<u>4.2.6</u>	<u>Women's experiences and meaning attributed to work as intrinsically satisfying</u>	145
<u>4.2.7</u>	<u>Women's experiences and meaning attributed to work as contributing to and serving society</u>	146
<u>4.2.8</u>	<u>Women's experiences of shaping and impacting the world through the exercise of power and authority</u>	149
<u>4.2.8.1</u>	<u>The experience of exerting authority</u>	150
<u>4.2.8.2</u>	<u>Discomfort regarding the exercise of power</u>	151
<u>4.2.8.3</u>	<u>Experience of powerlessness at work</u>	151
<u>4.2.8.4</u>	<u>Summary of shaping and impacting the world through the exercise of power and authority</u>	152
4.3	<u>CHAPTER SUMMARY</u>	153
<u>CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</u>		155
5.1	<u>CONCLUSIONS</u>	155
<u>5.1.1</u>	<u>Conclusions drawn from the literature review</u>	155
<u>5.1.1.1</u>	<u>The meaning of work as diverse concentric circles of meaning</u>	156

<u>5.1.1.2 Themes emerging as a conceptualisation of the meaning of work in general</u>	156
<u>5.1.1.3 Themes emerging as a conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women</u>	157
<u>5.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the phenomenological study</u>	160
<u>5.1.2.1 Hypothesis resulting from the phenomenological study</u>	163
<u>5.2 LIMITATIONS</u>	164
<u>5.2.1 Limitations of the literature review</u>	165
<u>5.2.2 Limitations of the phenomenological study</u>	165
<u>5.2.2.1 Sample used</u>	165
<u>5.2.2.2 The emergence of diverse and distinct thematic concerns</u>	166
<u>5.2.2.3 The researcher's concerns about exerting her own authority and power</u>	166
<u>5.2.2.4 Constraints in the study's confirmability</u>	168
<u>5.2.2.5 Constraints around the study's truth value and applicability</u>	168
<u>5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	169
<u>5.3.1 Recommendations for future literature reviews and phenomenological studies</u>	169
<u>5.3.1.1 Exploring the broad thematic concerns in greater depth through future research studies</u>	169
<u>5.3.1.2 Using diverse samples in future research studies</u>	170
<u>5.3.2 Application of the findings with organisational practices</u>	171
<u>5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY</u>	172
<u>REFERENCES</u>	174
<u>APPENDIX A: PERSONAL DATA FORM</u>	181
<u>APPENDIX B: PERSONAL DATA FORM</u>	182
<u>APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE</u>	185
<u>APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM</u>	187

LIST OF FIGURES

xiii

SUMMARY

xiv

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: A diagrammatic representation of concentric circles of meaning of work.....	32
Figure 2.2: A diagrammatic representation of concentric circles of traditional meaning of work for women	35
Figure 2.3: Concentric circles of meaning for women described in contemporary research and forces impacting on these	39
Figure 4.1: The meaning of work for women in this study and the inherent complexities	91

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SUMMARY

Despite the feminisation of the workplace as one of the key developments of this domain, the meaning of work for women is little understood. A phenomenological approach was adopted in this study to gain in-depth understanding of the meaning ascribed to work by a sample of ten South African, women graduates. Literature was used to generate three models – a male-centred, stereotyped and contemporary conceptualisation. Unstructured interviews were conducted and the protocols analysed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1985; 1986). Themes illustrated that the meaning of work for women is multifaceted and comprises a number of components including sense of identity and self-worth, meeting instrumental needs, social relatedness, serving others, intrinsic satisfaction and the exercise of power and authority. Findings suggested that the meaning women ascribe to work changes when they experience autonomy. Recommendations were made for future research and organisational practices.

Keywords

Meaning, work, women, qualitative research, phenomenology, female-centred research, stereotypes, unstructured interviews, the self as instrument, autonomy, identity, self-worth, instrumental needs, intrinsic satisfaction, relationships at work, serving and caring for others, power and authority.

CHAPTER 1 : INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

1.1.1 The feminisation of employment

Women represent more than half the population, and their representation in paid employment is increasing (Firth-Cozens & West, 1991). The feminisation of paid employment has been one of the most significant economic changes in the past decade in terms of both the rapid influx of women into the paid labour force and the emerging patterns of employment (Keightley, 1995; 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, 1995). About 854 million women were economically active in 1990, accounting for 32.1 percent of the global labour force, playing a major economic role in all countries (1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, 1995). Women's presence and involvement in the workplace have been described as one of the key developments in the realm of work, and a source of far-reaching social and cultural change (Keightley, 1995).

Juxtaposed to the increasing feminisation of paid employment, are assertions that women have always worked, but that their work has been systematically underrated and undervalued, resulting in its economic significance being downplayed (Hakim, 1996). A discussion of the feminisation of paid employment needs to take cognisance of the fact that working women are not a new phenomenon, and one that has been situated within political and social contexts. Of equal importance, in the light of discussion to come, is the issue that women's work, whilst moving from the home into the workplace, and from unpaid to paid, may continue to be located within political, social and psychological contexts. This has significant consequences for the way in which women experience work, and the meaning ascribed to this experience, both by women themselves, and by researchers working in this domain.

1.1.2 Limitations of research on the meaning of work for women

1.1.2.1 *Lack of research on the meaning of work for women*

Although the experience of women in the world of work has been described as a topic of unparalleled importance in the field of organisational psychology (Firth-Cozens & West, 1991) and increasing interest and research have been devoted to women's work experiences (Chester & Grossman, 1990), their specific experiences of work, and the meaning ascribed to these, have only recently been examined. Any conceptualisation of the meaning of work needs to recognise that very little research has been conducted in this domain and little understanding exists of "what 'work' means to women" (Stewart, 1990, p. 261).

Hakim (1996) has asserted that while huge volumes of literature exist on what researchers have called 'work orientations', 'work attitudes' and 'work values', there is a dearth of research on the meaning ascribed to work for either men or women. Research has focused on attachment to current employer, job or occupation; and the relative importance of work against family, leisure, community and religion as central life concerns.

Moreover, Hakim (1996) has emphasised that research completed has clear methodological limitations that need to be made explicit. Research findings have been limited by the particular topic addressed, the sample utilised, the wording of research questions and analysis techniques. Findings resulting from these research studies have been largely inconclusive, contradictory or ethnocentric. Furthermore, the research that does exist has generally emphasised men's experiences, rather than those of women (Hakim, 1996), which has led to two distinct conclusions on the meaning of work for women, namely :

- that no sex differential exists or

- that the meaning of work for women is opposite to that of men, reifying sex role stereotypes and positioning women's unique meaning given to work, as other.

The limitations of this research will now be explored in detail.

1.1.2.2 *Limitations and impact of male centred research*

Traditional models of the meaning of work have been based, for the most part, on men's occupational experiences with research drawing almost exclusively upon men's traditional experiences, and data assumed to fully explain women's experiences as well (Dex, 1985; Keightley, 1995). In reviewing research studies, it is often difficult to ascertain if women are included in a sample at all, and the resulting research has been male-centred (Dex, 1985; Hakim, 1996). Researchers have tended to assume a commonality of experience, namely that what is true of the experience of men at work, will be true for women and, as a result only male subjects have been used (Firth-Cozens & West, 1991, Dex, 1985; Hakim, 1996; Kahn, 1984). The implications of this research have been a marginalisation of studies on the meaning women attribute to work (Dex, 1985).

Research that has asserted this male-centred orientation includes that of Astin (1984), Dex (1985) and Kahn (1984). Even Chester and Grossman (1991, p. 1), whose research will be discussed in detail in chapter two, emphasised the following:

Women, contrary to the traditional mythology, work for much the same reasons as men do: to earn a living and to function as productive and competent members of society.

According to Astin (1984) men and women have the same reasons for working, although the nature of the work performed may differ. She contended that behaviour is motivated by the satisfaction of three basic needs, namely survival, pleasure and contribution, and work is important to both men and women because it has the capacity to satisfy these needs. Similarly, Kahn (1984) described human beings as sharing a common set of work motivations that translate into expectations, and meanings derived, and that women, like men, are able to satisfy needs through work. Various researchers maintained

that few, if any differences exist between women and men in the meaning they ascribe to work (Franklin & Sweeney, 1988).

These assertions, based on male-centred research, have recently been challenged because researchers and theorists from a variety of disciplines have labeled them as inaccurate reflections of women worker's realities (Chester & Grossman, 1990). Other researchers have called into question the validity of these articulations of sameness, in that contemporary studies show that typical understandings of work do not coincide with women's actual experiences (Keightley, 1995). Keightley (1995) further asserted that this research has obscured what may be unique to women's experiences and central to their situations. The impact of this is not neutral, in that it has resulted in a misleading and inaccurate description of the meaning women ascribe to work. According to Burman (1996) absences and silences within conceptualisations in psychology are structural indices of the rules that govern the discipline, and also provide the possibility of formulating new dialogues and conceptualisations. In other words, the inaccurate and limited conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women may result from psychology's historically patriarchal research tradition which has served to reinforce the power structure of the work domain and perpetuate women's exclusion from it. Paradoxically, this same conceptualisation, in its omissions and silences, presents the possibility of generating a new conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women.

1.1.2.3 *Limitations of contemporary women centred research*

The majority of more recent, women-centred studies have concentrated, not on the meaning women ascribe to their work, but on the reasons for women's employment and career choices, articulating changes in economic, family and social conditions (Astin, 1984; Richardson, 1991). Other studies have provided some insight into women's experiences in the workplace (Human & Allie, 1988; Richardson, 1991) in their focus on patterns that typify working women's lives, societal and institutional barriers impinging on the experiences and opportunities of working women (Chester & Grossman, 1990), broad sex role

expectations, work-and-family role ideologies and occupational stereotypes (Stewart, 1990).

Both Chester and Grossman (1990) and Stratham, Miller and Mauksch (1988a) have argued that, while research about women's meaning of work has been conducted in recent years, it has been gained through dramatically different sources and research paradigms. Research has been located within two broad domains, namely through

- broad scale demographic studies and survey data, or
- smaller scale qualitative research.

Whilst the former has provided knowledge about trends, relationships between variables and patterns applicable to large groups of women, "this type of knowledge has failed to yield any real understanding of the lives behind the numbers" (Stratham et al. 1988a, p. 4). Less attention has been paid to the phenomenological experience of work, and few studies have focused on the meaning women make of their work in the context of the rest of their lives (Chester & Grossman, 1990).

What little research has been focused on the meaning of work for women (Grossman & Stewart, 1990) has tended to do so, not in terms of voicing meaning in a phenomenological framework, but with a focus on expressing differences which parallel sex role differences. Despite this research addressing the limitations cited in the previous discussion, its assertions of differences in the meaning ascribed to work by women have continued to marginalise women's experience and reified sex role stereotypes. In these studies differences in the meaning of work for women are cited as being opposite to male accounts (Dex, 1985), and this is inevitably not a neutral act. Keightley (1995) articulated that with male experience presumed to be the norm, women invariably suffer in comparison. McLelland (1975, cited in Gilligan, 1997, p. 205) further described the impact of this, in that research that has "tended to regard male behaviour as the 'norm'... female behaviour (has been seen) as some kind of deviation from that norm".

Since there is little fully developed theory available to help define the important issues involved in women's experience of themselves in a work role (Grossman & Stewart, 1990), researchers have positioned their research, albeit using female subjects and under the auspices of female-centred research, within a male-centred paradigm. As such, differences in meaning are identified as opposites of the norm, and the meaning of work for women has continued to be marginalised. Differences in the meaning of work for men and women which paralleled sex role differences, in achievement motivation (Gilligan, 1997), power (Grossman & Stewart, 1990; Miller, 1986) and relational aspects of work (Miller, 1986), have emphasised that the meaning of work for women derives most importance from the relational context of work (Miller, 1986). Other studies perpetuate female mythology of work in their confirmation of stereotypes, which will be examined in a discussion to follow in section 2.2.1.1. Furthermore, these studies do not take cognisance of the process through which the stereotypes associated with women gain credence and acceptance, that is, not because they are accurate reflections of feminine identity, but as a result of the historical positions women have been accorded and in some cases, have unwillingly occupied (Burman, 1996). In a real sense, these studies lay the groundwork for a psychology that reifies empirical findings that describe parallels between motivational differences and sex roles.

This, no doubt, contributes to the global problem that, despite women playing a major economic role in all countries, their contribution is undervalued and not recognised as significant (1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, 1995). These studies suggest that women lack commitment to work and perpetuate stereotypes that work is "less important, less central" (Chester & Grossman, 1990, p. 2) to women. This certainly contributes to justifications of women's exclusion from the workplace, segregation in the job market and lower remuneration (Keightley, 1995).

In their attempt to focus on women-centred research, these studies unwittingly postulate a psychology of difference and continue a history of marginalisation and exclusion, perhaps in a more insidious and subtle form. Hakim (1996, p.202) emphasised the implications of this in the following statement:

The most effective mechanisms for subordinating women is neither exclusion from the workforce nor segregation within it, but the ideology of the sexual division of labour in the home and the ideology of sexual differences. Prisons of the mind are always more effective than prisons of the body.

The limitations of existing research have, then, far-reaching consequences for working women, both in terms the way their work is viewed and valued by others, and also, the way in which they view and value their own work.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Stratham et al. (1988a) asserted the need to know more about what women think and feel about the meaning of their work. Calls have been made for analysis at individual level, taking unique definition and experience into account, in order not to perpetuate research (as was cited in the previous discussion) that is based on preconceived notions or categories which may hold little meaning for the individual. As has been stated, many of the accepted meanings of work for women are misleading and misinterpretations of actual lived experiences. Keightley (1995) called for a renegotiation of the meaning women ascribe to work and emphasised that understanding the meaning women make out of their own experiences is indispensable. Further, Stratham, Miller and Mauksch (1988b) suggested that many of the commonly held beliefs around the meaning women ascribe to work be re-examined. The few studies which have adopted a phenomenological approach, and focused on the meaning women ascribe to work in the context of the rest of their lives, have confirmed the value of this approach and clarified inaccuracies and earlier assumptions (Chester & Grossman, 1991).

A deeper understanding of the meaning of work for women would help women to explain the importance of this domain in the context of their lives and the value they derive from it. This would enable women to refute previous conceptions that they attach little meaning to their work, and as such are not committed to it. Moreover, understanding the meaning of work for women will enable organisations to recruit, remunerate and retain women more effectively.

Finally, greater insight into the meaning of work for women may overcome the widespread problem of women's work being undervalued and its significance being overlooked.

1.2.1 General problem statement

Calls have therefore been made for research that attempts to foster a deeper understanding of women workers' realities because "there is little fully developed theory available to help define the important issues involved in women's experience of themselves in a work role" (Grossman & Stewart, 1990, p. 12). This study sought to describe the meaning that a sample of South African women graduates attributed to work in order to gain an accurate insight into this.

1.2.2 Problems to be explored through a review of current literature

The purpose of this study was to review current literature on the meaning ascribed to work in general, with a specific focus on research describing the meaning that women ascribe to work. This was integrated to provide a framework against which to explore the problem statement - the need to gain a more detailed understanding of the meaning that women attribute to their work.

1.2.3 Problems to be explored through a phenomenological study

Using a qualitative phenomenological methodology by "including the meaning women make of their own experiences" (Chester & Grossman, 1990, p. 5), the meaning that a sample of South African graduate women attributed to their work was explored in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the area.

1.3 AIMS

1.3.1 General aim

The general aim of this research was to describe the meaning that women ascribed to work in a sample of South African women graduates.

1.3.2 Specific aim of the literature review

This study sought to examine contemporary literature on the meaning of work in general and research findings on the meaning that women derived from their work in order to provide a framework to the phenomenological study.

1.3.3 Specific aim of the phenomenological study

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology to describe the meaning women make of their own experiences (Chester & Grossman, 1990) was used to describe the meaning of work for a sample of South African graduate women. The motivation for using this methodology is discussed in 1.4.2 and 1.4.6.

1.4 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

1.4.1 Disciplinary relationship

This study fell within the boundary of Organisational Psychology and specifically, Career Psychology, in that it aimed to describe psychological constructs applicable to women in a work context. This has implications for organisations and the women working in them, and their careers.

1.4.2 Psychology paradigm

The study operated within a phenomenological paradigm which according to Kruger (1988, p. 38) seeks to:

Find out things about people of which we can not possibly know and rather tries to get people to describe and explicate the meaning structures of their lives and behaviours, in other words to articulate what is thus disclosed.

Put differently, the phenomenological paradigm makes people's subjective experiences explicit, and expresses the way things are experienced and what meaning is derived from these experiences. In this study, the phenomenon of women's experience of work was described and the meaning ascribed to this experience explored.

1.4.3 Metatheoretical concepts

Against this broad phenomenological framework, a feminist meta theory, in which gender is viewed as a process not a structure (Burman, 1996) was utilised. A feminist research approach that explored and voiced "the absence and invisibility of women, who can be knowers" was used (Olesen cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 83). The applicable feminist research principles of collaboration, forming non exploitative relationships with subjects of the study, and placing the researcher within the study to avoid objectification (Creswell, 1998), aligned with broad phenomenological and qualitative approaches.

1.4.4 Models, theories, concepts and constructs

The construct of work was explored (Chester & Grossman, 1990; Ciulla, 2000; Kelly, 1995; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Ransome, 1996) to generate a working definition adopted in this study. 'Meaning' was articulated (Keightley, 1995), and current theories of the meaning ascribed to work described (Astin, 1984; Ciulla, 2000; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Naughton, 1995; Sora & O'Neill, 1995; Ransome, 1996; Thompson, 2000). Against this broad background models of the meaning that women attributed to work were explored (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Chodorow, 1978; Dex, 1985; Faludi, 1992; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Grossman & Stewart, 1990; Hakim, 1996; Keightley, 1995;

Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Osborne, 1991; Stratham, et al., 1988b; Rimm, 1999).

1.4.5 Central theoretical hypothesis

Articulating the experience of work for women and the meaning they ascribed to it, would promote an understanding of the meaning of work for women.

1.4.6 Methodological convictions

Since this study aimed to describe a subjective experience and to explain the meaning of this experience a qualitative methodology (Hagen, 1986; Kruger, 1988) was deemed appropriate. Specifically, a phenomenological approach was appropriate, because this methodology is “most suited to any type of research concerned with the realm of human experience ... it accepts the uniqueness of the individual, makes no attempt at dehumanisation and harbours respect for the reality and validity of individual experience” (Richardson, 1991, p. 113). This methodology was also selected because of the exploratory nature of this study and a qualitative, phenomenological approach made it possible to suggest relationships and hypotheses (Kerlinger, 1986).

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

1.5.1 Type of research

Creswell (1998) emphasised the importance of the use of a tradition of enquiry, with a single focus and an evolving research design. Yin (cited in Creswell, 1998) further stressed that the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions, and later, to its conclusions. Moreover, Kruger (1986) contended that method is always in a neophyte state and should dialogue with the problem.

With reference to these assertions, the research questions explored in this study were investigated by means of a specific research tradition, namely that

of phenomenology. According to Creswell (1998,p. 15) within this paradigm research is viewed as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

The aim of this study was to describe a single phenomenon, namely the meaning that a sample of South African graduate women ascribed to work.

Since it was an exploratory study “in a relatively unknown research area” (Mouton & Marais, 1992, p. 43), insight and comprehension were key rather than the collection of accurate and replicable data. Mouton and Marais (1992) have stated that in the case of such a study the primary research design consideration that applies is the need to follow an open and flexible research strategy. As such, theory generation took place inductively and the design emerged, with the structure and design secondary to what was being collected (Huysamen, 1997). In line with the phenomenological and qualitative paradigm, the research design evolved during the course of the study through a series of iterations to more clearly address the research questions (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

The appropriateness of a phenomenological design emerged in its facilitation of the study’s research aims because according to Moustakas (cited in Creswell, 1993, p. 54), a phenomenological research design aims to

Determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions, general or universal meanings are derived, in other words, the essence of structures of the experiences

Since description and understanding, rather than measurement and interpretation directed the research questions of this study, a phenomenological approach was relevant as this “perspective obliges psychology to respect the description and meaning of experiential life as a prime focus of intelligibility”

(Todres, 1986, p. 122). A broad research question, as opposed to a specific set of a-priori hypotheses and research questions have been stated as the study moves from the specific to the general (Stones, 1986). In line with this, dependent and independent variables were not operationally defined because variables were increased rather than kept to a minimum, and the phenomenon was investigated in its natural context and from the participants' frame of reference (Stones, 1986).

A phenomenological research design was deemed appropriate because it enabled the study to achieve its aims in building a detailed and holistic picture of the experience and meaning ascribed to work for the sample of South African, graduate women. The study sought to collect and describe the meaning of work for women, and not to prove a specific hypothesis. Rather than measuring and interpreting the relationship between dependent and independent variables, the phenomenon of work was described by analysing words and reporting a detailed view of the meaning that the sample group ascribed to work. A phenomenological research design was therefore appropriate to this study's research aim, and linked the empirical data to the research questions.

1.5.2 Unit of analysis

Since a number of women were studied "as representative of the particular population", the unit of analysis to be used was that of individuals (Mouton & Marais, 1992, p. 38).

1.5.3 Methods to ensure reliability and validity

The assertion that phenomenological methodologies have been regarded as lacking in the areas of validity and reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), is controversial. According to Creswell (1998) sound models of phenomenological research demonstrate rigour. Furthermore, Stones(1985,cited in Kruger, 1986, p. 108) emphasised that phenomenological research "is strictly scientific, but

concentrates on meaning rather than measurement ... it treats the data rigorously without doing violence to it".

Mouton and Marais (1992, p. 43) contended that insight and understanding, rather than "the collection of accurate and replicable data" are the focus of this methodology, and by implication, that issues of validity and reliability are less demanding. Alternative methods of validation to internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity have been suggested as appropriate to ensure rigour in a phenomenological study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

These are expressed as follows:

- truth value, where research presents a clearly recognisable description of an experience to those having it or reading about it
- credibility where the inquiry is conducted in such a way to ensure that the subject is accurately identified and described. (Seale, (1999) emphasised the use of member validation as central in achieving this)
- transferability, where the researcher can argue that findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions (Further, the theoretical parameters of research are clearly stated, and the data analysis and collection are clearly guided by concepts and models and fit into a body of theory)
- dependability, where the changing conditions of the phenomenon chosen for the study are set out and a refined understanding of the setting explained and
- confirmability, where another researcher could confirm the findings of the study

Marshall and Rossman (1999) emphasised the importance (although replicability is not an aim of phenomenological research) of explicitly stating the design and methodology used, demonstrating connections between the data and interpretations, presenting the study in a scholarly context and keeping records available for reanalysis. Undertaking the above, assisted in the practice of reflexivity, which is essential to deal with issues of reliability and replicability in a phenomenological study (Seale, 1999).

These alternative requirements were taken into consideration in this study to ensure its scientific rigor.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The relevant steps in both the literature review and the phenomenological study will now be described in detail. Throughout the steps outlined the researcher ensured that the study was conducted in a scholarly and scientifically rigorous manner according to the techniques appropriate for this phenomenological study described in section 1.5.3.

1.6.1 Phase 1: Literature Review

The meaning of work was broadly explored, with the emphasis on the area in which much current literature is focused, namely, the satisfaction of needs and motivational point of view. The absence of literature dealing with the meaning that women attribute to work was emphasised and existing literature reviewed. A model of meaning of work was constructed integrating the viewpoints reflecting the meaning of work for women. This promoted a deeper understanding of the meaning ascribed to work, and facilitated an exploration of this concept from a phenomenological viewpoint in the research component of the study.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Phenomenological Study

Step 1: Population and sample

Since sampling is done theoretically and not statistically in a phenomenological study, and a large quantity of data is analysed, a small sample was required (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Any sample belonging to a specific group and with experience of the phenomenon being researched (Stones, 1986) is considered to represent that group. A criterion sampling strategy (Creswell, 1998) was used comprising individuals who met various criterion (eg having knowledge of the phenomenon being researched and the ability to verbalise their experiences of it). In addition, snowball sampling (Creswell, 1998; Henry, 1990; Huysamen, 1997) took place as members of the population identified and recommended

other possible subjects as suitable for inclusion in the sample and were “information rich” (Creswell, 1998, p.119) A sample of six women, all graduates and all in paid employment, were chosen as a sample.

Step 2: Measuring instrument

According to Creswell (1998, p. 19), “unquestionably, the backbone of qualitative research is extensive collection of data”. Ely (1991) and Patton (1990) have also emphasised the importance of the self as an instrument in phenomenological research. In this study, the researcher, as opposed to an independent measuring instrument, constituted the primary research tool.

In order to collect data the researcher used an open-ended, unstructured interview. This was chosen because of its flexibility and the possibility of achieving depth of response (Kerlinger, 1986). This approach also facilitated the supply of a frame of reference for respondent’s answers, but put a minimum of restraint on the answers and their expression (Kerlinger, 1986). Questions and probes were developed on the basis of the literature reviewed and the researcher’s lived experience. These were sequenced and an interview guide developed.

Step 3: Data collection

Unstructured interviews, lasting between 45 and 60 minutes, were held in quiet and confidential venues selected by the subjects. The researcher asked the subjects to describe the meaning they derived from their work. Interviews with the subjects were held over a three-week period. Each interview was recorded on audiotape and transcribed.

Adopting a phenomenological approach in the study meant that the interviews were of paramount importance because they provided data that articulated the subjects’ personal internal world. Moreover, in a phenomenological study, data collection is underpinned by the value of gaining understanding, rather than of

control, as is the case in other paradigms (Hagen , 1986). This value was adopted in this study.

Step 4: Data processing

A fundamental principle in the processing of data in a phenomenological study is to allow the data to speak for itself, thereby allowing relationships and organisational schemes to emerge (Stones, 1985). The data collected was used as a “point of access from which to make the subject’s living of situations (her) own” (Wertz, 1983, p.204). Protocols were processed using the following modified method (Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1985; 1986):

- an initial holistic and intuitive assessment of the data
- the researcher bracketing preconceived experiences
- listing every significant statement relevant to the topic and giving it equal value
- breaking the protocols down into naturally occurring units
- clustering statements into themes or meaning units
- linking themes together to describe texturally what was experienced and structurally how it was experienced; and finally
- synthesising these to communicate the lived structure common to a particular experience

Step 5: Reporting and interpretation of results

Reporting of results was completed in line with phenomenological methodology of the study. That is, the participants’ experience was described in detail. Themes were integrated with the literature in order to move from the specific to the general, and ideas developed to a greater level of conceptual abstraction in line with the recommendations of Glaser and Strauss(1967,cited in Huysamen, 1997).

Step 6: Conclusion

The conclusions of both the literature review and phenomenological study were reported in order to clarify the findings of the research study and ascertain whether the problem statement and aims of the research had been met. In this step, themes were developed to a greater level of abstraction, and the study's contribution to the field of organisational and career psychology was described.

Step 7: Limitations

This step examined the limitations of both the literature review and phenomenological research, and a critical assessment of both these phases was presented.

Step 8: Recommendations

Based on the insight gained into the meaning of work for women, this study made recommendations both for future research studies and for organisational application. Recommendations for future areas of research in both Organisational and Career psychology were made to gain a deeper understanding in areas highlighted as significant by the study. Finally, on the basis of the understanding of the meaning of work for women that this study provided, recommendations were made for organisational practices in order to attract, develop and retain women more effectively.

1.7 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters are demarcated as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Phenomenological study

Chapter 4: Results

Chapter 5: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The background and motivation for this research study were presented in chapter one. A problem statement was generated and aims for both the literature review and phenomenological study formulated. The paradigm perspective, including the disciplinary relationship, applicable psychology paradigm and theories, concepts and constructs were clarified and the central hypothesis clarified. The research design and unit of analysis were presented, before the research methodology for the two steps of the study, that is, the literature review and the phenomenological study, were detailed.

The next chapter will review literature on the meaning of work in general and, specifically, the meaning of work for women.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

The aim of this chapter is to review literature pertaining to the meaning ascribed to work. This review will be completed to provide a framework against which to explore the problem statement articulated in chapter one and background to the phenomenological study. This framework will provide a more detailed understanding of the meaning that women attribute to work.

Firstly, this chapter will review general literature on the phenomenon under discussion, that is the meaning ascribed to work. In so doing, this phenomenon will be conceptualised. Secondly, in this broader context, literature on the meaning that women ascribed will be examined. Particular reference will be made to literature that has focused on the specific and unique meaning that women ascribe to work. The following domains of the meaning of work for women will be specifically reviewed:

- instrumental, economic and material ;
- sense of identity and self-worth;
- social connectedness and relatedness;
- intrinsic satisfaction;
- contributing to and serving society;
- impacting on and shaping the world through the exercise of power and authority.

2.1 THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF WORK

The discussion of the experience and meaning of work will start with definitions of central concepts, that is, “work” and “meaning”. Against this broad framework, the primary adult activities of working and ascribing meaning to work will be explained. A literature review will then be presented outlining various domains that describe the meaning of work.

2.1.1 Defining “work”

Work has been defined as an activity that produces goods and services of value to others (Chester & Grossman, 1990; Natale et al., 1995). Ransome (1996) has also asserted that work has four elements, namely, performance of an activity, payment, exertion of physical or mental energy and usefulness or expediency. These definitions, while providing some clarification, have explicit limitations that need to be explained because “one of the obvious limitations to understanding the nature and meaning of work lies in the narrow definition of what constitutes work” (Chester & Grossman, 1990, p .2).

Firstly, these definitions do not specifically address the issue of unpaid work, which is a critical issue with regard to work performed by women, whose work has historically been devalued since much of it has been unpaid. This study’s focus is on the feminisation of paid employment. As such, whilst an important issue, it is not within the ambit of this study to specifically address the issue of unpaid women’s work. In line with Ransome’s (1996) definition, then, for the purposes of this study, work is defined as paid work.

Secondly, these definitions do not include any description of the experience, emotions and meaning pertaining to work. As a phenomenological study, the subjective and personal criteria which people apply to work are central concerns, as is gaining an insight into the realm of meaning attribution and subjective interpretation (Ransome, 1996). The definitions cited above are, at best, only of pragmatic value in providing broad boundaries for the phenomenon under discussion. It is important to mention at this stage that the concept of work is both a loaded and intricate one. This is emphasised below, in descriptions of work that highlight it as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon - an activity, a place, a product and part of wider social systems.

Hollenbach (as cited in Kelly, 1995, p. 146) explained the difficulty of defining work as follows:

Work is not like a piece of pie that someone gives me, or like a pay check that I take home with me. A job is not a consumer

good. It is something I go to, something I engage in with many others in a highly complex, structured activity that is linked with a vast interlocking system.

Ciulla (2000, p. 28) said much the same about the difficulty of defining work in:

Work is an extraordinary word ... we do work and we go to a place called work. Work is something we have, something we own, and something we make ... the word work is both a verb and noun, an activity and a product that comes from that activity.

Finally, Fraser (cited in Ransome, 1996, p. 33) emphasised the private and public components of work as follows:

Work, the capacity of acting humanely on the world, is a shared experience; for the majority of us it is done in common with others, for every one of us it is done, however, privately for others.

Throughout this study cognisance will be taken of the fact that whilst significant reference is made to work, problems of definition are inherent, because the phenomenon is multifaceted and loaded. This research will adopt the broad boundaries provided by Chester and Grossman (1990) and Ransome (1996) who asserted work as a paid activity that produces a product or service of some value or use. At the same time this study will emphasise that work has social, subjective and psychological components, and is both public and private, noun and verb, which make it a complex phenomenon. In fact, a deeper understanding of the meaning of work is one of the articulated aims of this study.

2.1.2 Defining “meaning”

Berger and Luckmann(1966,cited in Keightley, 1995) defined meaning as “the (rendering explicit) of subjective processes by which the intersubjective commonsense world is constructed”. According to Brah (1993,cited in Ullah, 1996, p. 103), meaning was “a practice of making sense symbolically and narratively” These definitions will be used to delineate the concept of “meaning” in this study. Whilst the concept of meaning is complex, it is central to this

study. The above definition is useful in that it succinctly captures the essence of meaning, in its articulation and rendering explicit the subjective and individual constructs used to order and value one's personal world. According to Kruger (1988, p. 38) this is aligned with the research goal of a phenomenological study, namely, to;

Find out things about people of which we cannot possibly know and rather tr(y) to get people to describe and explicate the ... structures of our lives and behaviours, in other words to articulate what is thus disclosed.

2.1.3 The primary human activities of working and ascribing meaning

2.1.3.1 *Working as a primary adult activity*

Work has been reported to be one of the most critical life roles (MOW International Research Team, 1987) and the primary activity of adult life. The ability to work has been seen as one component of a functional adult (Freud cited in Astin, 1984; Gilligan, 1997). Whilst work has been defined as central to adult life, cognisance is taken of the fact that this assertion relates to contemporary culture and psychological paradigms. The significance of work is somewhat influenced by a culture's philosophical assumptions about what is real, how the world works and how much control people have over their lives (Ciulla, 2000). Work takes on a greater importance in a context in which people believe they can master the material world and shape their own destinies. In line with this, work is also regarded as significant because it promises insight into the wider philosophical meanings and significance of the human condition (Ciulla, 2000). Work offers a context in which human beings locate their adult lives, and, as such has been described as "the laboratory in which we live out our life project" (Natale et al., 1995, p. 20).

2.1.3.2 *Ascribing meaning as a primary adult activity*

According to Frankl (1960) the desire for meaning is the primary force for humans. Humans are regarded as seekers of meaning, trying to make sense of the world, and assign significance to their experiences. Jung (as cited in Thompson 2000, p.31) elaborated on this as follows:

Meaninglessness inhibits the fullness of life and can, therefore, be equated with illness; meaningfulness makes a great many things endurable, perhaps everything.

Since work has been described as the primary activity of adults, and with the search for meaning being central to any human activity, it seems clear that individuals will seek meaning and assign significance to the activity of work. In other words, individuals are the structurers of the experience and meaning of work, attaching significance, beliefs, definitions and value to this major stream of human activity (MOW International Research Team, 1987). In the discussion to follow, the meaning of work will be analysed and its subjectivity and fluidity discussed. The meaning of work will be explained in some detail, by reviewing the literature on this topic

2.1.4 *The meaning of work as subjective, fluid and transcending the instrumental*

2.1.4.1 *The meaning of work as both subjective and fluid*

In section 2.1.1, work was defined as a complex and loaded concept, a phenomenon whose experience and meaning are located in a broad socio-economic and psychological context. Juxtaposed against this assertion, however, is the concept of work as subjective and personal. Researchers have emphasised the importance of not making “the mistake of locating meaning outside of the person as something objective” (Thompson, 2000, p. 31). It has been argued that the meaning of work is derived from a highly individualised network of direct and indirect influences and associations (Natale et al., 1995).

The meaning that work carries is expressed in a variety of responses that span human experience, and is subjective and individual (MOW International Research Team, 1987).

However, although much literature and research (as discussed below) do not deny that meaning is individualised and located internally as a subjective phenomenon, they do emphasise commonalities across the meaning of work for individuals. These commonalities operate on a continuum and are not limiting, with the meanings ascribed to work varying and fluid across time (Natale et al., 1995). Thompson (2000) defined work as a phenomenon with concentric circles of meaning, and asserted that while immanent meanings do not vanish, the primacy of meanings may become displaced. Work is experienced as having varied and diverse meanings, some of which may be common to individuals. Also, these meanings may shift in importance across time (MOW International Team, 1987).

In a study conducted by Gini and Sullivan (cited in Thompson, 2000) in which the subjects were requested to assume that they had the financial freedom to retire immediately, or do any work they chose, only two percent of the sample opted for retirement, although significantly, most elected to change the work they were currently doing. This illustrated the centrality of work in people's lives and work's provision of meaning that meets complex needs. Furthermore, Ciulla (2000) established that, although work holds a variety of cognitive meanings for people and elicits a variety of emotions from them, no work is inherently more meaningful than any other. All work is capable of providing an element of meaning, whilst some work provides greater potential for meaningfulness in that it has "larger hooks than others on which to hang our deepest values" (Thompson, 2000, p.31). One should also note that not all experiences of work are meaningful, and work may not meet all of an individual's needs for meaning.

The meaning of work is conceptualised, then, as being subjective, individualised and based on a variety of connotations and experiences. It is also conceptualised as being influenced by wider socio-economic and historical

contexts. According to the MOW International Research Team (1987, p. 12), “the meaning of working is closely related to the meaning of life in modern society”. As such, individuals, using complex psychological, socioeconomic and philosophical lenses, ascribe meaning to work, and this meaning includes commonalities across individuals, and even more widely, across groups and societies. The complexity of the meaning of work can be articulated in it being subjective and shared, personal and contextual, variable and various.

2.1.4.2 *Work as transcending instrumental needs*

Work has historically emerged from something regarded as being somewhat negative and morally neutral (Ciulla, 2000), to something linked to spiritual belief systems (MOW International Research Team, 1987). In this context, the existence of God and spirituality, for the most part, has been the primary source of all meanings of work (MOW International Research Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995). Since this is generally no longer the case, personal and philosophical meanings have been ascribed to work, with it being viewed as a phenomenon fundamental to conceptions of self (Ciulla, 2000). Freud (cited in Astin, 1984, p. 120), however, asserted that work was indispensable to an individual’s subsistence, and a way of justifying one’s existence in society. He went on to describe work “not as a pleasurable activity to be sought, but a painful burden to be endured”. In other words, work was seen as a necessary but negative experience.

Astin (1984) articulated humans as need driven, and work as important in its capacity to satisfy three basic human needs, namely survival, pleasure and contribution. Work was described as having meaning across material, personal and societal domains. Ciulla (2000) saw work as transcending survival, material or economic needs, in its satisfaction of both psychological and social needs. Conger(1995,cited in Ciulla, 2000) described the workplace as an essential arena of life, in that people consciously and unconsciously brought their needs for community and spirituality into it. Yankelovich (cited in Thompson, 2000) concluded that the meaning of work lay in its contribution to an individual’s overall sense of meaning and coherence in life. Warr (1978,cited

in the MOW International Research Team, 1987) emphasised the importance of the meaning of work for psychological wellbeing in terms of happiness, life satisfaction, experience of pleasure and strain, self-esteem, anxiety, distress and depression.

Furthermore, Thompson (2000) highlighted that work is no longer purely instrumental, that work may meet much of the human desire for meaning and purpose, and may in no small way contribute to the human drive towards wholeness. In fact, many of the ways in which people measure meanings and experience value, are closely linked to an individual's work identity and the calibre of work performed. Taking this further, work and meaning have been articulated as being "in tension with each other in such a way that the experience of the one anticipate(s) the other" (Natale et al., 1995, p. 1).

Rather than merely conceptualising work as a commodity exchanged for direct, or indirect compensation, a psychological analysis conceptualised work as meeting ego needs, including those of inclusion, achievement, approval and power (Thompson, 2000).

2.1.5 The meaning ascribed to work

In line with the above discussion, diverse components may contribute to the meaning attributed to work. As such, meaning has been ascribed to work across the domains of:

- sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relatedness
- intrinsic satisfaction
- contributing to and serving the greater good
- shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority.

These domains will now each be examined in more detail.

2.1.5.1 *Work as a providing a sense of identity and self-worth*

McKenna(1997,cited in Ciulla, 2000) stated that work is experienced as meaningful in that identity and worth are derived from it. Other researchers have asserted that work is a means of self-fulfillment, self-actualisation and self-expression, with the worker's identity merging with the work, resulting in work becoming a central factor in one's self-understanding (Natale et al., 1995). Terkel (1968, cited in Ransome, 1996) captured this in a research subject's insightful and poignant comment: "Right now I can't really describe myself because ... I'm unemployed ... So, you see, I can't say who I am right now ... I guess a man's something else besides his work, isn't he? But what? I just don't know."

Furthermore, work has been described as a means of self development, meaningful in the self expression it promoted and the opportunity for learning and improvement it provided (MOW International Research Team, 1987). It has been described as an "anvil, on which we hammer out our inconsistencies, hone our skills, and temper our weaknesses" (Schumacher cited in Thompson, 2000, p. 36). Linked to this, work is seen as being intrinsically important because it contributes to self-evaluation, self-perception and self-identification (Natale et al., 1995). If work is experienced as fulfilling, psychological health and self-esteem can be developed (Naughton, 1995). Work, it is here asserted, provides a therapeutic forum, resulting in growth and self-realisation. It is seen as something that is capable of being personally transformative for and indispensable to personal development (Kelly, 1995). The essence of this view of work is captured in Fromm's statement (1956,cited in Ransome, 1996, p. 33) :

In the process of work, that is, the molding and changing of nature outside of (oneself), (humankind) molds and changes (it)self ... (it) develops ... powers of co-operation, of reason, (a) sense of beauty ... the more ... work develops the more ... individuality develops.

2.1.5.2 *Work as social connectedness and relatedness*

Whilst the above meaning of work presents a psychological analysis, it has also been seen as being characterised by a strong social component. According to Ransome (1996), work facilitates, and in fact, may constitute, social integration. It is experienced as meaningful in its provision of a regulating force in people's lives and a sense of discipline and structure (Ciulla, 2000). Meaning is experienced in the way that work structures time, imposing a rhythm on people's lives and organising people into communities and social groups. Work is also said to determine status, shape social interactions and ensure a sense of connectedness (MOW International Research Team, 1987). It is seen as fulfilling social needs, providing social connections and a means of understanding how one fits into a wider community (Natale et al., 1995).

2.1.5.3 *Work as intrinsically satisfying*

Astin (1984) has asserted that work meets a human need for pleasure, and that meaning is ascribed to the intrinsic pleasure of work activities. Pleasure is derived from the performance and accomplishment of a task or achievement of a goal. Furthermore, work is seen as promoting perceptions of self-efficacy, in the achievement of goals and the forum to take action that it provides. A study conducted by Csikszentmihalyi (1990, cited in Ciulla, 2000) on the experience of happiness concluded that happiness was experienced as optimal experiences of flow, or harmoniously ordered consciousness, and that this was experienced half the time at work, and only 18 percent during leisure time. Work was experienced as a time during which the subjects felt creative, strong, active, motivated and able to concentrate. These experiences were meaningful, and the work context facilitated these experiences in its provision of finite tasks, clear goals and immediate feedback. Work required concentration, deep involvement with a task that made it possible to forget life's problems and allowed complete control. Work's experiences were coherently explained in Csikszentmihalyi's study(1990, cited in Ciulla, 2000) and the meaning ascribed to these experiences centred on the challenging activities it promoted, the control it allowed and the resulting feelings of satisfaction and wellbeing.

2.1.5.4 *Work as contributing to and serving the greater good*

It has been argued that work derives meanings that transcend survival and instrumental needs, and meet psychological and social needs. The meanings are said to be subjective and personal. However, Astin (1984), Naughton (1995) and Thompson (2000) asserted that the meaning of work transcends principles of self-interest, and is a forum for service, and contribution to the greater good and wellbeing of others. Work's meaning can be derived in the recognition, appreciation and satisfaction derived from contributing to the needs of others through serving the community and wider society.

2.1.5.5 *Work as shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority*

Finally, work is experienced as a purposeful activity, promoting creativity (Hegel, 1952 cited in Ciulla, 2000), where ideas can be translated into objects or actions. Work gives the sense of being able to personally shape, influence and impact on the world through the use of power and authority. This transcends helping others and serving the greater good previously discussed. Arendt (1958) described work as a phenomenon that provides an artificial world to the natural world. Through the exercise of power and authority in a domain it impacts, resulting in change and development that transcends the individual. The meaning ascribed to this experience is that the artificial world produced will outlast each human, and is in some way a legacy. Arendt (1958, p. 69) explained that the “the work of our hands produces some material object; in a sense the memory of our lives is in this object”.

2.1.5.6 *Conceptualisation of meaning of work*

In line with the assertions made in 2.1.4.1, the above discussion conceptualised the meaning of work as diverse and varied. The meaning of work is also conceptualised as being subjective and immanent, whilst at the same time being influenced by wider socioeconomic and historical contexts. These may

serve as a lens through which individuals experience work and assign significance to these experiences. The impact of this contributes to common meanings ascribed to work across individuals. Furthermore, a diversity of meanings may be held, which can be described as concentric circles of meaning and the importance or primacy of these may vary across time.

Whilst these descriptions are all valid, the analysis of work presented above does not conclude that the meaning experienced is obtained exclusively through the experience of work. Whether or not work alone constitutes “the memory of our lives” (Arendt, 1958 cited in Ciulla, 2000, p. 29), is contentious. The point needs to be argued that other forums in life may facilitate similar experiences. That said, as was shown earlier in this chapter, work is the primary adult activity, and represents the major forum to invest time and energy. As such, despite the concerns expressed about the centrality and inherent meaningfulness of work, it represents an important forum to derive significant meaning from experiences.

The complexity of work’s meaning can thus be expressed in its assertion as instrumental, psychological, social and philosophical. Assigning meaning to work is conceptualised as being central to adult life, and at the same time subjective and shared, personal and contextual, various and variable.

The researcher has depicted these concentric circles of meaning, and the diverse meanings ascribed to work in the diagram below:

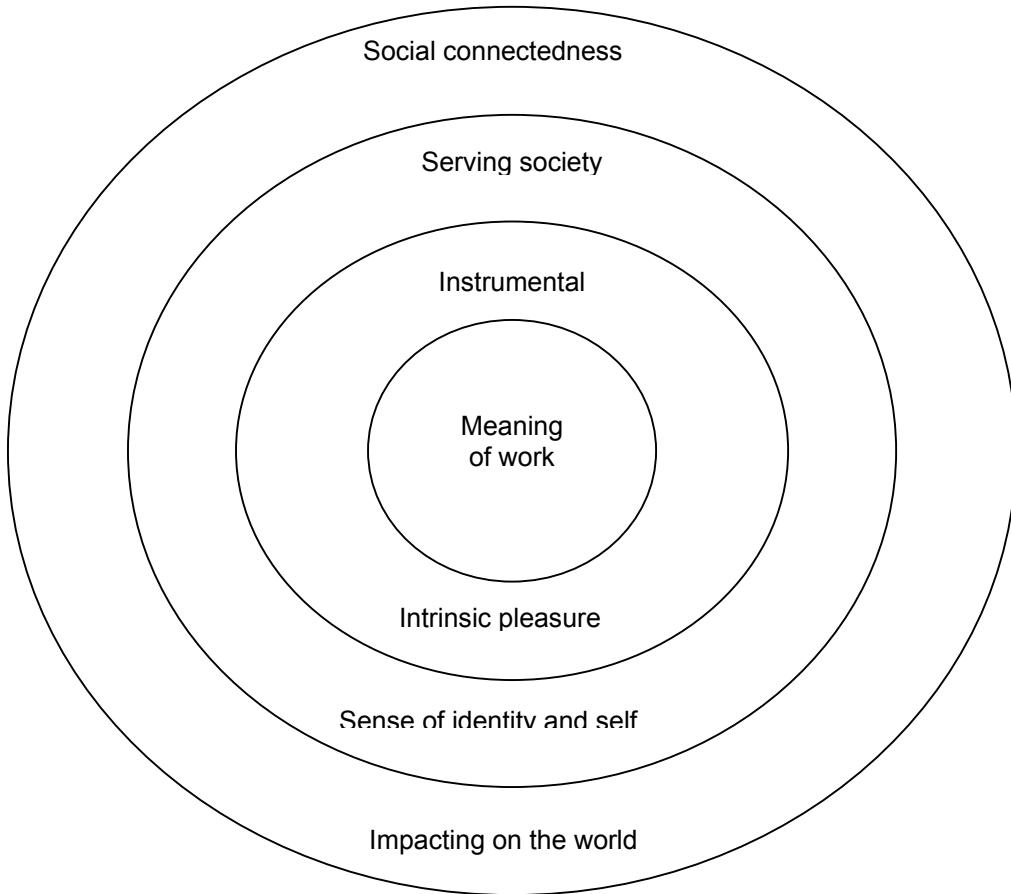


Figure 2.1 A diagrammatic representation of concentric circles of meaning of work

As illustrated above, based on the general literature review, this study conceptualises the following themes as components of the meaning ascribed to work:

- economic, material and instrumental needs
- sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relatedness
- intrinsic satisfaction
- contributing to, and serving, society
- impacting on and shaping the world as a legacy of existence through the use of power and authority.

This general model of the meaning of work constitutes a framework against which to present a literature review of the meaning of work for women.

2.2 THE MEANING OF WORK FOR WOMEN

Against the broad conceptualisation of the meaning of work presented, the literature describing the meaning of work for women will now be reviewed. The mythology surrounding the meaning women derive from their work will be presented, prior to citing more contemporary research. Each theme emerging from this review will be described in detail, before these are integrated in order to generate a conceptualisation of the specific and unique meanings women ascribe to work.

2.2.1 The meaning women ascribe to work

2.2.1.1 *Female mythology and male-centred research on the meaning women ascribe to work*

Mythology about women working, underpinned by the research discussed in section 1.2 and focusing on women's experience as being different from and opposite to that of male experience, has resulted in pervasive stereotypes on the meaning women ascribe to work. An analysis of these stereotypes can be used to conceptualise, a traditional view of the meaning of "women's work".

Stereotypes of the meaning of work for women cited in the literature include the following assertions:

- By nature, women do not have the capacity to work in the public workplace, and work is thus unpaid, private and family focused (Keightley, 1995).
- Women work for supplementary income only (Dex, 1985; Grossman & Stewart, 1990).
- Women work for instrumental reasons only, are motivated by money alone and are not personally interested in the work they do (Agassi, 1979 cited in Dex, 1985).
- Women do not derive a sense of identity, self-esteem or self-worth from their work, but through relationships, and from one relationship in particular, that of her husband (Gilligan, 1997).

- Social contact with people and relationships are the major focus of women's work (Grossman & Stewart, 1990), with women seen as more nurturing and expressive of emotion in their higher concern for relationships (Franklin & Sweeney, 1988).
- "Women's work ... is never done" (Osborne, 1991), that is, it is never completed, in its repetitive and ongoing nature. However, women do not mind repetitive, boring work with a focus on practical skills, and are not able to show initiative or interest in challenging jobs or promotions (Dex, 1985).
- Women's work is presumed to flow from a biological capacity to bear and nurture children. Meaning is derived from caring for others, and work suitable for women described as involving a large emotional component, in which others' needs are put before one's own (Keightley, 1995).
- Women are not interested in status and prestige in their work (Grossman & Stewart, 1990).
- Women are not comfortable with the exercise of power and authority at work, this being seen as a male prerogative (Hakim, 1996).

The above stereotypes positioned women's meaning of work as having strong instrumental, social relatedness and contribution or service components. Sense of identity and self-worth, intrinsic experience of work and the ability to impact on or shape the world are meanings that are marginalised within the meaning of work for women.

The researcher has summarised the literature in the diagram in Figure 2 below:

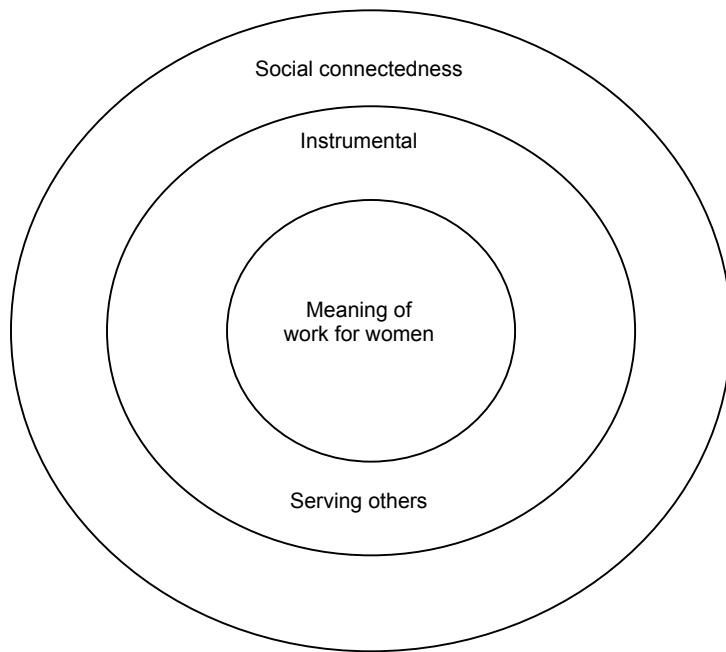


Figure 2.2: A diagrammatic representation of concentric circles of traditional meaning of work for women

As can be seen above, traditional literature located the meaning of work for women within economic and social domains, with no personal, psychological and philosophical meanings expressed. While the meaning of work is still subjective, it does not seem to be located with any primacy in the context of women's meaning system. This traditional conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women is described as something to be endured if circumstances called for it, but certainly not an experience that was either enjoyable or central to a woman's sense of self. Using Freud's assertion (as cited in Astin, 1984), the experience of work was seen as a burden to be tolerated, and as painful rather than pleasurable.

The research cited above has a sense of something missing, of providing an understanding of women's work meaning from within a male-centred paradigm, and certainly that the opposite experiences accorded to women are loaded. According to Franklin and Sweeney (1988), even if women transcend these stereotypes and achieve organisational success, it is at the cost of betraying their female identity and values. In this conceptualisation, the research seems

to suggest that if the meaning ascribed to work differs from the traditional conceptualisation, it is incongruent with an authentic female self. As Keightley (1995) reiterated, these assertions do not necessarily coincide with women's real experience. Moreover, Burman (1996) maintained that stereotypes are not based so much on inherent feminine identities, but on historical contexts and the positions women occupied within these.

Contemporary research will now be presented in an attempt to more accurately describe the meaning of work for women.

2.2.1.2 *Contemporary qualitative research on the meaning of work for women*

In an early interrogation of traditional conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women, Friedan (1982, cited in Faludi, 1992, p.190) stated that the picture drawn of women was not accurate. She asserted that women's experiences were different from those traditionally represented, describing this concern as the "problem that has no name". In so doing she emphasised that women sought more diverse experiences and meanings than working solely within the home could provide. More recently, Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987) described how women's roles are changing and that women are demanding greater fulfillment in their experiences. A US Health Activity Survey (cited in Faludi, 1992) showed that women working in paid employment experienced less depression than housewives, and the more challenging the work, the greater the improvements are in mental and physical health. Faludi (1992) asserted that the importance of paid work to women's self-esteem is basic and longstanding, and cited a study conducted in 1980 which showed that 87 percent of women regarded work as meaningful, in that they gained a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction through it.

There is little doubt, in assessing these studies, and emphasising the large scale feminisation of paid employment, that women are making enormous gains in their professional and working lives, but that the complexity of the meaning of work for women is little understood. Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987, p.11)

emphasised the difficulties in the changing meaning of work for women as follows:

Women are making the shift from people who service others, defer to others and who are themselves through their attachment to others, to becoming people who are visible in their own right and who stand as separate individuals while still connected to others. This is no easy feat.

Contemporary research has provided significant insights into women's experiences (Chester & Grossman, 1990). In an integration of several qualitative, phenomenological studies and identification of common themes, Stratham et al. (1988b) and Chester and Grossman (1990) conceptualised the unique meaning of work for women. Rimm (1999) and Bell and Nkomo (2001) further discussed the meaning women ascribe to work, and the contribution it makes to their sense of identity and self. These studies mark an important start in gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning that women make of their own working lives. In a sense they give voice to the meaning of work for women which has been hidden for so long – both within the home, and now, as it moves into the public domain, hidden in research orientation and results. Rather than anyone speaking on their behalf, women are able, through these qualitative and largely phenomenological studies, to make their voices heard.

Stratham et al. (1988b) integrated 13 qualitative studies in order to search for themes and unify concepts, and identified the unique meaning of work for women. Conceptual themes identified across these studies included the following:

- maintaining autonomy and control through work
- the desire to be recognised for professional capabilities and performance, influence and making things happen. The importance of the task at work is asserted, and women's experience described as "task engrossed, but person invested" (Stratham et al., 1988b p. 26). Although women value and nurture relationships, their people focus is blended with task focus. Women's people orientation is used to foster accomplishment
- maintaining dignity, improved self-worth and a sense of identity through work

- difficulty stemming from asymmetry in relationships at work for women. Power differentials are encountered when dealing with male managers and colleagues, and status differentials experienced in women-to-women relationships at work, making relationships complex
- the difficulty in having competence and performance recognised, with men's work more highly regarded than women's in an organisational context.
- women's experience of life as interwoven, interdependent and mutually reinforcing. As such seamlessness is experienced between a woman's work and home life

Similarly, in integrating studies Chester and Grossman (1990) have emphasised the following themes as providing a deeper insight into the meaning of work for women:

- the need to expand the traditional definitions of what constitutes work because women's work is still occurring in both private and public domains, and is both paid and unpaid
- the role of work in the development of a woman's sense of self and personal identity
- the importance of the relational aspects of work for women
- the fact that women experience complexity in the use of power at work
- the degree to which work experience for women is coloured by discrimination and sexism
- the fact that women experience fluid boundaries between work and personal life

Two further studies, those of Rimm (1999) and Bell and Nkomo (2001), concluded that the primacy of work's meaning and importance of family and personal relationships, may shift over time. Bell and Nkomo (2001) further emphasised that both work and family orientation are a vital part of identity creation for women.

These studies illustrated that not all themes represented the experience of all women, but that they are sufficiently represented to interconnect women from

diverse work experiences and personal circumstances (Chester & Grossman, 1991).

The following figure is a diagrammatic representation of these findings:

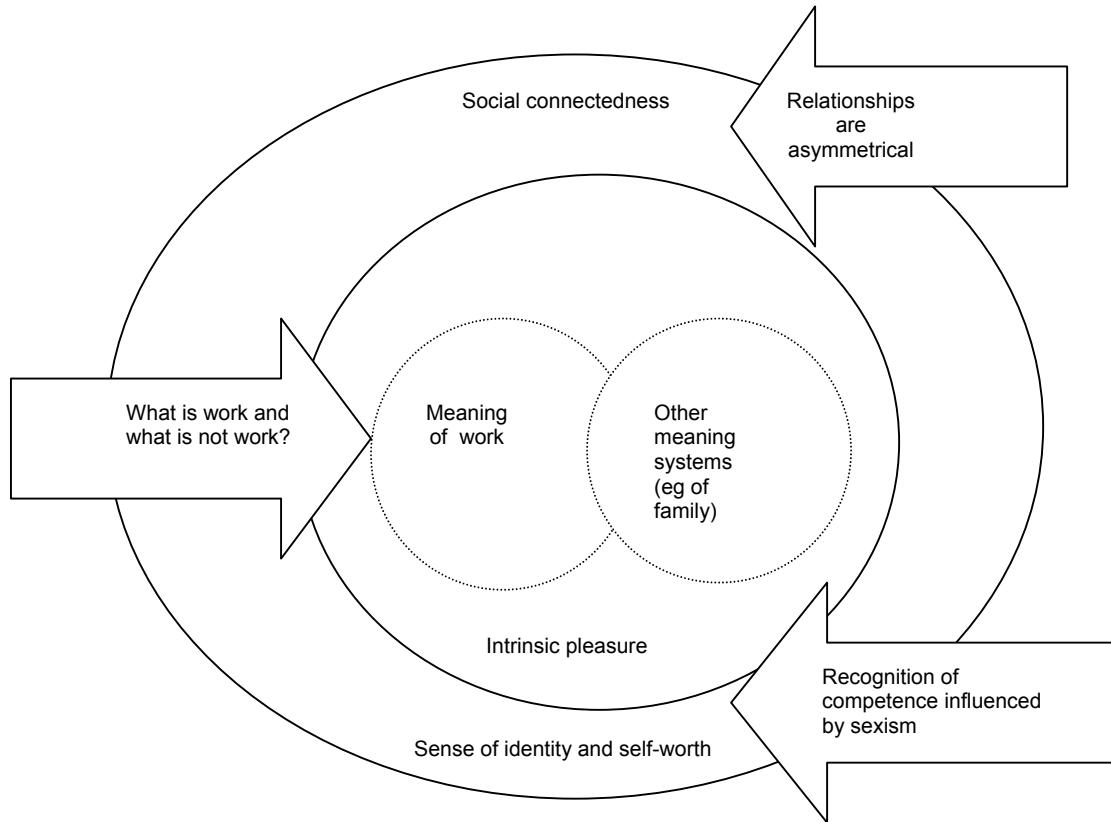


Figure 2.3: Concentric circles of meaning for women described in contemporary research and forces impacting on these

Contemporary qualitative research cited indicated that the meaning of work for women is a subjective and shared phenomenon, located within personal, psychological, social and philosophical domains. The meaning of work was asserted in the areas of self-identity and self-worth; social connectedness and relatedness; and intrinsic satisfaction. Economic, material and instrumental needs were not regarded as important, neither was contributing to, serving or impacting the greater good. The meaning derived from shaping the world was described as complex in that women experienced difficulty in the exercise of power and authority. Moreover, the meaning women derived from their work was described as diverse and variable over time. Importantly, the meaning of work presented was unique to women, with nuances and complexity specific to

their working experience. This adds depth to an understanding of the meaning of work for women.

In order to explore the conceptualisation presented, the meaning of work for women will now be explained in more detail. Thematic concerns that were presented in section 2.1 as central to an understanding of the meaning of work, have been used throughout this discussion as a framework against which to examine the meaning of work for women. The themes of self-identity and self-worth, intrinsic satisfaction and social connectedness have been substantiated as essential, but multifaceted components of the meaning of work for women. Divergent findings have been presented on the themes of instrumental needs, contributing to the greater good and shaping the world through the exercise of power and authority.

Accordingly, in order to gain an in-depth and holistic understanding of the meaning of work for women, the literature exploring the following domains will now be reviewed

- economic, material and instrumental needs
- sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relatedness;
- intrinsic satisfaction
- contributing to, and serving, the greater good
- shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority

2.2.2 Economic, material and instrumental meaning

Congruent with the assertions made by Stratham et al. (1988b) and Chester and Grossman (1991), other research has not emphasised the economic, material or instrumental meaning for women. Rimm (1999) highlighted that, of 1,400 women in the USA assessing the reasons behind their work satisfaction and the meaning they derived from it, financial satisfaction was chosen only by 33 percent of the sample. Similarly, the women did not complain about financial

dissatisfaction. As such, it was not a significant component of the meaning of work.

According to Chester and Grossman (1991), there is a need to expand definitions of work to include paid and unpaid work. The lack of economic or financial meaning derived may, in some way, be linked to the fact that historically, women's work was unpaid. Although this has changed significantly, it is almost as if, having historically derived meaning from unpaid work, women still separate meaning and payment, and do not derive meaning from their work in a financial sense.

2.2.3 Sense of identity and self-worth

A Hindi nun, Mata, (cited in Astin, 1984, p. 117) articulated the contemporary view of the meaning of work for women in the following:

The merit of work lies not so much in its results, but in the opportunity it affords the seeker to manifest, prove, demonstrate, fulfil, and express the...attributes of her being.

In other words, women ascribe meaning to work because it provides a forum for expression of self, and as such, a forum for a sense of self-worth and purposefulness.

Various researchers have emphasised that a vital component of a woman's sense of identity is a sense of self in connection with others (Chodorow, 1978; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). Put differently, women seem to have defined their sense of self through their relationships with others, and fused the developmental tasks of intimacy and identity creation (Gilligan 1997). Moreover, women have struggled with issues of separation and attachment (Gilligan, 1997), and have experienced differentiation and separateness as difficult (Orbach & Eichenbaum). A coherent sense of self has been highlighted as a significant part of self-development (Erikson, 1978, cited in Gilligan, 1997), and current research has emphasised that women, through work, are able to develop and express this (Bell & Nkomo, 2001).

An important component of the meaning of work for women has been the forum work provides for women to exercise their desire to be independent, to assert their own identity, to take care of themselves and to lead their own life (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Autonomy, a sense of independence and control have been pinpointed as other critical components of a women's identity derived through work. Furthermore, that if these are missing, women experience a sense of powerlessness and concern (Stratham et al., 1988b).

McKenna, 1997, cited in Ciulla (2000) described identity as being tied to a job for a woman. She further highlighted the difficulty of constructing an identity outside of the one on the business card and a life outside of work. However, according to Rimm (1999) the sense of identity derived from a work role may shift in importance and may be displaced by an identity more derived from family and personal relationships, even if a woman is successful, senior and committed to her work. Similarly, Bell and Nkomo (2001) explained that, after a focus on career, family and personal orientation become an important part of identity creation for women. The implication is that, whilst women experience meaning from work because it gives them an independent autonomous identity, the primacy of work's importance may be displaced by a family and personal focus. In these situations, however, women continued to work and reported an autonomous, independent sense of self in this domain of their lives. Research has shown that a critical component of a woman's sense of self was derived from work, and the prospect of giving up work threatened this identity (Rimm, 1999). Work was seen, then, as a place from which crucial aspects of a woman's identity were derived (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987) and in which an independent, autonomous sense of self could be expressed.

Research, further articulated that accompanying this sense of identity from work, women derived a strong sense of self-worth and dignity (McKenna, 1997, cited in Ciulla, 2000; Stratham et al., 1988b). Women's experiences of work contributed to perceptions of self-worth and self-efficacy (Chester & Grossman, 1991). Work was experienced as meaningful for women through the positive feedback from others (Keightley, 1995). According to Faludi (1992) women

experienced feedback as meaningful, in that it provided a sense of purpose and self-worth.

The issue of positive feedback is seen as critical in that women have emphasised their need for approval, acknowledgement and being noticed (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). In a number of ways this has been linked to the act of asserting an independent sense of self. Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987) described the importance of work as a forum for women to put forward an independent, autonomous and coherent sense of self, but also mentioned the emotional reaction women experience in this process. Women's awareness that asserting an autonomous self may cause betrayal and pain to others has generated a sense of impermissibility causing stress and a fear of abandonment. As such, women have expressed the need for recognition because it created visibility and assurance, enabled an independent self to be noticed and dissipated any feelings of inadequacy (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987).

The meaning woman ascribed to work through its provision of a sense of identity was regarded as complex. Just as women strive for an autonomous and independent self, this sense of self was incongruent with traditional conceptualisations of a woman's self. In order to gain a sense of reassurance and approval for this assertion, recognition from outside sources was needed. At the same time, however, women derived a real sense of self-worth and purpose from asserting this autonomous, and in control, self.

2.2.4 Social connectedness and relatedness

Gilligan (1997) has described that the psychology of women as distinctive in its greater orientation towards relationships and interdependence. As mentioned earlier, relationships have traditionally been viewed as being of great importance to women, and women have gained their sense of self concept and gathered a sense of wellbeing through connection and attachment to others (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Rimm, 1999). It has been reiterated that more women are asserting autonomous and independent selves, differentiating their

identity from that of others, and that work has provided an integral part of this sense of identity. However, women's functioning continues to show a greater orientation towards relationships. As Miller (1986) concluded women, like all oppressed groups, have developed mechanisms to cope with their relatively powerless state, and becoming the emotional specialists in relationships was one of these. This was said to continue in relationships at work. Social connectedness and relationships have been viewed as a vital part of the meaning a woman derives from her work, and a natural people orientation, fostering collaboration and interpersonal sensitivity highlighted as a woman's strength (Rimm, 1999). Moreover, work has been seen as a useful forum to experience this sense of relatedness because of the rich variety of relationships to be negotiated, experience of collegial relationships, the give and take of teamwork and the requirement for collaboration in the workplace (Keightley, 1995).

According to Stratham et al. (1988b), women have unique experiences and derive meaning from bonding which occurs in work relationships, but that this should not be seen as limiting a focus on task. Research has emphasised that women display an orientation towards people and relationships, but that this needs to be seen as occurring within the context of accomplishing tasks. Whilst the bonds established are a key component of the experience and meaning of work, and linked to a sense of self-esteem, this does not preclude an orientation towards tasks. In other words, work tasks are embedded in relationships. Chester and Grossman (1991) explained the significance of relational aspects and connectedness as components of the meaning women ascribe to work, but emphasised that it is imperative not to overlook the importance of the task components of work.

Research has highlighted that women's experience of relationships at work embodies a great deal of conflict and asymmetry (Chester & Grossman, 1991; Stratham et al., 1988b). Difficulties in dealing with gender differentials have been voiced when dealing with male colleagues, particularly male managers, where women experience unequal and problematic relationships. Furthermore, women-to-women relationships at work appear to be fraught with conflict and

difficulty, especially if a status differential is present. Orbach and Eichenbaum (1997, p. 72) emphasised that “women’s relationships with one another are loaded with psychological significance quite outside the apparently straightforward professional responsibilities they share”. Moreover, in the workplace, the bonds between women, traditionally seen as a sort of sisterhood, can be broken as a result of feelings of competition and envy, causing pain and confusion, and increasing feelings of isolation, particularly for senior women (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987).

Women’s desire for love, support and acceptance tie up in a complex way with their first mothering relationship and informed women’s expectations of relationships with other women. This was, however, often not the experience of women-to-women relationships in the workplace, particularly if a woman has asserted her identity as separate, autonomous and independent (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). Women may attempt to hide competitiveness in sisterhood and try to suppress it (Firth-Cozens & West, 1991), but frequently feelings of competition, envy, anger and of abandonment in relation to other women emerged, which are seen as unacceptable to articulate, and which serve to distance women (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). Whilst connectedness and relationships are regarded as an integral component of women’s experience and meaning of work, this was not always women’s experience, with a sense of isolation and distance expressed.

The loneliness and isolation women experienced in the workplace, which has already been described, may be compounded by the absence of role models or reference groups and feelings associated with being only one of a kind (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Kahn (1984) has asserted that the lack of role models or reference groups within the workplace has a strong influence on women’s achievement motivation, affiliative behaviour and anxiety levels. Furthermore, Kahn (1984) emphasised the importance of significant others and reference group members in the workplace in order for women to gain social legitimisation and feedback. The lack of these served to increase a sense of isolation, impacting on performance and motivation to achieve, which will be discussed in detail later in the next section.

Although the meaning women derive from relationships at work was a critical component for women, it was described as fraught with difficulty, both in terms of relationships with men, and in terms of women-to-women relationships. Moreover, women's focus on relationships should not be seen as precluding task orientation. Furthermore, the isolation resulting from the lack of role models and reference groups, frequently a women's experience at work, may impact on performance and motivation to achieve.

2.2.5 Intrinsic satisfaction

Astin (1984) stated that women could experience work as meaningful in its satisfaction of a need for pleasure. In other words, pleasure can be gained, both in the accomplishment of tasks and achievement of goals. Work experience has been regarded as meaningful in that it provides women with a source of mastery and accomplishment, which reinforced by positive feedback from others may provide an impetus to test and enlarge skill and abilities (Keightley, 1995). In Rimm's study (1999) of 1400 women, 87 percent of women cited the meaning gained from their work in its provision of a sense of challenge. The women said their work was fulfilling, and also that it promoted creativity. Faludi (1992) reiterated that women gained a sense of accomplishment through work. Furthermore, Bell and Nkomo (2001) asserted that women derive meaning from work in that it satisfied ambition, provided new challenges, enabled leaving a mark on the world, and provided a forum in which to act as independent and in control. Stratham et al. (1988b) concluded that women desire to be recognised for their professional abilities and performance, that an important part of meaning is that of doing a job well, and that discomfort is experienced if this is hindered. Moreover, work was meaningful and experienced as satisfying if women felt in control. This control was seen as being able to set one's own standards and adhere to them, and determine content (Feel, 1985, cited in Stratham et al., 1988b).

Although intrinsic satisfaction is a crucial component of work's meaning for women, various aspects of this experience are problematic. Orbach and

Eichenbaum (1987) have reiterated that competence in a work context has not been part of past understanding of what it means to be a woman. Furthermore, although work was experienced as meaningful, and a significant source of personal challenge, exploration and development, women have experienced difficulty getting work performance recognised and valued (Chester & Grossman, 1991). In a sense, this has evoked historical issues around women's work, as private, unpaid, undervalued and rendered insignificant. Despite the fact that women's work is now paid and in the public domain, this experience still needs to be articulated.

Horner (1968,cited in Gilligan, 1997) concluded that women have shown anxiety about competitive achievement and fear success. Reasons for this depend on the research paradigm. Firstly, male-centred studies have identified two levels of achievement motivation, that is, hope of success and fear of failure (Mclelland,1975, cited in Gilligan, 1997). Horner (1968, cited in Gilligan, 1997) mentioned a different experience for women, in which conflicts about competence, mastery and success were described. In studies conducted the motive to avoid success was identified, because "women seemed to have a problem with competitive achievement, and that problem seemed to emanate from a perceived conflict between femininity and success" (Horner,1968 cited in Gilligan, 1997, p. 205). Put differently, women may opt out of competitive situations, because the competitive feelings evoked were experienced as negative (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987).

Secondly, a lack of role models and reference groups has been seen as having a strong influence on achievement motivation, and the importance of others in providing feedback has been cited (Kahn, 1984). Expectations of success and achievement have been shown as being subject to a two-way influence: an individual's own beliefs, and most importantly, the belief that others hold for that person as an individual and member of social group. The implication for women is that, with fewer role models and a smaller reference group that may give feedback, they may experience a lower expectation of success. This may in turn impact on their success and achievement levels, and less frequent

experiences of the intrinsic cognitive and intellectual satisfaction derived from accomplishment at work.

Women's experience of work as intrinsically satisfying in the challenge, control and creativity it provides, and resulting experiences of accomplishment, has been asserted as meaningful. However, this concept is not without problems. Women have mentioned difficulties in getting their work recognised and valued in the workplace. Furthermore, this may be influenced by perceived concepts of femininity which preclude competence and success. Alternatively, the lack of role models and reference groups to provide feedback and reiterate expectations of success may hinder effective performance and successful accomplishment. In other words, even though women's experience of work is asserted here as meaningful and pleasurable, it is not uncomplicated.

2.2.6 Contributing to others and serving society

Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987) highlighted that connectedness, attachment, affiliation and selflessness, have been, and to a great extent, are still largely the foundations of women's experience. Women's work has traditionally involved caring, a large emotional component and specialist knowledge (Osborne, 1991). Ciulla (2000) stated that women still carry the brunt of service jobs and in general do more emotional labour in the workplace. That said, contributing to others and serving the greater good was not articulated as thematic in the research of either Chester and Grossman (1991) or Stratham et al. (1988b). Rimm's (1999) study, however, cited helping others and contributing as the second most meaningful component of work, after challenge. This assertion, and the historical importance of this in the meaning of work for women, necessitates an investigation of this component of the meaning of work.

Gilligan (1997) emphasised that women have equated goodness with helping and pleasing others, and Astin (1984) further concluded that pleasure is gained by women in contributing to and serving others. Meaning has been ascribed to work in that it enabled women to contribute to the greater good, help others,

serve the community and wider society. This however, perpetuates the stereotypes already explored, and overlooks the complexities of meaning women derive from serving others and contributing to the greater good. Importantly, this meaning ascribed to work was seen, not as a result of inherent gender differences, but resulting from socioeconomic dependencies, socialisation and the psychodynamics of nurturing (Horney cited in Osborne, 1991). These will now be explored to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of contributing to the greater good.

Horney (cited in Osborne, 1991) has emphasised that women have historically been socially and economically dependent on men. Caring and serving, as such, became essential components of practical survival. Chodorow (1978) described the nurturance children receive as having differential effects on male and female children, with female children internalising the caring, nurturing, unselfish role of “mother’s little helper”. Freud (cited in Osborne, 1991) derived the theory of female machoism - a pervasive sense of guilt about not doing enough for others or being enough. Osborne (1991) cited various studies indicating that the long-term effects of being mothered as girls contribute to the perpetuation of stereotyped notions of femininity. In other words, women find meaning in roles which enable them to continue to play the role of “mother’s little helper”, putting others’ needs before their own in acts of service, which, at the same time, fulfill their need to care, serve and help, meeting their own strong needs (Osborne, 1991). With work as a primary activity for an increasing number of adult women, the implication is that women continue the significant act of caring and servicing others in this activity. An ongoing sense of guilt at not being or doing enough is assuaged through work. This is experienced as meaningful in that it establishes a forum for service and caring resulting in recognition that is meaningful because it contributes to an increased sense of self esteem and self-worth (Astin, 1984). The meaning ascribed to caring for others, helping, serving and contributing to the greater good is thus a complex interplay between serving others’ needs and meeting one’s own needs resulting from complex social and psychological dynamics.

2.2.7 Impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority

For the purposes of the discussion to follow, Weber's (1976, as cited in Dexter, 1985) widely used definition of power, that is, the "probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out (their) own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests", will be used. Dexter (1985) emphasised that regardless of the type of work or the type of organisation, women's employment was characterised by limited power over their own and other's activities. Chester and Grossman (1990) stressed that women experience complexity in the use of power at work. This is complicated by Grossman and Stewart's (1990) emphasis that it may be difficult to persuade women to discuss their experience of power, and that little fully developed theory exists to help define the important issues involved in women's experience of themselves in a work role having influence, authority and an impact on others. Part of the complexity of women's experience of power is the confluence between their experience of power and powerlessness in the experience of work.

Power and authority are seen as a male domain (Hakim, 1996). Chodorow (1978), Gilligan (1996) and Miller (1986) emphasised that men have a greater orientation towards power, which was linked to individualism, whereas women defined themselves in terms of personal relationships, fulfilling the needs of others and, for the most part, powerless in their experience of work. According to Heilbroner (1988, cited in Keightley, 1995, p. 96), "work's meaning has been played out within the historic drama of power's exercise". Work was conceptualised as a relationship of subordination, domination and control. Furthermore, it was concluded that the most significant exercise of male power today takes a public form, and has to do with the degree to which men control, and are the beneficiaries of, women's work and productivity. Keightley (1985) reiterated that all of the instances of subordination and inequality associated with the workplace, were underscored by men's power over women. Women's experience of power at work was, in essence, an experience of profound powerlessness, as control of women moved from the private patriarchy of

individual men within families to the public patriarchy of hierarchical, male-dominated work institutions (Browne, 1987 cited in Keightley, 1995). This was frequently experienced by women in a lack of advancement, poor working conditions, unequal remuneration and job segregation. Even with women increasingly entering more senior, and more powerful roles, Hutado(1996, cited in Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 132) stated that “the invitation to power is only a pretended choice for ... women because, as in all cases of tokens, their inclusion is dependent on complete and constant submission.”

Whilst the above discussion has centred on women’s experience of powerlessness, any further discussion on the complexity of the meaning of work women derive from power, needs to investigate women’s exercise of power and experience of powerfulness. Research on the experience of power described the experience of power as that of inner vitality, strength and superiority (McLelland, 1975, cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990). In research dealing with women’s experience of power, however, women have not asserted these same experiences of exhilaration and personal aggrandisement. This has emphasised that power is experienced within the context of human relationships, and as these change, so power is experienced as changing (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). Furthermore, power is conceptualised as dynamic and inseparably tied to women’s emotional connections to other people, with the potential to evoke anxiety, ambivalence and conflict unless it is used in a positive sense.

Miller(1986, cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990) highlighted the following dimensions of power as being difficult for women:

- power seen as selfishness, used to further one’s own needs, unless used to enhance the power of others
- power seen as destructive, and its use equated with destroying the current relational context
- power seen as leading to abandonment, in that its exercise may precipitate abandonment by others
- power seen as a threat, and a more comfortable feeling would be that of inadequacy

- power seen as threatening identity, because it has consequences for one's sense of self as an acceptable, nurturing, loving and loveable human

Bell and Nkomo (2001), however, described the exercise of power as an important component of the meaning that women ascribed to work. Whilst McLelland (1975, cited in Dexter, 1985; Gilligan, 1997) has clarified that women's attitudes towards and expressions of power are different from those of men. An analysis of women's experience of power, focused on power's positive uses, and asserted that work also provided the opportunity to empower oneself and others (Keightley, 1995). Meaning was derived in the positive exercise of power, with a focus on interdependence, building up and sharing resources. Use of power by women was shown to be based on different skills, learning and socialisation to that of men (Dexter, 1985). Research conducted by (Grossman & Stewart, 1990) confirmed the above assertions. The subjects expressed pleasure and enjoyment of power, when used to nurture and empower others, and maintaining and striving for equality, mutuality and symmetry in relationships. Power was experienced as pleasurable and experienced as strength and confidence, if it was defined as a fully legitimised aspect of the role or accompanied by authority. Hierarchical power relationships were experienced as interfering with symmetrical, personal relationships and leading to emotions such as anger, aggression and envy. Finally, challenges to power or authority were experienced as personally threatening, resulting in anxiety over competence and adequacy.

The meaning of work women derived from the exercise of power is seen as having complexity, and multiple layers of meaning. In a number of ways, it is, like other components of the meaning of work for women, experienced as complex, evoking reactions that connect both pleasure and pain resulting from anger, aggression and envy that are not seen as compatible with notions of feminine identity.

2.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, literature pertaining to the meaning of work was reviewed. General literature referring to the meaning of work was analysed and a conceptualisation of this phenomenon provided to serve as a broad framework for the discussion to follow. The limitations and lack of research on the specific and unique meaning of work for women were articulated. The limitations of research operating within a male-centred paradigm and extrapolating results to women, postulating no differences in the meaning of work for men and women, was asserted. Furthermore, the limitations of research were expressed when differences in women's experiences were positioned as being opposite to male experiences, perpetuating misleading and inaccurate female mythology. Finally, contemporary literature stating the complexities and uniqueness of women's work meaning was presented. In so doing, a framework was established against which to pursue the research aim of the phenomenological study. The next chapter will present and discuss the research methodology of the phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 3 : PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

The objective of this chapter is to discuss in detail the phenomenological study of the research, with reference to the research methodology outlined in chapter one. This chapter will consider the phenomenological aims of the research. That is, the meaning given to work by a sample of South African graduate women. It will also assess the research design against the requirements established for rigorous qualitative research (Creswell, 1998). The sample, the measuring instrument, data collection, processing and analysis will be discussed. The self as instrument (Ely, 1991), a concept central to qualitative research, will be examined. Finally, issues of reliability and validity will be explored.

3.1 REQUIREMENTS FOR A SOUND QUALITATIVE STUDY

With phenomenology situated within a broader, qualitative paradigm, it is pertinent to initially discuss the requirements for a sound, qualitative study. According to Mitchell (cited in Silverman, 1997, p. 19) the quality of qualitative research is seen as lying in the power of its language to display a picture of the world in “which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity”. However, Stones (1986) has emphasised the importance of translating the qualitative praxis in a systematic and sustained way in order finally to ask with scientific rigour “did we get the story right?” (Stake cited in Creswell 1998, p. 20). Ely (1991, p. 95) further stressed that researchers must be aware of the issues and processes that weave their way through and beyond their qualitative research to keep it honest and believable. These assertions allude to the importance of a sound research design and issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. Despite these being conceived of and arrived at in different ways (Ely, 1991, p. 94), these issues are no less important in qualitative research than in other research paradigms.

As such, in establishing this study's research design, cognisance was taken of the requirements that needed to be met for this qualitative study to be viewed as sound and scientifically rigorous.

According to Creswell (1998), a sound qualitative study is based on the following principles:

- use of a tradition of enquiry
- framing of the study within an evolving design which presents multiple realities from the participants' viewpoint
- a single focus, in which a single idea is described rather than the causal relationship between multiple variables established
- rigorous data collection procedures which adequately summarise multiple forms of data
- data analysis using various levels of abstraction, actively moving from the particular to the general
- accurate presentation of data using explicit procedures of verification
- a persuasively written account, which is clear and engaging to increase reader verisimilitude

With reference to this study, the phenomenological study will be assessed against Creswell's (1998) framework for rigorous qualitative research in the discussions to follow in this chapter.

3.2 SAMPLE AND POPULATION

The purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). As such, in this study, nonprobability sampling techniques were used (Henry, 1990), that is, sampling techniques in which subjective judgment played a role in selecting the sample were used. Sampling was done theoretically and not statistically, and although a plurality of subjects was used to derive empirical data (Collaizzi, 1973), a small sample was required because of the large quantity of data to be analysed (Mouton & Marais, 1992).

As such, the subjects were regarded as appropriate to the sample if they met the following criteria (Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1985; Stones, 1986):

- experience of the phenomenon being researched
- verbally fluent in order to articulate their feelings, thoughts, experience and perceptions of the phenomenon being researched
- the same home language, or verbally fluent in, the home language of the researcher in order to avoid information loss owing to interpretation from one language to another
- naïvety with respect to psychological theory
- expressing a willingness to be open to the researcher
- rapport having developed between the subject and the researcher to allow the subject to feel relaxed and unthreatened

That is, women in paid employment, able to talk about their experiences, having no background in psychological theory on the meaning ascribed to work, and willing to participate in the study, were selected. Subjects without this background replaced possible subjects who met most of the criteria, but had some training in career psychology in order to “increase the probability of their verbalising the data of their awareness without undue interference” (Stones, 1986, p. 120).

In addition to the use of this criterion sampling strategy, snowball sampling (Creswell, 1998; Huysamen, 1994, Patton, 1990) was applied because the subjects recommended other possible subjects who they had identified as having relevant information.

Six women, all with a minimum of three years’ undergraduate study and all in paid employment, were chosen as a sample. Patton (1990, p. 186) emphasised that the sample is determined by informational considerations, that sampling is terminated when no new information is forthcoming, and that, as such, “redundancy is the primary criterion”. After conducting six interviews, in line with these assertions, the researcher considered the sample size adequate.

The following is a description of the biographical profile of the subjects in order to provide an overview of the subjects involved in the research subjects, based on the information elicited through use of the personal data form.

3.2.1 Age

The subjects' ages ranged from 27 to 32 years of age.

3.2.2 Race

Subjects that met the sampling criteria and were willing to participate in the research were selected, and race was not a criterion of the sampling strategy. As such, five subjects were white females and one a black Asian female.

3.2.3 Career guidance process in place

Three subjects had attended government, coeducational schools for the duration of their schooling, two had attended private girls' schools for both their primary and high schooling, and one had attended a government, co-educational primary school and a private, girls' high school.

All the subjects had completed some form of career guidance during their high schooling to assist their career and educational choices. All commented that they felt that this process had been inadequate. Two subjects mentioned that their father had assisted in their career choice, one stated that her mother had assisted her, while three subjects that both their parents had been involved in their career choice.

3.2.4 Postgraduate degrees

In line with the sampling requirements, all of the subjects had a minimum of one degree, with three subjects having two degrees. Three subjects had completed these at the University of Cape Town, and three at the University of the Witwatersrand.

The different disciplines studied by the subjects are reflected in the range of postgraduate degrees achieved. Two subjects had bachelor of commerce or business science degrees, one subject had a bachelor of education degree, and one had an honours degree in science (physiotherapy) and two had bachelor of law degrees.

One subject was completing a master's degree, while another subject was planning to commence a master's degree within the next 12 months.

3.2.5 Current job title and organization

In line with the sample criterion, all the subjects were in paid, full-time employment at the time of their participation in the research study. The range of the subject's work domain is indicated in her current job title:

- legal counsel and attorney
- legal advisor and attorney
- recruitment practice leader
- marketing director
- educator
- senior tutor and physiotherapist

The subjects worked in a diversity of organisations as set out below:

- an internet division of a national financial services institution
- an international auditing organisation
- a multinational international beverage organisation
- a primary educational institution
- a university.
- an information technology start-up organisation

3.2.6 Length of service in current role and full time employment

The length of service in the subjects' current role ranged from three months to seven years. The subjects had been in full-time employment since completing their postgraduate degrees, this length of time ranging from four to nine years.

3.2.7 Family history

One or both of their parents had raised all the subjects. Five subjects stated that both their mother and father had been active in raising them, while one subject had been raised by her mother.

3.2.8 Marital status

One subject was married and another engaged and about to be married at the time of the interview. Two subjects were in relationships, while the remaining were single with no relationship at the time of the interview.

3.2.9 Number of children

None of the subjects had any children at the time of the interview. Five subjects emphasised that they would like to have children in the future.

3.3 DEVELOPING THE MEASURING INSTRUMENT

3.3.1 Choice of measuring instrument

3.3.1.1 Importance of the choice of measuring instrument

According to Creswell (1998, p. 19) "unquestionably, the backbone of qualitative research is extensive collection of data". The choice of a measuring instrument to effectively enable collection of data relevant to the research aims was therefore critical in this study. The researcher decided that an unstructured interview was the most suitable measuring instrument, given the research aims

of describing and understanding the sample of graduate women's meaning assigned to work.

Given their flexibility, the possibility of achieving a depth of response (Kerlinger, 1986) and "their means of access to the respondent's life world ... (with) the focus ... not on control but on understanding the meanings intended" (Hagen, 1986, p. 338), an unstructured interview was chosen as an appropriate measuring instrument for this research study. In other words an unstructured interview was viewed as a measuring instrument appropriate to both the research aims and phenomenological research design, in its ability to generate data providing authentic insight into people's experience (Miller & Glassner, 1997). Stones (1986) asserted that the spoken, informal, nondirective interview allows subjects to be as near as possible to their lived experience. Durfenne (1967,cited in Stones, 1986, p. 120) stated the following:

In effect, when I speak, I am my speaking; I become one with words. Certainly ... to speak puts me at a certain distance from that of which I speak. But between my consciousness and my speech there is no distance at all: I am in union with the language I use.

Whilst language and words are important components of unstructured interviews, this choice of measuring instrument also gave the researcher access to nonverbal behaviour. "Looking, interacting and attending"(Ely, 1991, p. 43) are integral to the unstructured interview and contributed an additional form of data for the researcher. Unstructured interviews were therefore selected as a suitable measuring instrument in their facility to grasp the subject's experience more fully than in a more rigid methodological technique (Markson & Gognalons-Caillard cited in Stones, 1986, p. 120). This was important to enable the researcher to meet the research aims of the study.

3.3.1.2 *The self as instrument*

Ely (1991) and Patton (1990) mentioned the importance of the self as an instrument in phenomenological research. Instead of relying on independent

measuring instruments, the researcher herself is the primary research tool in this research paradigm. Decisions around sampling, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results rely on the researcher as the primary research instrument. Validity and reliability issues rest largely on the researcher's methodological skill, sensitivity, rigour and integrity. Furthermore, the researcher has to accept that others may find different meanings in the same data. The researcher's tacit knowledge, intuition, insight and lived experience are integral to the research. Feelings need to be heeded and declared, taken from an unspoken to a spoken level. The researcher needs to be aware that in hearing the subjects interviewed, she hears herself (Marshall, 1996). As such, the researcher needs to recognise and organise her own myths, stereotypes, prejudices and assumptions, in order to fully describe and understand the experience of the research subjects (Ely, 1991). The researcher in this study was cognisant of these requirements and undertook to account for and render explicit any bias she became aware of whilst conducting the research in a discussion of the research study's limitations.

Finally, the researcher was familiar with Ely's (1991, p. 103) statement that "the sum total of what people are will shape them as ... research instruments". The requirements for a phenomenological researcher, as stipulated by Ely (1991) - empathy, acceptance of emotions, the ability to tolerate ambiguity, flexibility and humour - were seen as criteria with which the researcher could comply. The researcher felt that she had found a methodological home within phenomenological research, with Ely (1991) and Patton's (1990) assertions providing insight and conviction in her tacit conceptualisations of her own strengths as a researcher.

3.3.2 Development of the measuring instrument

The research aims of this study, namely to describe the meaning attributed to work by a sample of South African graduate women in order to gain an in-depth understanding of this area, were carefully considered in developing the unstructured interview. The questions used in the unstructured interview were based on literature reviewed in chapter two and the researcher's lived

experience. Ely (1991) underlined the importance of a researcher's tacit knowledge and the significance of heeding evolving insight and hunches in qualitative research. This was explored in detail in the preceding discussion on the self as the measuring instrument. Suffice it to say that at this point the researcher used her own meaningful, lived experience as a South African graduate woman in paid employment in formulating questions to be asked in the unstructured interview. Moreover, the researcher was aware of her own bias in developing the unstructured interview, and that, as stated by Forconi (cited in Ely, 1991, p. 108), a researcher needs to be aware that "the aspect of human life you are about to study will most likely be your own". In fact, as the study progressed, the researcher was cognisant that the subjects were, in a sense, articulating her own story. The need to elicit potentially sensitive data and engage the subjects as full partners in the endeavour (Ely, 1991) was also considered in developing the measuring instrument. The method of developing the measuring instrument will now be discussed.

3.3.2.1 *Development of broad, unstructured questions and probes*

Using the literature reviewed in chapter two and her own lived experiences, the researcher, developed broad and unstructured questions to meet the research aims of the study. The questions that were developed included the following: "Tell me what meaning work has for you?", "and "Can you tell me in as much detail as possible, if there would ever be a time when you would not work?". The researcher was careful to develop open-ended questions, which enabled the subjects to describe their experiences and ground their feelings in this experience, rather than a dichotomous presupposition or cause and effect questions (Patton, 1990).

Moreover, in order to enable the researcher to fully access the subject's experiences, a series of probes were developed to make possible further discussion into issues emerging in the interview. This was essential in order to fully engage the subject as a partner in the interview, and develop the interview as a process in which the researcher follows as well as leads (Ely, 1991). Patton (1990) has emphasised the importance in unstructured interviews of

verbal and nonverbal probes because these deepen the response to a question, and increase the richness of the data obtained. The following are examples of the verbal probes developed: “Can you tell me more about that”, “Can you give me an example of that”, “I have a sense of ... Can you explore that”. Nonverbal probes that were used included “uhm” “uh,huh” and “ok”.

3.3.2.2 *Sequencing of questions and the development of an interview guide*

According to Ely (1991), it is a misconception that unstructured interviews lack structure, and while structure is not predetermined, it does emerge in the interviewing process. Both Mouton and Marais (1992) and Patton (1990) emphasised the importance of developing an interview guide which assists in listing topics to be covered in the data-gathering process and sequencing questions. An interview guide (Appendix B) meeting these aims was developed. Questions were sequenced in line with Scott and Chanlett's (1973) recommendations to ensure that initial questions were easy to answer, and did not elicit sensitive information. Biographical questions were asked first, followed by broad questions. Difficult or sensitive questions were sequenced later in the interview, and asked only once the researcher had established rapport, trust and credibility with the subject. These guidelines were modified during research, to enable the emergence of issues pertinent to the subject in fully describing their experience. An expert on qualitative interviewing was consulted to ensure the interview guide was clear and that the areas to be covered appropriate to the research aims.

3.3.2.3 *Development of a biographical interview within the unstructured interview*

In developing the questions and interview guide to be used in the unstructured interview, the researcher became aware that biographical data were required as part of the data collection process to collect details of the sample, and to enable the subject's experiences to be more fully described. As such, a personal data

form, (Appendix A), which facilitated collection of this information, was developed.

3.3.2.4 *Planning the venue and duration of the interview*

The researcher planned the appropriate venue in which to administer the interview, and this was based on a subject-centred approach (Ely, 1991), that is, the subjects selected a venue in which they were comfortable. The researcher ensured that these venues where appropriate to the research objective and enabled each subject to fully describe her experience. The researcher emphasised that the venues selected needed to meet the requirements of being quiet, private and confidential, with no interruptions . The duration of the interview was established as being between 45 and 60 minutes to ensure sufficient time.

3.3.2.5 *Planning the administration and data collection method of the interview*

Patton (1990) has articulated the importance of capturing the actual words of the subject and the usefulness of raw data, in quotations. The interviews were tape-recorded to facilitate this method of data collection and increase the accuracy of the data collection. Transcripts were then typed, and the responses of each subject used to identify trends and themes to describe more fully the experience, and meaning ascribed to work for the sample of South African graduate women. In addition, the researcher made detailed notes during the biographical interview, while short notes were taken during the experiential interview emphasising key sentences and words. Furthermore, nonverbal observations were recorded, as recommended by Ely (1990) in order to capture the rich data presented in facial expressions, gestures and the appearance of the subjects.

3.3.2.6 *Development of an interviewer feedback form*

The researcher realised the importance of developing an interviewer feedback form (Appendix C) to detail her sense of the interview, and her personal

experience of the process. With the self as the primary research tool (Ely, 1991), the researcher's personal cognitive and emotional responses to the interview were regarded as important to declare as a source of information providing insight into the research process.

3.3.2.7 *Use of a pilot interview*

In order to determine that the interview met the research aims , a pilot interview was used prior to the administration of the interview with the sample subjects. One subject in the sample was interviewed questions which had been initially developed. Resulting from difficulties experienced in using this interview with questions being too abstract and, as such, difficult to answer, changes were made to the measuring instrument. These were made after this pilot interview had been conducted to ensure that the research aims were more appropriately met. Questions that were confusing for the subject were not included. For example, the question “Can you describe your experience of work?” did not elicit a clear answer, and needed significant explanation from the researcher. This question was therefore excluded. Similarly, the use of “inner experience of work” was rephrased as the “experience of work” for clarity and ease of understanding.

3.3.3 **Objective of the measuring instrument**

According to Ely (1991), the objective of unstructured interviews is to see the world from the eyes of the other. The objective of the measuring instrument in this study was to examine fully the meaning the subject attributed to this experience of work. The goal of the measuring instrument chosen, an unstructured interview, was to explore in-depth the research question under examination, and describe the experiences of the subjects. The objective of the unstructured interview was, then, to obtain detailed descriptions of the subjects' experience of the phenomenon, while putting a minimum of restraint on their answers or expression (Kerlinger, 1986).

3.3.4 Rationale of the measuring instrument

Since the meaning the subject attributed to work was highly personal and sensitive, the measuring instrument that was chosen ensured the following:

While (the content of the interview) is dictated by the research problem, they impose no other restrictions on the content and manner of respondent answers (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 442).

As such, the unstructured interview promoted flexibility, possibilities of depth, co-operation and rapport, and allowed the researcher to gain greater insight into the subjects' beliefs, attitudes and experiences (Stones, 1986). As unstructured interviews are subject-centred (Ely, 1991), they allowed further areas to be probed as these came up spontaneously in the interview, and facilitated a greater understanding of the subjects' experiences of work, and the sense they made of them. The rationale, then, for using an unstructured interviews as the measuring instrument in this study was that it was best suited to meet the research aims.

3.3.5 Administration of the measuring instrument

Administration of the unstructured interview comprised an introductory briefing, completion of the biographical personal data form, the experiential interview and an interviewer feedback form. These various steps in the administration of the measuring instrument will be discussed in detail.

3.3.5.1 *Planning the introductory briefing*

A telephonic appointment with each subject was made, providing a brief overview of the purpose of the interview - to explore the meaning the subject ascribed to work for research purposes. The researcher then discussed the time required and duration of the interview. Once the subject had agreed to participate in the study, the researcher requested that she choose an appropriate venue and time to meet face to face.

Confidentiality, trust, interaction and rapport were essential to the research ethos (Stones, 1986) as was establishing the subject as a “full partner in the endeavour” (Ely, 1991, p. 58). The introductory briefing was important in achieving this. The introductory briefing included an explanation of the purpose of the research and interview and requesting the subjects’ permission to use a tape recorder and notebook. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given. The duration of the interview and the need to complete a personal data form prior to conducting an experiential interview were discussed. Rapport was established through positive verbal and nonverbal encouragers from the researcher. Good eye contact, smiling, open body language and encouragers such as “hmm”, “ok”, “uh uh” ensured that the subject felt comfortable with the process and setting, and competent enough “talk back” (Blurner cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 100).

The unstructured comments, which served as the introductory briefing, are detailed in appendix A. Examples included the following:

- “Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, and for taking this time to have this interview with me”.
- “As discussed on the phone, the reason for this interview is to listen to the meaning you give to your work. This will form part of my master’s research and will be used as data for my dissertation”.
- “Your responses will be completely confidential, and your responses will be kept anonymous”.
- “In order to record the interview, I would like to use a tape-recorder and notebook to make notes. Are you comfortable with this?”.
- “The discussion will last between 45 and 60 minutes” .
- “In order to gain background, personal information I will need to complete a personal data form with you before we commence the actual interview. Is it okay to start with this?”

3.3.5.2 *Planning the completion of the biographical personal data form*

Once the introductory briefing had been completed, the researcher completed the demographic personal data form with the subject, and noted her responses on the document. On completion of this, the researcher indicated that the interview would now commence, and made sure that the subject was comfortable and ready to proceed.

3.3.5.3 *Planning the unstructured interview*

The researcher then proceeded with the unstructured interview, using the interview guide developed to assist in the topics to be covered, the sequence of these, and the probes to be used to elicit greater detail and ensure the subject's experience was fully described. The interview commenced with an introductory, open-ended question:

- “Can you describe, in as much detail as possible, the meaning work has for you”

The researcher used the probes developed in the interview guide, as verbal and nonverbal encouragers to encourage the subject to describe her experience of work in depth. Examples of these included the following:

- “Can you tell me more about that”?
- “Can you give me an example of that”?
- “I have a sense of ... Can you explore that” and
- “Uhm” “uh, huh” and “ok”.

Once the subject reached saturation on this question she was asked the following question:

- “Would there ever be a time you would not work? Describe this in more detail.”

Once the researcher felt that the subject had reached saturation point and that “the subject [had] pre-scientifically explicated all that the subject feels is related

to (her) personal experience of the situation being researched" (Stones, 1986, p.126), the interview was ended. The researcher thanked the subject for her time and input .

3.3.5.4 *Planning the completion of the interviewer feedback form*

On returning to her office, the researcher completed the interviewer feedback form to detail her experience of the interview, and her personal response to the subject and interview process. Details of the interview process, and cognitive and emotional responses to the interview were documented. Additional pertinent information on the interview, such as nonverbal behaviour, interruptions or background noise, was noted. The researcher collated this with the personal data form from the interview, and the notes she had taken. The tape on which the interview was recorded was labelled with the subject's details.

3.3.6 *Reliability of the measuring instrument*

Kirk and Miller (1987) defined reliability as the extent to which a measurement procedure yields a similar answer however and whenever it is carried out. Integral to the concept of reliability is checking the strength of the data (Kirk & Miller, 1987). In other words, reliability refers to the issue of validity central to the data collection process (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Seale (1990) has emphasised that reliability, particularly external reliability, was not a central concern of a phenomenological study, given the nature of the study, and that alternative ways of thinking about reliability and replicability need to be used. However, both internal and external reliability can be improved considerably in qualitative studies, and cognisance was taken of these recommendations in this study.

Confirmability, when another researcher may have arrived at a comparable conclusion using the same data, perspective and situation, is an example of an alternative to reliability applicable to qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In considering the confirmability of the interviews in this research study,

internal consistency or asking for the same information in slightly different ways (Mouton & Marais, 1992) was used. Since no information on the reliability of the measuring instrument used exists, consistency and theoretical reliability formed the basis of an assessment of the reliability of the measuring instrument and the strength of the data.

3.4 CONDUCTING THE DATA GATHERING

The various steps in the gathering of data for this research study on the experience and meaning ascribed to work for the sample of South African graduate women, were discussed in detail in section 3.4.3, and will be briefly presented here.

3.4.1 Agreement to participate in the study and appointment scheduled

A telephonic appointment with each subject was made, providing a brief overview of the purpose of the interview. The time required and duration of the interview were discussed. Once the subject had agreed to participate in the study, the researcher requested that the subject choose an appropriate venue and time to meet face to face.

3.4.2 Introductory briefing

The introductory briefing included an explanation of the purpose of the research and interview and gaining permission to use a tape recorder and notebook. Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were given. The duration of the interview and the need to complete a personal data form prior to conducting an experiential interview were discussed. Rapport was established through positive verbal and nonverbal encouragers from the researcher. Good eye contact, smiling, open body language and encouragers such as “hmm”, “ok”, “uhuh” ensured that the subject felt comfortable with the process and setting, and competent enough to “talk back” (Blurner cited in Miller & Glassner, 1997, p. 100).

3.4.3 Completion of the personal data form

The researcher then completed the demographic personal data form with the subject and noted her responses on the document. On completion of this, the researcher indicated that the interview would commence, and made sure that the subject was comfortable and ready to proceed.

3.4.4 Unstructured interview

The researcher then proceeded with the unstructured interview which was tape-recorded. The interview guide was used and open-ended questions asked, as described in section 3.3.5.3.

Once the researcher felt that the subject had reached saturation point and had fully described her experiences, the interview was concluded. The researcher thanked the subject for her time and input.

3.4.5 Completion of the interviewer feedback form

On returning to her office, the researcher completed the interviewer feedback form to detail her in-depth experience of the interview, and her personal response to the subject and interview process. Additional pertinent information on the interview, such as nonverbal behaviour, interruptions or background noise, was noted. The researcher collated this with the personal data form from the interview and the notes taken. The tape on which the interview was recorded was labelled with the subject's details.

3.4.6 Transcribing interview protocols

The tape recording of each interview was transcribed in its entirety including recording pauses, as well as comments such as “uhm” and other nonverbal sounds made by the subjects such as coughing. The notes the researcher

made during each interview were documented at the conclusion of the interview protocol.

3.4.7 Reliability of the data-gathering process

Reliability has been defined as the central issue of validity in the data collection process (Mouton & Marais, 1992). However, the importance of determining the strength of the data (Kirk & Miller, 1987) and extent to which the data-gathering procedure gives a similar answer however and whenever it is carried out, were discussed in section 3.3.6.

Mouton and Marais (1992) reported that four variables influence a study's reliability – the researcher, the participants, the measuring instrument and the context in which the research is conducted. These will be examined with reference to the research study under discussion.

3.4.7.1 *The researcher*

Mouton and Marais (1992) stressed that the researcher's image and affiliation may impact on the reliability of a study. In this study, the researcher was aware of the importance of presenting herself professionally, and of ensuring that the participants were aware that they were participating in a research study for a masters' dissertation at an international university. This was regarded as ensuring that the subjects responded with depth and authenticity.

The researcher as the primary research tool and the concept of self as instrument (Ely, 1991) were explored in section 3.4.1.2. The subjective involvement of the researcher in the process, and use of her personal responses as an information source, have been established as important to the research process, with specific reference to the development of the measuring instrument. The researcher was aware of her own personal responses and possible bias. Reliability was enhanced, however, in the researcher declaring herself, and the availability of her responses, as an addendum to the research (appendix C).

Ely (1991) has highlighted that through training and experience, the phenomenological researcher becomes more skilled and finely tuned, adding to the reliability of the study. In this research study, the researcher had both training and experience in conducting unstructured interviews. Careful attention was taken in developing the interview guide to help the researcher to ensure that all areas were covered in sufficient detail, allowing the subjects flexibility of response, and not prompting them in any way.

3.4.7.2 *The participants*

The participants' perception of their need to play a certain role or respond in a certain way (Mouton & Marais, 1992), was avoided in this research study through the use of broad, open-ended questions. Reliability was improved in this study by using open-ended questions because it allowed the subject flexibility and depth of response. Use of leading questions was minimised as far as possible, enabling the subject to describe her experiences authentically. The probes used, both verbally and nonverbally, ensured that the subject had as little as possible input on the researcher's reactions to her responses, and helped minimise the problem of "response sets" (Mouton & Marais, 1992, p. 88).

3.4.7.3 *The measuring instrument*

The reliability of the measuring instrument was enhanced in the use of broad, open-ended questions allowing the subjects' depth and flexibility in their responses. The focus of the unstructured interview ensured that the subject was a full partner in the process, leading the discussion in whatever direction seen as appropriate to her experience (Ely, 1991). Effects such as leading questions, midposition, "don't know" responses, sequencing and item sensitivity, which impact on reliability, were reduced.

3.4.7.4 *The context*

To ensure that issues of reliability were met with regards to the research context, the interviews were scheduled within three weeks, ensuring that the spatio-temporal factors asserted by Mouton and Marais (1992) were satisfied. The interviews were all scheduled at times convenient to the subject, and the venues chosen by the subject, at her place of employment or residence, in accordance with the requirements of privacy, confidentiality and quietness stipulated by the researcher.

3.4.7.5 *Internal consistency*

As an alternative form of validity, appropriate to unstructured interviews, internal consistency was assessed (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Internal consistency refers to the researcher obtaining the same kind of data from the subject when requesting this in slightly different ways. In this research study, internal consistency was improved by asking the same questions in different ways. In other words, the subjects were requested to describe the meaning that work had for them, with different reference points across time and organisations.

3.4.7.6 *Theoretical validity of the measuring instrument*

Since no information exists on the validity of the measuring instrument, its theoretical validity will be assessed. A presentation of the literature in chapters 1 and 2, conceptualising the meaning women ascribe to work, was used as a basis for the development of the measuring instrument. Moreover, the validity of questions used was assessed by an expert on qualitative research and unstructured interviews. The pilot interview conducted helped to further increase the validity of the measuring instrument. Questions that were confusing or abstract, such as “Describe your inner experience of work”, were discarded and the questions that were asked were simplified. In the interviews, the questions, which the researcher intended to use, were asked.

Furthermore, an additional measure, comparability, that is, when another researcher could have arrived at a comparable conclusion using the same data, perspective and situation (Guba & Lincoln, 1981), was assessed.

The data-gathering process in this study was established as reliable. The researcher's awareness of herself as the primary instrument, and declaration of her own responses, as well as her training and experience, ensured that this issue was appropriately handled. The use of broad, open ended questions, allowing for flexibility and depth of response, ensured that issues concerning the participants or the measuring instrument, impacting on the study's reliability, were overcome. The short time span in which interviews were all conducted, and the collaborative way of selecting the venue, ensured that the context was reliable. Finally, internal consistency was achieved in the use of different questions to elicit similar answers from the subject.

3.5 DATA PROCESSING

According to Creswell (1989), phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the various steps of reduction, analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings. The importance of custom building the research approach within a broad framework (Huberman & Miles; Dey, 1990, both cited in Creswell, 1998) was emphasised. Furthermore, the objective of data analysis in a phenomenological study was explained as allowing the data to speak for itself, thereby allowing relationships and organisational schemes to emerge (Stones, 1985). Cognisance of these articulations was taken in this research study.

3.5.1 Processing of the data

The data collected through the unstructured interviews conducted were analysed using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1985; 1986). The interview protocols were analysed by examining recurring themes that emerged in the interviews, as well as information gathered in the personal data and interviewer feedback forms and notes taken

on nonverbal language. After breaking these protocols down and identifying themes that emerged across the six subjects' interviews, these natural meaning units were integrated as a whole to communicate the lived structure (Stones, 1985, 1986) particular to the meaning given to work

3.5.1.1 *Transcription of the interview protocols*

The tape recording of each interview was transcribed in its entirety and nonverbal sounds documented. The notes the researcher made during each interview were documented at the conclusion of the interview protocol.

3.5.1.2 *Identification of emerging themes and patterns*

Stones's (1985;1986) guidelines for conducting phenomenological research were utilised. The researcher first read through the interview protocols in their entirety, gaining a sense of the whole. After this initial holistic and intuitive assessment of data, the protocols were further analysed to identify themes and patterns or meaning units. The researcher completed this phase of the analysis using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1985; 1986). The following steps were covered as the researcher analysed the data:

- The researcher bracketed her preconceived experiences.
- Every significant statement relevant to the topic was listed.
- Statements were clustered into emerging themes or meaning units.

3.5.1.3 *Description of emerging themes or patterns*

The researcher then formulated recurring natural meaning units or themes to describe the meaning the subject ascribed to work. Emerging themes were linked together to describe the subject's experience both texturally and structurally (Stones, 1985; 1986). In other words, the subject's experience of work and then the sense of what this experience meant to her were described in detail.

3.5.1.4 *Moving themes from the specific to the general*

The aim of this research study was to describe rather than interpret the meaning that the sample of South African graduate women ascribed to work. However, the researcher took cognisance of the necessity to move the themes identified from the specific to the general. Recurring themes in the data collected from the six subjects were seen as dominant, and integrated to possibly describe the meaning that South African graduate women ascribed to work. A detailed literature review was completed at this stage for each theme identified, and this integrated with the findings to enable the study to achieve a higher level of abstraction.

3.5.2 **Validity of data processing**

Inferential validity (Mouton & Marais, 1992) was assessed as the relevant validity issue in the data-processing phase of the research study. It was deemed necessary at this stage to ensure that the research was honestly and credibly presented to both the subjects and wider readers (Ely, 1991). Alternative methods of validation have been suggested as appropriate to ensure rigour in a qualitative, exploratory study (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Researchers also emphasised the importance of truth value, rather than traditional views of validity in qualitative research, where research presents a clearly recognisable description of an experience to those having it or reading about it (Bloor, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Credibility, where the inquiry is conducted in a manner to ensure that the subject is accurately identified and described, has been regarded as a key component of validity appropriate to this research study (Bloor, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Seale (1999) emphasised the use of member validation as central in achieving this. “Member validation” (Bloor, 1997, p. 41) denotes an array of validation techniques that seek to demonstrate a correspondence between researcher analysis and sample members’ descriptions. According to Polkinghorne (cited in Creswell, 1998), in a

qualitative study validity rests on whether ideas are well grounded and well supported.

The truth value of the study was assessed by presenting the analysis and interpretation of the data to members of the sample, and requesting their input on whether the research presented a clearly recognisable description of their experience. Assertions were made that the analysis and interpretation did present a recognisable description of their experiences. The applicability of the research study was established by presenting the processed data to additional readers, outside the research context, and requesting them to assess whether the research was meaningful and applicable. Their verdict was that the study met both the requirements of having truth value and applicability.

3.6 ASSESSMENT OF THE SCIENTIFIC RIGOUR, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

3.6.1 Review of the scientific rigour of the phenomenological study

Creswell (1998) outlined the principles upon which a sound qualitative study should be based in order to establish the data's meaning and treat it rigorously, but not reductively (Stones, 1985, cited in Kruger, 1986). On the basis of these principles, the scientific rigour of this phenomenological study is assessed as follows:

- The study made use of a tradition of enquiry, as it is a phenomenological study.
- The study had an evolving design, based on a qualitative, phenomenological design which made it possible to present multiple realities from the participants' viewpoints.
- It had a single focus, in that the meaning of work for women has been described rather than the causal relationship between multiple variables established.
- Rigorous data collection procedures were used, involving unstructured interviews being tape-recorded and transcribed allowing multiple forms of data (ie both verbal and non verbal) to be summarised.

- The data were analysed using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen methodology incorporating various levels of abstraction and actively moving themes from the particular to the general.
- The data were accurately presented using raw data and the subjects' statement to increase procedures of verification.
- A persuasive written account was provided which is clear and engaging in order to increase reader verisimilitude.

Alternative methods of validation to reliability, internal and external validity and objectivity have been suggested as those of truth value, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Bloor, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). These will be assessed to confirm that appropriate alternatives to reliability and validity have been proposed for this study.

3.6.1.1 *Review of the study's reliability*

Seale (1990) asserted the practice of reflexivity in relation to improving reliability and replicability, explaining to the research audience as much as possible the procedures that have led to a particular set of conclusions. Furthermore, reporting the researcher's status position in the field, detailing as much as possible who offered data and why, describing the social situations in which the research was conducted, and presenting details of which theories informed research and analysis have been described as processes to improve external reliability (Seale, 1990). These assertions as applied to this research study have been presented in much detail in the course of this chapter.

Transferability or the assertion that findings will be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions (Bloor, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1981), is a further example of alternative reliability of which the researcher took cognisance. Presenting the theoretical parameters of the research clearly and explicating the appropriateness and requirements of a scientifically rigorous phenomenological study increased the transferability of this study. Also, locating the data collection process within a body of theory and guided by an

explicit model (ie the use of an unstructured interview process) further added to this study's transferability.

Owing to the lack of information on the reliability of the measuring instrument used, consistency and theoretical reliability formed the basis of an assessment of the measuring instrument's reliability and the strength of the data. In line with the qualitative nature of research, the study's transferability and dependability were established by explaining to the research audience as much as possible about the procedures that led to a particular set of conclusions.

The study's transferability was improved in that it attempted to report the researcher's status position in the field, detailing as much as possible who offered data and why, describing the social situations in which the research was conducted, and presenting details of phenomenological theories as informing research and analysis.

Adding to this study's confirmability, low inference descriptors were used, and the subjects were requested to describe the meaning work had for them, with different reference points across time and organisations; verbatim accounts of the data were presented in the discussion of results, and the data was recorded mechanically and the raw form preserved for future researchers to access. In this study, however, it was not possible to use multiple researchers, peer review or participant researchers given the nature of the study as a master's research study conducted by a single researcher.

Finally, Mouton and Marais (1992) reported that four variables influenced a study's reliability – the researcher, the participants, the measuring instrument and the context in which the research is conducted. The issues of confirmability and transferability were also added to these four in this study. These were a focus in this study as explained below.

- The researcher was aware of the importance of presenting herself professionally and ensuring that the participants were aware that they were participating in a research study for a master's dissertation at an

international university, adding to the depth and authenticity of response. The researcher also declared herself, and the availability of her responses in the use of an interview feedback form.

- With reference to the measuring instrument, the researcher had both training and experience in conducting unstructured interviews and took special care in developing the interview guide to ensure that all areas were covered in sufficient detail, allowing the subjects flexibility of response, and not prompting them in any way.
- The participants' perception of their need to play a certain role or respond in a certain way (Mouton & Marais, 1992) was reduced in this research study through the use of broad, open-ended questions, minimising the use of leading questions and response sets as far as possible.
- Spatiotemporal factors were lessened because the interviews were scheduled within three weeks, at times convenient to the subjects, and the venues chosen by each subject in accordance with the requirements of privacy, confidentiality and quietness stipulated by the researcher.

With reference to the above, the research study generally met the requirements of confirmability and transferability, and may therefore be described as reliable. Limitations regarding the study's confirmability, and ways of improving this, are discussed in chapter five.

3.6.1.2 *Review of the validity of the study*

Validity in qualitative research was asserted as the extent to which the research study provides an accurate account (Kirk & Miller, 1987). The theoretical and inferential validity of the study were assessed using the alternate concepts of credibility, truth value and applicability, as discussed below.

According to King (1994), a qualitative study is valid if it really examines the topic which it claims to have examined. This has to do with the importance of theoretical validity or credibility. The researcher was aware of the requirement that the study should present a detailed and accurate understanding of the construct being explored, that is, the meaning of work for women.

A thorough literature review was conducted in an attempt to improve the theoretical validity and credibility of this study. Literature on the meaning of work in general was assessed to promote an accurate understanding of the concepts underpinning this central construct. Research findings relevant to the meaning of work for women were then considered, to confirm that, although a conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women diverged from the general literature review, concepts identified in the general literature formed a foundation for these. Literature describing the meaning of work for women was ascertained as falling within two distinct domains:

- a traditional, mythological description of the meaning of work for women based largely on stereotyped notions of feminine identity, or
- more contemporary descriptions derived directly from women's statements and experiences.

The literature on contemporary conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women was studied in detail to further add to the theoretical validity of the research study. Open-ended questions were framed to ensure that the constructs identified in the literature review were measured in the unstructured interview. These questions were assessed by an expert on unstructured interviews, and a pilot interview conducted with one subject as discussed in 3.6.1.2. Questions that were recognised as accurate descriptions on the meaning of work for women were used, ensuring the study's theoretical validity or credibility. Moreover, after the identification of themes, the researcher completed a further literature review to obtain detailed insight into each emerging theme.

Creswell (1998) and Ely (1991) emphasised the importance of the truth value and applicability of a research study, or being able to assess whether its account of what was studied is perceived to be honest and accurate by both subjects and a wider audience. The truth value of this research study was evaluated by presenting the interpretation to members of the sample and requesting their input on whether the research presented a clearly recognisable description of their experience. The subjects confirmed this. Going a step further, the applicability of the research study was established by presenting the

processed data to additional readers, outside the research context, and requesting them to assess whether the research was meaningful and applicable. Their verdict was that the study met the requirements of having truth value and applicability.

Based on the above, the research study can be described as largely meeting the requirements of both theoretical and inferential validity. Limitations and suggestions for improving both the study's truth value and applicability are set out in chapter five.

3.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the various steps in the research methodology of the study under discussion were documented. The appropriateness of the qualitative paradigm was discussed, emphasising that a phenomenological approach was deemed best to achieve the research aims. The sampling technique was discussed and sample demographics described. A discussion on the measuring instrument followed, covering the choice, development, objective, rationale, analysis, interpretation, reliability and validity. The self as instrument, a concept integral to qualitative, phenomenological research, was explored. Next, the functions of data gathering and processing were discussed. Finally, the scientific rigour of the study was evaluated. The concepts of transferability and confirmability, relevant to establishing the reliability of the study and the concepts of truth value, credibility and applicability, relevant to ascertaining this study's validity, were reviewed.

The next chapter will present and discuss the results of the phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 4 : RESULTS

The objective of this chapter is to discuss in detail the results of the phenomenological study of the research in an effort to understand the meaning the sample of South African graduate women interviewed ascribe to work. This chapter will first state the results of the unstructured interviews conducted to provide access into the subjects' world and provide insight into the meaning they attribute to work. Secondly, the results will be integrated with the literature review presented in chapter two.

As stated in the previous chapter, the data generated through the use of six unstructured interviews was analysed using the modified Stevick-Collaizi-Keen method (Stones, 1985) in order to identify recurring themes and integrate these as a whole to communicate the lived structure (Stones, 1985; 1986) particular to the meaning the subjects ascribe to work. This study took cognisance of Patton's (1990) expression of the importance of using raw data, and Stones's (1985) assertion of the need for the data to speak for itself. As such, the subjects' articulations of their experience will be reported directly in this chapter as evidence of the themes identified.

By way of an introduction, Figure 4.1, an integrated diagrammatic model of the findings, is presented. Each theme will be discussed briefly before significant statements are presented to illustrate the six subjects' specific experiences. A summary of the discussion will close each theme presented. Results will be integrated with the literature review as the discussion moves from the specific to the general.

The following themes will be discussed:

- the activity and expectation of ascribing meaning to work, and its fluidity
- economic, material and instrumental needs
- sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relating at work

- intrinsic satisfaction
- contributing to and serving society at work
- shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority

4.1 DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

4.1.1 The activity of ascribing meaning to work and an expectation of meaningful work

Before providing detailed discussions on specific themes, this section will start with a more general discussion in which the subjects described the activity of ascribing meaning to work and a general expectation that their work activity should be experienced as meaningful. Firstly, the subjects did not state that work is an inherently meaningful experience, but rather that they regarded the experience of work as something to which they actively ascribe meaning. Whilst all work had the potential for having meaning ascribed to it, and the subjects had clear expectations of being able to do so, this did not always happen. Furthermore, whilst different themes emerged during the interviews with the subjects, these were shared to varying degrees and were fluid and changeable over time. They emphasised that work was not the only domain to which they ascribed meaning. Other domains were described as providing meaning for the subjects, although these were not necessarily comparable to the meaning that the subjects derived from work. Finally, being able to experience work as meaningful was seen as vital for the functioning of the subjects, and if they were unable to perceive their work as having some meaning, they experienced a sense of disillusionment and emptiness, and a desire to actively ascribe meaning in other domains of their life.

4.1.1.1 *The act of ascribing meaning to work and the expectation that work should be meaningful*

At the outset of each interview, the subjects asserted that whatever the current meaning they derived from their work, they had a clear and ongoing expectation that they should derive some meaning from their work.

Subject 1 described work as the primary activity of her adult life - an activity to which she ascribed meaning that was not comparable with any other domain of her life in :

"My work takes up all my time. It takes up, I would say, about eighty percent of my time. I love my work. I don't derive (the same meaning) from any other activity that I undertake...To me it is really a core part of my life, it is a focus of my life."

Subject 2 asserted the importance of this search for meaning both generally and in her work domain in the following statement:

"People search for many years as to what they want to do career wise and also for the meaning in their lives. But those two both culminate in what I do."

Rather than working for purely instrumental reasons, as discussed further in section 4.1.2, the subjects emphasised their expectation that they should be able to ascribe some other meaning to their work experience. Work was described, then, as something to which the subjects' actively attributed meaning and not something inherently meaningful. To take this a step further, whilst all work had the potential for meaning to be ascribed to it, the subjects did not, in every experience of work, attribute meaning to their experience. They stressed that some of their experiences of work were regarded as having greater meaning than others.

Subject 4 emphasised the expectation of, and search for, work to be meaningful as follows:

"My job really is a means to a financial end. Not to say that I wouldn't love for it to have more meaning. There are definitely ways that I have identified where it could have more meaning."

4.1.1.2 *Commonality, diversity, fluidity and changeability of the meaning of work*

The subjects asserted simultaneously that the meaning they derived from work could change and was fluid. Whilst themes were shared across the subjects regarding the meaning of work, the immanence of this varied. In other words, the primacy of the meaning ascribed to work shifted across subjects, over time or in different forums for work, according to different roles or organisations.

Subject 1 explained this as follows:

"My work meaning has evolved.'

Subject 3 expressed the fluidity of the meaning of work in the following:

"I think that the meaning my work has given me has been different in the different phases I have gone through in my personal life... I am biding time right now. Before it was a hobby and passion ... and then the pressure of work took over and the enjoyment dropped significantly. And it became almost like survival."

Subject 5 stressed that work, while not currently experienced as such, had previously been meaningful. She expressed this in:

"There must have been something to keep me there! (Laughs) ... At the moment (Sighs) ... this is not a good time (Laughs). At the moment not very much! Yah ... I wish I could say satisfaction, but I actually can't."

Subject 4 clearly explained the fluidity of her experience of the meaning of work as follows:

"My work started out having meaning for me. It was fairly novel, I was on a steep learning curve, and I had a number of defined goals ... At the moment, my work has very little meaning for me – all it really is, is a means to an end"

Subject 6, underlined the significance of the temporal descriptor "now" in the following:

"You have obviously asked me in the right job (Laughs). Otherwise you wouldn't be able to be interviewing me – it would have been a huge skew if I had been at Company Y... My work adds a lot of meaning to my life now...the environment is so good for me right now. It is just the environment I need.

4.1.1.3 *The importance of meaning being ascribed to work*

The subjects further described the meaning they derived from work as being integral to their functioning at a number of levels, this varied from subject to subject as explained in detail in sections 4.3 to 4.7.

Subject 6 emphasised this in:

"Work is an integral part of my life actually now."

Subject 3 described this further as follows:

"It is a component of what makes me happy or makes me tick."

If, for various reasons, the subjects did not ascribe meaning to their work, and their expectations of being able to derive meaning from this experience were not met, they mentioned unrealised expectations, disillusion, emptiness and the search for other forums and other roles in which to ascribe meaning.

Subject 4 captured the essence of this in her articulation:

"I didn't ever think that work would be the most important thing in my life. But I have a fairly deep sense of disappointment about how meaningless and mundane and how unchallenging my job is from all sides, from all aspects. It seemed to have such promise. There is a large amount of disappointment in that.... it affects my life in that I want to move to the next level in my personal life. I want to explore marriage and motherhood much more compellingly now than ever before. And that is not only biological. It definitely has been brought about by this vacuousness and chasm I have in my working life."

4.1.1.4 *The importance of meaning being ascribed to other domains of life*

Despite the fact that the subjects stated that work, and more particularly work experienced as meaningful were vital to their functioning, they emphasised the importance of this not being the only activity in their life from which they derived a sense of meaning.

Subject 1 highlighted this in her experience of being retrenched:

"The biggest learning lesson has been from that side, that work is not everything...Work was still important to me, but with a very different focus and angle...I fortunately, very fortunately, in fact, I got retrenched. And that also showed me a lot of meaning from work. I was devastated in a sense, because work was everything for me, and retrenchment really opened my eyes. Then I realised all my other desires that I have in my life, because I really do want to follow traditional ways and contribute to my community"

Subject 3 emphasised the significance of other domains of meaning, and particularly that of her family in:

"My family defined who I was. My family was so integral to leading a balanced life, and the values of my family defined my life. And I take that into work, and I try to apply those principles."

Subject 4 voiced the importance of other domains of meaning in her life in:

"I get up earlier on the weekends! I get on with stuff I love in my life."

Subject 6 expressed the need to balance the meaning she derived from work with other domains in her life in:

"But I am one of those people who is also work and play. I do go home, and I do have a life. I am not going to live for my job. When I am there I want to add value, when I am home I want to add value to my cats and my home and my friends."

4.1.1.5 *General assertions about the experience and meaning of work*

Broadly positioning the above assertions as background to the detailed discussion of the meaning the subjects ascribe to work in sections 4.2 to 4.7, the following can be noted in summary:

- The subjects emphasised that, whilst work was not inherently meaningful, they expected to be able to ascribe meaning to their work activity.
- The meaning they ascribed to work was fluid and varied from subject to subject, over time or work contexts.
- However, the subjects emphasised that they also derived meaning from domains other than work.
- Ascribing meaning to their work activity was pinpointed as a critical component of their overall functioning.

The diagrammatic representation, below, serves as an introduction to the next discussion, in which each thematic concern voiced by the subjects is explored in depth.

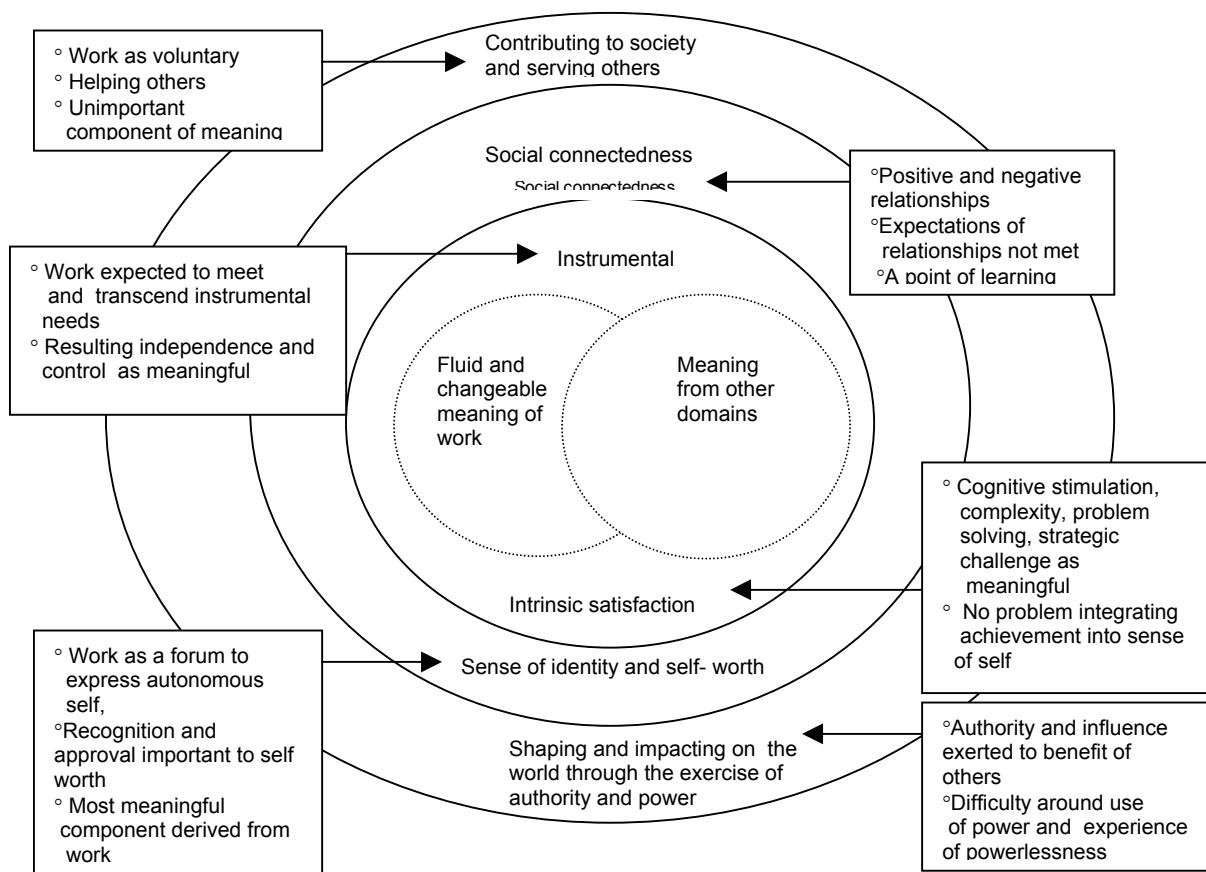


Figure 4.1 : The meaning of work for women in this study and the inherent complexities

4.1.2 Economic, material and instrumental needs

In discussing the meaning of work from an economic, material or instrumental perspective, the subjects provided a textured description. In all cases, if their experience of work was described as being without meaning, they qualified this by adding that despite saying that work had no meaning at the outset, it met their instrumental needs in that they earned a salary. The subjects expressed

varying experiences of whether money was meaningful, with some subjects describing it as important and others emphasising that they would continue to work if they were not paid for their work. In general, since the subjects were employed in professional roles and were earning commensurate salaries, the instrumental aspects of their work were not described as being central to the meaning they ascribed to work. All the subjects concurred that they both expected their work to meet their instrumental needs and transcend these. On further exploration, the subjects who had emphasised that their work lacked meaning in its meeting of only instrumental needs, described the resulting financial independence and sense of control as meaningful.

4.1.2.1 *Work as meeting instrumental needs*

The subjects who said their work lacked meaning at the commencement of the interview, immediately qualified this in their description of work as meeting economic, material and instrumental needs. The implication was that the meaning of work should surpass simply meeting instrumental needs - that this alone was not experienced as meaningful.

Subject 4 expressed both the instrumental nature of her work, and the fact that this was not experienced as particularly meaningful in the following:

"At the moment, my work has very little meaning for me – all it really is, is a means to a financial end."

Subject 5 asserted this succinctly in her statement:

"All I derive from my job is a salary."

4.1.2.2 *Work as both meeting and transcending instrumental needs*

The subjects differed in their experience of the relative importance of the instrumental meaning they derived from work. Subject 2 stressed that the material or economic aspect of work was not important:

“Funny thing happened when I first started teaching. Typical red tape, the government had not registered me so I had no salary. I was working for nothing. The school said to me ‘we will pay the money and you can pay us back when the government pays you’ and I literally said ‘Don’t worry! I don’t want to be paid for this job. This is fun – I’ll do it for free!’ (Laughs)”.

Other subjects emphasised the importance of the financial aspect of their work. Examples of this include Subject 4’s statement:

“Money is probably very important.”

Subject 3 described her work as meaningful but emphasised that:

“I would not do this job for free.”

Similarly, Subject 6, although describing the meaningfulness of her work highlighted the importance of economic and material benefits in:

“Adding value to make the business work, and being recognised for my skills, and then being adequately remunerated for it.”

The subjects agreed that, since they were in professional roles and were being remunerated correspondingly, they were able to both expect their work to meet their instrumental needs, and to transcend these needs.

Subject 1 expressed this in:

“Money has been an object, but it hasn’t been an object in that I have to think of my next plate of food … my motivation has been … the basic necessities have sorted themselves out and work has gone beyond that.”

Subject 3 further emphasised that because her salary met her instrumental needs, the economic and material aspect of her work was not central to the meaning she derived from her work :

"I guess because I am not struggling, it is not the centre of everything. I think if I was earning R 5000 a month, I might think of it more. I also think, money for me ... is the opportunity it creates ..."

4.1.2.3 *Meeting instrumental needs experienced as meaningful in the provision of independence and control*

Despite having initially described their work as lacking in meaning in that it merely met instrumental needs, later in the interview, the subjects concurred that there was meaning underpinning this. Meeting instrumental needs were described as meaningful in the independence and control they provided.

Subject 2 emphasised this in:

"...Financially ... it is nice ... to say 'I have earned this. It is my money.' And I can go and buy a dinner set or whatever it is, without having to ask permission."

Subject 5 asserted this more clearly in the following:

"It gives me independence ... mostly financially... really this is how I earn my money. So that is how I am financially independent. I obviously wouldn't be financially independent if I wasn't working."

Subject 3 articulated that, more than independence, meaning was derived from the control that meeting instrumental needs provided:

It gives you the freedom to live a comfortable life. I do want financial freedom ultimately." The interviewer reflected "It is part of freedom and exercising control?" To which Subject 3 added "Control over my future."

4.1.2.4 Summary of the instrumental meaning of work

In summary, subjects stated the following in a discussion of the instrumental meaning they ascribed to work:

- Work that provided instrumental meaning only was not experienced as meaningful, per se, possibly because the subjects' remuneration was not of central concern to them.
- The subjects had different views on the importance of the economic and material aspects of work, but concurred that work activity was expected to both meet, and transcend instrumental meaning.
- The subjects, whilst not initially ascribing significant meaning to their instrumental needs being met, on reflection emphasised that the independence and control over their lives emanating from this, were meaningful.

4.1.3 Sense of identity and self-worth

The subjects described a complex experience of work and the meaning ascribed to it with reference to a sense of identity and self-worth. Work was seen as providing critical components of identity for some subjects and a forum in which identity could be expressed. Moreover, the sense of identity expressed through work by these subjects was characterised as autonomous, independent and in control. Further, and almost in contradiction, despite the subjects' experience of work as a forum in which they could assert an independent self, they required validation for the self asserted. In other words, the subjects clearly articulated the importance of the recognition and positive feedback that their work provided to their sense of self. This was described as a meaningful aspect of work.

Recognition was experienced through feedback on performance and achievements. The subjects interviewed emphasised two aspects of their experience of recognition at work. Firstly, they explained that they established performance measures internally and assessed their own performance against

these. Secondly, whilst the subjects set performance measures for themselves, they needed validation from external sources, such as colleagues, superiors or the wider organisation. The subjects explained that this requirement for recognition and validation was linked to a need for their manager's approval. When explored further, they emphasised that the need for approval from their manager was, in some way, linked to their relationship with their father.

In addition, the subjects described their experience of work as one in which they could feel valued, through the value they added to an organisation and the resulting recognition and approval gained. They asserted that their sense of self-worth was related to their experience of worth and value at work. This was experienced as the most meaningful component of their work.

4.1.3.1 *Work as providing important components of identity*

The subjects explained that their work provided core components of their identity. In other words, their work provided a focus for their life, a way of describing themselves and understanding their own and others' identities. This was ultimately experienced as meaningful.

Subject 1 expressed work as defining her identity in the following assertions:

"Work ... defines who I am in a way... It really is a core part of my life, it really is a focus of my life"

"It is the first part of my conversation with anybody ... to find out what work they do. It is the first topic about myself. Work is for me, from that point of view, a definer ... where I get my identity"

Subject 2 emphasised this further in:

"I am very defined by how a teacher is supposed to look and supposed to talk – and I fall right into that. I just slip into it quite comfortably."

"I think everyone is defined by their jobs. The first thing you ask when you meet a stranger is ask 'so what do you do'...I like being defined by what I do. It gives meaning to my life."

"I would say that basically my existence to a large extent is defined by my work. Besides my marriage, it defines me. I live to work, I could never imagine not. "

Although the subjects who were interviewed had professional qualifications and senior titles in their organisations, their sense of identity defined by their work, was not derived from their titles or professional identity, but in the actual work activities they performed. Subject 1 captured the essence of this in the following statement:

"It is not so much being a director. I mean, taking all the arrogance out of it and all of that. I really have set goals in my life defined from a career point of view. The fact that I have become a director right now, and at the age of thirty, I am really proud of that, but I never, never introduce myself like that. I have never derived meaning out of that ... when I talk about what I do, what I physically do daily, what my daily work entails. So yes, you know, there I get my identity."

Rather than defining identity, work was experienced by some subjects as providing a forum for self-expression or assertion of their identity. Moreover, this was experienced as a meaningful component of their work activity.

Subject 6 stressed this in the following:

"My work adds a lot of meaning to my life now...the environment is so good for me right now. It is just the environment I need. It lets me be the personality I am, it lets me be who I am...Work is an integral part of my life actually now."

Subject 1 highlighted that her sense of identity was expressed through her work in the statement:

"I really come out in work."

The importance of work as a forum in which a sense of self could be expressed is emphasised in the assertions: "It lets me be the personality I am, it lets me be who I am" and "I really come out in work".

4.1.3.2 *Work as providing an independent, autonomous self*

In addition, to the subjects describing their work as meaningful in that it facilitated the expression of a sense of self, they stated that this self as an autonomous, independent and in-control self. In some instances, this was different to the sense of self the subjects experienced in other domains of their life.

The subjects explained the self asserted in the work domain as meaningful, because in some instances, this was described as their desired or chosen sense of self.

As Subject 2 aptly put it :

"It is who I want to be."

Subject 3 clearly described the meaning she derived from being able to assert an independent and autonomous self at work in the following statements :

"When I go home it is a totally different mindset, and you have to put on another cap ... and I actually have to fit into everybody else's lives. And my life has to take, not a backseat, but to integrate. And that is very different at work – I can control who I am. At home it is almost like – and I am not unhappy about this ... tradition and the family structure define me."

"I think to a certain extent I am shy. But the way people can talk to me and respond to me, and I can respond back to them, because of my knowledge...I really really have so much respect because I have an opinion and expertise. "

Similarly, citing the difficulty in asserting an independent self in other life domains, Subject 3 stressed the following:

"I am completely in control. (Laughs). Where I am not in family relationships really, not in personal relationships. ... I am very comfortable at work because I am in an environment where I know what I am doing... In my work I feel completely in control "

Subject 2 emphasised a sense of her independent, autonomous and assertive self in the work domain, but expressed the necessity of actively developing this sense of self herself:

"I have got the voice, and I have built myself into that role of being that voice."

The subjects contended that work facilitated the assertion of an independent and autonomous self, which was meaningful. Juxtaposed against this, however, were their assertions that this self-identity could differ from a sense of self in other contexts, such as the sense of self in a family relationship. In this context, a sense of self was derived in relationship with others, and was dependent rather than autonomous, reliant rather than in control. The subjects were conscious of the different self-identities asserted. Furthermore, despite the need to actively develop an independent self-identity, and the meaningfulness of work in facilitating this, subjects emphasised the difficulties of so doing. The complexities inherent in this process are explained in the discussion of recognition, approval and self-worth below.

4.1.3.3 *The importance of recognition and approval*

Despite work being experienced as meaningful in that it facilitated the assertion of an autonomous self, as discussed, the subjects concurred in their description of the importance of gaining positive feedback and recognition through work. Recognition was experienced through positive feedback on successful performance and varied achievements which the subjects perceived as significant, including employment in a well-known organisation, winning an

incentive, promotion, selection to deliver a high profile task and successful completion of a task. This was described as meaningful and important in the subjects' experience of work, and in a sense, validated the independent self asserted.

Subject 3 illustrated the importance of recognition in the following:

"Yah. Recognition. Throughout my career I have always wanted to be in the top team, I have always wanted the overseas incentive trip, I have always wanted to be the next person up for promotion. I have always wanted to be the one who represented us at the next indaba."

Subject 4 emphasised:

"And something else I guess I derived meaning from was being recognised and praised and appreciated. A large part of my lethargy at the moment is that I have none of that...I don't think that any of us – or very few people – are secure enough to work in a certain role, and to work day to day, and keep on being motivated without recognition and encouragement."

Subject 5 stressed:

"I get my feedback predominantly from the patients themselves while I treat them and then from the doctors. And that is always quite nice obviously ... and you do know if you are doing a good job as you end up getting more patients... that is always positive reinforcement."

Finally, Subject 6 underscored the importance of this in the following statement:

In response to the interviewer probing in "*I have a sense that recognition is an important issue for you?*", the subject responded: "*I think it always has been. Recognition is the bottomline for me. Recognition, not dancing around and saying 'Jane has done this'. But people knowing I am doing something.*"

Taking this further, the subjects emphasised two aspects of their experience of recognition at work. Firstly, they highlighted that they set performance measures for themselves against which they evaluated their own performance. At the same time, however, they recognised a need for validation from external sources, such as colleagues, superiors or the wider organisation.

Subject 3's statement highlights this:

“...I think I am my own worst enemy. I set my own goals. I don’t need anyone to impose them on me. I constantly will take the goal posts further and further. I have to feel and know that I am giving it my best shot and I am always benchmarking against other companies or other people in similar roles. I think I do that myself, but then I enjoy the recognition from my peers, or boss or whatever. And that makes me feel like I can move on.” In response to the interviewer probing further in “so there are almost two things going on here. On the one hand that need for achievement quite internal, on the other hand, you mention recognition from other people?” the subject replied, “Yes. Recognition like a pat on the back, recognition financially and recognition from your peers. And that makes me feel as if I am excelling in that role. And that makes me feel like I can move on.”

The subjects clearly described the importance of feedback in shaping their perceptions of their own success.

Subject 6 described this in the following:

“I felt that was missing for the last two years. I was recognised for things that weren’t based on intellect. I was recognised for being able to organise and being able to manage. I wasn’t recognised for having a brain. So I didn’t think I had one”.

Subject 2 highlighted a slightly different experience in that colleagues who had different professional goals did not offer her feedback or recognition that she valued, and she disregarded this, further asserting an autonomous self.

She expressed this as follows:

"I am very independent and I don't base what I have achieved on other people's opinions. Sometimes I do, but generally I don't. Also, their style is so different from mine and they don't always know what I am trying to achieve."

In addition, the subjects experienced recognition as related to a sense of approval. This was described as a critical and meaningful part of work. Yet the subjects experienced their need for approval as problematic and an issue on which they were attempting to gain understanding and resolution. However, the subjects emphasised the current importance of approval for them.

Subject 2 articulated this experience clearly in:

"I think a part of you still seeks your bosses approval no matter what... I am trying to build myself out of that...I really am. I respect him, but I don't need his approval. Those are two different things. And I keep having to talk myself into remembering that."

Subject 4 stressed this in the following:

"And something else I guess I derived meaning from was being recognised and praised and appreciated. A large part of my lethargy at the moment is that I have none of that...I don't think that any of us – or very few people – are secure enough to work in a certain role, and to work day to day, and keep on being motivated without recognition and encouragement. I derive a lot of satisfaction and validation from that. If I could identify the two factors lacking in my current situation, the one is bad management and the other is that lack of approval."

Subject 6 described the impact on her sense of self and perceptions of competence in a situation where she received no recognition and did not have her manager's approval :

"I felt that I never ever met up to the standards of my boss. It was really, really hard for me. I was a complete shell of a person. I had no feelings about anything. I was always too scared to say anything, to do anything, to be anything because I didn't think I could be. And that...that also might have come about in my relationship with my boyfriend. So a combination of two strong men. I think they played off on each other. It broke me – and I let it break me...Needing their approval. Definitely yes. It is something I have noticed and learnt. Approval comes into a lot of aspects of my life. And now I am working on it. And something I am thinking about a lot. Do I always need approval? And in the past yes, definitely without a doubt. I wouldn't have done it unless my boss said it was ok...it became detrimental, because I never had faith in myself..."

The link between the subjects' need to experience the approval of their manager and their sense of self was emphasised by the their words "lethargy", and "I was a complete shell of a person. I had no feelings about anything. I was always too scared to say anything, to do anything, to be anything because I didn't think I could be." The link between recognition, approval and self-worth will be explored in more detail in section 4.1.3.4.

When some of the subjects explored the need for approval at work further, they emphasised that this was, in some way, linked to their relationship with their father. Although this was not an area which all the subjects were comfortable to explore, those that were able to do so, clearly asserted that their relationship with their manager was related in some way to their relationship with their father, and that similar dynamics were at play in their need for approval from an authority figure.

Subject 6 illustrated this in her assertions:

"My boss was a strong fatherly figure ... he was not my father ... but that is how he sees himself. He sees himself as a protector – and that was how my boyfriend saw himself – I needed to be protected. I don't think I do now, but then I thought I did."

In reply to the interviewer's further probe, "I have a sense of an obedient, 'good' girl who took what was given to her? the subject continued, "Completely. And that is because of all the strong men in my life. And that started with my father."

Subject 1 stressed:

My father played such a big part of my life, in all aspects of my life."

Finally, Subject 3, in answer to a clarification from the interviewer "And where do you think this need comes from?", responded:

"I think this comes from my father."

In a sense, the subjects described their work as meaningful in its facilitation of both a forum in which an independent self could be asserted, and the feedback, recognition, and finally, approval, of the assertion of this autonomous self. In almost contradictory terms, they emphasised that their assertion of autonomy in some way required validation from an authority figure.

4.1.3.4 *Work as providing self-worth and feeling valued*

Connected to the sense of validation of an autonomous sense of self, the subjects, further articulated their experience of work as enabling a feeling of being valued and increasing self-worth. A sense of self-worth was related to experiences of feeling productive, making a contribution and adding value in the work context.

Subject 3 highlighted this in the following:

"The other thing was the acknowledgement from the client in terms of really knowing their business and really adding value to their business."

Subject 6 articulated the importance of adding value, and the link between adding value and feeling valued in her assertions:

"It is nice to show you are adding value to the business."

"I feel like I am adding value – that is my main thing, I want to add value to a business. Adding value to make the business work, and being recognised for my skills."

"I don't want to be seen as a cost centre. I don't want to be seen as 'you have to employ her because ...' or 'she works here, find her something to do'. I want 'we need her, we like her, she is adding value to our business'. ... that is what it is for me – that I am worth (pauses) something."

In response to a further prompt by the interviewer, "so in a way you add value to get a sense of feeling valued, valuable and having value?" Subject 6 replied, "Yah. I think that is what it is. Umm. Yah. In the past I felt that I had no value to add, so I thought of myself as valueless and worthless. Now, being able to add value and being recognised for adding value, I feel like I am valuable. It helps me as a person."

"Being worth something has a lot to do with who I am. For a lot of years I didn't think I was worth anything ... I had a degree, but it didn't show my intellect. I didn't have any problemsolving abilities. I couldn't come up with anything which could add to the business ... I never felt in the past that I was adding any value ..."

The subject continued in reply to the interviewer's prompt, "I have a sense that adding value to an organisation links with your own sense of self-worth?" "Self-worth, yah. I think it is very personal to me. I don't always do what I do for the business, I do it for myself."

Being purposeful, contributing to an organisation, adding value and, in so doing feeling valued and having worth, was experienced as a meaningful component

of work, and something which added in a more general sense to feelings about one's self. The subjects articulated this experience of work, and the meaning ascribed to it, as the main component of the meaning they derived from work. This was emphasised in the following articulations where subjects asserted the impact of losing this, should their lives no longer contain a work component:

Subject 1 stated:

"I would never not work. I had an extended holiday once and it drove me mad. I had to force myself to get up in the mornings, as I felt I was not doing anything constructive with my life."

Subject 2 concurred in the following:

"The year after matric I didn't do anything, I took a year off and I ended up just waitressing and working in clothing boutiques...It was the most dreadful year. I had no reason to get up in the mornings. I would force myself...I just hated doing nothing every day. From the first minute of teaching, I never had that...I never rush home because what is there to rush home to? Why do you want to be at home twiddling your thumbs or watching TV? There is nothing you are accomplishing then. From my point of view I think, 'at least I am doing something with my life.'

"I don't think there is any point in my life where I don't think I wouldn't work at all. I don't think so...I have a phobia about becoming one of these people – you are calling yourself a housewife but what are you doing with your morning. You are watching videos, you are sleeping until ten, you are walking around in your pyjamas until one. And I know women like that. And the fear of becoming like that motivates me (laughs) to not want to stay at home." In response to the interviewer's probe, "What, in more detail, would you fear about that?" The subject continued, "I think it is such a waste of a life, such a waste of all your potential"

Subject 5 illustrated this in:

"I wouldn't not work at all...it might not be physio, but I would have to do something. I couldn't just stay at home and look after children. And the house...I would need to use my time productively."

"I like having a purpose to get up in the morning. I don't know if staying at home and having kids might be my purpose."

Subject 4 stated:

"I don't see that I would ever be a full time mother. I might not work in the formal sector or the profession ... I would probably have projects to do, something enterprising for myself."

Finally, Subject 3 emphasised the importance of a sense of self-worth derived from work activity perceived as purposeful in:

"Even if I had babies would I want to work? ... I'd be a nightmare if I didn't work, because I am someone, even if I get tired of it , or whatever, I need to be busy. Busy doing something that I see as productive. I think I would go mad if I had to stay in a house with all these little tots...It is a component of what makes me happy or makes me tick."

4.1.3.5 *Summary on the sense of identity and self-worth*

The discussion of the meaning ascribed to work experienced through the sense of identity and self-worth gained, can be summarised as follows:

- Work provided important components of identity and a forum in which the subjects' identity could be expressed.
- Moreover, through work, the subjects expressed a sense of identity described as autonomous, independent and in control.

- Almost in contradiction, the subjects required approval for the self asserted and emphasised the meaningfulness of the recognition, positive feedback and validation that their work provided.
- If the subjects received this validation and approval, and felt they were adding value in their work activity, they said that they had a sense of self-worth.
- Achieving a sense of identity and self-worth was experienced as the most meaningful component of their work.

The complexity of the meaning of work articulated here once again needs to be emphasised in its interplay between the assertion of autonomous self, and the validation of this self by external sources, and perversely, authority figures. This vital component of the meaning the subjects attribute to work emphasised a multifaceted relationship between dependence and independence, control and reliance.

4.1.4 Social connectedness and relating at work

The subjects described their experience of relationships at work as a source of meaning, albeit that this emanated from contrary experiences, that is, relationships were experienced as both positive and constructive, and negative with high levels of conflict. Learning and growth resulted from both of these experiences. Relationships with colleagues, clients and subordinates were seen as positive in the variety of people with whom the subjects interacted, as a source of learning and growth, and as an important part of the subjects' work experience and meaning. In contrast, and with some incongruity, some relationships in the workplace were experienced as adversarial and as having high levels of conflict. This was experienced as negative and destructive, yet resulted in an independent, autonomous self being asserted which was viewed as meaningful in the subjects' development.

Furthermore, the subjects expressed unrealised expectations around relationships, having anticipated that they would be more positive and constructive than they were experienced as being. The realisation that

relationships did not necessarily represent positive or constructive experiences was seen as a point of learning, growth and maturity. A resulting sense of independence and isolation was expressed. Relationships with other women in the subjects' work team (subordinates or colleagues), or with their male manager, were described as negative or destructive. One subject mentioned her strong disappointment in the lack of a mentor in her workplace. The experience of working in a specialist, niche, and expert role was seen as a response to the negative and destructive experience of relationships within a team.

The experience of relationships at work, and the meaning the subjects ascribed to this, will now be explored in detail using examples cited by the subjects to emphasise the relevant themes asserted.

4.1.4.1 *Experience of positive relationships at work*

Relationships with colleagues, clients and subordinates were regarded as positive because of the variety of people with which the subjects interacted and as a source of learning and growth. These were described as an important part of the subjects' work experience and meaning.

Subject 1 articulated this in:

"They say to me 'you are so lucky', they earn a lot more money than I have ... but they do not interact with people and I do, I interact with different types of people."

Subject 3 asserted that:

"Right now what's giving me any sense of meaning is the people I work with. The people and the commitment that I feel towards them, and the fact that they are loyal and honest and good people, drives me to go to work everyday."

“As I got more senior [my meaning] has been my staff. The people that I have managed, and how I have been able to ... the one thing that my boss said to me was that ‘your managers can thank you for their careers in how they have grown’ and the mentoring I have given them. I enjoy working with people and I have the ability to bring out the best in people. “

“I like the long term relationship part of our business. I think I have good relationships with my clients...It is high level exposure. I think I have good people skills and I get on well with my clients.”

Subject 5 emphasised:

“I think what I find meaningful is the fact that I relate quite well to the students.”

Subject 6 further articulated the importance of relationships in the following:

“I am working with very strong personalities – a balance of male and female – it is great.”

“I like interaction and going to work and seeing people. I miss the people over the weekends.”

Subjects further expressed their interaction with people and relationships as a source of learning, growth and development, and as having meaning.

Subject 5 articulated this in her statement:

“I don’t think I would have matured in the way I have working in another job where I was having less interactions with people and other professionals and so on. It has opened my eyes ...you’re meeting a lot of interesting people...and there is the mentoring role which is meaningful.”

4.1.4.2 *Experience of negative relationships at work*

The subjects' experiences of relationships at work were in some respects complex and contradictory. Although some relationships were experienced as positive and meaningful, as articulated previously, other relationships were characterised by conflict and were experienced as negative.

The subjects asserted that their initial expectations of how they would experience relationships within the workplace had not been realised. The realisation that relationships did not necessarily represent positive or constructive experiences was seen as a point of learning, growth and maturity. A resulting sense of independence and isolation was expressed.

Subject 1 highlighted this in her assertion:

"What also happened, was that my idea of work (that I would make true friends, or other friends, you know some sort of relationships at work) ... those things never happened. Work was very cut throat, or people were very superficial. People were gunning for their own agendas. And that was normal. That was a big maturity and learning that had to take place in my life. And thereafter, work was still important to me, but with a very different focus and angle. My career was still important to me, but I realised I had to look after myself as well."

The subjects further emphasised their experience of relationships in the workplace as being adversarial with high levels of conflict. They experienced this as negative and destructive. Relationships with other women in the subjects' work team (subordinates or colleagues) or with their male manager were often experienced as negative.

Subject 5 illustrated these conflicts in her assertions:

"But there is a problem in that there is only one person I report to, who is not a mentor to me, who can not give me any particular advice – who doesn't really understand me, and doesn't really understand what I want. We don't identify."

"There are challenges with one or two females in the department, they are not very pleasant and they do spoil my day. There is conflict and competitiveness, jealousy. Very negative emotions. I also have a great deal of conflict with my manager – there is a ... mutual lack of respect which is draining and fairly challenging."

Subject 3 concurred in the following:

"It has been really stressful, there have been high emotions. There have been a lot of confrontations between me and my boss."

Subject 6 emphasised :

"In terms of the women I work directly with, and it was the same at Company X – all of the female attorneys experienced it to some extent, all the support staff were women. There must be some kind of ... I don't know what the right word is ... maybe women working in subordinate roles having to work for women ... maybe envy, maybe jealousy...this carried through to my present environment."

Subject 6 further illustrated that, despite these relationships being experienced as negative, they resulted in learning and growth, as a more mature and independent self was evident in the following description:

"I don't like fighting and I don't like adversarial relationships. I am not scared of them, and I will say something if I need to, but I never questioned before. I am learning to question now. I am learning to say 'well, you don't like this ... but why?'. I never said that before."

However, even if relationships within the subjects' immediate work environment were experienced as negative, with little meaning ascribed to them, other relationships in the workplace, with both male and female clients, could still be experienced as positive and meaningful.

Subject 4 emphasised this in:

“But interspersed with all of this, there is a lot of very positive and very validating and very challenging and humorous other people there. A lot of lay people – in marketing, finance ... it is strange that I would have to look outside of my immediate environment for that.”

“It is kind of ironic. Frustration and conflict in my team, and validation outside of it.”

“In terms of women I give advice to there is no conflict.”

Moreover, in addition to the lack of positive, supportive relationships within the workplace, subjects described a strong disappointment in not being able to identify a female mentor within the workplace.

Subject 4 continued and highlighted this in:

In response to a probe from the interviewer, “I have a sense of it being lonely”, the subjects responded: “Not isolated from any females or males. But isolated from any senior women. I think that men relate to women and women relate to women in the workplace differently ... I think there is a huge amount of benefit that I could derive from a slightly older, more experienced, wiser woman. And there isn’t one. There have been one or two women I have an interaction bordering on that kind of interaction. But not that kind of interaction exactly.”

She took this experience further in an examination of why she experienced work as lacking meaning, in the following assertion:

“At the moment, my work has very little meaning for me ... I don’t know what has brought about the transition ... but it has something to do with not having a very good relationship with my manager and really, although trying and trying to find one, not being able to identify a mentor within the organisation.”

In response to the experience of relationships within an immediate team and with the subjects' immediate male manager as negative, and the inability to identify an appropriate mentor, the subjects asserted their independence and preference for working in a specialist, niche, and expert role. It would seem that they felt that expert or specialist roles would minimise the need to work in a team, enable independence and facilitate a positive experience of relationships, in ensuring wider relationships within the organisation, and affirmation gained from the exercise of cognitive expertise and competence.

Subject 5 clearly asserted this in the following:

"I really don't have any particular constructive relationships with the people I work with, in terms of the people in my department. I do have good relationships with my clients – the managers who give me instruction, and I enjoy that kind of interaction... I am not going to say I don't work in a team or that I am not very good at working in a team, but I have always found my role to be quite individualistic and fairly isolated."

Subject 2 emphasised this further in her assertion of an autonomous self, which was meaningful, and relationships, even sound relationships, as secondary to this in:

"I am very independent. You have to work with the other teachers a lot... It is essential you have good relations – and we do have. It makes your life easier, and it is nice. But it is a secondary part."

4.1.4.3 *Summary of social connectedness and relating at work*

The subjects described their experience of relationships at work as a source of meaning that can be summarised in the following:

- Social connectedness and relationships at work were characterised by contrary experiences. In other words, relationships were experienced as both positive and constructive, and negative with high levels of conflict.
- Learning and growth resulted from both of these experiences.

- Relationships with colleagues, clients and subordinates were seen as positive and as a vital part of the subjects' work experience and meaning.
- Relationships with managers and female colleagues were experienced as particularly adversarial and fraught with conflict. The subjects expressed their unrealised expectations of relationships, having anticipated that they would be more positive and constructive than they were actually experienced as being.
- The realisation that social connectedness and relating at work was not always a positive or constructive experience was a point of learning, growth and maturity, resulting in the assertion of an independent, autonomous self which was viewed as meaningful in the subjects' development.

Relationships at work were thus experienced as complex, with some of the subjects ascribing meaning to them, and others describing them as representing negative experiences of work. In the latter instance, the resulting learning and growth and assertion of an independent self were meaningful.

4.1.5 Work as intrinsically satisfying

The subjects emphasised their experience of work as intrinsically satisfying in its provision of intellectual stimulation and a forum to display their cognitive skills. Work was experienced as meaningful if it had components of conceptual reasoning, problem solving, intellectual complexity and strategising. The subjects expressed their experience of growth and learning through cognitive challenges to which they had risen and which they had mastered. A sense of accomplishment and achievement was experienced in this. The subjects emphasised dissatisfaction and a lack of meaning, if their work was not described as intrinsically satisfying.

4.1.5.1 Work as *intrinsically satisfying*

The subjects' assertion that their experience of work was intrinsically satisfying because it provided a challenging cognitive experience and a way of gaining intellectual stimulation is illustrated in the following statements:

Subject 1 described this in:

"I love what I do as it stimulates my mind...it stimulates me intellectually."

Subject 5 highlighted her disappointment if problem solving was not an active part of her role, and the areas that she found satisfying in her statement:

"I think what I find more upsetting is there isn't that ongoing clinical reasoning process. And that is very sad for me. And it happens so much. It is very disillusioning to see that. And you think 'is that going to be me in thirty years time'. When it is so routine and there is no intellectual component...(Research) probably is what I find most stimulating right now. Lots of activity and problem solving."

Subject 3 emphasised:

"Work also keeps me mentally stimulated and in tune with what is going on out there... You can talk to people intelligently."

The subjects went on to describe their experience of work as providing cognitive challenges that resulted in learning and growth, and experiences of achievement and accomplishment.

Subject 2 described this in the following:

"It gives me a sense of accomplishment and a sense of challenge. A lot of challenge. Which you have got to rise to. If I think now what I have achieved in those seven years, what I didn't think I could do. It floors me sometimes."

Subject 5 asserted:

"(Work) has given me a lot of challenges and I have enjoyed that and learnt a lot."

Subject 3 stressed both her competence and her enjoyment of cognitive challenges in the following assertions:

"I know what I am doing. I do it thoroughly, methodically, I do it well. I don't tackle anything stupidly..."

"More and more [meaning is from] the intellectual stimulation."

Subject 4 concurred and asserted:

"[I] hav[e] an enormous amount of comfort in knowing that I am adept at what I do."

However she added that in addition a certain amount of discomfort accompanied the learning and growth :

In response to the interviewer probing, "*I have a sense that your meaning from your work also comes from intellectual stimulation?*", the subject responded: "*Definitely, yah. That is definitely a large part of it. But there is a lot to be said from being comfortable within your job and knowing what you are doing. I guess learning new tasks every day and having new experiences, where I hadn't any experience of a particular area was pretty stimulating, but there was a fair amount of insecurity in that as well.*"

The subjects experienced their work as meaningful if it had components of conceptual reasoning, problem solving, intellectual complexity and strategising. Work that was perceived to be administrative, mundane or routine was seen as lacking in meaning, and subjects had moved or changed roles or organisations to minimise the administrative component in their work. They experienced meaning if their work provided a vehicle for the implementation of their ideas, and as such, work was seen as enabling innovation.

Subject 1 and Subject 2 provided examples of this in the following descriptions :

"At Company X, why I didn't like it, and why I left so quickly, was because it was so administrative. There was no thinking and strategising. And that is what I actually wanted to do. That took me to strategic planning at Company Y, which I found a lot of meaning out of because I was a lot more senior. Doing a lot more conceptual work, and seeing strategies come to life. That was important."

"A phenomenal amount (of admin) – far too much – sometimes the admin's overwhelming and you think 'this isn't what I signed up for. This isn't teaching. The admin work is a killer...Meaning for me personally is far more in the worksheets you develop, the themes you develop, the way you choose to present yourself to the children. You really get to be creative. Generating the idea and the creativity of the idea. And seeing it through."

Subject 3 further emphasised the impact of work not being experienced as intrinsically satisfying in:

"It is becoming more strategic and now that is what is starting to fuel the fire again and make it exciting...If there is not a new challenge, and doing something that you haven't been exposed to before, ...then my personal motivation goes like this (indicated 'down' with her hand)."

Subject 4 took this further, and asserted the lack of this component of meaning, and its impact on her own sense of potential in the following:

"I don't enjoy routineness or mundaneness There is some intellectual stimulation in coming to grips with new legislation and how it influences our promotions or mergers. I guess there is some stimulation, but as I have said, I feel I can do it in my sleep...ideally I would like more variety. I don't think I use my full potential, a lot of what I do is quite administrative and I would prefer not to do that kind of job."

4.1.5.2 Summary of work as being intrinsically satisfying

In summary, subjects emphasised that they experienced the following meaning of work through intrinsic satisfaction:

- Work is experienced as meaningful if it is a means of intellectual stimulation and provided a forum to display cognitive skills, that is if it has components of conceptual reasoning, problem solving, intellectual complexity and strategising.
- It is meaningful if growth and learning are experienced through cognitive challenges that the subjects have risen to and mastered. The resulting sense of accomplishment and achievement was experienced as meaningful.
- Dissatisfaction, and a lack of meaning were emphasised, if work was not described as intrinsically satisfying.

4.1.6 Contributing to and serving society through work

Some subjects briefly expressed that their work had a sense of service and helping others, which was meaningful. However, it must be emphasised that some subjects made no mention of it in the interviews and those that did, did not articulate this theme in detail, with only brief mention made of this experience of work across the interviews. The experience of work as service was linked to subjects asserting their work as not “real” work, in the sense of being drudgery or a difficult chore. Work was not, however, construed as frivolous, trivial or as play, but was experienced more in the sense of voluntarism, something the subjects chose to do. In describing their work as voluntary subjects removed the issue of money and financial aspects from their experience of work, something that has been explored in section 4.1.2.

Taking this further, the subjects experienced work as something that enabled them to make an impact on and contribution to wider society through caring for and helping people. This experience reflected a very traditional sense of “woman’s work”. Although this theme emerged in some interviews, it did not constitute a large part of the interview as indicated by the number of statements presented in the following two sections.

4.1.6.1 *Work not seen as work*

Some subjects clearly asserted that their work was not experienced as “real” work or a job, describing their experience of work more in the sense of a calling, a hobby and a passion. Work was not experienced in the traditional sense of work as drudgery or an unpleasant activity. The subjects described their experience of work as an activity that they did voluntarily, through the exercise of choice.

Subject 1 illustrated this in the following :

“I must also qualify that I don’t see it as ‘work-work’...”

Subject 3 further clarified:

“When I joined Company X, I could almost say that work became my hobby. What I was doing I was personally interested in.”

“I could almost say that work became my hobby and a passion.

Subject 2 elevated her work above these descriptions in her statement:

“I am one of those people who is very fortunate that my work is my calling...it is not my job as such.”

4.1.6.2 *Work as contributing to and serving society*

Although the subjects did not experience their work as work as such, it was not however, construed as frivolous, trivial or as play. In describing their work in the sense of voluntarism, they further expressed their work as enabling them to impact on, and contribute to, wider society.

Subjects 2 emphasised this in the following:

"When I want to contribute to society, I think, I am doing that in my job already...you know, I am impacting on the community."

In response to the interviewer probing, "*can you give me more detail of the meaning you derive from contributing to society?*", the subject replied: "*you just change the perspective of one child, or you just give one child self confidence. I may not be impacting on society, but that child will because of what I said.*"

"I think 'wow [my work] matters...you put your mark on the world."

"You do make a difference."

Subject 3 stressed:

"I think that at the core of what I do, you are having a major impact on people's lives. So the nature of the business that I work in you are having a major impacts in people's lives, and I have never taken that lightly."

The subjects described this contribution to society further by mentioning that in their service to society, they cared for and helped people. This is illustrated in Subject 3's statement:

"I think that the meaning I always derived when I was consulting was helping people and making a good job match where they can thrive and flourish. You feel like you are doing something for society."

Subject 5 stressed the importance of the meaning she derived from this theme in the following:

"From the patient side as well, you know that they are being helped."

"Definitely in my profession meaning comes from helping people, you do see that. So yes, definitely helping people..."

4.1.6.3 *Summary of serving and contributing to society*

In summarising the meaning that subjects derived from their work by serving and contributing to society, the following can be highlighted:

- The subjects emphasised their work as an act of choice or voluntarism.
- Serving and contributing to society was achieved through their work activity.
- They experienced helping people as meaningful.

The meaning that the subjects attributed to work articulated in this theme concurred with stereotyped notions of the meaning of work for women, and provided a sense of what has traditionally been termed “women’s work”. Interestingly, some subjects emphasised this meaning of work only briefly in each interview and many did not voice it at all.

4.1.7 *Shaping and impacting the world through exercise of power and authority*

The subjects referred to their experience of power within their work as multifaceted and somewhat contradictory. Exerting authority, expressed as control, influence and having a voice was described as meaningful, although subjects showed discomfort and concern about the experience of what the interviewer described as “power”. They preferred to use other descriptors, such as “responsibility” and “accountability” in their description of experiences, emphasising the use of influence within the boundaries of authority. Other subjects did not experience control or influence in their workplace, describing experiences of powerlessness. This experience of powerlessness was accompanied by strong, emotional reactions. However, if the subjects were able to overcome this sense of powerlessness, they experienced growth and learning, which was meaningful.

This will now be explored in detail using illustrations from the subjects to emphasise the themes asserted.

4.1.7.1 *The experience of exerting authority*

The subjects expressed the exercise of authority in the control of their work environment as meaningful. They also described their knowledge and cognitive skill as a source of authority in the control and influence they exercised.

Subject 3 illustrated both her initial discomfort at this experience, and then the meaning the exercise of authority has for her, in her assertion:

"Even in my personal relationships, my boyfriend says that we often bang heads because I am so used to issuing an instruction. Well, I don't think I am really like that, I try to get people to buy in. But ultimately I know I am going to win because I am the boss (laughs)...I think within me there is a bossy side, and I like to be in control, I like to be leading, I do like my ideas to be implemented. Although I hope I am more facilitative than that. I like to lead. I don't like to be lead."

Subject 2 stressed her experience of control in a similar vein, and said that it was tempered by perceptions that authority should be exercised in a positive way in:

"My personality is that I like to control. If I can't get people to act the way I want them to act, I find it very stressful (laughs). I always think 'how can I force them to ...' and then I have to think again 'no that's not it'.

In exploring the meaning she derived from the exercise of her authority, Subject 3 emphasised the following:

"I am completely in control (laughs). Where I am not in family relationships and not in my personal relationship. There you are at the top of the hierarchy – in your little world anyway...I am very comfortable at work because I am in an environment where I know what I am doing. Sometimes in my relationship I think 'Why do I feel like this?' In my work environment I feel completely in control...Family and friends – those things are actually much harder because

there is an emotional component. Work is factually and business driven. It is actually much easier...I don't feel vulnerable.”

Subject 2 asserted her authority, and an independent self, which she found meaningful in the following:

“It gives me a feeling of accomplishment that I am not just a ‘yes man’. I tend to – when it is appropriate, or when I can – to disagree. I don’t just keep quiet which a lot of people do”

Subject 3 however, emphasised, the importance of the exercise of this authority and influence, not merely through her positional authority, but through the exercise of knowledge and cognitive skill in the following assertions:

“I try to be well prepared, get the issues on the table, already thought around the issues and lead the discussion in that way...To try to be part of the thought leadership and putting issues on the table, and try to bring creative solutions, and influence your colleagues.”

“I have quite a confrontational side ... I am not afraid in the workplace to go against the grain. I am not afraid to speak my mind. But I never speak my mind without having researched it well. And if it is a contentious issue and I know that I am going to come up against resistance, I make sure I have all my facts in a row. It irritates me in the workplace, people who are just ‘yes’ people and take it because it is the popular thing to do. I think that I have at times definitely butted heads with people and stood my ground...but I make sure I have my facts to back it up.”

The subjects illustrated, then, that they were comfortable in the exercising of control and influence within the boundaries of authority. Authority was described as resulting, not merely from a position or role, but from a sense of knowledge and expertise that was used as a point of influence.

4.1.7.2 *Discomfort regarding the exercise of power*

In the previous discussion the subjects emphasised their sense of comfort and even the meaning, from being assertive in an act of influence and authority. Other subjects did not concur. They contended that exercising power was perceived as negative and something that could lead to rejection or disapproval.

Subject 1 highlighted this in:

“One of the things about me is that I just don’t know how to say ‘no’. I take on a lot of responsibility and never say no, which can be a bad thing. But that has a lot to do with my personality. Assertiveness is something, which I have learnt through work and through my career. I had to graduate to that. The difference between being assertive and being ugly.”

Despite her general assertions to the contrary, Subject 2 explained the complexity of exercising authority in her statement:

“Every time I am determined not to be a ‘yes man’. But every time there is a whole dilemma, how do I do it without being offensive. How do I do it without being so meek that I am apologising for doing it? It always causes levels of discomfort and fear. I don’t know why, it is a ridiculous fear. They won’t accept me for saying this.”

The need for approval was discussed at length earlier in section 4.1.3. The above assertion possibly ties in with that need.

Even if the subjects stated that authority, control, influence and having a voice were meaningful, they expressed concern and discomfort about labeling this as ‘power’. Their experience was either not recognised as being an experience of power, or they preferred to use other descriptors such as “responsibility” and “accountability”. This highlighted the subjects’ emphasis that influence and authority can be used in a manner perceived to benefit others.

Subject 2 explained her lack of recognition of her power as follows:

In response to the interviewer's probe "you mention authority in reference to that child. Being a teacher is a position of authority, and has quite a lot of power attached. Can you explore that?" the subject responded, "I think sometimes I don't see that perspective ... I forget often that they see me as powerful. I keep thinking, surely they see me as their loving teacher. I forget that a lot of them see me as powerful and I don't think of myself as that way. I don't experience power a lot."

Subject 3 acknowledged that her initial response to her experience of power would have been denial, but in examining the experience further, she expressed the meaningfulness of power in her work experience as follows:

In response to the interviewer probing "In your roles, as you have gone up the ranks in all your promotions, I have a sense that you have gained more and more power. Can we explore that?", the subject replied, "I wouldn't say, if you just asked me that blandly, I wouldn't say 'yes and that is meaningful.' Then I think ... even in my personal relationships, my boyfriend says that we often bang heads because I am so used to issuing an instruction. Well, I don't think I am really like that, I try to get people to buy in. But ultimately I know I am going to win because I am the boss (laughs)...I think within me there is a bossy side, and I like to be in control."

The subjects said they had difficulty using authority and influence and resisted naming their experience as power, preferring to soften it using other, more acceptable, comfortable descriptors, such as 'responsibility', 'accountability' and 'empowering'. Subject 6 described this in:

"Control is quite a hard word. Definitely empowering, very much empowerment ... I very much believe in the empowerment of people and I like to empower people. Control is not the word I want to use, but it has the idea, it does have that. But it is an uncomfortable word. I don't like the word control at all – it

doesn't sit well with me. It is in charge. Softer than control. I prefer responsibility. Yah. Responsible and accountable.”

Subject 5 concurred in her statement:

“Looking at my role at the university right now with exams, you've got a lot of power (laughs). Fortunately it doesn't all rest on my shoulders because I wouldn't enjoy that. And in clinical work, in private practice, you do (have power) as you are making decisions with physiotherapy being a first line practitioner, you are making decisions as to whether to see this or that doctor. So there is a certain amount of power...to me, I see it more as responsibility than power...Responsibility to another person, to a patient, rather than power. To use my knowledge to their benefit.” In reply to the interview probing further in “I sense that you are not comfortable in seeing it as a powerful role”, the subject confirmed, “No. No. I definitely see it more as responsibility.”

Subjects expressed difficulty in the use of authority and influence, resisting this being described as ‘power’ which they perceived as having negative connotations, and something which may result in disapproval. Subjects described their experience of influence and authority in a positive sense, with the focus on making an impact on others to their benefit. They derived meaning from this.

4.1.7.3 *Experience of powerlessness at work*

Adding to an intricate experience of power at work, and juxtaposed against the meaningful experiences discussed, some of the subjects described a sense of powerlessness at work. Their experience of powerlessness was associated with their relationship with their manager and men whom they experienced as powerful in the workplace, who blocked or controlled them, rendering them as powerless. This experience was highlighted as being negative and evoking strong emotional responses. The subjects asserted that this sense of powerlessness was in some way related to their relationship with their father. In

cases where the subjects had been able to overcome this sense of powerlessness, they emphasised growth and learning, which was meaningful.

Subject 2 articulated this in:

"If the executive sees an event differently to how you do – and you don't have the power to disagree, and people not wanting to listen, to step out of themselves and see it from a different angle. That is stressful."

Subject 5 asserted this further in:

"I found strong men... not strong men ... I don't even think the word powerful is the word. Men who expected women to know their place, without saying it. Women are secretaries, even in the legal profession, a women is not a lawyer, a women is a secretary."

Subject 3 highlighted the following:

"I don't think it is the status that gives me meaning. In this day and age, knowledge is power. It is exposure that gives me meaning. I was frustrated before as there was someone on top of me who wouldn't disseminate information down... The exposure I have had in the last four months has been so exciting. So mentally stimulating, whereas he provided none of that. He kept it. He was disempowering me because I didn't have the information they were looking for."

Subject 4 explained her experience and her emotional reaction in her statement:

"I would prefer to have more control over my own development and more control over what was going to happen in the future. But there is a problem in that there is only one person I report to...who doesn't understand me, and who doesn't really understand what I want. We don't identify. Ideally, I would like, not to be autonomous, but to report to someone who gives me more freedom."

Subject 4 replied, in response to the interviewer's probe, "*almost a sense of powerlessness?*" "*yes, that is how I feel.*" The interviewer continued, "*although on the one hand you wield a lot of power in the advice you give and the managers you serve?*", to which the subject responded, "*that's right. There is a bit of incongruity in that. I am the one person who would draw up the documents for a very valuable deal. And who the vice presidents would come to for advice. Yet that is not reflected...and I feel demotivated by that, angered by that and fairly resentful of that.*"

The experience of powerlessness was emphasised as negative in the above in "angered by that and fairly resentful of that" and "frustrated", and, in other assertions, as explained below.

Subject 2 stressed her emotional reaction in:

"Such anger, that you are not being heard. That you are not getting through. To despair, maybe sometimes, that things are not going as you want them to."

The subjects emphasised their experience of powerlessness as an experience that had played itself out in other aspects of their life and was linked to their relationship with their father. A sense of powerlessness was also explained as something in which they may have been complicit. Self-awareness, learning and growth had been a source of asserting power and overcoming this sense of powerlessness.

Subject 6 explained this as follows:

"In my life I have always, something I have picked up, I have a lot of respect for my elders because that is how I have been brought up. Mister and missus, aunty and uncle – that is how my life is. My father is obviously a strong part of my life. If someone is older than me, particularly if it is a man, I have always tended to withdraw. So in practice that is what I did. Now there is a man, and I am quite intimidated by him, like I have been in the past, and I am trying hard not to be intimidated by him." In reply to the interviewer's probe "so other parts

of your life play out in the workplace...?", the subject continued, "Yes. It is always men, and I always bow down to my father, the boss and my boyfriend...I am someone who will play the damsel in distress. I have had to learn to stand on my own two feet... Saying I can do this, and knowing that I can. Before I didn't know and didn't even want to know that I could."

"I never had faith in myself. I never did anything unless my boss said it was okay. He was a strong fatherly figure. He was not my father. I had lunch with him recently and he made a comment about my eating habits, which he always had, and he said 'that was so paternalistic.' But that is how he sees himself. He sees himself as a protector. And that was how my boyfriend saw himself. I needed to be protected. I don't think I do, but I thought then I did."

4.1.7.4 *Summary of shaping and making an impact on the world through the exercise of power and authority*

In summary, the following can be said about the subjects' multifaceted experience of shaping and making an impact on the world through the exercise of power and authority:

- Exerting control and influence and having a voice was described as meaningful by some subjects if it was seen as acting within the boundaries of authority, and combined with cognitive expertise and knowledge.
- Other subjects explained that they had difficulty asserting themselves and having a sense of authority because of concerns about losing approval if they exerted this.
- The subjects had difficulty exercising "power", which was viewed negatively. They preferred to use other descriptors, such as "responsibility" and "accountability" in their description of experiences, emphasising the use of influence within the boundaries of authority and for the benefit of others.
- Other subjects did not experience control or influence in their workplace and described their experiences of powerlessness, resulting in emotional reactions. However, if the subjects did manage to overcome this sense of

powerlessness, they experienced growth and learning, which was meaningful.

4.2 INTEGRATION OF THE RESULTS AND LITERATURE

4.2.1 General findings on the meaning of work and emerging themes

The findings of the phenomenological study presented above provided a detailed description of the meaning of work for the sample of South African graduate women who were interviewed. The results of the study showed that the women's experience and the meaning they assigned to work were diverse and, in line with Chester and Grossman's (1990) assertion, not all themes were represented in the experience of all the subjects. However, thematic concerns that were common to subjects did emerge and were described in detail. The diversity of the subjects' experiences illustrated Natale et al.'s (1995) assertions that the meaning of work was highly individualised and derived from direct and indirect influences and connotations. In addition, the subjects' descriptions concurred with Ciulla's (2000) findings that work has held a variety of cognitive meanings and elicited a variety of emotions providing meaning that met complex needs. Furthermore, whilst the meaning ascribed to work spanned human experience and was subjective and individual, it was shown also as being influenced by historical, socioeconomic and philosophical influences, as emphasised by the MOW International Research Team's (1987) findings. This resulted in the emergence of themes on the meaning of work that were common to and shared by the subjects.

Broadly, then, the meaning ascribed to work by the sample of women interviewed can be described as both a subjective and shared phenomenon, located within personal, psychological, social and philosophical domains corroborating the conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women asserted in section 2.2.

The results illustrated the confluence of the general model of the meaning of work presented in section 2.1.5 and the contemporary conceptualisation of the

meaning women ascribe to work asserted in 2.2.1.2 and 2.2.2 to 2.2.7. The subjects' descriptions of the meaning of work were largely anchored in the theoretical basis provided by these models. The general, predominantly male-centric, model identified distinctive concepts explicating the meaning of work applicable to the thematic concerns voiced by the subjects. The contemporary conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women further developed and refined concepts, more accurately explaining the findings for the subjects interviewed. The results of this study will be broadly explored against the framework provided by these models, before a detailed integration of findings is presented.

The results of this study confirmed the broad themes asserted in the general model of the meaning of work presented in section 2.1.5. That is, subjects articulated the following distinctive themes described in the literature reviewed:

- the meaning of work as subjective, objective and fluid (Ciulla, 2000; MOW International Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Thompson, 2000)
- work as transcending instrumental needs (Astin, 1984; Ciulla, 2000; MOW International Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Thompson, 2000)
- work as providing a sense of identity and self-worth (Ciulla, 2000; Kelly, 1995; MOW International Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Naughton, 1995; Ransome, 1996; Thompson, 2000)
- work as providing a sense of social connectedness and relatedness (Ciulla, 2000; MOW International Team, 1987; Natale, Sora and O'Neill, 1995; Ransome, 1996)
- work as intrinsically satisfying (Astin, 1984; Ciulla, 2000)
- work as contributing to the greater good (Astin, 1984; Naughton, 1995; Thompson, 2000)
- work as impacting on and shaping the world (Arendt, 1958; Ciulla, 2000)

The research findings also upended the female mythology and stereotypes articulated in 2.2.1. The subjects located the activity of work visibly outside of the home, in a paid and public domain. Moreover, the meaning of work asserted did not emphasise components of meaning traditionally ascribed to women, namely those of instrumentality, social relatedness or service. These

contributed only in part to the meaning of work articulated and were described as being multifaceted, as will be illustrated in the integrated description to follow. According to the subjects in this study, the sense of identity and self-worth, intrinsic satisfaction and ability to impact on the world through the exercise of power and authority are essential components of the meaning ascribed to work, despite these components having been marginalised in traditional conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women. In so doing, the subjects confirmed Keightley's (1995) assertions that the stereotypes found in traditional conceptualisations are misleading and inaccurate, and do not coincide with women's real experiences.

The subjects emphasised that work was linked to primacy, if not exclusivity, in the subjects' meaning systems. Even if their current work was not described as such, their work experience in general was described as meaningful and essential to their functioning. As explored in detail in the section below, the research findings were principally congruent with the contemporary conceptualisations of the meaning women ascribe to their work as presented in chapter 2. Faludi's (1992) emphasis that women sought diverse experiences and meanings through their professional and working lives was evidenced by the complexity and volume of data the subjects presented in response to the research question. The research findings of Bell and Nkomo (2001), Chester and Grossman (1991), Orbach and Eichenbaum, (1987), Rimm (1999) and Stratham et al. (1988b) were largely corroborated. However, the research gave voice to findings that investigated, extended and unpacked the literature articulated, and in so doing spoke to the subjects' complex, textured and multifaceted experience of the meaning they gave to their work .

Against these broad statements, an integration of the research findings and the conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women will now be undertaken.

4.2.2 The activity of ascribing meaning to work and the expectation of meaningful work

The subjects described work as an essential, yet not inherently meaningful, activity for women, indicating congruence with the literature that work is the primary adult activity (MOW International Research Team, 1987) and Freud (cited in Astin, 1984) and Gilligan's (1997) statement that the ability to work be regarded as one component of a functional adult . The subjects confirmed Natale et al. 's (1995, p. 20) assertion that work offers a context in which human beings locate their adult lives and as such represents "the laboratory in which we live out our life project".

In addition, the subjects concurred with Thompson's (2000) assertions that work was an activity to which meaning had actively to be ascribed and, while all work had the potential for some meaning to be ascribed to it, not all work activities were experienced as meaningful. The subjects emphasised that the act of being able to ascribe meaning did not always follow from work activity.

However, they emphasised that whatever the meaning they currently derived from their work, they had an expectation of being able to ascribe meaning to their work activity. This was described as an important, if not an exclusive component of being able to constitute "the memory of [their] lives" as suggested by Arendt (1958, p. 69).

Moreover, the subjects concurred with findings of the MOW Research Team (1987, p. 12) that "the meaning of work is closely related to the meaning of life in modern society". The volume and depth of data provided by subjects in response to the research question emphasised an expectation that their work provide meaning, even if this was currently not the case.

Furthermore, as suggested by both Bell and Nkomo (2001) and Rimm (1999), subjects emphasised that the primacy of meanings ascribed to work may vary across time. They described the meaning they gave to their work as fluid and changeable, in line with Thompson's findings (2000) that the immanence of meanings was changeable.

Finally, the subjects emphasised that work was not the only domain from which they derived meaning, confirming Bell and Nkomo's (2001) findings that women derive meaning from various domains in their life.

In summary then, the research findings concurred with the following conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women that were reviewed (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Chester & Grossman, 1991; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b) regarding the meaning of work for women in asserting:

- Work as the primary adult activity for women.
- Work is an activity that is not inherently meaningful but one to which meaning needs to be actively ascribed.
- The expectation that the work activity should be meaningful, and the importance of meaningful work.
- The meaning of work and the wider life meaning intersecting.
- The changeability and fluidity of the meaning of work.
- The importance of other domains of meaning.

4.2.3 Women's meaning of work as transcending economic and instrumental needs

The subjects in this study generally concurred with the research cited (Ciulla, 2000; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b; Thompson, 2000) that the meaning they ascribe to work transcends economic or instrumental needs. However, in their description of the meaning of work from an economic, material or instrumental perspective, the subjects provided a multilayered narrative that supported the literature reviewed and showed that some meaning was in fact derived through the meeting of instrumental needs.

If at the outset of the interview subjects described their experience of work as being without meaning, this was qualified in all cases, in that it met the subjects' instrumental needs through earning a salary. Where the subjects' experiences and meaning differed from the literature reviewed, is that if they did not experience their work as meaningful in any other domain, economic or material

factors money were experienced as meaningful, and instrumental meaning assumed primacy.

In additional findings not congruent with the literature reviewed, the economic or material components of work were not significant (Ciulla, 2000; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b; Thompson, 2000) and the subjects expressed varying experiences of whether financial remuneration was experienced as meaningful. Some subjects described it as important in providing meaning, whilst others emphasised that meaning was derived from other factors and they would continue their work even if they were not paid to do so.

In general, the instrumental aspect of their work was not described as central to the meaning the subjects ascribed to work since they were employed in professional roles and remunerated accordingly. On further exploration, the subjects who had emphasised that their work lacked meaning in its meeting of instrumental needs only, described the resulting financial independence and sense of control as meaningful. This corroborated Stratham et al.'s (1988b) more general finding that work provided autonomy and control for women. This study emphasised economic, material and instrumental meaning as significant, not in its provision of meaning in this domain alone, but in its facilitation of independence, autonomy and control. These have been emphasised as significant thematic concerns of the meaning of work for women, both throughout this study and in the literature reviewed.

In review then, the literature was confirmed by the research findings in some instances, but the results reflected a more multilayered exposition of the economic, material or instrumental meaning of work, that is, as suggested by the literature cited (Ciulla, 2000; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b; Thompson, 2000):

- Work that provided instrumental meaning only was not experienced as meaningful, per se, possibly because the subjects remuneration was not of central concern to them.

- The subjects' expectations were that the meaning of work both meets and transcends the instrumental.

However, in findings not suggested in the literature reviewed the subjects,

- differed in their assertion of the importance of the economic and material aspects of work
- who initially did not ascribe significant meaning to the instrumental needs being met, on reflection emphasised that the resulting independence and control were meaningful

These above two statements corroborated more general findings in the conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women, namely, that it provided a sense of autonomy and control (Stratham et al., 1988b).

4.2.4 Women's experiences and meaning of work as providing a sense of identity and self-worth

The findings of the research study presented detailed and lengthy descriptions of the meaning of work derived from its provision of a sense of identity and self-worth. The subjects felt that significant meaning for them related to this thematic concern, confirming the following statement by a Hindi nun, Mata (cited in Austin, 1984, p. 117) that:

The merit of work lies not so much in its results, but in the opportunity it affords the seeker to manifest, prove, demonstrate, fulfill, and express the ... attributes of her being.

In line with Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) assertions the subjects emphasised that work provided both crucial components of identity and a forum for expressing an independent, autonomous self. Chester and Grossman's (1990) statement that work was less central and important to woman's definition of self and personal identity compared with that of men, was not substantiated. On the whole subjects did not concur with literature cited, namely that their sense of identity was derived in connection with others (Chodorow, 1978; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). However, difficulties in asserting differentiation and separateness (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987) were implied in the complexity of

subjects' articulations on the meaning ascribed to work with reference to a sense of identity and self-worth. The research findings presented confirmed the broad assertions in the literature reviewed (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Chester & Grossman, 1991; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Rimm; 1999 and Stratham et al. , 1988b) and developed these further in a detailed and intricate presentation of the meaning derived from the sense of identity and self-worth that work provided to the subjects.

A detailed discussion is now presented below in which the research findings and literature cited is integrated across four themes.

4.2.4.1 *Work as providing essential components of identity*

Rimm (1999) and Bell and Nkomo (2001) assertions that work provided important components of identity and a forum in which identity could be expressed, were supported in this study. The subjects emphasised Chester and Grossman's (1990) finding that work fulfilled a key role in the development of a woman's sense of self and personal identity. The subjects described work as something that provided a focus for their life, a way of describing themselves and understanding their own and others' identities. Some of the subjects confirmed McKenna's finding(1997, cited in Ciulla, 2000) that a woman's identity is tied to her job, and that constructing an identity outside of work is difficult. Rather than defining identity, work was experienced by other subjects as providing a forum for self-expression or assertion of their identity. This was experienced as a meaningful component of their work activity.

Elaborating on this sense of identity, the subjects confirmed Bell and Nkomo's (2001) assertion that work provided a forum for women to assert an independent, autonomous and in-control self. Similarly, the subjects' descriptions were congruent with the findings of Stratham et al. (1988b) in their emphasis on autonomy and control as the critical components of identity derived from, and maintained through work.

In some instances the subjects said that this was different from the sense of self experienced in other domains of their life. To some extent these experiences outside of a work domain corroborated literature previously cited that a woman's sense of identity was derived in relation to others (Chodorow, 1978; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). The subjects explained that their identity may be constituted through different domains. Whilst work was described as an important forum to assert an autonomous, independent self, the subjects stressed that they derived other components of identity from other domains.

4.2.4.2 *The importance of recognition and approval*

Despite the need to actively develop an independent self-identity, and the meaningfulness of work in facilitating this, the subjects emphasised the difficulties in so doing. This was congruent with Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) findings in this regard. Although the subjects described work as a forum in which they could assert an independent self, they required validation for this self assertion. That is, they clearly articulated the importance of recognition and positive feedback that their work provided to validate their sense of self.

Taking this further, the subjects emphasised two aspects of their experience of recognition at work. Firstly, they highlighted that they set performance measures for themselves, and evaluated their own performance against which they evaluated themselves. At the same time, however, they recognised a need for validation from external sources, such as colleagues, superiors or the wider organisation. As such, the subjects in this study concurred with research that a sense of self and self-worth are largely derived through positive feedback from others (Keightley, 1995). They emphasised that this requirement for recognition and validation, linked to a need for their manager's approval which was in some way linked to their relationship with their father.

These findings confirmed Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) assertions that women need recognition from outside sources, because this creates visibility and assurance, and protects and fosters their new, independent sense of self.

Additionally, the subjects experienced recognition as related to a sense of approval. This was described as a critical and meaningful part of work. The subjects experienced their need for approval as problematic and an issue on which they were attempting to gain understanding and resolution. However, they emphasised the current importance of approval.

In a sense, the subjects articulated their work as meaningful in its facilitation of a forum in which an independent self could be asserted, and the feedback, recognition and finally, approval, of the assertion of this autonomous self. Subjects, in almost contradictory terms, emphasised that their assertion of autonomy required, in some way, validation from an authority figure. Although not supported by literature cited, subjects emphasised that this search for approval had its genesis, in some way, with their father.

Subjects linked this to a need for approval, acknowledgement and to be noticed. Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987) have established this need for validation as a process through which women are compensated for the emotional reaction accompanying their assertion of an independent self. The complexity of this is encapsulated in the following:

Every woman is aware of the potential she has to arouse feelings of abandonment or betrayal in others, when she lets it be known she is acting autonomously. A sense of danger and impermissibility often pervades such acts on the parts of women. Not only is a woman aware of the ways in which her activities and desires cause pain to others, she may also be in some stress about acting on such personal desires, believing there is something wrong in her wanting to take such initiatives(Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987. p 68).

4.2.4.3 *Work as providing a sense of self-worth and value*

The research findings were congruent with Chester and Grossman's (1990) assertions that the sense of identity derived from their work contributed to perceptions of self-worth and self-efficacy. The subjects also described their

experience of work as one in which they felt a sense of self-worth and being valued, through the value they added to an organisation and the resulting recognition and approval gained. These descriptions confirmed Faludi's (1992) emphasis that a sense of self-worth and purpose were meaningful components of work, and Keightley's (1995)'s statement that work provides the possibility of contributing to society's functioning.

For the most part, the subjects did not concur with Bell and Nkomo's (2001) finding, that after a period of focusing on career, a more personal and family orientation may assume higher primacy in defining identity. However, it was confirmed that an important component of a woman's sense of self is derived from work, and the prospect of giving up work threatens this sense of identity (Rimm, 1999). The subjects were unequivocal in asserting that they did not believe that a personal or family orientation would define identity and displace the primacy of the meaning they derived from work because in some way, they viewed a family role as less purposeful than a work role. This may have resulted from the subjects' career stage, marital status, with only one subject married, and the fact that none of the subjects had children. As such, work constituted a primary source of both identity and self-worth.

4.2.4.4 *Summary of sense of identity and self-worth*

In summation then, the research findings generally confirm the conceptualisation of the meaning provided through the sense of identity and self-worth work as set out in the literature reviews (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Chester & Grossman, 1991; Faludi, 1992; Keightley, 1995; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Rimm; 1999; Stratham et al. 1988b).

- The subjects substantiated that they derived meaning from work in that it provided them with a sense of identity and self-worth and that this was significant.
- The subjects provided detailed and complex articulations, and emphasised the interplay between work as providing components of an independent sense of self, the forum to assert this autonomous self, and the provision of an intricate process to validate this self.

- According to the subjects, the validation and approval they received at work had an impact on their sense of self-worth.

However, the findings did not confirm Bell and Nkomo's (2001) assertion that over time the primacy of women's sense of identity derived from work would be replaced by an identity derived from a personal and family orientation. Possibly, as highlighted by Rimm (1999), the self-worth experienced by the subjects was linked to their sense of identity derived from work. As such, giving up work threatened this sense of identity and self-worth, and was not something they were prepared to do. The subjects in this study asserted that despite their personal and family orientation, they would continue to work, and so retain the sense of identity and self-worth they derived from this domain.

4.2.5 Women's experiences and meaning of work as attributed to social connectedness and relatedness

Rimm's (1999) emphasis on the meaning of work derived from social connectedness and relatedness was substantiated in the subjects' descriptions of their experience of relationships at work as a source of meaning despite the fact that this meaning emanated from contrary experiences. This extended and in some ways contradicted the research of Keightley (1995), Rimm (1999) and Stratham et al. (1988b) that characterised relationships as both collegial, collaborative, positive and constructive, and negative with high levels of conflict. However, the subjects asserted that learning and growth resulted from both of these experiences. In essence the research cited dealt with only a component of the subjects' description of the meaning resulting from social connectedness and relatedness.

Gilligan's (1997) assertion that women have a strong orientation towards relationships and interdependence, and Chester and Grossman's (1990) findings that indicated the importance of the relational aspects of work for women, were confirmed by various experiences described by the subjects in the study. Similarly, Stratham et al.'s (1988b) articulation that women derive

meaning from bonding that occurs in work relationships, was, in some instances, corroborated.

Despite these experiences being described as positive and meaningful, subjects did not confirm, as articulated by various researchers, that their sense of identity was derived in relation to others (Chodorow, 1978; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). Even if learning and growth resulted from social connectedness and relatedness, this was not, in any event described as a source of identity.

Furthermore, the subjects asserted unrealised expectations of relationships, having anticipated that they would be more positive and constructive than they were experienced as being. This to some extent substantiated the findings of Chester and Grossman (1990), Gilligan (1997) and Stratham et al. (1988b) regarding women's focus on relationships and interdependence. The distinction emphasised in this study is that in some instances these expectations were not met in reality. Moreover, the realisation that relationships did not necessarily represent positive or constructive experiences was seen as a point of learning, growth and the opportunity to assert an autonomous self.

The subjects corroborated Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) emphasis that women-to-women relationships in the workplace were loaded with psychological significance which transcended shared professional responsibilities, and were the source of negative emotions such as feelings of competition, envy and jealousy. This study also confirmed Firth-Cozens and West's (1991) findings that women try to hide competitiveness and suppress it in expressions of sisterhood because they experience these feelings as unacceptable.

The findings of this study were congruent with Kahn (1984) and Bell and Nkomo's (2001) assertions that women's experiences of social connectedness and relatedness were influenced by the lack of role models and absence of reference groups. This served to highlight the distance, isolation and loneliness experienced by women. Furthermore, congruent with Stratham et al.'s (1988b) assertions, the subjects described relationships as asymmetrical with power

differentials as a source of much conflict with their male managers, which were experienced as negative.

In conclusion, the following is a summary of the conceptualisation of social connectedness and relatedness, and the results of this study:

- Social connectedness and relationships at work were characterised by contrary experiences. That is, relationships were experienced as both positive and constructive in line with the findings of Chester and Grossman (1990), Gilligan (1997) and Stratham et al.(1988b) , and negative with high levels of conflict as suggested by Firth-Cozens and West's (1991) and Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987).
- The subjects expressed unrealised expectations of relationships, having anticipated that they would be more positive and constructive than they really were. These expectations are congruent with research that stressed women's relationship focus (Chester & Grossman, 1990; Gilligan, 1997; Stratham et al., 1988b).
- Although not evidenced by the literature reviewed, learning and growth resulted from both positive and negative experiences within relationships.
- While relationships with colleagues, clients and subordinates were seen as positive and a vital part of the subjects' work experience and meaning, research suggesting that subjects derived a sense of identity through relationships (Chodorow, 1978; Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Gilligan, 1997; Miller, 1986; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987), was not confirmed.
- Relationships with male managers and female colleagues were experienced as particularly adversarial and fraught with conflict, as suggested by Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987) and Stratham et al. (1988b).
- The realisation that social connectedness and relating at work were not always a positive or constructive experience was a point of learning, growth and maturity, resulting in the assertion of an independent, autonomous self which was viewed as meaningful in the subjects' development.

4.2.6 Women's experiences and meaning attributed to work as intrinsically satisfying

According to Astin (1984), women could gain satisfaction in the accomplishment of tasks and the achievement of goals. Rimm's study (1999) also demonstrated that a significant source of meaning for women was its sense of challenge, fulfillment and the creativity it enabled. This was the experience and meaning for all subjects in the study, who described intrinsic satisfaction in work's provision of intellectual stimulation and a forum to display their cognitive skills. Work was experienced as meaningful if it had components of conceptual reasoning, problem solving, intellectual complexity and strategising. The subjects described their experience of growth and learning through cognitive challenges to which they had risen and mastered. This gave them a sense of accomplishment and achievement.

This confirmed Bell and Nkomo's (2001) assertion that women derive meaning from work because it satisfies ambition, provides new challenges, enables leaving a mark on the world, and provides a forum in which to act independently and in control. There was also evidence to support Stratham et al. 's (1988b) assertion that women experience the desire to be recognised for their professional capabilities and performance, influence and their ability to make things happen.

Finally, the subjects did not confirm Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) findings that asserting competence is inherently difficult because it has not been part of the understanding of what it means to be a woman. Although research had suggested that women struggle to reconcile concepts of femininity with accomplishment achievement and success (Horner,1968, cited in Gilligan, 1997), there was no evidence of this in the subjects' assertions. If anything, the evidence presented above, suggests that the subjects easily reconciled these concepts.

The following integration of research findings and conceptualisation of intrinsic satisfaction can be summarised below:

- Work was described as meaningful in its provision of intellectual stimulation and providing a forum to display the subjects' cognitive skills if it had components of conceptual reasoning, problem solving, intellectual complexity and strategising. This substantiates Astin (1984) and Rimm's (1999) findings.
- The subjects experienced growth and learning through cognitive challenges to which they had risen and which they had mastered. The resulting sense of accomplishment and achievement was experienced as meaningful, and the subjects had no difficulty reconciling this with a feminine self-concept, despite research to the contrary (Horner, 1968, cited in Gilligan, 1997; Orbach and Eichenbaum, 1987).
- Dissatisfaction and a lack of meaning were emphasised, if work was not described as being intrinsically satisfying, as asserted by Bell and Nkomo (2001).
- Stratham et al.'s (1988b) research was confirmed in the subjects' emphasis on the importance of being recognised for performance and competence.

4.2.7 Women's experiences and meaning attributed to work as contributing to and serving society

The subjects in this study confirmed the contradictory assertions in the literature cited on the meaning of work derived from contributing to and serving society. Neither Chester and Grossman (1991) nor Stratham et al. (1988b) expressed this as a strong thematic in their research. Rimm's (1999) study, however, cited helping others and contributing as a meaningful component of work. Some of the subjects in this study did mention a certain amount of experience and meaning related to this theme, but did not provide details or confirm it in more than isolated statements.

Linked to the issue of contributing to and serving others, the subjects asserted that work as not "real" work and positioned it as voluntarism and something they chose to do. The concept of voluntarism was not referred to in the literature reviewed, but could tie in to Gilligan's (1997) assertion that women equated goodness with helping and pleasing others. In an effort to gain the descriptor of

"good", the subjects possibly classified their work as voluntary with the accompanying connotations of being charitable and altruistic, rather than working for economic, material or instrumental rewards. The subjects then went on to describe the meaning they derive from helping others, which is congruent with Astin's (1984) findings that women derive meaning from contributing to and serving others.

The subjects made these assertions in the interview, but did not refer back to them, or spend much time on this experience and meaning ascribed to it. Once the subjects had made these assertions, they moved on to other thematic concerns, which were a stronger focus of the interviews. An understanding of this is possibly evident in the interplay between traditional notions of a feminine identity, and the more independent identity being asserted by women in the contemporary workplace. According to Orbach and Eichenbaum (1987), a sense of helping others, connectedness, affiliation and selflessness have historically been basic foundations of women's experiences. Moreover, Osborne (1991) discussed the effects on women of internalising the role of "mother's little helper" and the stereotyped notions of femininity being perpetuated. Horney (cited in Osborne, 1991) contended that the genesis of these notions lay in women's traditional socioeconomic dependency. Far from inherent altruism, helping others was fuelled by issues of survival. Historically, women cared and served as these were a means to ensure continued existence in a context in which they did not enjoy financial independence. The issue of financial dependence has previously been explored in some depth and the subjects' financial independence asserted. It would seem, therefore, that the subjects in this study had no economic requirement to care and serve for others.

The interrelatedness between serving and dependence may clarify the content and number of subjects' statements on helping others. Whilst most subjects did not mention this component of meaning at all, some of them seemed obligated to pay homage to this sense of femininity, if only briefly. The subjects, particularly those who had emphasised financial independence and the assertion of an autonomous self, focused in more detail on other aspects of the meaning they derived from work. The implication here is that because the

subjects' survival no longer depended on serving or caring for others, this was no longer a component of the meaning of their work.

However, whilst the complexity of serving and helping others may have been explained in the above, the lack of information on contributing to society has not. Freud (cited in Osborne, 1991) articulated the concept of female machoism and women's pervasive sense of guilt in not doing or being enough. Serving and helping traditionally assuaged this guilt, and work, in traditional roles, provided a forum for this. Furthermore, Astin (1984) cited that the recognition gained through these acts was linked to self identity and self-worth, and was experienced as meaningful. The interplay between work, recognition, self identity and self-worth has been explored in depth in section 5.1.3. This study suggests that the relationship asserted by Astin (1984) and the Freudian concept of female machoism (cited in Osborne, 1991) may still be played out in the meaning of work for women. The difference, however, is that, with the feminisation of employment resulting in women being able to work in diverse domains, the acts for which they gain recognition and experience self-worth, are not limited to traditional domains of caring and helping. The subjects did not mention contributing to wider society, however, contributing and adding value to organisations was expounded at length. The findings of this study suggest that female machoism may be played out in the contemporary work domain, facilitated not through helping, caring or serving, but through adding value to, and being purposeful in organisations. Guilt was assuaged, recognition received and self-worth experienced by the subjects in the work they performed in organisations.

Although the source of female machoism may have been different to those described by traditional notions of femininity, it is suggested that the underpinning process is equivalent to Astin's (1984) assertions that women meet their own needs for recognition and self-worth by contributing to others.

Integrating this study's findings and the literature that was reviewed on the meaning that women derived from work through serving and contributing to society, the following can be highlighted:

- Serving and contributing to society was achieved through the work activity of some of the subjects within this study, although this did not form a strong thematic concern. The subjects differed in their views on the importance of this, confirming different findings cited in the literature (Chester & Grossman, 1991; Stratham et al., 1988b; Rimm, 1991).
- The subjects emphasised their work as an act of choice or voluntarism, a theme that was not evident in the literature. This possibly emphasised findings that women equate goodness with helping others (Astin, 1984), while volunteering, rather than working for instrumental reasons, held connotations of charity and altruism.
- Some subjects briefly paid homage to the meaningfulness of helping people, in line with Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987) findings.
- The absence of assertions on this theme could result from the subjects' financial independence, confirming Horney's (cited in Osborne, 1991) findings that women serve and care as a means of survival emanating from socioeconomic dependence.
- Although serving and contributing to others was not mentioned as a significant theme, Freud's theory of female machoism (cited in Osborne, 1991) and Astin's (1984) conclusion on recognition from acts of caring resulting in self-worth, were intimated in other themes emerging in the findings of this study. Subjects confirmed, through the absence of evidence on the meaningfulness of serving and caring, that they derived recognition and self-worth from alternate sources.

4.2.8 Women's experiences of shaping and impacting the world through the exercise of power and authority

Researchers have emphasised power and authority as a male domain (Chodorow, 1978; Hakim, 1996; Gilligan, 1996 and Miller, 1986) with men having a greater orientation towards power than women. According to Stratham et al. (1988b), women experience power differentials in their experience of power. While according to Chester and Grossman (1990), they experience complexity in its use. Raymond,(1986,cited in Beweley, 1996) asserted that

women have a dual relation to power. This study concurred with these findings, and emphasised that part of the complexity of women's experience of power and authority is the confluence between their experience of power and powerlessness in the experience of work. Furthermore, as suggested by the literature cited, the subjects explained that their experience of shaping and influencing the world through the exercise of power and authority at work is multifaceted and somewhat contradictory.

4.2.8.1 *The experience of exerting authority*

Bell and Nkomo (2001) asserted that the exercise of power and authority was an important and meaningful part of work. In addition research has been cited that asserted women's experience of power and authority as exercised within the context of human relationships (Grossman & Stewart, 1990), and stressed the importance for women in its used to empower the self and others (Keightley, 1995). Moreover, Grossman and Stewart (1990) emphasised that women express pleasure and enjoyment of power, when it is used to nurture and empower others, and if it was defined as a fully legitimised aspect of the role.

Some of the subjects in this study confirmed this finding in the literature when they referred to the exercise of authority in the control of their work environment as meaningful. The subjects also described their knowledge and cognitive skill as a source of authority in the control and influence they exercised. However, in their assertions the subjects alluded to the necessity of using power and authority acceptably.

This study illustrated the findings concurring with those of Bell and Nkomo (2001); Chester and Stewart (1990); Grossman and Stewart (1990) and Keightley (1995). The subjects were comfortable in the exercise of control and influence within the boundaries of authority. Authority was described as resulting, not merely from position or role, but from a sense of knowledge and expertise that was used as a point of influence. The subjects also emphasised the significance of using power and authority within boundaries regarded as acceptable.

4.2.8.2 *Discomfort regarding the exercise of power*

According to Chester and Grossman (1990) women experience complexity in the use of power. Some subjects in this study who asserted that exercising power was perceived as negative, corroborated this. These findings substantiated Miller's conclusions (1986, cited in Grossman and Stewart, 1990) that women's difficulties in exercising power are linked to perceptions that this is selfish, destructive, leading to abandonment and threatening to traditional concepts of feminine identity.

Furthermore, the subjects' discussion of this theme was complicated by Grossman and Stewart's (1990) emphasis that it may be difficult to persuade women to discuss their experience of power, and that there is little fully developed theory that helps to define the key issues involved in women's experience of themselves in a work role as having influence, authority and an influence on others. This study demonstrated this difficulty in the subject's reticence to talk about power and discussion of being uncomfortable with their experiences of power.

The subjects confirmed McClelland's assertions (cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990) that women do not experience power as exhilaration, inner vitality, strength and superiority, but at best, experience meaning in the exercise of indirect power and authority. The subjects also expressed significance through the positive, empowering use of authority and its ability to nurture and help others, substantiating the findings of Grossman and Stewart (1990) and Keightley (1995).

4.2.8.3 *Experience of powerlessness at work*

Dexter (1985) has asserted that women's experiences are characterised by limited power over their own and others' activities. Work has been conceptualised as a relationship of subordination/domination and a significant forum for male power in their control of women's work and produce (Keightley,

1985). Heilbroner (1988, cited in Keightley, 1995) articulated that “work’s meaning has been played out within the historic drama of power’s exercise” and established work as the most significant forum for the exercise of male power. Women have experienced this in their lack of advancement, poor working conditions, unequal remuneration and job segregation. Some of the subjects in this study asserted this experience of powerlessness and associated it with their relationship with their manager, and men who were experienced as powerful in the workplace who blocked or controlled them, rendering them as powerless.

The subjects defined powerlessness as an experience that had played itself out in other aspects of their life and was linked to their relationship with their father. Subjects identified that they may have been complicit in this sense of powerlessness. This substantiated Browne’s (1987) findings cited in Keightley, (1995) that the experience of powerlessness at work mirrored powerlessness at home, with patriarchy moving from a private to a public domain.

Some of the subjects mentioned complicity in their sense of powerlessness, confirming Wolf’s (1993) finding cited in Beweley (1996) that women may seek power by creating an identity of powerlessness. Finally, however, some of the subjects expressed the learning and growth stemming from overcoming this sense of powerlessness and asserting power as found by Kahaleole Chang Hall (1993, cited in Bewley, 1996).

4.2.8.4 *Summary of shaping and impacting the world through the exercise of power and authority*

The literature that was reviewed has, largely been substantiated by the findings of this study.

- The subjects articulated complex and somewhat contradictory findings regarding their use of power and authority (Chester & Grossman, 1990 and Stratham et al., 1988b)
- The subjects described the meaning derived from exerting of control and influence and having a voice as meaningful, if it was seen as acting within the boundaries of authority, and combined with cognitive expertise

and knowledge (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Grossman & Stewart, 1990; Keightley, 1995).

- Some of the subjects explained that they had difficulty around asserting themselves and experiencing a sense of authority because this impacted on their notions of feminine identity and they feared losing the approval of others if they exerted themselves. (Chester & Grossman, 1990 and Miller cited in Grossman & Stewart, 1990).
- The subjects had difficulty discussing the concept of “power” (Grossman & Stewart, 1990;) and viewed the exercise of power negatively preferring to use other descriptors, such as “responsibility” and “accountability” in their description of experiences, emphasising the use of influence within the boundaries of authority and for the benefit of others (Grossman & Stewart, 1990; Keightley, 1995).
- Other subjects described experiences of powerlessness in the workplace (Dexter, 1985), resulting in emotional reactions. Moreover, powerlessness was described as something also experienced in other domains of their life (Browne cited in Keightley, 1995).
- The subjects experienced growth and learning experienced as meaningful if they were able to overcome this sense of powerlessness (Kahaleole Chang Hall, 1993 cited in Bewley, 1996).

4.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the results of the phenomenological study. The direct description of the meaning given to work by the sample of South African graduate women interviewed was reported in order to gain access to the subjects’ world and provide insight into their experiences. The recurring themes that were identified included :

- the activity and expectation of ascribing meaning to work, and its fluidity
- economic, material and instrumental needs
- sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relating at work
- intrinsic satisfaction

- contributing to and serving society at work
- shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority

The direct evidence was then integrated with the literature reviewed.

The next chapter will present a discussion of the conclusions and limitations of the study, and make recommendations for further studies.

CHAPTER 5 : CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this chapter is to present the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this study. In so doing, the conclusions the research findings of the literature review and phenomenological study will be evaluated against the research aims stated in chapter one. In other words, the findings of the research and its contribution to a deeper understanding of the experience and meaning of work for women will be reviewed. The limitations of both the literature review and the phenomenological study will also be discussed in this chapter. Finally, recommendations for future research and organisational application will be made.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions will now be discussed in relation to the aims of the literature review and the phenomenological study. In addition, hypotheses for this research will be formulated.

5.1.1 Conclusions drawn from the literature review

The literature review in this study provided insight into the complex, sometimes incongruent and nuanced meaning of work for women. An integrated conceptualisation of the meaning of work in general, and the meaning of work for women specifically was generated. The following are significant in this conceptualisation :

- the description of concentric and fluid circles of meaning
- the identification of themes as significant components of the meaning of work
- 3 conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women, including a detailed integration of literature to design a model based on contemporary research

These will be discussed in detail below.

5.1.1.1 *The meaning of work as diverse concentric circles of meaning*

The literature review analysed the complexity of the meaning of work and explained it as follows:

- It is influenced by broad socioeconomic or historical contexts resulting in its being shared across individuals,
- It is individual and located internally (MOW International Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995).

A particularly useful contribution to the study was Thompson's (2000) explanation of the phenomenon as having concentric circles of meaning, whose primacy may be displaced, although immanent meanings do not vanish. Moreover, the meaning of work was seen as transcending instrumental needs and contributing to an individual's overall sense of meaning and coherence (Yankelovich cited in Thompson, 2000).

This literature review conceptualised the meaning of work as a multifaceted phenomenon that is both shared and subjective and comprises a variety of fluid components.

5.1.1.2 *Themes emerging as a conceptualisation of the meaning of work in general*

General themes emerged in the literature review that were useful in conceptualising the diverse components of the meaning of work. This study integrated these and identified them as the concentric circles of meaning ascribed to work. The detailed understanding of the meaning of work gained in this study established the circles of meaning as follows:

- a sense of identity and self-worth (Ciulla, 2000; Kelly, 1995; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Naughton, 1995; Ransome, 1996)

- social connectedness and relatedness (Ciulla, 2000; MOW International Research Team, 1987; Natale et al., 1995; Ransome, 1996)
- intrinsic satisfaction (Astin, 1984; Ciulla, 2000)
- contributing to and serving the greater good (Astin, 1984; Naughton, 1995; Thompson, 2000)
- shaping and impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority (Arendt, 1958; Ciulla, 2000)

5.1.1.3 *Themes emerging as a conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women*

The literature review of this study confirmed that, despite the large-scale feminisation of paid employment (Keightley, 1995; 1994 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development, 1995) and the enormous gains made by women in the workplace, the complexity of the meaning of work for women is little understood.

This study reviewed seminal literature and identified three conceptualisations of the meaning of work for women. Firstly, a model was designed illustrating that women ascribe the same meaning to work as men do. In other words, the meaning of work for women stems from the fact that they are competent and productive members of society because of their work activity (Astin, 1984; Dex, 1985; Hall & Donnell cited in Franklin & Sweeney, 1988; Kahn, 1984; Keen, 1991, cited in Ciulla, 2000). Whilst this initial conceptualisation had elements of accuracy, it presented a model that failed to take cognisance of the complexity, subtleties and nuances of women's experiences at work.

A second model asserted that the meaning of work for women is markedly different to that of men and congruent with female mythology and stereotypes. In other words, women prefer to work in an unpaid and private domain (Keightley, 1995). The meaning of work for women was positioned within the home and as having strong instrumental, social relatedness and contribution or service components. If compelled to do so, women worked for instrumental reasons (Dex, 1985), and derived meaning from the social relatedness and

connectedness work provided (Grossman & Stewart, 1990), and through helping and caring for others (Keightley, 1995). This second conceptualisation was seen as being located within a historical context, perpetuating stereotyped notions of femininity (Burman, 1996).

Finally, according to contemporary research, these models of sameness or difference inaccurately reflect the experiences of women (Keightley, 1995). An integration of contemporary research illustrated that the meaning of work for women was multifaceted and intricate (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Chester & Grossman, 1990; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b). Seminal qualitative, phenomenological studies on the meaning of work for women were identified as those of Bell and Nkomo (2002), Chester and Grossman (1990), Rimm (1999) and Stratham et al. (1988b). These studies marked an important start in gaining an entry point into a deeper insight into the meaning that women ascribe to their working lives. The importance of these studies is that, rather than anyone speaking on their behalf, these qualitative and largely phenomenological studies have helped women to find their voices.

The resulting conceptualisation defined the meaning of work as both subjective and shared, with meaning derived from personal, psychological, social and philosophical domains. Instrumental meanings were asserted as unimportant in contributing to the meaning of work (Chester & Grossman, 1991; Stratham et al., 1988b; Rimm, 1999). Although not all themes were seen as representing the experience of all women, they were regarded as being sufficiently represented to interconnect women from diverse work experiences and personal circumstances (Chester & Grossman, 1991). The contemporary model described the following as key components of the meaning of work for women:

- A sense of identity and self-worth (Astin, 1984; Chester & Grossman, 1991; Ciulla, 2000; Stratham et al., 1988b) is promoted with work providing a forum for the assertion of an independent, autonomous self (Bell & Nkomo, 2001) and a place from which crucial aspects of a woman's identity were derived (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987). The importance of other domains, like family and personal relationships, in promoting a woman's sense of identity and impacting on the primacy of the meaning of work was also

asserted (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Moreover, a meaningful part of work was described as the mechanisms it provided for the positive feedback, recognition, assurance and approval women needed to overcome the stress and fear of abandonment caused by asserting an independent self (Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987).

- Social connectedness and relatedness (Chester & Grossman, 1991; Gilligan, 1997; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987; Rimm, 1999) were seen as an important source of the meaning of work for women. However, this did not preclude a focus on the task components of work (Chester & Grossman, 1991). Furthermore, relationships were seen as asymmetrical and the source of conflict (Chester & Grossman, 1987). Relationships with male managers and between women were seen as difficult, and characterised by feelings of competition, envy, anger and abandonment (Firth-Cozens & West, 1991).
- Intrinsic satisfaction was regarded as important, and linked to enjoyment derived from accomplishment, challenge, problem solving, skill development and the exercise of competence (Astin, 1984; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Keightley, 1995; Rimm, 1999; Stratham et al., 1988b). Conversely, the literature emphasised that women experience stress around achievement and success (Gilligan, 1997) since these were not integrated into traditional conceptualisations of feminine identity, and few role models existed to provide feedback on their expectation of success (Kahn, 1984). This rendered the theme of intrinsic satisfaction as problematic to women.
- Contributing to others and serving society was emphasised as a vital component of the meaning of work in some studies (Ciulla, 2000; Osborne, 1991; Rimm, 1999), but not in others (Chester & Grossman, 1991; Stratham et al., 1988b). The socioeconomic imperative for women to care and serve (Horney cited in Osborne, 1991) and Freud's theory of female machismo described this component of work's meaning as a complex interplay resulting from complex social and psychological dynamic.
- Impacting on the world through the exercise of power and authority was described as a complex source of meaning for women (Chester & Grossman, 1990), one that women had difficulty articulating (Grossman & Stewart, 1990) and represented by the confluence of experiences of both

power and powerlessness (Keightley, 1995). According to research findings women ascribe meaning through the exercise of power and authority at work only if it was used responsibly to empower and benefit others (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Grossman & Stewart, 1990).

This conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women provided an in-depth understanding in line with the aims of the literature review, and a framework for the phenomenological study offering an entry point for exploring the meaning of work for the women in the sample. Furthermore, and significantly, it can be used as a conceptualisation for future studies on the meaning of work for women.

5.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the phenomenological study

With reference to the aims of the phenomenological study, discussed in chapter one, conclusions will be now drawn.

The meaning of work for women in this study was shown to be complex and multilayered. It was explained as highly individualised, derived from direct and indirect influences and connotations, eliciting a variety of emotions and meeting complex needs. Furthermore, the women in this study described components of meaning that were shared, and distinct themes emerged. The meaning ascribed to work by women in this study was described as both a subjective and shared phenomenon, located within personal, psychological, social and philosophical domains.

An understanding of the meaning of work for women in this study was largely anchored in the themes identified in the general conceptualisation of the meaning of work described. The contemporary conceptualisation of the meaning of work for women further developed, refined and explained concepts more accurately.

Broadly, then, the women in this study described their meaning of work as both subjective and objective, as fluid and changeable and as transcending instrumental needs. Their descriptions questioned female mythology and

stereotypes associated with the meaning of work for women. The activity of work was visibly located outside of the home, in a paid and public domain. Moreover, the meaning of work asserted by the women in this study did not emphasise components usually ascribed to women, namely instrumentality, social relatedness or service. These contributed only in part to the meaning of work articulated and were described as being multifaceted.

The women in this study saw work as the primary adult activity for their gender and as an activity that was not inherently meaningful but one to which meaning needed to be actively ascribed. They stressed the expectation that their work activity should be meaningful, and the importance of meaningful work to their effective functioning. They also stated that work was only one source of meaning in their life, and that the meaning ascribed to work was changeable and fluid.

Women in this study stated that meaning is derived from the following domains:

- instrumental needs being met
- a sense of identity and self-worth
- social connectedness and relatedness .
- intrinsic satisfaction
- contributing to the greater good
- the ability to impact on and shape the world through the exercise of power and authority

The research gave voice to findings that investigated, extended and unpacked the literature, and in so doing addressed the textured and multifaceted experience of the meaning of work for women.

Work that provided instrumental meaning only was not experienced as meaningful, per se. Since remuneration was not of central concern to women in this study, they expected that their work should transcend the instrumental for it to be meaningful. However, in findings not suggested in the literature reviewed, women in this study differed in their assertion of the importance of economic and material aspects of work. In this study women not initially ascribing

significant meaning to instrumental needs being met, on reflection emphasised that the resulting independence and control were meaningful.

The provision of an autonomous and independent sense of identity and self-worth was highlighted as a critical component of the meaning of work for the women in this study. However, a multifaceted relationship between dependence and independence, control and reliance was described in this process. Although it was critical for women in this study to assert an autonomous self, this was emphasised as difficult and accompanied by strong emotional reactions. Furthermore, this study illustrated the importance of assurance and acknowledgement that abandonment will not result from women's assertion of this independent self. Finally, however, if this process was realised, women in this study highlighted the resulting self-worth as a significant component of the meaning of work.

In this study, relationships at work were experienced as intricate sources of meaning, with conceptualisations of social connectedness and relatedness asserted as significant, albeit with distinct differences from the literature reviewed. In some senses, meaning was derived from relationships not through connection with others, but, ironically, because connection was absent. Disillusionment with social connectedness and relatedness rendered this meaningful in that the women in this study could assert an independent and autonomous self in the work domain, expressing themselves separately from relationships or connectedness.

In essence, the results of this study were congruent with the conceptualisation of the meaning of work in its intrinsic satisfaction as illustrated in previous research. This thematic concern was unproblematic in its description, in fact, this contributed to its importance. Whilst difficulties experienced in reconciling achievement and accomplishment with feminine concepts of self, and the problem of being recognised for performance and competence, were mentioned in previous studies, here they were not expressed by the women in the study . In other words, the significance of this theme does not stem from the presence of problematic or complex descriptions, but from their very absence.

In this study, a deeper understanding was gained of the meaning women derived from contributing to and serving others, not in the quantity of data gathered, but in the brevity of the theme. Traditional notions of femininity were alluded to, but a shift from work as a domain in which women serve others was emphasised by the absence of evidence presented. However, other themes that emerged in this study suggest that the intricate process of women assuaging guilt, gaining recognition and a sense of self-worth, persist.

This study highlighted an understanding of the meaning derived from the exercise of power and authority essentially congruent with the literature cited. A textured and complex relationship between power and powerlessness at work was substantiated, with women's exercise of power being influenced by the interplay of their own sense of identity and the exercise of patriarchy. A deeper understanding of the meaning derived from impacting on and shaping the world through the exercise of power and authority was gained in the diversity of experiences described by the women in the study.

Finally, this study provided evidence of the diverse and unique experience and meaning of work for women. These experiences were underscored by nuances and complexities specific to contemporary women, and demonstrated that the work domain is one in which women were experiencing far reaching changes. This study also highlighted the difficulties inherent in the processes underpinning these changes. The results of this study supported Orbach and Eichenbaum's (1987, p. 11) assertion that, in their experience and meaning of work

Women are making the shift from people who service others, defer to others and who are themselves through their attachment to others, to becoming people who are visible in their own right and who stand as separate individuals while still connected to others.

This is no easy feat.

5.1.2.1 *Hypothesis resulting from the phenomenological study*

The key hypothesis suggested by this study is the following:

- The meaning women ascribe to work changes once they seek autonomy.

Secondary hypotheses formulated from the results of this study that seem to underpin this key hypothesis are the following:

- A sense of independence and control for women results from the instrumental components of work for women.
- Women derive significant components of their identity from their work.
- Work provides women with an important forum to exercise an autonomous, independent self.
- Intrinsic satisfaction contributes to the meaning of work for women.
- Women do not experience difficulties integrating achievement and accomplishment into their sense of self.
- Women do not all experience meaning through serving and caring for others.
- The meaning women derive from power at work is influenced by diverse experiences of power, authority and powerlessness.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

Stones (1986) emphasised the importance of translating the qualitative praxis systematically and scientifically. Stake (cited in Creswell, 1998, p. 20) asserted the need to ask the question “did we get the story right?”. Ely (1991) stressed the significance of explicating the issues and processes underpinning research in order to establish it as honest and believable. Assessing the limitations of the study is essential to ensure the scientific rigour alluded to, and establishing whether the research aims of describing the meaning women derive from their own work experiences, have been met. The limitations of this study will be reviewed across the following domains:

- the literature review
- the phenomenological study

5.2.1 Limitations of the literature review

The limited amount of literature in this domain was articulated, and the value and scarcity of qualitative, phenomenological studies emphasised. The literature review was presented in the context of these assertions. Whilst the literature review provided a detailed assessment of research findings on the meaning of work, and the meaning of work for women in particular, it was limited by the absence of studies in this domain. Although a limitation, this also highlights the significance of the objective of this study to contribute to developing this body of knowledge.

5.2.2 Limitations of the phenomenological study

5.2.2.1 *Sample used*

A limitation of the phenomenological study may be contained in the sample used. Although the methodological rationale for using a sample of only 6 subjects was based on sound research (Creswell,1998; Huysamen,1997; Mouton & Marais, 1992), issues pertaining to the sample could be regarded as a limitation. The use of criterion and snowball sampling techniques (Creswell, 1998) and the researcher's subjective judgments about who to include in the sample resulted in a sample that was information rich but one that had a similar demographic profile. The consequence of this was that no black African subjects were included. Although the title of the research study refers to South African women graduates, a significant demographic component of the South African population was not represented in the sample of women used as subjects. Whether the truth value of the research for black African women has been influenced by this, remains to be seen.

Another limitation in the sample used is that the subjects demonstrated similar marital and family status characteristics in that only one was married and none had children. This may have limited the researcher's access to experiences and meaning of work to women who have to balance different sources of identity, and whose primacy of work had shifts within the context of their life as a whole.

This was not an explicit objective of research, but a thematic concern that may have been useful to explore in depth.

5.2.2.2 *The emergence of diverse and distinct thematic concerns*

A further possible limitation in the research was the use of an unstructured interview as a research method. Whilst Kerlinger (1986) stressed its appropriateness to a phenomenological study in the depth of response provided and its provision of the minimum restraint on expression, the open-ended questions used in this studies resulted in a breadth of information gained across a diversity of themes. A holistic insight into the meaning of work for women was consequently obtained, with diverse natural meaning units and thematic concerns described by the subjects. However, given the time constraints of the interviews, the researcher accessed breadth rather than depth description. Whilst the research objective of gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning of work for women was achieved to some extent, each thematic concern requires further exploration to obtain a detailed understanding.

5.2.2.3 *The researcher's concerns about exerting her own authority and power*

Ely (1991) and Patton (1990) asserted the self as the primary research tool in phenomenological research, and the importance of recognising and organising the researcher's own myths, assumptions and feelings, taking these from an unspoken to a spoken level. Forconi (cited in Ely, 1991, p. 108) stressed that the researcher needed to be aware that "the aspect of human life you are about to study will most likely be your own". The researcher, taking cognisance of these articulations, was aware that the subjects were describing experiences which, as a South African graduate woman, could easily have been her own. The thematic concerns identified resonated with her own experience. This was not a limitation per se, but characteristic of phenomenological research, in which the researcher is subjective and involved in the process.

However, the researcher was aware that the thematic concerns surrounding exercising power and authority were particularly evocative of her own experience. She was conscious that in her interviews she had difficulty exerting her own authority in certain instances. In some situations, where she had a sense that the subjects were not describing their entire experience because it may have been difficult for them to articulate emotions or experiences not perceived as permissible or integrated into concepts of traditional feminine identity, she hesitated to exert her power and authority as both interviewer and researcher. Whilst this may have been in line with feminist concepts of nonexploitation, collaboration (Burman, 1996; Creswell, 1998), empathy and acceptance (Ely, 1991), the researcher felt that she was complicit in colluding with the subjects. Put differently, she herself felt discomfort exerting her power in a way that may not have been empowering to the subjects, and so tempered her probes in situations perceived as sensitive or uncomfortable. In her caution in asserting greater authority and control, the researcher did not impel the subjects to describe experiences that may have added depth to the research. The interviews were described as pleasant and affirming experiences by the subjects, but the researcher, in some instances, on transcribing the tape recordings, felt that the subjects had not always articulated their complete narrative and that the difficult components of it had been alluded to, but were largely, absent.

Despite this being asserted as a limitation, it illustrates and explicates another significant example of the interplay between power, authority and powerlessness for women at work. Bhavnani (1993, cited in Ullah 1996) explained that “messiness” in research is what is important because it serves as an entry point into the power relations between the researcher and subjects. The researcher’s experiences, moreover, substantiate Kristeva’s (1981, cited in Taylor, 1996) findings that within an interview context, power relations are not binary and power is constantly shifting and being resisted by both parties in the interaction. In this study, the experience in the interview situation provides significant insight into women’s exercise of power and authority.

5.2.2.4 *Constraints in the study's confirmability*

A third limitation of the phenomenological study may be found around the issue of confirmability. Kirk and Miller (1987) have emphasised that reliability is integral to the data collection process in that it confirms the strength of the data in phenomenological research. According to Seale (1990), internal reliability, or confirmability and consistency (Bloor, 1997; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) can be improved through the use of multiple researchers, a peer review or participant researchers. In this research study use of any of the above was not permissible given the constraints of the master's dissertation. However, the research findings were limited by this and the use of multiple researchers confirming the study's findings would have assisted the study's confirmability.

5.2.2.5 *Constraints around the study's truth value and applicability*

Inferential validity has been asserted as critical in the data processing phase of the research study (Mouton & Marais, 1992), with the truth value of the study ensured in that the research was honestly and credibly presented to both the subjects and wider readers (Bloor, 1997; Ely, 1991; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Whilst the researcher did present the findings to certain subjects to gain feedback on the correspondence between her analysis and sample members' descriptions, this was informal and unstructured. A more rigorous approach to obtaining member validation (Bloor, 1997) would have increased the truth value of the study.

Similarly, applicability of the study was improved in presenting the processed data to three readers outside the research context and gaining their assessment of whether the research was meaningful and applicable. This process was, however, influenced by its informality. The applicability and inferential validity could be improved by a more structured approach to the process.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The feminisation of employment and the assertion that women's work is "hidden" – in the home, in its undervaluation in the economy, in its absence in male-centred research, make this a significant study. Articulating these women's experiences and meaning of work in a research context brings women's experiences and the meaning they ascribe to work, in the open. Locating experience, no matter how complex, within a paradigm, within research and theory, in a sense gives the experience credibility and credence. It transforms the experience from something unusual and other, to something shared and unique. This is in itself an empowering act, and part of the process required to articulate women's work as meaningful, valued, valuable and significant in women's experiences as a whole.

In order to continue this process, recommendations are made for

- future research studies in the field of organisational and industrial psychology
- the application to organisations

5.3.1 Recommendations for future literature reviews and phenomenological studies

5.3.1.1 Exploring the broad thematic concerns in greater depth through future research studies

The researcher recommends that future research studies be undertaken within the domains of organisational and career psychology to explore each thematic concern identified in greater depth. The results of this study represent a starting point in developing a detailed and holistic theory of the meaning women ascribe to their work. It is suggested that future research further describe and articulate women's experiences, establish relationships and test hypotheses formulated in the findings of this research study.

The researcher also recommends that further studies focus on assessing the changing sense of identity women are expressing as a key component of the meaning they derive from work. This represents a seminal finding in this study, and one requiring detailed exposition. Similarly, the following areas represent possible future research topics:

- the impact of autonomy on the changing meaning of work for women
- the relationship between women's financial independence and the assertion of an independent, autonomous sense of self
- the importance of work for women asserting an autonomous sense of self
- relationships between women at work
- the components of work characterised as intrinsically satisfying for women
- the changing importance of serving and helping others in the meaning of work for women
- adding value and being purposeful as the new women's work
- the meaning of power and authority at work for women

The richness and diversity of future research emanating from this research study is alluded to in the quantity and variety of studies recommended above. A detailed and comprehensive understanding of the meaning of work for women will be gained if future research focuses on these domains.

5.3.1.2 Using diverse samples in future research studies

A significant recommendation for future research to be undertaken is that the thematic concerns asserted are explored with a diverse sample of women. There is little doubt about the richness of the results to be achieved from using samples with representatives of black African women. Certainly, in the South African context, issues of applicability will be improved in the construction of samples that reflect the racial demographics of the current work force. Further, women who are married or have children, and who work either full or part time, would add depth to an understanding of the issues of work's primacy and the interrelationship between work and other domains of meaning for women.

5.3.2 Application of the findings with organisational practices

The findings of this research study have valuable implications for organisational and human resource practices. The feminisation of the workplace has been articulated, and this study provides useful insights into women's experience and the meaning they derive from work. Organisational practices to attract, develop, retain and effectively manage women at work emerge from the study.

Certainly this study asserts work as a vital component in defining women's sense of identity and self-worth, and by implication, women workers should not be viewed as less committed to their work than their male counterparts. That said, this study emphasises the complexity of work and family in providing meaning for women, and the fact that women may require flexibility and family friendly practices within organisations to facilitate this. This study also provides input into career development practices, asserting that women expect their work to be meaningful, but that the primacy of this meaning may change, necessitating career development and management processes investigating the importance of meaning, and providing changing competency development to facilitate the fluidity of meaning.

The issue of equity in financial remuneration remains relevant, and this study emphasised that women expect their work to both meet and transcend their instrumental requirements. The implication for organisations is that issues of remuneration equity are germane, and there is little suggestion that this will change.

The importance of work in establishing a sense of identity and self-worth has implications for organisations in their performance management, recognition and reward practices. Regular, objective and developmental feedback has been established as critical to women and should be built into organisational practices.

The study explored changing experience of "women's work", and the declining importance of serving and helping, and increasing requirements for work that is

challenging, strategic and enables problem solving and creativity. Attracting and retaining women requires organisations to provide women with access to roles and ongoing development to facilitate intrinsic satisfaction. Career development practices need to encourage women to enter domains not traditionally defined as appropriate to women. This has implications for both recruitment and selection practices, as well as training and development interventions. Within the South African context, this is interrelated to employment equity and skills development initiatives.

Furthermore, the complexity of relationships between women, and female subordinates and male managers, has organisational implications. Managing a diverse workforce, facilitating delivery through teams, and averting claims of discrimination based on gender requires organisations to take cognisance of these concerns. Organisational leadership should be taught how to manage diverse workforces and gender issues included in employment equity and transformational agendas.

Finally, organisations need to equip themselves to ensure that they provide a forum for women to assert identities at work that are being redefined. Whilst this research study to some extent confirmed that women work in order to function as competent and productive members of society (Chester & Grossman, 1990), the complexities and intricacies cited in this study describe the difficulties involved. At the same time, however, this study asserts the significant growth and development emanating from this reconceptualisation of the meaning of work for women.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of this study. The research findings of the literature review and phenomenological study were assessed against the research aims set out in chapter 1. Furthermore the conclusions of the phenomenological study were presented, providing a deeper understanding of the experience and meaning of work for a particular sample of women with implications for the understanding of the

experience and meaning of work for women. The limitations of both the literature review and the phenomenological study were explained in this context. Finally, recommendations were made for future research and organisational application.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PERSONAL DATA FORM

Interviewer: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed, and for taking this time to have this interview with me. As discussed on the phone, the reason for this interview is to listen to the meaning you give to your work and your experience of your work. This will form part of my master's research and will be used as data for my dissertation.

Your responses will be completely confidential and remain anonymous.

In order to record the interview, I would like to use a tape recorder and notebook to make notes. Are you comfortable with this?

The discussion will last between 45 and 60 minutes.

In order to gain background and personal information, I need to complete a personal data form with you before we commence the actual interview. Is it okay to start with this?

Subject: Response.

Interviewer commences with the personal data form.

APPENDIX B: PERSONAL DATA FORM

GENERAL DETAILS

Name:	
Race:	
Age:	

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

What was the name of the primary school you attended?		
What was the name of the high school you attended?		
Did you attend a government or private school?	Primary	High
Was this a single or coeducational school?	Primary	High
Was there a career guidance process in your high school?	Yes	No
Who else was involved in your career choice decisions?		
What university / universities did you attend?		
What degree(s) have you obtained?		
Has anyone else in your family obtained this qualification?		

CAREER HISTORY

What is your current job title?	
For which organisation do you currently work ?	
How long have you been in this role?	
How many previous roles have you held in this organisation?	
What were their job titles?	
How long were you in these roles?	(1) (2) (3)
How many previous roles have you held outside this organisation?	
What were their job titles?	(1) (2) (3)
How long were you in these roles?	(1) (2) (3)

FAMILY HISTORY

What is your marital status?	
Who played an active role in	

raising you?	
Did your mother work?	
In what role?	
Did your father work?	
In what role?	
Does your partner work?	
In what role?	

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer: We will now start the interview. Are you comfortable to proceed?

Subject: Response.

Interviewer: Can you describe, in as much detail as possible, the meaning your work has for you?

- Reflect and probe.

For example:

Can you tell me more about that?

I have a sense of ... can you explore that?

- Ask for examples.

Can you give me an example of that?

(The subject will start talking or require clarification. If so, the question is paraphrased. For example. Can you tell me what meaning your work has for you? Once the subject has exhausted this subject, move onto the next question.)

Would there ever be a time you would not work? Describe the reasons behind this.

- Reflect and probe.
- Ask for examples.

(Once the subject has exhausted the subject, the interviewer terminates the interview)

Interviewer: Our time is up. Thank you for your time, co-operation and participation in this research process. Goodbye.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM

Name of subject:	
Date and time of interview:	
Venue of interview:	

Description of interview process:

Cognitive response to interview:

Emotional response to interview:

Nonverbal behaviour of subject:

Verbal behaviour of subject:

Additional notes: