

**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY
AT WORK: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Beverley Anne Sterley, student number 04284631, declare that

Women's experience of their sense of identity at work: A phenomenological study

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

Miss BA Sterley

Date

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ABSTRACT

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AT WORK: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Although women increasingly contribute their labour to an ever-burgeoning workplace, little is understood about their roles and sense of identity at work. Adopting a phenomenological approach to this study will allow the researcher to discover what women's experience of their sense of identity at work encompasses. Furthermore, a review of the contemporary literature, and a phenomenological approach to the study employing semi-structured interviews and an explication of the protocols using the 'modified' Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998), may be used to explore women's experience of their sense of identity in the workplace. Recommendations may be made for future research and organisational practice.

The main findings indicated, *inter alia*, that the participants expressed their sense of identity at work from a 'collective' or social identity orientation. This finding also supports various feminist researchers' viewpoints that women may develop a unique sense of identity relative to the environment in which they find themselves (Ely, 1994; Hakim, 1996). Themes that arose from the interviews with the participants included the concerns women express universally to a greater extent, yet included their interests, abilities, traits and material characteristics to a lesser extent (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg & Turner, 1987). The study findings also questioned psychology-based "person-centred" ideas about women's relationships with other women at work, and added credence to the supposition that the demographic composition of an organisation may influence an individual's experiences at work (Ely, 1994, p. 203). Furthermore, as social

identities are more significant in organisations, due to the incidence of social groups (Fisher, 1986; Mortimer & Simmons, 1978; Van Maanen, 1976), it would appear that as fewer women are employed in management and the upper echelons of organisations, they would therefore not benefit from being involved in the social environment of work, and would therefore not be in a position to adopt the identity of their counterparts (Becker & Carper, 1956). The contribution of this research to understanding women's experience of their sense of identity, and the provision of a basic framework in this regard, may assist female employees, and their employers and managers, in their relationships at work, and in this way improve the employment prospects and retention of women.

Key words:

Female-centred research, the self as instrument, self-esteem, gender, qualitative research, phenomenology, change, creative, personal identity, social identity, independent.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

Chapter 1 provides the background and motivation for the research. This dissertation considers women's experience of their sense of identity at work. The researcher reviews discussions with respect to identities, female identity as stated by women, female identity as stated by men, the domain of work as a forum to assert identity, and research in this regard. Thereafter, the problem statement, paradigm perspective, design of the research and method used for the research, are examined.

1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Feminist researchers suggest that women may develop a unique sense of identity, relative to the circumstances or environment in which they find themselves (Ely, 1994; Gilligan, 1997; Hakim, 1996; Miller, 1986). To Jacobson (1964, 4, p. 66), identity meant "I want to be different, in fact myself". A further elaboration of the definition of *identity* was postulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 132), who suggested that "indeed, identity is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world". "A coherent identity incorporates within itself all the various internalized roles and attitudes" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 132). As a woman, this raises the question as to what the female sense of identity entails and why historical theories of feminine personalities or identities were formulated through the empirical theories and assumptions of men (Gilligan, 1982). As a female researcher, I proposed to explore women's experiences of their sense of identity, and, more specifically, to provide an in-depth understanding of female identity theory from a solely feminine stance. This research may provide insight that could assist employers in the recruitment, remuneration and retention of women at work.

The interest for me, as the researcher in this study, lies in my past experiences at work. During a career that spanned almost twenty-five years, I worked for attorneys doing accounting and, eventually, financial management. I realised that this path would not allow me to realise my full potential or to fulfil my self-determined goals. Upon reflecting on the experiences I had had up to that point in time, I realised

that the most important choice I could make was to study further and try to achieve at least some of my dreams. Although I knew that I faced many challenges, I also knew that I could not go on doing what I was doing at that time. I was in a well-paid job, was part of a 12-member team, had many friends at work, as well as support from colleagues. I had varied and interesting work in financial management, and had progressed on a career path that I was lucky to have had the opportunity to be granted. However, each day that I carried on trying to force myself to stay doing the work I was doing, brought with it feelings of ineptness, frustration, helplessness and bouts of nausea. These emotions eventually consumed my daily experience, until I could no longer persevere in my work. These sensations were not new: I had experienced them a few times over the course of my working life, but until then I had managed to carry on supporting myself and my family by changing jobs and moving on.

At this point, my 'sense of identity' was rather fragile, because I knew that I was capable of achieving more than I had done up to that point. I felt slightly insecure about what my capabilities would allow me to achieve, and I had little support for this venture as I was the main breadwinner in my family. After much careful planning and consideration, I made the decision to change my career, and began studying B.Com part-time at North-West University in Potchefstroom. After three years of studying accountancy coupled with industrial psychology, I became frustrated when I was not able to complete cost accountancy, and approached the university for advice as to what courses would be suitable for me to follow. At the assessment centre I was advised to study industrial psychology, and once I started reading, I realised that this was the path I should take for a future career. An immense sense of relief and joy engulfed me, and to this day the discipline continues to captivate and interest me.

After having experienced all this change, growth, diversity and, eventually, progress, I wished to do an in-depth study to explore what other women's experience of their sense of identity at work had been, or was, for them, and in this way contribute to a body of knowledge by adding my insight.

I realised that careful career planning, assessment, and career counselling at school level, would provide a platform for women that would assist them to choose

careers to suit their personalities, at a younger age, and in this way allow them the time and opportunities to achieve their goals and dreams successfully. It is also important to discover relevant meaning of the words "a sense of (women's) identity" – a key component of personality and individuality. I will thus start this study by discussing the literature I discovered on identity and a sense of identity.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

From the initial exploration of available research, it would appear that a few authors have attempted to define the meaning of the word 'identity' as it applies to women and, therefore, women's experience of their sense of identity, and many have provided a diverse, stipulated and evolving meaning to the term (Fearon, 1999). It also becomes apparent that early researchers on women's identity were mostly male, and that these conflicting and male-centred theories provided little relief for women wishing to express their personal identities as unique and diverse extensions of themselves.

Contemporary feminist theories seemed to provide more insight into the exploration of the feminine identity. It also appears that research and contemporary theories of the feminine sense of identity are discussed from many diverse approaches and disciplines, suggesting the complexity of the concept. It is for this reason, as a female, I wished to explore the experience (as related to by women) of their own unique sense of identity at work, and to endeavour to suggest that this may contribute to the study of the phenomenon – and perhaps motivate further research on this concept.

In my quest to find research on this topic on various psychology websites, various library searches (Proquest social sciences journals, Sabinet-SA, African Electronic Journals, Ebscohost, the Unisa library catalogue) and Google Scholar, I discovered that there is a lack of specific research on women's experience of their sense of identity at work. A discussion hereof follows.

Women are actively engaged in the domain of work, and increasingly contribute more labour and knowledge to this domain, yet very little research has been conducted on the conceptualisation of women's experience of their sense of identity at work, and as a result, there is little understanding of what this concept

means to women. To this end, various researchers have contributed diverse accounts on women's experience of self at work as set out hereunder (Ely, 1994; Hakim, 1996; McKenna, as cited in Ciulla, 2000).

Ely (1994) discussed the impact of professional women's representation in the upper levels of organisations on their female peers and hierarchical relationships. He postulated that women's relationships are influenced by their social identity (Ely, 1994, p. 203). Ely's (1994) study findings challenged psychology-based "person-centred" ideas about women's relationships with other women at work, and suggested that the demographic composition of an organisation may influence an individual's experience at work (Ely, 1994, p. 203).

Thereafter, Hakim (1996) suggested that much research on work orientations and attitudes has focused on the experience of men, as opposed to that of women, and has provided distinct conclusions – namely that no sex role differences are evident, and that women attribute a different, unique meaning to work from that of men. Much of this research is inconclusive and contradictory.

According to McKenna (as cited in Ciulla, 2000), women achieve worth and identity from work. Work may influence women's sense of self-expression and actualisation, and in this way women's identity may merge with their work (Natale, Sora & O'Neil, 1995). Work is seen as being able to provide an environment where individuals can achieve growth, transformation, personal development, and realisation of the self (Kelly, 1995).

Person (2003) postulates that "the meaning woman ascribed to work through its provision of a sense of identity was regarded as complex" (Person, 2003, p. 43). Even though women yearn for an independent and autonomous 'self', this sense of identity conflicts with traditional, patriarchal ideas of what being a woman means, and the author suggests that further research could contribute to an understanding of this conflicting concept (Person, 2003). The general problem with traditional ideas of what being a woman constitutes is, firstly, that a female identity may be multi-faceted, may consist of multiple identities activated simultaneously or separately, and that this phenomenon has not been researched extensively, and secondly, that much research has discovered that women have been, and still are

being, discriminated against in the workplace in (Shih, Young & Bucher, 2013; Trachtenberg, 2012; Turner, 1982, 1984).

The lack of specific contemporary research on women's' experience of their sense of identity in the domain of work, might indicate some of the challenges women may experience while trying to assert themselves at work. This prompted me to undertake this study, to discover womens' experience of their sense of identity at work, from womens' perspectives.

An exploration of women's experience of their sense of identity at work may also be of relevance in understanding when and why women can assert themselves at work.

Research focusing on women at work has had, as its focus, the expression of differences in terms of sex roles differences, and has not been designed to express women's voices using a phenomenological methodology (Grossman & Stewart, 1990). Keightley (1995) postulated that as the male experience at work was presumed to epitomise the norm, women would bear the brunt of this peculiarity. McLelland (as cited in Gilligan, 1997) thereafter suggested that research has regarded male behaviour as the norm, and female behaviour as, therefore, a departure from that norm. Male-centred studies such as these do not describe what feminine identities truly are, but rather what positions women have occupied historically – sometimes unwillingly (Burman, 1996).

Person (2003) asserted that according to Statham, Miller and Mauksch (1988) and Chester and Grossman (1990), there have been calls for individual analysis, while considering experience and uniqueness, in order not to perpetuate research that “has been located within two broad domains, namely through –

- broad scale demographic studies and survey data, or
- smaller scale qualitative research” (Person, 2003, p. 7).

Researchers such as Chester and Grossman (1990) have, furthermore, suggested that female-centred, phenomenological research explaining “unique experience(s)” and definition at individual level (Person, 2003, p. 7), could contribute to the understanding of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

1.2.1 General problem statement

Research that contributes to an improved understanding of what women's experience of their sense of identity in the domain of work entails, could contribute to women's sense of self – thus enhancing their personal development, and could therefore assist organisations in the recruitment, retention and remuneration of women employees. Listening to the voices of women at work, and how they experience their unique sense of identity, would enhance people's understanding of what women are experiencing at work, and whether the domain of work allows them to develop their identities.

1.2.2 Problems to be explored through a review of current literature

The purpose of this study was to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, in general, by, *inter alia*, reviewing current literature, and specifically focusing on research that describes a female sense of identity. This provided the context for, and insight into, the problem statement – namely understanding women's experiences of their sense of identity at work.

1.2.3 Problems to be explored through a phenomenological study

A qualitative phenomenological study allowed the researcher to explore women's experiences of their sense of identity at work, in order to understand more about this phenomenon, and gain more insight into the topic, in this manner (Chester & Grossman, 1990).

This research was designed to answer the following research question, to address these issues: "What is women's experience of their sense of identity at work?"

1.3 AIMS

The following general and specific aims were formulated:

1.3.1 General aim

The general aim of the literature review was –

- to provide insight into an understanding of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

1.3.2 Specific aim of the literature review

The specific aim of the literature review was –

- to conceptualise women's sense of identity, and
- to conceptualise women's experience of their sense of identity at work, in general.

This will provide a framework for the phenomenological study.

1.3.3 Specific aim of the phenomenological study

The specific aim of the qualitative, phenomenological study was –

- to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, to contribute to a framework that may assist in understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Figure 4.1);
- to make recommendations that may improve the experience for women at work; and
- to make recommendations for further research in industrial and organisational psychology.

The motivation to use a phenomenological method was discussed in 1.4.2 and 1.4.6.

1.4 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE

The general aim of this research was to explore the experience of women's sense of identity at work – a single phenomenon. To this end, I will now discuss the disciplinary relationship, psychology paradigm, meta-theoretical concepts, models, theories, concepts and constructs, the central theoretical hypothesis, and methodological convictions.

1.4.1 Disciplinary relationship

This study falls within the ambit of the discipline of industrial psychology and the sub-disciplines of Career, Personnel and Organisational Psychology. Its aim was to understand the psychological constructs inherent in women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

1.4.2 Psychology paradigm

The research was conducted within the phenomenological research paradigm. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define a research paradigm as "a basic set of beliefs that guide action", dealing with first principles, or the "researcher's worldviews" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 157).

Within this paradigm, and using a qualitative research approach, an author will generally take us to a place in motion. As when watching a film, people seldom have reason to focus on the camera. Phenomenology brings the observer's design and method to the fore and makes it part of the equation of meaningful conception and participation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Furthermore, Groenewald (2004) suggests that according to Giorgi (1985), a researcher should aim to describe the phenomenon accurately and truthfully, without the use of a predetermined framework.

The aim of this study was therefore to explore and ascribe meaning to the phenomenon of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

My epistemological position could be described as follows:

- a) data could be found in the perspectives of women who are working and experiencing their own sense of identity, and
- b) because of this, I could engage with the participants in gathering the data. (Groenewald, 2004).

1.4.3 Metatheoretical concepts

Using a broad phenomenological framework and a qualitative research approach while utilising feminist principles of collaboration, avoidance of objectification and non-exploitation of the subjects (Creswell, 1998), I explored the opinions of women

expressing their own sense of identity at work. By placing myself in the study, I approached the study with qualitative and phenomenological approaches of scientific rigour. I took cognisance of measures of validity and reliability as applicable to a phenomenological study and, specifically, the content and construct validity of this study deemed appropriate for phenomenological studies, and based the study on the principles of a sound qualitative study as outlined by Creswell (1998).

1.4.4 Models, theories, concepts and constructs

The concept of identity and a sense of identity (Gilligan, 1997; Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004) was explored, in order to find a suitable definition to adopt in this study. Models of the meaning attributed to women's sense of identity were explored against this background.

1.4.5 Central theoretical hypothesis

Exploring women's experience of their own sense of identity at work, and the meaning they attribute to it, could provide meaningful insight into progress made in this field in the interests of women and their associates.

1.4.6 Methodological convictions

A qualitative methodology was used to set out and explore a subjective experience (Hagen, 1986; Kruger, 1988). A phenomenological approach was specifically appropriate, because "[t]he aim of phenomenology is the return to the concrete" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 4), captured by the slogan "Back to the things themselves!" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 56; Husserl, 1970; Kruger, 1988, p. 28; Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

According to Welman and Kruger (1999, 2003), phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved. A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with what the people involved, or who have been involved, have experienced with regard to the issue being researched (Goulding, 2005). An exploratory qualitative study, using a phenomenological research paradigm, will make it possible to suggest relationships (Kerlinger, 1986).

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the phase that involves the research question, the purposes of the study, what questions to ask to answer the research question, and how to strategically obtain this information (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

1.5.1 Type of research

In order to explore the specific research question, I chose qualitative research (as opposed to mixed methods research), using a phenomenological approach. Researchers have encouraged mixed method approaches in feminist writings (Mertens, 2003, 2009) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggested that there was a need for mixed methods research, in order for researchers to take more of an advocacy stance and in this way to provide a platform to address social injustice. However, Howe (2004) suggested that mixed methods research is not sufficiently interpretive, does not encourage participation by participants, and also does not allow for an understanding of those taking part (Sweetman, Badiee & Creswell, 2010).

Although only relevant to this research by virtue of the feminist 'interpretive' approach, more recent articles on the social capital potential of women (Hodgkin, 2008) and African-American women in science (Buck, Cook, Quigley, Eastwood & Lucas, 2009), suggest the benefits to society of research using a 'lens' promoting advocacy, while feminist researchers in sociology suggest a link between mixed methods research and feminist viewpoints (Leckenby & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Stewart & Cole, 2007). However, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), mixed methods "takes qualitative methods out of their natural home, which is within the critical, interpretive framework" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 9). I chose qualitative research using a phenomenological approach, because, *inter alia*, qualitative research has been described as being "interpretive and creative while allowing the researcher to construct interpretations" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pp. 25–26).

According to Hammersley (2000), phenomenologists are of the opinion that the researcher cannot be disconnected from his or her own beliefs. Accordingly, I followed the guidelines of Edwards (2001), who is of the opinion that phenomenology is interventionist, and therefore in the phenomenological reduction

(*epoche*), to consciously suspend any assumptions, in order to allow for original reality and empathy with others (Spinelli, 1989).

Although research indicates that it is not necessary to define the independent and dependent variables in a phenomenological study, as it is envisaged that there will be an ever-expanding set of variables (Stones, 1986, 1988), I considered it necessary to elaborate on the concept of a sense of identity, in order to provide a holistic view of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

Thus, a qualitative, phenomenological research design was deemed appropriate to carry out the aims of the research, as, according to Terreblanche and Durrheim (2002), using a phenomenological approach permits a "concerted effort to reveal the 'structure of experience' using the terms of reference of the participants themselves" (Terreblanche & Durrheim, 2002, p. 405).

1.5.2 Unit of discussion

The sample selected was based on the research purpose (Babbie, 1995; Schwandt, 1997) and to interview women who have had 'lived' experiences of the phenomenon that was researched (Kruger, 1988, p. 150). These women were the unit of discussion (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000), and their informed consent (refer to Appendix E) was requested (Bailey, 1996; Arksey & Knight, 1999).

1.5.3 Methods to ensure measures of reliability and validity

The scientific rigour of the study was monitored using measures of methods of reliability and validity deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998; Kirk & Miller, 1987). Qualitative researchers frequently rely on the writings of Guba (1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982) when analysing criteria for confirmability of reliability and validity concepts in qualitative methodology. However, Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) suggest that these criteria do not apply to confirmability in phenomenology, nor in feminist philosophy. They argue for a return to validity to ensure rigour, and suggest the use of techniques of verification so that validity and reliability are attained during the process – as opposed to being declared by external reviewers on completion of the project (Morse et al., 2002).

Constant verification of the mechanisms used during the research may contribute to ensuring measures of validity and reliability. By using an iterative approach to the qualitative research, I may move back and forth between the design and the implementation, thus ensuring congruence (Morse et al., 2002).

I was required to and used sensitivity, flexibility, skill and creativity in using verification strategies that could determine measures of validity and reliability of the study. Verification strategies that could ensure measures of validity and reliability include theoretical thinking, theory development, coherence to methodology, a sufficient sample size and the addition of a developing relationship during sampling, collection of data and explication (Morse 1997). These verification strategies should contribute to building measures of validity and reliability in the pursuit of ensuring scientific rigour (Morse et al., 2002). In this study, I used theoretical thinking, theory development, coherence to methodology and the addition of a developing relationship during sampling, collection of data and explication. The size of the sample may have been too small, and I therefore endeavoured to discover elements of meta-themes that could become evident at six interviews (Gallagher, Rocco & Landorf, 2007). During the sampling, collection of data and data explication, I continuously moved between the viewpoints and my frame of reference.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The steps in both the literature review and the phenomenological study were described. The researcher endeavoured to conduct the study in a scientific manner as set out in 1.5.3.

1.6.1 Phase 1: Literature review

Women's experience of their sense of identity at work was broadly explored. From a review of the current literature, emphasis was placed on the concepts of personal and social identities, while considering all other relevant ideas of identity. The researcher discovered a limited amount of research on the concept of women's sense of identity at work, and existing literature was therefore reviewed. It was hoped that this methodology would assist the exploration of the concept from a phenomenological viewpoint.

1.6.2 Phase 2: Phenomenological study

According to Creswell (1998), a phenomenological study allows the researcher to delve deeper into a phenomenon through a retrospective process, and, in this manner, to reflect on historic lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). The phenomenological study allows several individuals to describe what they have experienced with regard to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In the process, the researcher moves from a “sense of the whole to the discussion and synthesis of smaller consistent statements of a concept or phenomenon” (Giorgi, 1985, p. 19). Precise descriptions reduced to text then lead to a description of the essence of the experience, namely ‘what’ and ‘how’ the individuals experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To this end, I used the following steps:

Step 1: Sampling

Sampling is a theoretical process in phenomenological studies. Because a large quantity of data is expounded on, a small sample is sufficient (Mouton & Marais, 1992). In addition, typical case sampling allows one to consider why certain people or groups express themselves in particular ways, and what processes they use to construct their attitudes. The role they assume in dynamic processes within an organisation may also become apparent from this process.

Sampling technique

I selected a typical purposive case sample of professional women who were employed and who had an understanding of, and could discuss, the experience of the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 1998). Snowball sampling was of use, in that ‘informants’ provided access to other members of the population who were willing to participate in the research (Creswell, 1998; Huysamen, 1997).

Sample size

The size of the sample was determined after reading various approaches to qualitative and phenomenological research (Creswell, 2007; Mouton & Marais, 1992). It became evident that data saturation might occur at 12 interviews, while elements of meta-themes might become evident at six interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Gallagher et al., 2007). For this research, sampling was a typical purposive case sample of professional female individuals who were employed, and who had

an understanding of, and could discuss, the experience of the phenomenon being researched.

In keeping with the requirements for the scientific rigour of the study, I also took notes, and reflected on my notes after the interviews. I then started to explicate the themes and sub-themes to cluster them.

Step 2: Measuring instrument

Research is unquestionably measured in terms of an “extensive collection of data” (Creswell, 1998, p. 19). To collect the data, I made use of semi-structured interviews to allow for flexibility and to encourage participants to engage in the process. This semi-structured interview approach was a guide for the respondents, in terms of the research questions, and placed a minimum of restraint on the responses to their experience.

As techniques to gather qualitative data, semi-structured interviews are designed to allow the researcher to gather information about people (including their ideas and opinions), which tend to be more manageable because they are arranged as conversations around an interview guide (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The interview guide allows one to use both closed- and open-ended questions, and in so doing encourages communication (Arksey & Knight, 1999). I used open-ended questions and probes and prompts, and in this way elicited further elaboration and clarity on the research questions, in order to achieve in-depth and complete answers (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Ashmore et al. (2004) suggest that when endeavouring to understand the “collective identity element narrative”, standardised procedures could be designed for purposes of assessment, and that one could “devise a semi-structured format, perhaps model(l)ed after the Life Story Interview procedure developed by McAdams (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997) to assess individuals’ personal life stories”. (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 97). A study undertaken by Sweetman, Badiee and Creswell (2010) yielded information that suggested that semi-structured interviews were the more common methods utilised by researchers when collecting qualitative data.

As the researcher, I was the primary research tool in this phenomenological study (Ely, 1994; Patton, 1990, 2002). Accordingly, the questions in the interview guide were developed based on my life experience and on the literature reviewed. As such, with the understanding of my own distinctive characteristics with regard to sensitive, emotional or controversial subject matter, when endeavouring to get my sample of professional women to engage with me and to disclose information that could potentially upset them, I endeavoured not to upset anyone, and to ensure that there was no risk of harm to them, and was also prepared for emotional reactions from my sample of women (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Step 3: Data collection

A typical case sample was used for the qualitative research project. Data collection was gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the participants that lasted for between 35 and 45 minutes each. Semi-structured interviews were held with the participants in quiet and convenient venues where privacy was secured. The researcher recorded the semi-structured interviews, and the data was coded and assigned using Atlas-ti in accordance with the relevance to each participant's personal internal experience. The phenomenological study method was deemed appropriate, in order to gain an understanding of the experience – as opposed to controlling the outcome (Hagen, 1986).

In line with the research ethics required of a dissertation study, I set aside previously conceived knowledge, biases, understanding and judgements, in order to see the experience without these elements (Moustakas, 1994). I also kept a journal of my own experience, in order to identify possible biases and to eliminate assumptions (Van Manen, 2005).

Step 4: Data explication, discussion of coding and steps in thematic analysis

This study focused on exploring women's experience of their sense of identity at work. Individuals have a multiplicity of identities, and may have more than one important identity (Cadsby, Servatka, & Song, 2011). Ashmore et al. (2004) suggest that certain assessment strategies are available to probe these features of identity, to provide thicker and richer detail to describe the identities, and suggest the use of interview-based explorations to allow for detailed descriptions of participants. To this end, these explorations could be based on three types of content,

namely (a) self-attributed characteristics, (b) ideology, and (c) narrative. It has been suggested that narrative as an element of identity allows the individual to explore her own internal story, and this concept has become a major approach to understanding personal identity (Gergen & Gergen, 1988; McAdams, 1997). Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001, p. 12–13) suggest that “narrative is a substantial and growing approach to self/identity”.

In order to achieve these outcomes, I selected the Stevick-Collaizzi-Keen method. This method allowed me to include a description of personal experience of this phenomenon, and to determine any significant description in an experience. All relevant statements were recorded for their unique contribution, clustered into themes and units of meaning, and expounded on for texture, and thereafter constructed into a description of the experience. Finally, the units of meaning of participants' experience of their sense of identity at work were integrated into the essence of the experience of an independent sense of identity (Chicoine, 2003).

Step 5: Reporting and interpretation of findings

The experience of participants was reported in detail, in order to develop the themes. The findings were explicated in line with a phenomenological method of moving from the specific to the general when integrating themes to the literature (Glaser, 1992; Goulding, 2005).

Step 6: Ethical considerations

In order to obtain informed consent from the participants, I firstly ascertained whether the participants selected were willing to participate in the research (refer to Appendix A & E). As this was an important component of the research, I ascertained whether the potential participants understood the nature and extent of the research, and were in a position to make a voluntary decision thereon. I provided participants with the background and motivation for the research, asked them for personal information (refer to Appendix B), and discussed the purpose of the semi-structured interviews. The Interview Feedback Form (refer to Appendix D) was used as a note. Participants signed the informed consent form (refer to Appendix E) before commencing the interview, and were made aware that they could withdraw at any time – after which their information would be destroyed.

Step 7: Conclusion

The conclusion of both the literature review and the phenomenological study reflected on the findings of the research, and determined whether the aims and problem statement of the study were met.

Step 8: Limitations

The limitations of both the literature review and the phenomenological study were examined and discussed.

Step 9: Recommendations

The findings of women's experience of their sense of identity at work may provide recommendations for future research in the areas of Organisational, Personnel and Career Psychology. It is also envisaged that the outcome may provide 'thick' and 'rich' information of value (Creswell, 1998, p. 119), which may benefit women and their associates at work.

1.6.3 Phase 3: Article development

The requirements of this dissertation suggest that Chapter 4 be presented in the format of an academic article. When I wrote the article, I started with the introduction and key focus of the study and the background. I then focused on the purpose of the research, trends discovered in the research literature, the research problem, and the value that could potentially be added to the study. The research design and methodology section followed – which included the research approach, method, setting and entrée, as well as the researcher's role, sample, data collection and recording of the data. I then focused on the explication of the data, and during this phase I started formulating and interpreting the substantive theory. A conceptualisation of the findings followed, and during this phase I asked questions and formulated the diagrams and themes, while referring to the literature and considering my own experience, using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Chicoine, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998). This process allowed me to suggest themes and sub-themes, and to depict these in Chapter 4, Table 4.2. As a result of this process, I could design the framework as depicted in Chapter 4, Figure 4.1. I then proceeded to the completion of the reporting, conclusions and recommendations for future research, and the limitations of this study.

1.7 CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters will be presented as follows:

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 3: Research methodology

Chapter 4: Article

Chapter 5: Conclusions, contribution, recommendations and limitations.

1.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 provided the background and motivation for this research. The problem statement and aims for the proposed literature review and phenomenological study were formulated. The researcher's role and motivation for the study, the paradigm perspective, disciplinary relationship and constructs, were clarified. The research design, unit of discussion and method for both the literature review and phenomenological study, were postulated. The chapter ended with the chapter layout.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In line with the research aims, this chapter provides insight into what constitutes women's experience of their sense of identity at work. The specific aim of the literature review, to both conceptualise women's sense of identity and to conceptualise women's experience of their sense of identity at work in general, provided a framework for the phenomenological study.

2.1 WOMEN'S SENSE OF IDENTITY

How does one determine women's experience of their sense of identity? Is identity expressed as a collective concept or is it expressed as an individual concept? In answer to some of these questions, I will now discuss concepts of personal identity as discovered in contemporary literature.

The construct of personal identity has been researched quite extensively in terms of individual identity, male and female perspectives of identity, and other forms of identity (Ashmore et al., 2004). As an individual's personal orientation will influence the amount of time spent in an occupation, and other factors such as the organisation's official policy and working hours, personal identity will be explored (Ashmore et al., 2004).

Personal identity typically refers to characteristics of the self that one believes, in isolation or combination, to be unique to the self, rather than being shared with a specifiable set of others; personal identity sets one apart from all others (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001; Simon, 1997). But what is a sense of identity of a person?

2.1.1 Defining identity

It also becomes apparent that the construct of identity has been researched from many different presuppositions, and by those from many disciplines of thought. Identity includes, but is not limited to, definitions incorporating aspects of national, political, personal, social, and role-specific ideas (Berger & Luckmann; Bloom; Deng; Herrigel; Hogg & Abrams; Jenkins; Katzenstein; Kowert & Legro; Taylor; Wendt; as cited in Fearon, 1999, pp. 4–5). Therefore, for clarity, I have explored a few definitions of the term *identity*:

- a) Fearon (1999, p. 25) suggests that personal identity “is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orient her behavior that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to” (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston & McDermott, 2006). Fearon furthermore provides a more detailed discussion on (b) and (c) of his definition.
- b) Katzenstein (1996) suggests that the word *identity*, “references mutually constructed and evolving images of self and other” (Katzenstein, 1996, p. 59; Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996).
- c) A further elaboration of the definition of *identity* was postulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 132), who suggested that “indeed, identity is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world”. “A coherent identity incorporates within itself all the various internalized roles and attitudes.” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 132; Pfadenhauer & Berger, 2013).

I considered at least 14 definitions of identity in the literature, and discovered certain extraordinary definitions, including descriptions of a “nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject?” (Clifford, as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5). “Any source of action not explicable from biophysical regularities” (White, as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5); “a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question; identity is a process, identity is split”; “Identity is not a fixed point but an ambivalent point” (Hall, as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5).

Upon considering all of the abovementioned definitions of identity, I considered the use of one definition per type of identity discovered, that may be generalised to a broader population (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and relevant to personal identity, one definition relevant to social or collective identities, and one definition relevant to the workplace. I realised that at some point I would have to choose a definition of identity that might be suitable for use in this study, which could include the possibilities of unbiased aspects of the identities of the participants, but could also be used across populations.

In choosing this definition, the many possibilities of types and combinations of identities became relevant. I decided that the most relevant and inclusive definition of a suitable identity was that of James Fearon (1999), who interestingly both refers to 'her' and links personal identity to social identity, in his definition. It appeared important that a definition of personal identity be included, because my study was to conceptualise women's sense of their identity at work from a small sample of women within the context of a phenomenological study.

For the purpose of this study, the definition of personal identity, as set out by Fearon (1999, p. 25), states that –

Personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orient her behaviour that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to.

Likewise, Jacobson (1964) suggested that separateness, independence and autonomy were important facets in establishing identity or identities. This leads to the question of what a sense of identity entails.

2.1.1.1 Defining a sense of identity

Lachmann (2004) refers to Stern (1985), who departed from the concept of a model of linear development of an infant leading to transformation to form a separate self, and described four cumulative senses of self. These senses of self continuously transform, influence and develop each other. As each infant develops capacity, new opportunities and resources for growth develop. These four senses of self are described as being a sense of an emergent self, a core self, a verbal and a subjective self. These four basic senses are the foundation of the sense of self, and therefore the identity. Lachmann (2004) postulates that 'identity' has been absorbed by the sense of self, and argues that the concept of sense of self provides an accessible and detailed way in which to access the uniqueness of an individual in the context of an environment (Lachmann, 2004). In substantiating the theory, Lachmann (2004) refers to Jacobson (1964), who postulated that independence, separateness and autonomy were important facets of establishing

an identity, and linked the development of the 'self' to a world of objects. Stern (1985), furthermore, refers to the 'senses of self', and links the development thereof to relations between others and the self.

As these senses of self or identity are continuously transforming or regenerating, does this explain that it is possible to construct more than one identity?

2.1.2 Multiple identities

What are multiple identities? The four senses of self, continuously reformulating and changing each other, may allow the construction of multiple identities. Identities have been described as being personal, social or collective, national, political, role-specific, and in ways mentioned above. Social identities may include various identities such as race, gender, nationality, family and occupation (Turner, 1982, 1984; Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As identities may be transformed, renewed, regenerated or reformulated, and influence and develop each other, it is suggested that they become a composite of the whole at manifestation, and may therefore be utilised either together or separately – thus suggesting the use of multiple identities (Cadsby et al., 2011).

How do the multiple identities of individuals fit into a collective concept such as 'being women'?

2.1.3 Collective Identity

What is collective identity? Collective identity is not separate and distinct from personal identity, and includes reference to social identities (Wheelan, 2005). Wendt (as cited in Fearon, 1999, pp. 4–5), defines collective identity as follows:

Social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. ... [Social identities are] at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine 'who I am/we are' in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations.

Social or collective identities refer to the link between an individual (self) and to a social group or groups (Brewer, 2001; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Collective

identities may furthermore be described as being reflections of individual or group behaviours when interacting with social structures (Hogg et al., 1995).

Having discovered meanings and definitions of multiple and collective or social and group identities, is it evident that because the senses of self continuously transform, influence and develop each other, in a sense resulting in changing or redefining or switching of identities, the same may switch or regenerate or reformulate? What does the redefining or switching of identities entail?

2.1.4 Identity redefinition and identity switching

Identity redefinition or switching has been described by Shih et al. (2013) as strategies people may use to manage their identities when faced with discrimination. Identity redefinition is described as redefinition and re-association with stereotypes, whereas identity switching is described as dissociation with the identity that is facing the discrimination and change to an identity attracting less discrimination (Shih et al., 2013). Identity redefinition or switching may result in the separation from, or loss of, or change in, an identity. This process may result in the reformulation of an identity.

This discovery leads me to a discussion on identity reformulation. What is identity reformulation?

2.1.5 Identity reformulation

Identity reformulation may be described as being a process consisting of six cognitive processes – those of planning, projecting, accounting, assessing, weighing and reviewing (Pickens, 1982). However, can identity reformulation and the use of multiple identities lead to identity conflict?

2.1.6 Identity conflict

What is identity conflict? Identity conflict may be described as being role conflict or even identity crisis. Ashforth and Mael (1989) suggest that because a person may belong to groups, the various identities in their social identity may place changeable demands on that person – demands that may cause conflict in their personal identity (Leary, Wheeler & Jenkins, 1986). Resolving conflict between

identities may be achieved by regeneration, switching or reformulation, loss of, and change in identity (Shih et al., 2013).

Cadsby et al. (2011) postulate that familial, gender or professional identities may influence preference for competition. The results of a study wherein male and female professional participants were exposed to a priming stimulus, suggested that the female identities conflicted. The conclusion was that the female preference for competition differed, depending on the identity active at the time. Identity was affected by social norms, and this affect could be extended to behaviour in the workplace (Cadsby et al., 2011).

Having discovered various meanings and definitions of identity and a sense of identity, I explored research on women's identity from a feminine perspective.

2.2 A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Josselson (1996) produced a longitudinal study of 30 women (in 1972), wherein she discovered that women's development was charged with revision and diversity. Thereafter, Horney (as cited in Osborne, 1991) postulated that family influences influenced the development of women and this work provided the foundation for contemporary feminist theories focusing on early experiences and relationship-oriented identities in women (Chodorow 1995; Gilligan, 1982). From the literature, it appears that at this time, 1972 to 2012, more women were taking an interest in research regarding the development and identity of women (Balabanova, 2004, 2007; Carruthers, 2003; Chodorow, 1995; Gilligan, 1982, 1997; Jacobson, 1964; Josselson, 1996; Miller, 1986; Trachtenberg, 2012; Vindhya, 2012).

Other proponents of contemporary feminist theory, Miller (1986) and Gilligan (1997), postulated that personality theories were based on the work of white, middle-class men, using andocentric models of maturity (eg Kohlberg, 1981; Levinson, 1978). As an avid proponent of feminist relational theory, Gilligan (1982) wrote a ground-breaking study (of moral development) that suggested that many personality theories of women have been based on empirical research that has been evaluated by groups of men. Women's social relationships were seldom recognised. Why was this?

2.2.1 Connection with others and generativity in forming a woman's sense of identity

Carruthers (2003) concurs with Erikson (1968), in that identity formation has been described as being linear, and that this is an important milestone to reach before intimate relationships are possible. Carruthers (2003) postulates that the development of a woman's identity may require that both connection with others (intimacy) and attainment of competence (generativity) should be formed. As women's identities may regenerate or switch, there may be internal conflict in balancing multiple roles and in their relationships with others (Maslow, 1956, 1987; Rogers, 1957). This concept has, however, been researched from another perspective by Boon (2008).

Boon (2008) discusses the work of Nancy Locklin (2007). Boon postulates that Locklin's (2007) research on the identity of women in 18th-century Brittany held many important social customs. These customs seem to be relevant in this century. Although literature and authority during the 17th and 18th centuries suggested that women should remain secluded, this practice did not reflect the reality of women's lives. Women had active work, and developed friendships and networks. Networking provided women with opportunities of, *inter alia*, prospects for work, thus allowing women to make choices. In fact, women were deeply involved in their communities, providing friendship and support to others. Women shared accommodation and worked together. However, there were also women who collaborated against other women, viz, "it was not uncommon to find women engaged in collective action against other women" (Locklin, 2007, p. 136, cited in Boon, 2008).

According to Boon (2008), Locklin's (2007) conclusions were that society appeared to hold multifaceted customs, cultures and social norms, and that during the 18th century the lives of women were not governed by gender alone. The practice of women collaborating against other women has been researched; however, there is very little current research on this phenomenon in the workplace (Boon, 2008; Miller, 2006; Simonton & Montenach, 2013).

2.2.2 Feminist approach/Womanist approach and identity

Feminine identities have been described from two differing approaches, namely a feminist approach and a womanist approach. What is the difference between a feminist identity approach and a womanist identity approach?

Altintas and Altintas (2008) postulate that feminist identity theories may be based on relationships of power, knowledge, voice, agency and position (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008), or on other political theories. More feminist identity theories include racial, regional, national and ethnic identities (Howell, Carter, & Schied, 2002). Womanist identity theory (Ossana, Helms & Leonard, 1992, p. 403), on the other hand, is associated with a model of black identity development (Cross, 1971). This theory suggests that black identity has “an inner structure that ignores externally based identity and embraces internally based individuality” (Moradi, as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008, p. 72). This approach is differentiated from the feminist approach in the following manner:

- Womanist – Inner values, talents and beliefs (Ossana et al., 1992)
- Feminist – Political orientation or debate between men and women (Parks, Carter & Gushue, as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008).

Furthermore, Parks et al. (1996) suggest that there are four basic stages of the womanist model (Downing & Roush, 1985), namely –

- denial of social bias and acceptance of traditional sex roles
- confusion and debate about gender roles
- idealisation of women and an external feminine stance
- internalised definition of female identity – not necessarily feminist or traditional roles (Parks et al., as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008).

The differences between the two models of the feminist (Downing & Roush, 1985) and womanist approaches to identity (Ossana et al., 1992, p. 403) suggest that –

- Feminist identity – political and societal/Womanist – not political or societal
- Feminist identity – the role of women versus men/Womanist – a woman’s own value

- Feminist identity – personal attitude/Womanist – inclusive of feminist identity (Ossana et al., as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008).

Feminist and womanist identity approaches appear to describe women on a more holistic level based on race, politics, gender roles, societal roles, values and beliefs, and culture.

Having discovered many facets of the feminine perspective of women's identity, and being cautiously aware that there were many more to discover, I decided to briefly explore women's identity from a masculine perspective, and in this way discover specific gaps in the research that I had not discovered up to this point.

2.2.3 A masculine perspective on women's identity

Maslow (1956, 1987) considered a self-actualising or self-contained person as being capable of experiencing deeply profound interpersonal relationships with others, while Rogers (1957) was of the opinion that self-affirmation and positive self-esteem would result from empathic, genuine, congruent relationships with others (Rogers, 1957). Thereafter, Erikson (1968) postulated that life is a series of sequential stages, and that each stage presents with developmental tasks, attainment of stability and then transition to the next stage (Merriam & Clark, 1991; Schlossberg, 2005). Later, Erikson (1968) was of the opinion that female development consisted of the choice of an occupation and the pursuit of an ideology, and that although women could maintain relationships, their relational skills impeded the formulation of a clear identity.

Thereafter, Stewart and Healy (1989) undertook a study on the formation of women's identity. They compared groups of women during 1910, 1920 and 1927. Their findings illuminated many subsequent theories of events that occurred during infancy, and the development to adulthood, that had an influence on women's attitudes towards family, work and political ideology (Braungart; Fitzgerald; Schuman & Scott; Stewart & Healy; Duncan & Agronick; Stewart & Gold-Steinberg; as cited in Deaux & Snyder, 2012, p. 790).

In an article discussing relevance and meaning, and a sense of identity at work, Wright (2010) refers to the little-known work of Hersey (1932), who endeavoured to discover a relationship between employee well-being and productivity. Hersey's

(1932) work was designed to look at a person's life in its totality. Wright suggests that by his being able to connect to the work of past researchers, it has 'solidified' his identity within his field, adding relevance and meaning to his work. Wright further suggests that when looking for solutions to add meaning and relevance to a field, the focus should firstly be on the individual. Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), in turn, refer to individuals when they suggest that identity work may be defined as being, *inter alia*, the work of individuals "in forming, maintaining or strengthening the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165).

In summary, while realising that there may be much more research to discover, the discovered research (both feminine and masculine) has already revealed that discussions of women's sense of identity at work, as postulated, appear to be lacking in wholeness and integration of certain facets of a women's sense of identity. This may be attributed to the fact that in earlier years women were denied access to economic enrichment from work, from taking part in political discussions, and from participation in male discussion circles at work, that could develop their attitudes and opinions. In recent transformative times, women have been allowed access to these forums and, more specifically, to the domain of employed work, and to express themselves in this forum – thus shedding light on certain aspects of their sense of identity that allows this discussion (Balabanova, 2004, 2007; Kalev, 2005). The question is – what is women's experience of their sense of identity at work?

2.3 WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AT WORK

Women have faced many concerns in their relationships with others, in defining their sense of self, and in identity creation and intimacy (Gilligan, 1997). This raises the question as to whether work and economic independence provide women with levels of autonomy and independence previously denied them. More importantly, many women workers, from different countries, feel an enhanced sense of self-esteem and an expansion of life choices as a result of wage employment (Tiano & Fiala, 1991).

Balabanova (2007) conducted a mass representative survey on a study of the nature, causes and consequences of women's economic dependency, on the population of Nizhnii Novgorod, Russia, during October and November, 2003. Writing in the feminist tradition, and focusing on "the negative consequences of economic dependency" (Balabanova, 2007, p. 17), she suggested that her own survey results "appear to confirm a direct link between economic dependency and lack of equal rights and exploitation of women" (Balabanova, 2007, p. 17). The survey consisted of 878 working inhabitants of the city, of which 432 were women and 446 men (Balabanova, 2007). Economic dependency appears to perpetuate the cycle of a "lack of equal rights and exploitation of women", adding credence to the negative impact this practice will have on unemployed or under-employed women's sense of identity (Balabanova, 2007, p. 17).

Rimm (1999) suggested that a women's sense of identity at work is still dependent on her personal circumstances. Whether she has a senior role, is successful or committed, she may still place her family and personal relationships above her work. However, women experienced work as a crucial factor that could contribute to the derivation of their identity, and in which they could reach autonomy and independence (Balabanova, 2004, 2007; Jacobson, 1964; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1987).

Researchers have also contemplated the role of collective identification (Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2001) in relation to absenteeism, productivity and employee turnover, while others have theorised as to how a "conceptually independent identity, such as gender" (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 102) may be perceived in the organisational context. These considerations relate to employee decisions to either leave or stay with a company that may be "considered measures of behavioural involvement of an organizational identity" (Ashmore et al., 2004, p. 102). As researchers have already discovered a link between an individual's decision to either stay with, or leave, a company, and collective identification, it may be possible that there is another facet of women's identity at work that has not been discussed. Research on intergroup conflict or identity conflict as a result of group or collective identity pressures, seemed to be lacking.

Musson and Marsh (2007) furthermore suggest that identities are emergent and dynamic, particularly for those in management (Watson & Harris, 1999), and that this can only be as a result of changing contexts and relationships, while Czarniawska, (1997) is of the opinion that identity is an ongoing, socially constructed process that is attained through the interweaving of occupational and social classifications. These classifications help individuals to define themselves in the environment, and to discover their identity (Burr, 1995). As identities may be described as emergent and dynamic within changing settings and relationships, of either social or work-related classification, it appears that these relationships may hold the key when conflict arises.

2.4 FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AT WORK

As it is possible that individuals may use multiple identities, including collective and social identities, what factors may affect women's experience of their sense of identity at work?

Firstly, women's experience of their sense of identity at work should enhance their sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (Chester & Grossman, 1990), even though it appears that the domain of work may also present challenges. As such, work is considered to be a critical aspect of identity (Rimm, 1999). In addition to experiencing an enhanced sense of self-efficacy and self-worth, Balabanova (2004, 2007) suggests that a women's economic dependency, may, *inter alia*, be one of the key factors in defining her status in society. Balabanova (2007) also suggests that as a result of economic dependency, women are more vulnerable on the social and economic planes.

Secondly, individuals may use strategies to manage their identities when faced with discrimination. The strategies of 'identity redefinition' and 'identity switching' are salient, when the identity that is facing the discrimination is 'switched', or changes to an identity attracting less discrimination (Shih et al., 2013).

Thirdly, women also experience an extensive collective identity. In an article exploring how collective identity is constructed among female activists in Andhra Pradesh in southern India, Vindhya (2012) discusses women's self-description,

their seminal influences in decision making, and own narratives of a single action involving collective action. The study found two portrayals of the participants' self-description – firstly, the sharing of boundaries of collective action (indicating an element of teamwork), and secondly, a link to a larger community – as opposed to narrower links to personal and familial identities.

Furthermore, in a study designed to ascertain the effect of mentoring on women's professional growth, Chovwen (2004) discovered that mentoring relationships in an organisation have the propensity to predict the significant growth of mentees. Participants with mentors reported more growth than those without mentors. Affirmative action policies and employment discrimination in South Africa may prevent certain sectors of the population (who may become protégés or mentors) from working – which, in turn, may predict less growth in younger women.

It was anticipated that the many factors that affect women's experience of their sense of identity at work (a few discussed herein) may have included emotive dialogue. Very little research could be found on the use of emotive dialogue by women (Anderson, Vinnicombe & Singh, 2010), and nothing could be found that specifically iterates women's experience of their sense of identity at work, while including this perspective.

Utilising this body of knowledge, while acknowledging that there may be many more areas of thought that I had not discovered in this literature review, I endeavoured to conceptualise what women's experience of their sense of identity at work encompasses, and in this way gained more insight into what this phenomenon may denote. Opinions on women's sense of identity at work had been postulated, yet few women had researched this phenomenon from a purely feminine perspective. An exploration with female participants, using a phenomenological study, may shed some light on these questions.

2.5 SUMMARY

In line with the research aims, Chapter 2 defined identity and also certain aspects of identity. Literature pertaining to a sense of identity, and specifically women's experience at work, was reviewed. Utilising this body of knowledge, while acknowledging that there may be many more areas of thought that I had not

discovered in this literature review, I endeavoured to conceptualise what women's experience of their sense of identity at work encompasses, and in this way gained more insight into what this phenomenon may denote. Opinions on women's sense of identity at work have been postulated, yet few women have researched this phenomenon from a purely feminine perspective. Thereafter, factors affecting women's experience of their sense of identity at work, was discussed. This approach provided a basis to establish a framework to pursue the research aims of the study, namely an exploration with female participants, utilising a phenomenological study.

The next chapter of this study sets out the methodology and research design. Included in Chapter 3 are the basic characteristics of a phenomenological study, method, sample, setting, entrée and the role of the researcher, the data collected, and recording, analysis and assessment of the scientific rigour, reliability and validity of the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

The objective in this chapter was to discuss the phenomenological study as outlined in 1.6.2. The expected outcome was to achieve the aim of the research – that is, by delving deeper into a phenomenon (Gallagher, Rocco & Landorff, 2007), to allow several individuals to describe what they have experienced with regard to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and in this way to give meaning to women’s experience of their sense of identity at work.

I assessed the design of the research against established requirements for a sound qualitative study (Creswell, 1998), discussed the sample and population and sampling strategy, interview guide, collection of data, processing and explication of the data, and evaluated the scientific rigour of the phenomenological study.

3.1 BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

This research project was based on a phenomenological research paradigm, using a qualitative research approach as stated in 1.4.2.

The focus of this dissertation was to gain an understanding of the essence of women’s experience of their sense of identity at work. The nature of the research was considered to be a problem best suited to a phenomenological research design within the discipline of psychology. The basic purpose of a phenomenological study is to “reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence” or a description of “what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The researcher identified and wished to understand the phenomenon of women’s experience of their sense of identity at work, and after designing the research, data was collected from a sample of women who have experienced this phenomenon. Thereafter, an explication of the essence of the experience for all the participants followed. The description consisted of ‘what’ and ‘how’ they experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The main assumptions of the phenomenological paradigm that informed my design and method decisions were –

- a) This study was situated within the phenomenological research paradigm. Within this paradigm, and using a qualitative research approach so as to set out and explore a subjective experience (Hagen, 1986; Kruger, 1988), the researcher will generally take us to a place in motion.
- b) This approach will make it possible to suggest relationships (Kerlinger, 1986). Phenomenology brings the observer's design and method to the fore as part of the equation of meaningful conception and participation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), accurately and truthfully, and without the use of a predetermined framework (Giorgi, 1985).
- c) A researcher applying phenomenology is concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena with the people involved, or who have been involved, of what they have experienced with regard to the subject being researched (Goulding, 2005; Welman & Kruger, 1999, 2003).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The most important criterion for a research design is that the result should answer the research question (Huysamen, 1997; Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). In this section, the research design (with reference to the research approach) and strategy were discussed.

3.2.1 Research approach

A qualitative research approach based on the phenomenological paradigm, was used to answer the research question (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). According to Creswell (2007), the basic characteristics of the qualitative approach to research using phenomenology are as follows:

- Focus – an understanding of the essence of the experience
- Type of problem best suited to a phenomenological design – describing the essence of the lived phenomenon
- Discipline – education, psychology and philosophy

- Unit analysed – several individual cases that have had the experience are studied

Qualitative research reflects the viewpoints of the participants, permits the use of broad questions, allows for data collection of spoken and written words and thereafter explicated and described as themes. This type of research may be biased and subjective (Creswell, 2005, p. 39).

3.2.2 Research strategy

The type of qualitative case study may be distinguished by the intent of the case analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). As the intent of the case analysis was to describe women's experience of their sense of identity at work, a collective case study was selected, using multiple case studies in which one issue or concern was discussed. The researcher purposefully chose multiple cases to show differing perspectives on the issue. As the researcher was reluctant to generalise from one case to another, representative cases were included in the qualitative study (Creswell, 2007, p. 74).

According to Yin (1994), a case study will provide both deep insight into, and an understanding of, the context of the research, and will allow the researcher insight into, and an understanding of, the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Stanton and Salazar (2004), suggest that the analysis of more than one case study is achieved using the replication principle (Stanton & Salazar, as cited in Gilson, 2012). Each case is considered to be unique and whole, and is compared to other cases in order to attribute conclusions and insights that may have commonalities to generalise to other situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009). Iterative analysis is undertaken in order to search for expected replications in subsequent cases (Stanton & Salazar, 2004, as cited in Gilson, 2012).

3.3 RESEARCH METHOD

In this section, the research method, with reference to the research setting, entrée and establishing the researchers role, sampling, developing the measuring instrument, data collection, data analysis, data interpretation, rigour and quality and the ethical considerations used to conduct the empirical study, were discussed.

3.3.1 Sampling

In the discussion of the sampling I have described the research setting, as well as how I attained entrée to, and established my role as, researcher in different organisations.

I initially decided on a typical purposive case sample (Creswell, 1998), and asked a colleague to suggest five possible participants. My colleague provided five names and contact numbers. I then contacted each participant during May 2012 in order to firstly explain who I was, and thereafter that I was doing a master's research dissertation on women's experience of their sense of identity at work. I then asked them if they would be interested in participating, and once they had expressed interest, I explained that the research would be conducted with the ethical considerations of informed consent, and asked if they would they be prepared to engage in the research by signing an informed consent form (refer to Appendix E). All the first five participants agreed, and I then notified them that everything they shared with me would remain confidential, and they would remain anonymous to the research. After further agreement, a few participants asked me to explain the nature of the research. I found it most useful to read sections of my own experience from 1.1, and this proved sufficient information for the participants. Once I had full agreement to continue, I informed them that I would advise them when I would be starting the research and interview process.

Once I had received the go-ahead from my supervisor and from the Ethical Research Committee at Unisa, I called the first participant and set up an appointment for the interview. I met the participant at her office at the designated time, and commenced with the interview. Once this interview was over, I started working on the recording as the transcription was not yet typed. I looked for themes, sub-themes and relevant material to add to my next interview questions. I called the next participant, and set up an appointment for the interview. Once this interview was over, I asked my colleague to transcribe both interviews. In the interim, and in the same manner, I started working on the recording, and looked for themes, sub-themes and relevant material to add to my next interview questions – and found more questions to ask the next participant. I then received the transcriptions, and, using Atlas-ti, found themes and sub-themes, and explicated the content. I then called the third participant, only to discover that she had had

some medical problems and would no longer participate. This experience was not unexpected, as I had approached each of the participants during May 2012, and it was now November 2012. I reconsidered my strategy and decided that I would reread the interviews, and, based on the information, find the next participant based on the outcomes of the previous interviews. It appeared from the first two interviews that the participants were concerned for their black colleagues. I then decided to trace participants or informants using snowball sampling (Babbie, 1995; Huysamen, 1997).

I approached a female colleague with whom I worked, and asked her if she could refer me to a possible participant. My colleague suggested that I approach someone with whom I worked. I approached a female colleague who manages her sister's small business and has a 3-year diploma, and asked her if she would like to participate in my research. She welcomed the opportunity, and offered to meet with me on Monday 11 February 2013 at 13h00. She immediately asked me if I needed any other participants – to which I replied that I did. The method of snowballing allows one to expand the sample by asking one participant to recommend another participant (Babbie, 1995). Neumann (2000) calls this type of participant a *gatekeeper*. A *gatekeeper* as defined by Neumann (2000) is “someone with the formal or informal authority to control access to a site” (Neumann, 2000, p. 352), and a person from whom permission is required. The prospective participant offered to contact a colleague and ask her if she would like to participate in the research. Three days later, she called me to advise me that I could meet with her colleague on Tuesday 12 February 2013 at 11h00 at her office in Johannesburg. Unfortunately, this interview was postponed to a later date to be confirmed on Thursday 14 February by the participant. According to Bailey (1996), the new participant who has volunteered her participation in the research is called a *key insider* or *key actor*. As it so happens, the colleague (the gatekeeper) reported that she was feeling tired on Monday 11 February, and asked if we could re-schedule the interview. I agreed, and the interview was held on Wednesday 13 February at 15h00. This interview was completed successfully. On Thursday 14 February, the *key insider* arranged for the interview to be held at her offices in Johannesburg on Wednesday 20 February 2013 at 13h00. This interview was completed successfully.

3.3.1.1 Description of sample

A biographical profile of the participants follows. This overview has been prepared from the Personal Data Form (refer to Appendix B) filled in by the participants.

3.3.1.2 Age

The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 56 years.

3.3.1.3 Race

I did not consider race as pertinent to the research, as I felt this would be discriminatory, and contrary to the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of 1996. Participants were only required to be women, to meet the criteria for the sample. The participants composed six females – three white, one Chinese and two black females. However, race became a necessary criterion to be added after discussions with the first two participants' differentiated women's experiences of their sense of identity at work, for reasons of race. Race has therefore been added to the questionnaire and personal data form (refer to Appendix B).

3.3.1.4 Career guidance process in place

Three participants indicated that they had attended government coeducational schools for the duration of schooling: one had attended a government, coeducational primary school and a commercial high school; another had attended private schools for both primary and high school.

Four participants had not completed any form of career guidance programmes, during their schooling, which would have assisted them with career and educational choices. One participant indicated that she had attended a career guidance programme, but this had not been adequate with respect to a career choice. One participant indicated that her family had assisted her with a career choice.

3.3.1.5 Graduate degrees

The research design of the phenomenological study required that the participants were employed, professional women. According to the definition of Queeney (2000) mentioned in 1.6.2, the participant should be the holder of a graduate degree and whose work requires a certain skills base and knowledge. This person should also have authority over others at work, and report to a more senior person.

As such, four participants indicated that they had attended a university, while one participant did not attend a university. All were employed in responsible positions in management, and one had many certificates and had been employed in management for more than 25 years. All had authority over others at work, and all reported to a more senior person.

The range of degrees and certificates indicated that one participant had completed a BA (Hons) (HR) degree (including Industrial Psychology) at the University of the Witwatersrand; another participant had completed a BA (LLB) degree at the Rand Afrikaans University (now University of Johannesburg); yet another participant had completed a 3-year BA (Industrial Psychology) degree at Vista University; a fourth participant indicated that she had completed a 3-year diploma in management at the Tshwane University of Technology; and, a fifth participant held many diplomas in completed courses.

One participant was planning to commence a business management degree within the next month, and another participant is currently reading towards an Honours degree in industrial psychology.

3.3.1.6 Current job title and organisation

A criterion for the sample was that all the participants should be employed as professionals when they took part in the research. Participants were employed in the following positions:

- Attorney
- Executive researcher
- Office manager
- Administrator – legal and credit management in a major bank
- Key accounts manager

The types of organisations the participants were employed in ranged from –

- recruitment and human capital staffing solutions;
- firm of attorneys;
- executive human capital sourcing;
- manufacturer and
- major bank.

Table 3.1 below describes the demographical details of the sample used in this research:

Table 3.1: Sample demographic details

LABEL	AGE	QUALIFICATION	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	RACE	INDUSTRY
A	53	BA (Hons) (including Industrial Psychology)	32	White	Executive human capital sourcing
B	56	Various diplomas	36	White	Human capital sourcing
C	27	BA LLB (Law)	3	Chinese	Legal
D	33	BA Industrial Psychology	13	Black	Banking
E	32	University Diploma (Marketing)	5	Black	Manufacturing

(Source: Own research)

3.3.1.7 Sample size

I decided on a small sample of six women. Because a large quantity of data is analysed, a small sample is sufficient (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Furthermore, data saturation was determined throughout the data collection. Once themes and sub-themes were repeated, adding further participants would not lead to further insight (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

3.3.2 Developing the measuring instrument

Data collection in phenomenological studies may comprise of semi-structured interviews with participants (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2007; May, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). This section describes the development of the semi-structured interview and the personal data form (refer to Appendix B).

3.3.2.1 Choice of measuring instrument

When choosing a measuring instrument, I discovered that the interview is a most useful data gathering technique that may be used for a detailed description of the essence of the “lived experience” of the research topic (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). On deciding which type of interview to use, I discovered that structured interviews would not allow me to explore and probe further, and that unstructured interviews could allow too broad a discussion. However, the open-ended, semi-structured interview, coupled with the personal data form, would allow me to achieve the

research aim of describing women's experience of their sense of identity at work, and also allow me to not only set the questions, but also to probe further and to ask more questions (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 2007; May, 2001).

Semi-structured interviews are data-gathering techniques used in qualitative research, which are designed as conversations, loosely arranged around an interview guide (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The semi-structured interview also allows one to collect information about the participant's ideas, experiences, opinions and views (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The semi-structured interview guide was developed to meet the aims of the research (refer to Appendix C). Moustakas (1994) suggests the use of two general, broad questions that will probably lead to a rich structural and textural description of the experience of the participants, and I decided to choose two primary questions.

As the questions to be asked were personal, and therefore possibly sensitive questions, I had prepared myself for possibilities that included endeavouring not to upset anyone, to ensure that there was no risk of harm to them, to be prepared for emotional reactions from the sample of women (Arksey & Knight, 1999), and to ask less threatening questions first, and more threatening questions afterwards.

3.3.2.2 Developing the interview guide for the semi-structured interview

An interview guide is a framework for the semi-structured interview, and addresses the most important questions of the study. I started by considering a number of questions in line with the research question. I then completed an interview guide and submitted it to my supervisor for comment. I was guided as to the number and relevance of the questions. The questions relative to family were discarded, as I discovered that family-related questions would not satisfy the aims of this research. I then revised the remaining questions, and formulated the results. I met with two colleagues, and pre-tested the interview questions with them in order to ascertain if there would be any difficulties with the research design. That data was not included in this study. I then decided on open-ended questions, as my aim was to achieve suitable levels of communication quickly, and to encourage participation in the study.

The semi-structured interview guide was developed to ensure that biographical questions were asked first, and the two principle questions followed. Open-ended questions as a natural progression of the conversation, were anticipated, while the researcher would be mindful of steering the conversation in the direction of the main topic being discussed (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). I was also diligent in ensuring that the research questions would be specific to the nature of the research, were put in language familiar to the participants, were not ambiguous and vague, either embarrassing or too personal, and that no leading or hypothesis-producing questions would be produced (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

Questions included the following:

- What do you understand about women's experience of their sense of identity at work? Please describe this in as much detail as you can.
- How do you experience this sense of identity at work?
- Do you feel that this is a positive path for your personal growth and development at work?
- Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

3.3.3 The self as instrument

This study was designed to provide an understanding of women's experiences of their sense of identity at work. The participants' opinions were expressed *verbatim*, in order to reflect the true position of each participant. It was therefore essential that there was personal interaction between the participants and the researcher, and it is acknowledged that because of this interaction, this study may reflect personal biases (Creswell, 2005). Furthermore, because I placed myself in the study (Creswell, 2013; Rogers, 1979), the concept of reflexivity became the most important aspect once I commenced with the interviews. I constantly maintained and checked the study for "the biases, values and experiences that" I may have inadvertently brought to the study, in order to view the experiences of the participants from a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). In the following paragraphs, I will show how I positioned myself in the different aspects of the research process.

In discovering whether the research paradigm would suit the design and method I had chosen, and to assist me in the conviction that I would discover my own strengths as a researcher in the process, I read widely, and researched as many proponents of phenomenology and the research design that I could find (Creswell, 1998, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 2005). This discovery enlightened and assisted me in the interpretation of what I intended to research, and in finding a way to understand the complex phenomenon of the topic of my research, because these were idioms that I could attach to my experience of my sense of identity at work.

In this research paradigm, as the primary research instrument, I needed to make certain decisions regarding the sample, collection of data, interpretation and explication of the results of the interviews (Patton, 1990, 2002). As such, the reliability and validity of the study's design, method, integrity and rigour rest largely on my frame of reference, decisions and interpretation of the findings.

In my approach, and using all possible research instruments and *epoche* to assist me with the interpretation, I understood and accepted that although my knowledge and experience were central to the research, the meanings and interpretations that I attributed to the participant's lived experiences might differ from person to person.

I have expressed my own, and offered an interpretation of the participants', frame of mind during the interviews, and taken these to the unspoken level. As a requirement of the study, I needed to avoid incorporating my perceptions of myths, stereotypes and biases into the participants' experiences (Van Manen, 2005) of their sense of identity at work. To achieve this, I recognised and accounted for any bias I discovered during the research in the discussion on the limitations of this research. I also acknowledge that I endeavoured to conduct this study with flexibility, empathy, sensitivity, and tolerance of the emotions and diverse viewpoints of the participants.

3.3.4 Developing a personal data form

I developed a personal data form prior to the interview (refer to Appendix B). Biographical data such as name and surname, age, education and occupation, and

career guidance processes already achieved, or in place, were deemed indispensable to the study of relationships between these variables, and to ascertaining the sufficiency of the number to be interviewed in the sample (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

From an ethical standpoint, it should be mentioned that although the professional intention of the researcher was not to harm or to reveal the identity of the participants, names and surnames were important for the outcomes of this study. Chawane, Roodt and Van Vuuren (2003) suggest that the meaning attributed to themes and sub-themes must truthfully reflect what the participants intended. Although race was not considered relevant at the outset of the study, and I preferred not to include it in the personal data form, race became an important criterion for this study as it progressed, and was thus added to the personal data form. This addition became necessary after discussions with the first two participants. Race has therefore been added to the questionnaire and personal data form (refer to Appendix B).

The personal data form should be completed at the outset of the interview, so as to establish a rapport between the parties, and because this information is considered to be neutral to the interviewer and interviewee (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000).

3.3.5 Using a pilot interview

I conducted a pilot study with one participant with the necessary criteria to participate in the study. This study was used to ascertain whether the participant would be comfortable (as would be noted in both verbal and non-verbal behaviour during the interview) with the personal line of questioning, whether the method and procedure would measure and answer the research question, and whether the questions to be asked were clear and unambiguous, and “directed to the participant’s experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the theme in question” (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). The transcript was then sent to my research supervisor for comment, and feedback was provided. I integrated the comments from my research supervisor into the interview, and commenced with the next interview (Welman & Kruger, 2003).

The first interview was held with Participant A. This pilot interview proved challenging, as the participant was quite outspoken, and the researcher was sometimes

quite taken aback by the participant's comments. The pilot interview was a good platform to test the question's sequence and their relevance. I advised my supervisor that the interview had been held, and submitted a transcription for feedback and consideration. My supervisor read the transcripts and informed me as to the relevance of refining certain aspects of my first interview, namely prompts used and the discussion of my own experience. The feedback from my research supervisor was that the research could proceed. I continued with the interviews and applied the feedback received from my research supervisor. This process allowed me to feel more in control of the interview and to discuss the topics in a little more detail – thus providing richer responses in the data.

3.3.6 Collection of the data

Steps used in the administration and collection of the data are discussed in this section.

3.3.6.1 Invitation and agreement to participate in the study and appointment made

I contacted each participant telephonically, and consulted with them regarding their availability, the time and place of the interview, and asked them whether they had any questions regarding the interview. Once availability was confirmed, the interviews were then scheduled for a specific time at a certain place, generally at the participants' place of work.

In order to reach agreement with each participant before the interview, I explained the research process as follows: an introduction; purpose of the research and interview; necessity to complete a biographical data and consent form; that two main questions would be proposed; that the interviewer would electronically record the interview, with the participant's permission, take notes during the interview, and fill in a feedback form of the interview once completed, and in this way planned the interview in a consultative manner as suggested by Arksey and Knight (1999). I also explained that ethical clearance to do the research had been granted by the University of South Africa.

3.3.6.2 Introductory briefing

I used the introductory comments below (listed in Appendix A) to do the briefing –

- 'Thank you for offering to participate in this interview.'
- 'As explained, this interview forms part of my master's research that is entitled "Women's experience of their sense of identity at work", and I will use a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological research approach. Do you have any questions?'
- 'The meaning you attribute to the discussions we will have will be used as data for my research. Your identity will remain anonymous and all your responses will be treated as highly confidential'.
- 'I would like to record the interview/s that will last for about 45 minutes, using a tape recorder. I propose to transcribe the information using Atlas-ti, once completed. I will also make use of a notebook while we are talking, so that I don't miss anything you say. Are you comfortable with this method?'
- 'I will require some background information from you. I have a personal data form that we can complete. Will this be in order?'

I thereafter commenced with the completion of the personal data form.

3.3.6.3 Completion of the personal data and consent form

After the introduction, I asked the participants to complete the personal data form in their own handwriting, and, thereafter, the consent form. Once this was completed, the interview commenced.

3.3.6.4 Conducting the semi-structured interview

I endeavoured to establish rapport, credibility and trust at the beginning of the semi-structured interview, as suggested by Moustakas (1994) and a few of my colleagues, and by discussing my own 'lived experience' as written in the introduction to the research, and in this way to relax and enable the participants to fully describe their own experiences.

I thanked the participants for agreeing to participate in the research study (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004), and then once again explained the purpose of the study. I discussed how long the interview would take, and assured the participants that they were promised confidentiality and anonymity, that should they wish to withdraw at any time, they might do so, and that their information would be destroyed immediately (Welman & Kruger, 2003). I assured the partici-

pants that they could say whatever they liked, pertinent to the research questions, and this information would be treated as highly confidential.

I then asked the participants if I might use a tape recorder and take notes during the interview. Once assured of their consent, I proceeded to test the tape recorder to make sure that it was recording properly, and continued to check the recorder during the interview to make sure it was running. After the participant completed the personal data and consent forms, I proceeded to the interview guide and commenced the interviews. During the interviews, certain new topics arose and questions were asked, and I only explored these for clarity or expansion, where necessary (Henning et al., 2004). Having a flexible approach to the exploration of the questions at hand, allows for further information and insight (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

During the interviews, I used probes, and prompted participants to elaborate, clarify and provide examples of the meaning attributed to answers provided. Examples of the verbal probes used included “say it in Afrikaans”, “that’s very interesting”, “how does that make you feel?”, “would you like to elaborate on that?”, “that’s also very interesting”, and “this has been your experience”. More probes included “would this be how you experience women’s sense of identity at work”, “can you maybe just elaborate on what it is you think they are experiencing”, “that must be quite frustrating”, “for what reason”, “why do you feel sorry for them”, and “how do you feel about that”. Other verbal probes used included ‘yes’ and ‘yeah’. Towards the completion of the interviews I asked follow-up questions to allow myself to probe unanticipated themes or new ideas that had arisen, or to understand and grasp the essence of the answers provided (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

Once the participant had answered the questions within the allocated time, I enquired as to whether there was anything further the participant would like to add, and thereafter made a verbal summary of the salient features of the interview, in order that the participant could verify same. I then advised the participant that they may be contacted again, to read the notes and to ascertain that the content was transcribed and understood as was intended by the participant (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 97). I then concluded the interview and thanked the participant for their participation in the research study (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

3.3.6.5 Completion of the interviewer feedback form

The interviewer feedback form (refer to Appendix D) was completed immediately after the interview. Feedback included the salient features of the interview, verbal and non-verbal cues to behaviour, and posture and positioning of the participants. This information was then attached to the personal data form, education and occupation form, informed consent form, and notes written during the interviews and filed in a secure filing system (Burns & Grove, 1997).

3.3.6.6 Transcribing interview protocols

Initially, the first interview was transcribed and returned. Thereafter, another two interviews were completed and the recordings were sent for transcription. The last two interviews were held, recorded and sent off for transcription. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed professionally, and all sounds, verbal and non-verbal, were typed. The recorder had its own labelling system. All the transcriptions were sent to the researcher's supervisor for comment. Once the transcriptions were returned, they were filed together with the individual participants' forms and notes until they would be used in explication. The notes made by the researcher during the interviews were attached to the transcriptions. The interviews were conducted over a period of two months. The protocol included an interview guide and a verbal request for permission to engage in subsequent communication by telephone, email or further interview. I then revised the remaining questions and formulated the results.

3.3.6.7 Data processing

I have deliberately avoided the use of the words 'data analysis', as Groenewald (2004) suggests that Hycner (1999), cautions that the word 'analysis' is not appropriate when using the phenomenological paradigm in a research study. Analysis sometimes means a 'breaking into parts', and this would imply that the data is not studied as a 'whole'. Creswell (2003a) suggests that the analysis of data requires continuous thought, questioning and taking of notes during the study. This section describes the processing of the data and data audit trail.

Data collected using semi-structured interviews, was explicated using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998; Stones, 1986, 1988). Themes, sub-themes and recurring themes collected in the interviews, and

information from the personal data form and interviewer feedback form, including aspects of non-verbal indicators of behaviour, were explicated.

a) Identification of emerging themes

I set about identifying emerging themes in the data, using the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Chicoine, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998). The steps included the following:

- Obtaining a full description of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon being researched;
- Ascertaining the meaning and significance of 'what' was experienced;
- Identifying and recording all statements relevant to the research;
- Horizontalisation (determining significant statements or quotes) of the relevant statement (Moustakas, 1994).
- Clustering units of meaning into themes;
- Assigning meaning to the textural description of the experiences;
- Assigning meaning to the structural description of the experiences;
- Construction of a structural-textural description of the experience;
- Integration of all participants' experiences into the essence of women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Chicoine, 2003).

Thereafter, I proceeded to the description of emerging themes.

b) Description of emerging themes

I uploaded the transcriptions onto Atlas-ti, and began the process of formulating units of meaning that might recur, in order to describe women's experience of their sense of identity at work. Once duplication of the relevant statement of the units of meaning was completed, the remaining units of meaning were clustered into themes, according to the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Chicoine, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998). Themes that emerged were linked together, and in this way a description of the participants' experience, both structurally and texturally, was gathered from the data (Chicoine, 2003). I then began the process of assigning meaning to the structural and textural descriptions of the experience. This process gave meaning to the participants' experience of their sense of identity at work and what this meant

to them, and provided the detail in which to describe the experience (Chicoine, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Transcription, explication and sorting the interviews into units of meaning and themes helped the researcher to determine the participants' meaning, in order to “describe the central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2005, p. 49).

c) Moving themes from the specific to the general

Following the aims of this research, I undertook to describe women’s experience of their sense of identity at work. A detailed literature review was completed at this stage for each theme identified, and integrated with the findings, to explore women’s experience of their sense of identity at work, in order to understand this phenomenon.

3.3.7 Assessment of the scientific rigour of the phenomenological study

According to Creswell (1998), there are measures of methods of reliability and validity deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study. My approach using these measures was as follows:

- I made use of a tradition of enquiry for the phenomenological study.
- I used an evolving design that would allow me to present multiple views of participants realistically.
- This study was based on a qualitative research approach.
- In this study a single variable was described – women’s experience of their sense of identity at work.
- In this study I conducted semi-structured interviews that were tape-recorded and transcribed; notes were taken, and the participants' non-verbal behaviour was noted. This allowed me to interpret both verbal and non-verbal data – thus adding to the rigour of the data collection procedures.
- I used the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to move themes from the particular to the general.
- Raw data was presented as evidence to substantiate the findings. These procedures lead to improved possibilities for verification.

- The authenticity of the study was improved by providing a written account that would be clear and engaging to its readers (Creswell, 1998; Kirk & Miller, 1987).

3.3.7.1 Review of the scientific rigour of the phenomenological study

In my approach to return to techniques of validity and the use of techniques of verification, in order to attain measures of reliability and validity during the process as mentioned in 1.5.3 above, I constantly monitored verification of the mechanisms used during the research, by using an iterative approach to the qualitative research, and moving back and forth between the design and the implementation – thus ensuring congruence (Morse et al., 2002).

Alternative methods of validation of reliability and validity were proposed. Verification strategies that I used for measures of validity and reliability included theoretical thinking, theory development, coherence to methodology, a sufficient sample size, and the addition of a developing relationship during sampling, collection of data and analysis (Morse, 1997). I was required to use sensitivity, flexibility, skill and creativity in using these verification strategies.

From a contemporary perspective, scientific rigour is reflected when there are high levels of accuracy, precision and completeness using clearly defined procedures (Argyris, 1980; Friedman, 2001). The relevance of validity as an action concept to this study, is the significance that accuracy may be reflective of a better understanding of the whole (Argyris, 1980), thereby possibly improving transferability.

To achieve *epoché*, I endeavoured to put myself through an experience of self-reflection, so as to identify my own biases and assumptions. I kept a journal, to identify my own reflections on the questions in the semi-structured interviews, and to identify certain biases and assumptions so as to learn from the experience (Van Manen, 2005).

I discovered that an audit trail of the data gathering and resulting findings may establish confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This technique was thus incorporated into the research process, to ensure scientific rigour throughout the process. A portion of the audit trail has been produced from the completed data explication (Rosedale, 2008), and is presented below.

a) Introductory excerpt from the audit trail

It appeared from the interviews that some of the participants' reflections on their answers to the experience of their sense of identity at work were evoking certain aspects relevant to the answer that they may not have considered before. I realised that I would have to identify these in the data explication and discuss same.

b) Extracting emotive dialogue from the study

When interviewing certain participants, I experienced a number of differing and profound emotions resulting from the content of the dialogue. I realised that anyone reading my work may experience the same emotions and wondered how they would manage this process. At this time, it became relevant for me to scrutinise the emotive content in each participant's interview and to consider each aspect of the outcome intently.

c) Bracketing out (*epoche*) of perceptions of the researcher

I applied one of Husserl's (1970) concepts of *epoche* or 'bracketing out' of my own perceptions relevant to the research study, before commencing with the semi-structured interview, in order to listen to the participants' experience from a fresh perspective (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). According to Miller and Crabtree (1992, p. 24), bracketing one's own perceptions relevant to the research means that the researcher "must bracket her own preconceptions and enter into the individual's life-world, and use the self as an experiencing interpreter".

This is a further extract from the audit trail: 'The fourth interview proved to be quite daunting, as I struggled with the replies from the participant, specifically with regard to her 'not' yet enjoying a sense of identity at work. An immense sadness enveloped me, as I initially had the urge to comfort her and to talk more about this phenomenon. Once the interview was over, I retracted from the discussion and began to encourage her, and decided not to pursue that aspect of the conversation but rather to discuss her options at work and the manner in which she could possibly go on a path of discovery. When I got home, I reflected on what I had experienced and what I had been told. I started to remember my own journey to self-discovery and what I had experienced,

and, in remembering, found some consolation in that my journey (with all its trials and tribulations) had brought me here and this was quite a nice place to be. I decided to write more on my experience and started doing so.

d) The competent practitioner

The competency of a practitioner in a social context is vitally important to the process of research. Practitioners are required to identify potential pitfalls, biases, misunderstandings and use of myths and stereotypes, and to clarify and remove these from the study. By selecting the topic of the research, the researcher expresses an interest in and wishes to endeavour to add value to the topic of research, in the context in which she has experienced the phenomenon. The process increases the researcher's awareness of the topic as a member of the society in which she lives.

e) Researcher's critical life incidents

I grew up in a diverse South African family, with mixed heritage of British, Irish and Lithuanian lineage. While growing up, leadership, family responsibility and cultural values were very important lessons – as were the traditions of many differing and conflicting cultural backgrounds. My life experience has been quite diverse.

I did not attend primary school, but attended classical music lessons from the age of five until the age of twelve, and had a tutor every afternoon for the last two hours. I was able to play the violin, flute, piano, bass and double bass, and wrote poetry. Being in a convent run by Dominican nuns, I was taught reading, writing, arithmetic and religion. At the age of nine or so, I was to play at my Piano Teacher's Examination, but could not, for reasons of fatigue and, I believe, exhaustion, and thereafter decided to stop playing any musical instruments – much to the dismay of those around me. Thereafter, I went to a government coeducational high school. This dramatic change was rather difficult to adapt to and I did not enjoy high school. Along with this, I experienced areas of self-development distinct from the norms of the society in which I lived. This discovery of the uniqueness within me initially brought with it confusion, even anger, due to frustration, but ultimately brought with it awe and wonder, and the excitement that there were an enormous number of

possibilities that existed within me. I continue to discover and explore my uniqueness, and to understand the context, so that I might share my experiences more completely with all those who might be interested in it.

Growing up, my desire was to be an attorney. As a candidate attorney during the 1980s I was sent to a court in Springs, to do a 'watching brief'. Upon pronouncement of sentence, the accused committed suicide in the courtroom in front of all his family and all present, and unfortunately died. The experience was very traumatic for me, as I had been sitting with my back to the accused, and did not see the weapon before I heard the shot. I initially thought I had been shot, but was grateful when I discovered it was not me. As I was trained in first aid, I tried to save the young man's life, but he did not survive, and this left me saddened by his death. This experience left me devastated and confused about a system wherein I could lose my life at the age of 23 years. Feeling completely betrayed, I decided to start working in another field, and, as strange as it sounds, spent the next 25 years of my career working with attorneys, and kept up with certain aspects of my studies. I became bored, disillusioned, and frustrated with the progress I had made in my career, and eventually changed from reading law to accountancy studies during 1996. My inability to grasp cost accounting motivated me to go to an assessment centre, where I discovered that I could possibly study industrial psychology, and proceeded with my studies. At this stage I had a rather fragile sense of identity at work. When I had completed a bachelor's degree in industrial psychology, I found renewed confidence in my ability to succeed at work. A doctor in industrial psychology at the university suggested that I apply to do an Honours degree. With this newfound confidence, I proceeded therein. Upon completion, once again I received encouragement from a friend and colleague to proceed to do a master's degree. This measure of success brought with it a positive change in my life, albeit that the cost and time needed to complete my studies impacted negatively on my family and my progress at work. I am, however deeply grateful for the positive impact on my life.

I hope that this insight into my experience will allow the reader hereof to understand what shapes my worldview, and to see the world through the lens through which I see it. As I was intensely and actively engaged in the process

of the research with each participant, I was reduced to humility by this prospect and remain extremely respectful to the participants I interviewed.

My supervisor provided much-needed guidance and insight into the process of research. Initially, I could not grasp qualitative phenomenological research, and was both confused and frustrated by this process. After my supervisor made a suggestion that I attend a day conference on the research process at the university, I suddenly found my way. I looked forward to gaining further technical knowledge and to the advice I could receive regarding the explanation of the data and themes emanating from the interviews.

f) Bias pitfalls

Bias became my biggest challenge during my studies in industrial and organisational psychology and the research process. As a child I had desired to become an attorney, but eventually studied accountancy and then industrial psychology. My frame of reference and worldview was definitely skewed in favour of the first two disciplines. During my studies, I was encouraged to work on a paradigm shift in cognition for career purposes, and continue to do so.

g) Use of an expert

Existential philosophy has been discussed by many, and the idea that inner growth may often be preceded by suffering has been expressed by, among others, Moustakas (1994), and Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Sartre and Tillich (as cited in Rosedale, 2008, p. 175). My experiences and studies have taught me that I am not alone in my quest for self-discovery of my own sense of identity.

The assistance of my supervisor, mentors and peers became the most important aspect of my studies in industrial and organisational psychology. I continue to be guided by all.

The next section examines the ethical considerations that were adhered to during research.

3.3.8 Ethical considerations

To ensure the ethical requirements of this study, ethical clearance was obtained from the university, to proceed. Before the interview, I ensured that there was

agreement with each participant to participate in the study by explaining the research process and providing a written outline of the purpose of the research and interview (refer to Appendix A). Once I had ascertained that the potential participants understood the nature and extent of the research, were in a position to make a voluntary decision thereon, and that the participants selected were willing to participate in the research, I ensured that a biographical data and consent form (refer to Appendix B and E) were completed and signed (refer to Appendix C). The participants were made aware that their personal information would be kept confidential at all times, and that they could withdraw at any time – after which their information would be destroyed. The Interview Feedback Form (refer to Appendix D) was used as a note.

In order to protect the anonymity, confidentiality and identity of the participants, the verbatim discussions of the interviews have been indicated in this study by referring to the participants from 'A' to 'E', and their quote from the line in the transcript has been allocated a number. Thus, I refer to A4 or E63. All the data has been securely stored and will be destroyed once the study has been evaluated and completed.

3.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The steps used in the research methodology were documented in this chapter. The rationale for the use of a phenomenological paradigm within qualitative research, was discussed. Thereafter, the sampling strategy and technique, and the demographics of the sample, were described. The self as instrument was explored, followed by data gathering and administration processes.

An evaluation of the scientific rigour of the study was suggested, and concepts relevant to the reliability and validity of the study were reviewed.

The next chapter comprises an article on the phenomenological study.

CHAPTER 4

ARTICLE

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR SENSE OF IDENTITY AT WORK

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ABSTRACT

Orientation: Although women increasingly contribute their labour to an ever-burgeoning workplace, little is understood about their roles and sense of identity at work. Research on work orientations and attitudes has focused on the experience of men, as opposed to that of women, and this has provided distinct conclusions – the most relevant of which are that no sex role differences are evident, and that women attribute a different, unique meaning to work from that which men do (Hakim, 1996).

Research purpose: The purpose of this research was to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, and in this way to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon.

Motivation for the study: More and more women are being gainfully employed. Feminist researchers suggest that women may develop a unique sense of identity, relative to the circumstances or environment in which they find themselves (Ely, 1994; Hakim, 1996). There is a need to understand women's experience of their sense of identity at work from a feminine perspective.

Research design, approach and method: This study was conducted within the phenomenological research paradigm. A typical purposive case sample and snow-ball sampling were employed, to focus on professional women at work in various industries. A review of the contemporary literature, and a phenomenological approach to the study, employing semi-structured interviews and an analysis of the protocols using the 'modified' Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998), were conducted.

Main findings: The findings indicated, *inter alia*, that women preferred to express their sense of identity at work from a 'collective' or social identity orientation. It also seems that women may develop a unique sense of identity, relative to the environment in which they find themselves. The findings also indicated that most of the participants expressed ideas of being discriminated against – firstly, by virtue of their gender, and thereafter by virtue of race and status.

Practical/managerial implications: This research may contribute to understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work, and in the recruitment, remuneration and retention of women in organisations.

Contribution/value add: The contribution of this research to understanding women's experience of their sense of identity, may assist female employees and their employers and managers in their relationships at work, and in this way improve the employment prospects and retention of women.

Keywords: Female-centred research, the self as instrument, self-esteem, gender, qualitative research, work, experience, phenomenology, change, creative, personal identity, social identity, independent.

INTRODUCTION

Key focus of the study

As more and more women are gainfully employed, there is an increasing need to understand women's experience at work from their own viewpoints. The focus of this research was to understand and gain insight into a sample of professional women's experience of their sense of identity at work. The improvement of inter-relationships between employees and employers should contribute to individual personal development, and therefore also contribute to organisational performance goals.

Background to the study

Feminist researchers suggest that women may develop a unique sense of identity, relative to the circumstances or environment in which they find themselves (Ely, 1995; Altintas & Altintas, 2008; Gilligan, 1997; Vindhya, 2012). As a woman, this raises the question as to what the female sense of identity entails, and why historical theories of feminine personalities or identities were formulated through the empirical theories and assumptions of men (Gilligan, 1982).

To Fearon (1999, p. 25) identity means, *inter alia*, "personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways" (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston & McDermott, 2006). A further elaboration of the definition of identity was postulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966, p. 132) supported by Pfadenhauer & Berger (2013), who suggested that "indeed, identity is objectively defined as location in a certain world and can be subjectively appropriated only along with that world". To Hall (as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5), identity is "a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question; identity is a process".

The interest for me as the researcher in this study lies in my past experiences at work. In a career spanning more than 25, I found myself constantly unsettled and frustrated by a lack of progress in my career. I decided to resume my studies during 1996, and after assessment at a university, started reading industrial and organisational psychology.

Having experienced this change and diversity and, eventually, progress, I wished to do an in-depth study to explore what other women's experience of their sense of identity at work has been, or is, for them, and in this way to contribute to a body of knowledge that is lacking. I furthermore realised that careful career planning, assessment, and career counselling at school level, could provide a platform for women that would assist them to choose careers that would suit their personalities at a younger age, and in this way allow them the time and opportunities to successfully achieve their goals and dreams. It is also important to discover relevant meaning of the words 'a sense of (women's) identity' – a key component of personality and individuality.

Research purpose

Research has been conducted on men's experiences of identity at work (Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Gilligan, 1982; Hakim, 1996), yet little has been conducted on women's experience of their sense of identity at work, in order to understand why so few women have achieved roles of significance in the corporate world. The number of women employed in senior organisational roles has not increased (Kalev, 2005), even though there is a call for (and demand for) economic growth and the development of women in South Africa. The purpose of this study was to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, in general by, *inter alia*, reviewing current literature thereon, and specifically focusing on research that describes a female sense of identity. This provided the context and insight into the problem statement – namely understanding what women's experience of their sense of identity at work is. The findings were incorporated into a basic framework, suggesting interrelationships between the concepts.

Trends from the research literature

The research purpose suggests that attention is focused on two concepts, namely on research that describes a female sense of identity, and secondly, on an exploration of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

The first concept describes a female sense of identity. After having considered at least fourteen definitions of identity (see 2.1.1), I have adopted the definition of James Fearon (1999, p. 5) who interestingly both refers to 'her' and links personal identity to social identity, in his definition to describe personal identity as, *inter alia* –

Personal identity is a set of attributes, beliefs, desires, or principles of action that a person thinks distinguish her in socially relevant ways and that (a) the person takes a special pride in; (b) the person takes no special pride in, but which so orient her behavior that she would be at a loss about how to act and what to do without them; or (c) the person feels she could not change even if she wanted to.

With due consideration of all fourteen definitions, I have adopted the definitions of both Jacobson (1964), who suggested that separateness, independence and autonomy were important facets in establishing identities (see 2.1.1), and Wendt (1994, cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5), who postulated that “[s]ocial identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object. ... [Social identities are] at once cognitive schemas that enable an actor to determine ‘who I am/we are’ in a situation and positions in a social role structure of shared understandings and expectations” (Wendt, as cited in Fearon, 1999, p. 5), to describe social identities.

A further concept relative to identity is an identity orientation. Identity orientations are labelled as personal, social and collective. A personal identity orientation describes a sense of self within an individual, which reflects more of an internal emphasis, based on self-knowledge and self-evaluation. People who define their ‘sense of self’ with this orientation focus on their emotions, thoughts, ideas, beliefs and personal goals. Thus, personal identity reflects a more private sense of self (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). On the other hand, a social identity orientation describes a sense of self within an individual, which reflects more of an external emphasis, based on interactions with, and the reactions of, others. Those with such an orientation focus on what others say about them, or how others treat them, in defining their sense of self (Ely, 1995). Thus, social identity reflects a more public sense of self (eg concerns about one's popularity and reputation). Feelings associated with a group (social identity) may be negative, positive or ambivalent, and, when expressed as a process in the environment of work, may be reflective of hierarchies and comparisons with others (Ely, 1995). Finally, a collective identity orientation describes a sense of self within an individual, which reflects more of a communal emphasis, based on a sense of belonging to a larger social group. For example, individuals with a collective

orientation focus on their ethnic heritage, religious affiliation, occupation or country of citizenship, when defining their sense of self. Thus, collective identity reflects a sense of self based on group membership (Vindhya, 2012).

What is a *sense of identity*? The interpretation of identity is precarious work. Identity work has been described as being the work of individuals “in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003. p. 1165). Watson (2008) suggested that when people are engaged in ‘identity work’, they “strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity” (Watson, 2008, p. 129). However, Beech (2008) is of the opinion that this work, consisting of an exchange of ideas, includes the assimilation of acts, routines and roles that may create a ‘sense of self’ (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Simpson and Carroll, 2008) possibly describing a sense of identity.

The second concept, in the exploration of women’s experience of their sense of identity at work, revealed that identities are not only represented by personal, social or collective identity. Multiple identities may become apparent, because the four senses of self – eg a sense of an emergent self, a core self, a verbal self and a subjective self, continuously reformulate and change each other. These four basic senses are the foundation of the sense of self – and therefore the identity. Identities have furthermore been described as being national, political and role-specific, while social identities may include various identities such as race, gender, nationality, family and occupation (Turner & Giles, 1981; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As identities may be transformed, renewed, regenerated or reformulated and influence and develop each other it is suggested that they become a composite of the whole at manifestation. Identities may therefore be utilised either together or separately thus suggesting the use of multiple identities (Cadsby, Servatka & Song, 2011).

Furthermore, identity formation has been described as being linear, and this is an important milestone to reach before intimate relationships are possible (Carruthers, 2003; Erikson, 1968). Carruthers (2003) postulated that the development of a woman’s identity may require that both connection with others (intimacy) and attainment of competence (generativity) should be formed. As women’s identities

may regenerate or switch as they grow there may be internal conflict in balancing multiple roles.

A further concept in the exploration of women's experience of their sense of identity at work revealed both feminist and womanist identity theories. Feminist identity theories suggest that female identities may be based on relationships of power, knowledge, voice, agency and position (Acker, Barry & Esseveld, as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008), or on other political theories, and may include racial, regional, national and ethnic identities (Howell, Carter & Schied, 2002), thus expressing both social and collective identities. Womanist identity theory (Ossana, Helms & Leonard, 1992, p. 403), on the other hand, is associated with a model of black identity development (Cross, 1971). This theory purportedly suggests that black identity has "an inner structure that ignores externally based identity and embraces internally based individuality" (Moradi, as cited in Altintas & Altintas, 2008, p. 72), thus describing a personal identity.

It becomes apparent that a feminine identity and a sense of identity have many facets and complexities. It also appears important that organisations endeavour to find ways to understand these complexities, yet insufficient research exists on this complex phenomenon.

Research problem and objectives

Based on the participants' verbatim discussions of their experiences, the following question arose:

- What is women's experience of their sense of identity at work?

The objectives of this research were –

- to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work;
- to contribute to a framework that may assist in understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work;
- to make recommendations that may improve the experience for women at work; and
- to make recommendations for further research in industrial and organisational psychology.

The potential value add of the study

The potential value of this study may be found in providing an improved understanding of women's experience of their sense of identity at work. The merit of this study therefore lies in the provision of a framework explicating women's experiences of a sense of identity at work. Such a framework may assist organisations to understand women's experiences in the workplace and in this way find interventions to challenges that may occur.

What will follow?

The research design section sets out the research approach, method, strategy and setting, before discussing the researcher's role, ethical considerations, data collection and reporting. Thereafter, the findings are grouped into four broad themes emerging from the data, and are discussed with reference to sub-themes. The emergent themes are women's experience of their sense of identity at work, an experience of a sense of alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict, factors that affected women's experience of their sense of identity at work, and career development. The article will be concluded with the limitations of the study, after making recommendations for research in the future.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

This research project is based on a phenomenological paradigm, using a qualitative research approach (Van Manen, 2005). The phenomenological study method was deemed appropriate in order to gain an understanding of the experience as opposed to controlling the outcome (Hagen, 1986). According to Creswell (2007), the basic characteristics of the qualitative approach to research, using phenomenology, are that the focus is on an understanding of the essence of the experience, that the type of problem best suited to a phenomenological design describes the essence of the lived phenomenon, that suitable disciplines for this type of research are education, psychology and philosophy, and that the unit of analysis consists of several individual cases that have had the experience. Qualitative research has, *inter alia*, been described as being interpretive and creative, while allowing the researcher to construct interpretations (Lincoln, 2001).

Research method

The research method provides a discussion of the procedures and techniques used to conduct this study.

Research strategy

As the intent of the case analysis was to describe women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Creswell, 2007), a collective case study was selected, using multiple and representative case studies in which one issue or concern was discussed, in order to show differing perspectives on the issue. A case study will provide both rich insight and an understanding of the context of the research, and will allow the researcher insight into, and an understanding of, the phenomenon (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, the analysis of more than one case study is achieved using the replication principle. Each case is considered to be unique and whole, and compared to other cases in order to attribute conclusions and insights that may have commonalities to generalise to other situations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2009). Iterative analysis is undertaken in order to search for expected replications in subsequent cases (Gilson, 2012).

Research setting

All the participants were employed within organisations in the private sector. Upon enquiry, the participants expressed their interest in participating in the research. The interviews were conducted at the place of employment of all but one participant, at a predetermined time and in a quiet, private, secluded place, so as to avoid interruptions and disturbances. The remaining participant's interview was conducted in a conference room of a hotel close to her place of employment, for privacy, anonymity and convenience.

Entrée and establishing researcher roles

Before commencing with this study, I set about reading and understanding the requirements of qualitative research. Once I had submitted the research proposal and had an indication of acceptance from my supervisor, I approached the participants individually, as to their *prima facie* interest in my research. Once I received permission to continue from my supervisor and the university's ethics committee, I continued with the research project and proceeded to discuss the aims of the research and to do the interviews with the interested participants.

Sampling

For this research, sampling was a typical purposive case sample of professional female individuals who were employed, and who had an understanding of, and could discuss, the experience of the phenomenon being researched (Creswell, 1998). Snowball sampling was of use in that 'informants' provided access to other members of the population who were willing to participate in the research (Creswell, 1998; Huysamen, 1997). All the participants were employed in the private sector, ie human resources, manufacturing, finance and legal.

The following table shows the distribution of the participants according to label, age, qualification, years of experience, race and industry:

Table 4.1: Sample demographic details

LABEL	AGE	QUALIFICATION	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	RACE	INDUSTRY
A	53	BA (Hons) (including Industrial Psychology)	32	White	Executive human capital sourcing
B	56	Various diplomas	36	White	Human capital sourcing
C	27	BA LLB (Law)	3	Chinese	Legal
D	33	BA Industrial Psychology	13	Black	Banking
E	32	University Diploma (Marketing)	5	Black	Manufacturing

(Source: Own research)

Sampling is a theoretical process in phenomenological studies. I decided on a small sample of six women. Because a large quantity of data is analysed, a small sample is sufficient (Mouton & Marais, 1992). Furthermore, data saturation was determined throughout the data collection. Once themes and sub-themes were repeated, adding further participants would not lead to further insight (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006).

Data collection methods

Semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for the study, to allow for flexibility, to encourage participants to engage in the process, to serve as a guide for the respondent in terms of the research questions, and also to place a minimum of restraint on the responses to their experience. Semi-structured interviews are designed to allow the researcher to gather information about people (including

their ideas and opinions), and that tend to be more manageable because they are arranged as conversations around an interview guide (refer to Appendix C), (Arksey & Knight, 1999). The interview guide allows one to use both closed- and open-ended questions, and in so doing encourages communication (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). At the outset, a pilot interview was conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. The pilot interview allowed me to check the appropriateness and relevance of the questions designed for the study, and to determine whether they would answer the research aims.

Thereafter, semi-structured interviews in quiet, private and convenient venues were held with the participants. Data collection was gathered from the semi-structured interviews that lasted between 35 and 45 minutes each.

Recording of data

All relevant statements from the semi-structured interviews were recorded after permission was given. The statements were then transcribed (Chicoine, 2003).

Data analysis

The data was explicated using the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method allowed me interview and to obtain full descriptions of the participants' experience of the phenomenon while determining the significance of the descriptions given (Chicoine, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978; Creswell, 1998). The transcribed data was coded and assigned using Atlas-ti, in accordance with the relevance to the participants' personal internal experience. The meaning units were then clustered into themes and I could then develop descriptions of the textures in the experiences. Once completed, I could construct a structural-textural description of the experiences, and thereafter integrate all the participants' experiences into the essence of women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Chicoine, 2003).

Strategies employed to ensure quality data

In order to ensure the quality of the data, the scientific rigour of the study was monitored using measures deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study (Creswell, 1998; Kirk & Miller, 1987; Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002).

Although many forms of validity exist, there are two main forms, namely internal validity and external validity (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). However, qualitative researchers prefer to refer to the 'trustworthiness' of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Oosthuizen & Naidoo, 2010). There are four elements to the concept of trustworthiness – namely transferability, dependability, credibility and conformability (Creswell, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). These are verification mechanisms used during the research, with which to assess or contribute to the study's rigour (Morse et al., 2002). Strategies that could measure rigour in qualitative research include the audit trail and confirmation of the research results with the research informants (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I kept an audit trail, and have undertaken member checking of the research results with the research informants who expressed an interest in this feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also maintained constant verification of the mechanisms used during the research. As suggested by Chawane, Roodt and Van Vuuren (2003), the phrases and statements recorded in the interviews were quoted verbatim, so as to meet the internal validity required of this study. I used the coding method strictly, as described in a previous chapter, in the event of any future replication of this study, and I presented meaningful deductions of the responses as discussed in the findings of this study, in an endeavour to satisfy this requirement (Chawane et al., 2003).

Methods to ensure ethical research principles

In order to ensure the ethical requirements of this study, ethical clearance was obtained from the university to proceed with the research study. In order to reach agreement with each participant before the interview, I explained the research process and provided them with a written outline of the purpose of the research and interview (refer to Appendix A). I ascertained whether the potential participants understood the nature and extent of the research, were in a position to make a voluntary decision thereon, and whether the participants selected were willing to participate in the research. Once agreement had been reached, I asked all the participants to complete and sign a biographical data and consent form (Appendices B and E) which would grant me the necessary permission to proceed with the interview. Participants signed the informed consent form (refer to Appendix E) before commencing the interview (refer to Appendix C), were made aware that

their personal information would be kept confidential at all times, and that they could withdraw at any time – after which their information would be destroyed. The Interview Feedback Form (refer to Appendix D) was used as a note.

In order to protect the anonymity, confidentiality and identity of the participants, the verbatim discussions of the interviews have been indicated in this study by referring to the participants from 'A' to 'E', and their quote from the line in the transcript has been allocated a number. Thus, I refer to A4 or E63. All the data has been securely stored, and will be destroyed once the study has been evaluated and completed.

Reporting

The various themes and sub-themes were identified and tabled (Table 4.2). An introduction to each theme and sub-theme follows, before discussion of the participants' statements contributing to their experiences. The findings were integrated into the literature review, to move the discussion from the specific to the general (Glaser, 1992; Goulding, 2005) and to conceptualise each participant's viewpoint according to the literature, before making comparisons of the findings.

The findings of this study will be presented in a framework (Figure 4.1), and thereafter a discussion of the conclusions will follow.

FINDINGS

Due to the richness of the analysed data collected from the interviews, the data was initially grouped into sub-themes and related aspects. Thereafter, the product was clustered into four themes as shown in Table 4.2. My goal as the researcher, and as the organising mechanism, was to narrate the story resulting from the interviews with the participants (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). I discussed each theme, sub-theme and its related aspects, and at times pertinent literature was integrated into the discussion of the themes, sub-themes and related aspects. Thereafter, verbatim evidence from the collected data was presented. The verbatim evidence refers to the participant interviewed, and indicates the line in the transcript in which the data can be found – for example, (C384–386) refers to Participant C, lines 384–386 of the data.

The four most important themes that emerged from the study were as follows: the meaning women ascribe to their experience of their sense of identity at work; alienation, with sub-themes of loss of, and change in, sense of identity at work; factors affecting women’s experience with sub-themes of mentors, interpersonal skills, teamwork and discrimination, and society’s norms, and, lastly, career development with sub-themes of personal development and self-esteem.

Table 4.2 depicts the various themes and sub-themes and an introduction to each theme and sub-theme:

Table 4.2: Grouping of themes into sub-themes and related aspects

THEMES	SUB-THEMES AND RELATED FACTORS
Women’s experience of their sense of identity at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning women ascribe to their sense of identity at work • A negative sense of identity at work • An ambivalent sense of identity at work • A positive sense of identity at work • Social identity
Alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of sense of identity at work • Change in sense of identity at work
Factors affecting women’s experience of their sense of identity at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors • Interpersonal skills • Teamwork • Discrimination and society’s norms
Career development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal development • Self-esteem

(Source: Own research)

The meaning women ascribe to their experience of their sense of identity at work

Expressions that emerged from the data indicated that participants in this study attached meaning to their experience of their sense of identity at work, from differing perspectives and identities. Replies included nuances, and did not necessarily manifest at the outset of the discussions. This approach required me to consider how I would provide an objective opinion as to the participants' replies to the first question, namely –

- What do you understand about women's experience of their sense of identity at work?

In reply thereto, participants expressing their personal identity suggested that –

Every single stage in this life ... every single part is just equally as important that without the one it just wouldn't make me who I am today (C384–386)

As a woman I want to be educated, so the reason why I enjoy ... work ... is because of my previous working experience (E52–54)

Whereas, participants expressing their collective identities suggested that –

As women we're still, even now in the 21st century ... struggling to find our identity. We don't have much say in our lives, in our careers. What we do is what ... society expects from us (D41–43)

Do women really know ... are they looking ... for their sense of identity ... do they think about their identity as a woman in the workplace? (A198–199)

I enjoy working with a lot of people, communicating with them, to know what they want, what they need (E54–55)

A participant expressed her sense of identity from both personal and social identities:

The problem I have with the sense of identity, specifically ... with Affirmative Action is that coming from a white female, you have lost your identity because you are always the last rung on the ladder (B63–65)

To further illustrate women's experience of their sense of identity at work, I will briefly integrate positive, negative and ambivalent feelings, and social identities, as expressed by the participants in this study.

A negative sense of identity at work

Participants' negative feelings and lack of control suggested unhappiness at work – which is later extended to the family, a struggle to find an identity at work, and frustration:

I'm here at the workplace [because] I have to ... It's for survival (D126–128)

An individual who has not established a firm personal identity will have trouble fusing his or her identity with another person or object, and will feel isolated and disengaged from work. This phenomenon was expressed by two participants. The participants expressed their frustration while activating both their personal and social identities:

If you're not happy at work and have not found yourself, then when you go home, you actually take it out on your family (A369–370)

This is something that when I studied it's something that I want to do. I enjoy what is going on in that field, I want to be part of that field. So I just said, let me do it for myself, not for the company because for me I felt like they don't need my qualification and me, I do need my qualification for me to go through (D195–199)

There were many positive statements evident in the statements of the participants.

A positive sense of identity at work

It is important to have a positive sense of identity at work. Participants distinguished themselves from similar persons by discussing their unique, positive characteristics, and included 'positive' feelings to attribute to the meaning of women's sense of identity. Participants expressed themselves by activating their occupational, personal and collective identities:

I've actually learnt ... the firm has taught me ... there are deadlines [to keep to]... It improves my sense of ambition, [my] drive, organising and [keeping to] deadlines and becoming more systematic (C228–231)

[Order] ... gives your life a sense of value ... there's a purpose, you want to do better, you want to expand in your firm and you want to reach further goals to improve [yourself] (C244–245)

I was free but knew my goal (E52)

Participant's briefly discussed tasks and feelings about work, once again incorporating both social and personal identities:

[People were] ... enjoying my facilitating (E226)

I love what I do (B282)

In this discussion, participants included aspects of personal, occupational and social identities, and expressed positive experiences of their sense of identity at work:

It's nice to be able to place someone [in a position] ... you change people's lives (B284–285)... [it] is a whole change in them as well ... I actually enjoy ... that job satisfaction ... achievement is actually worth to me more than the comm [commission] that I get for it (B287–289)

Participants expressed enjoyment and the relevance of their work by sharing personal components of their identity of achieving success in the workplace:

It doesn't matter which profession you're in, but [that you have] ... a passion for what [you] are doing (C250–251)

Your work is your pride (C349)

It is part of you and it reflects how you as a person are (C354–355)

Participants E and A explained why it is important to have a positive sense of identity at work, albeit that both participants were unhappy in the present environment they were employed in, and again considered the collective:

I'm going to advise [other learners about the relevance of] education (E270–271)

Education ... is very, very important (E273)

[Education] will make them [women] stronger because some women ... didn't go to school (E162)

It's easy for you to work on your own because you can do whatever you want at any time ... You can enjoy your life (E280–281)

The person will know who they are; they will be comfortable with themselves and they will be happy in themselves, and they will portray that positive energy down to the people [they work with] (A360–362)

The participants' expressions reflecting independent, courageous, strong senses of both emergent and core identities, expressed positive aspects of a sense of identity at work.

The next discussion reflects statements about ambivalence pertaining to the core identity of an individual, made by the participants.

An ambivalent sense of identity at work

As women have been precluded from many positions and roles, they would not have adopted all the attitudes and roles within those settings, and may have become uncertain and indecisive (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The participants expressed ambivalence in relation to both their sense of identity and in relation to work; however, the use of differing identities remained constant:

I don't really know. Sense of identity ... I need to think about it (A197)

I don't think I have a sense of identity... at work I think ... At a career level I haven't found my identity, not yet (D124–128)

Maybe there is no hard and fast rule, but I also think that everything is moving so fast in life that people get put into position, whether [they are] male/female sometimes ... that they're not actually geared up for, that they don't have the knowledge as to how to do it and how not to do it. Where they should go, what they do, how they should do things (A322–327)

The meaning attributed to a sense of identity thus far seemed consistent with a few of Czarniawska's (1997) suggestions, namely 'an ongoing social construction', and Ely's (1995) theory of identity, including negative, positive and ambivalent feelings.

Social identity

Social identity is both an "individual's knowledge of" and "the emotional significance of" membership of social groups (Turner & Giles, 1981, p. 24). Participants expressed the meanings and significance of their work settings, and the emotional significance of the knowledge of their membership in a certain social group. Participant C expressed her sense of self as being a part of a social or collective identity orientation to the group of women, as well as by using her personal identity:

Our whole motive [is] to motivate your colleagues, especially women ... women should stick together (C360–361)

[it's] amazing to see how different I've become ... It's like a story book ... When... you're ... in [the] work environment, the social network ... and the real experience ... affect you differently and that's how it makes me the person I am today (C375–384)

However, participant D expressed the meaning and significance of her work setting in her sense of identity:

I will be able to identify myself ... because that will be something I will be enjoying ... waking up in the morning looking forward to go to your workplace (D227–230)

Participants also expressed a sense of identity that could be considered definitive to the 'group' or gender of women and to a national identity:

I am a woman and ... I'm also Asian (C58–59)

In summarising the meaning women attribute to their sense of identity at work, it becomes pertinent to notice that participants expressed themselves either from their personal identity, social identity or collective identities, or from their personal, social and collective identities simultaneously.

The next theme identified in the interviews was alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict and its sub-themes.

Alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict

Experiences of feeling alienated at (or from) work and colleagues, as described by participants, may result in feelings of subjection and conflict with expectations, so that the person will comply with demands made upon them, possibly resulting in the person feeling distanced from work or others, and in feelings of social isolation. The experience may also result in the person moving from one position to another. In describing this phenomenon as alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict, mention should be made of the possibility that this phenomenon may also reflect identity reformulation.

The participants in this study expressed themselves in relation to both societal, gender, collective and personal experiences:

... We [women] are ruled by the society. Whatever decisions we make, it has to please the society before it can please you (D43–44)

Because society dictates that ... [and] then you actually become a different person (A212–214)

Alienation has been described as experiencing a sense of powerlessness, social isolation and loneliness, lack of intrinsic engagement in work, lack of consensual order and meaninglessness and depersonalisation or a loss of identity (Chodorow, 1995; Dean, 1961; Gilligan, 1982; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan & Mullan, 1981; Robinson, Shaver, Wrightsman & Andrews, 1991).

Participants described work experiences of social isolation and lack of consensual order, shared from mother to daughter, while using both personal and collective identities:

... I have spoken to a few ... for example my mother. From what she went through it's still the same, and then what I'm going through now... for her age we will say maybe it was because of the system [governing] ... But for me now, under the new system, I'm still going through the same even though I think it's under wraps... If something bad (happens) you don't hear it. They don't talk about it, it's something that is not ... talked about ... We're thinking that we're in this new system, whereas everything is still the same for women, and as a woman that's how I see it (D66–74)

Participants expressed conflict relating to intrinsic engagement in work:

... I don't [enjoy work]. I'm just doing it for the sake of like, I have to live, I have to survive (D130–131)

The participants' reports of experiences of alienation or identity redefinition or switching (while using a collective identity) may lead to changes in the emergent and core senses of self, suggesting depersonalisation and a loss of identity:

You don't live ... You act differently, completely differently (A216–218)

Participants' negative feelings of alienation or identity redefinition or identity switching, powerlessness, lack of consensual order and depersonalisation at work appear to have a direct link to discriminatory practices at work:

I feel that it's almost like I'm an outsider (B87–89)

The participants also expressed a loss of sense of identity at work – which is the theme of the next discussion.

Loss of sense of identity at work

Participants expressed both trying not to lose their identity and a 'loss' of sense of identity at work. Participant A preferred to refer to this view using her social identity, while participant B chose her personal identity to express her viewpoint:

We all have aspirations ... its maybe how you get there and you can fulfil your identity in such a way that you don't lose your identity within getting to that role? (A348–350)

As a white woman I have lost my identity in having to meet ... affirmative action and BEE [Black Economic Empowerment] and ... other regulations (B87–89)

The loss of a sense of identity at work now seemed more complex than the ambivalence expressed about a sense of identity at work. Philosophically, if the core of the personal identity of a person is changed, they will not be the same person. The participant used her collective identity to express this experience:

Do they lose their identity as a woman in the workplace ... do they become somebody else? I can actually say, yeah, I experience it myself – actually becoming another person (A204–207)

You sometimes become a different person and you lose your identity that you actually don't know who you are anymore (A225–227)

I feel a lot of people lose their identity ... that's not their personality or their identity ... and they act in one way in the workplace and they act another way at home (A279–283)

The expressions of participant A, while employed in previous management positions, included suggestions that the environment a person was in, and expectations from senior managers and relationships with others, could cause one to lose their identity:

... Lose your identity sometimes in the working world and maybe women more than men (A245–246)

Endeavouring to discover the meaning to ‘change’ in sense of identity at work, I will proceed to discuss this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants.

Change in sense of identity at work

Identities are dynamic and emergent – especially for those in positions of management, and this is a consequence of changes in circumstances and relationships (Musson & Marsh, 2007).

Participants expressed that they needed to protect their identities against others, articulated their attitudes, and made suggestions regarding change to their personalities, using both personal and collective identities:

So they mustn't change your attitude, the way you are (E93–94)

I don't entertain the negative things too much ... I entertain the positive things ... or I confront a person in a very good way because my motto is that somebody's not going to change my personality (E114–116)

The participants had almost confirmed the possibility that relationships with others at work could affect one's own sense of identity or personality on a deeper level than has been discussed in the literature, and that ‘work’ provided a forum wherein women may experience autonomy and independence, and from which they could derive important characteristics of their identity (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Most of the participants in this study explained that they had experienced negativity at work, and that what they were describing was the resolve they had adopted to avert the negativity so as not to experience the ‘change’ in identity.

The next theme that emerged from the data explication sets out various factors that appeared to affect women's experiences of their sense of identity at work. I will proceed to discuss this theme and its sub-themes.

Factors affecting women's experience of their sense of identity at work

The following four factors appeared to be influencing women's experience of their sense of identity at work: mentors, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and discrimination and society's norms. The participants chose to describe these aspects of their experience from both their personal and their social identities. A discussion of each of these factors in relation to the participants' comments follows.

Mentors

In recent transformative times, women have been allowed specific access to mentors in the domain of employed work, and to express themselves in this forum. The participants described their experiences with a mentor, using their personal identities:

For a person to love his or her job... the mentor is very important (C271–272)

I had a very good mentor... He explained ... everything nicely, he was very kind-hearted, he was genuine and he went the extra mile. So with him showing me that kind of respect ... I actually feel that I gave him the reciprocal kind of respect, and also, I wanted to do the extra mile for the firm (C294–297)

The participant's expression of a positive experience with her mentor reflects her intrinsic engagement at work and how the factor positively affected her sense of identity at work.

Participant C also reflected on her relationships with her male colleagues at work:

I think that maybe a long time ago men were always the dominant one, but I believe that nowadays that we're on equal footing. All the experience personally that I've had is that all the men that I've dealt with, they give us the same respect ... as they would with their male colleagues or male employees. And I think that that whole traditional concept of 'men are more superior than women' has fallen away, in my experience I think it has (C139–144)

Participant C's experience reflected less gender discrimination and showed an improvement in her relationships in terms of society's norms. This finding suggests that the participant's positive experience with her mentor while a candidate attorney, and with her respectful colleagues as a qualified attorney, has a positive

influence on her relationships at work and therefore on her sense of identity at work.

However, participant A experienced the opposite with female mentors, and preferred not to comment when probed about male mentors:

I have not really in life come across a woman that I've worked with to be my mentor (A310–311)

[Perhaps due to a] ... lack of training (A317)

Yeah, there was one or two (A314)

Women attach meaning to relationships with their mentors at work, and it appears that positive relationships may evoke positive experiences of their sense of identity at work; and, likewise, negative experiences evoke negative or ambivalent responses.

Another factor affecting women's experience of their sense of identity at work relates to interpersonal skills.

Interpersonal skills

Erikson (1968) was of the opinion that female development consisted of the choice of an occupation and the pursuit of an ideology, and that although women could maintain relationships, their relational skills impeded the formulation of a clear identity. This sentiment was expressed by a participant from her social or collective identity:

[Women] ... use their emotions at work ... and that clouds their judgement ... things don't get done ... and it becomes fussy [and] emotional (C70–72)

Participants acknowledged, however, that some women worked systematically and in an orderly management style, and suggested that without order at work women would not attain their goals. Participants also expressed their frustration regarding their colleagues' lack of knowledge about their work:

You've got a person sitting in HR and they're mainly females ... They don't have a clue what the person does ... They don't have job descriptions ... because they

don't know how to do the job descriptions ... And if you don't have a job description(s), how do you do a job spec ...? [Specification]... How do you function without the basics? (B207–216)

What you get [in the workplace] ... with HR departments ... You will ask them about the job spec [job specification] ... and you'll ask them for a job description ... You don't have access to line management ... People don't know what they're looking for and don't understand the concepts ... so they will reject the candidates that are actually good for the position (B174–187)

... It is very frustrating (B189)

... Women that I've worked with, I'm not saying all women – I sometimes think ... in the working environment that a woman ... in a managerial position, will come to work and take all her frustration out on the staff (A288–291)

The participants expressed their frustration with their counterparts' lack of experience and knowledge from both their personal and collective identities. This frustration appeared to affect the participants' sense of identity negatively (Participants A and B), and even affected a participant to the extent that the participant left her place of employment without the security of future employment or income in place:

I left my last position because they wanted to bring business development in (B240–241)

You now get put into a position, sometimes to ... fill the gap or get the BEE status right ... I just think a lot of people, a lot of women in high places are just not ready for that position (A331–334)

Participant A expressed another concern, explaining that women in management (that she had worked with) had the tendency to arrive at work and frustrate her, due to either inexperience or a lack of good interpersonal skills:

The woman is in a managerial position, will come to work and take all her frustration out on the staff (A291)

I think that's very frustrating for people in the work environment (A300–301)

The participants' experiences suggest mostly negative experiences of their sense of identity at work, as this relates to interpersonal skills with other women.

The next factor affecting women's experience was teamwork.

Teamwork

The role of collective identification, in relation to absenteeism, productivity and employee turnover, became pertinent in this study. These considerations may relate to employee decisions to either leave or stay with a company.

Participant E expressed her dissatisfaction and lack of enjoyment at work because she had to work alone (using her personal identity), and added that teamwork held various collective benefits:

I don't feel a challenge because I'm alone ... I don't enjoy [the] work that I'm [doing] (E59)

You don't [only] work for ... yourself. You work for the community, you work for the organisation, [and] you work for everybody (E202–204)

Participant B expressed her frustration at being powerless to change her work situation, and commented that her colleagues lacked confidence. Colleagues continually asked for her assistance in order to avoid conflict that arose – which they attributed to cultural barriers and a lack of experience. The participant preferred not to assume the role of a mentor or to be a part of a team, rather deciding to leave the company she was employed in. Both personal and collective identities were rallied in this expression:

I left my last position because they wanted to bring business development in (B240–241)

A lot of them don't have a clue what is going on ... [They] don't know what you are talking about ... [or] they don't understand the position (B181–182)

[Colleagues] ... found it a bit uncomfortable when interviewing either white or black males ... they were intimidated (B310–311)

Participants' expressions suggest that participant E could have benefited from the assistance of a mentor in her company, whereas participant B, who could have been a possible mentor, felt it necessary to leave the company she was employed at, for the reasons mentioned.

The next factor affecting women's experience of their sense of identity at work was discrimination and society's norms.

Discrimination and society's norms

As an executive headhunter, participant B is required to find only black female candidates and expressed her frustration using both personal and collective identities at being,

... Dictated to as to who we are allowed to recruit (B69–70)

I find that very frustrating ... no matter how educated, experienced ... because you [are] white you are not considered material or even considered for the position (B74–75)

Participants also expressed discrimination relating to income and status, and disappointment that they were being excluded from certain selection processes:

I would have liked to have been put up for a position; [to] know ... that I've beaten a male, whether they're black or white, a female whether they're black, Indian or Coloured, to the post because of what I am and who I am (B139–142)

... That's the reason why I've had to go solo. Basically there aren't any positions. I studied HR, I've also got a degree – there aren't any positions for white females in the country. And what you tend to get a lot is, HR divisions now will not even look at having [white women] (B172–175)

Emergent, verbal and subjective senses of self are all expressed in this paragraph, illustrating the participant's negative feelings.

The participant expressed certain business practices causing group conflict, citing workplace bullying as ethical dilemmas preventing her from trading fairly, and the negative effect this had on her experience of her sense of identity at work:

... people take money under the table. For example, I'll give you specs and the company will pay whatever your comm. is, but I would like you to give me a portion of that comm. And it happens ... I've seen it happen (B218–222)

... they will for example give a couple of specs to a couple of agencies, and even though those agencies will find them ... the right candidates, they will put the candidates that the agency that they're halving that comm. with ... forward. So in other words, if I put a really good candidate forward, meets the spec, fits the company culture, you go there, you do whatever you like and ... that person will not be put forward ... because ethically I wouldn't agree to ... give half of or a portion of my comm. that her company is paying me (B226–234)

That's why I don't deal with clients; I'm a researcher. I refuse to deal with the clients (B237–238)

This is another reason why participant D would not stay in her company when the company proposed changes including business development. The negative effect this experience had on the participant's core and emergent sense of identity at work appears to be immeasurable, and in this instance, the participant appeared to be unsettled.

Participants A, B, and C also expressed concerns of unfair workplace practices, being undervalued and economically disadvantaged, while also considering members of their group:

If we look at our ... colour, we don't feature in that anymore (A333)

[Women] ... must obviously have the same opportunities as men (C151–152)

So I've experienced the discrimination throughout my life (B137–138)

Being ... Asian ... you feel prejudiced ... [If] your letterhead ... reflects an Asian surname ... they respect you ... or they ... mess around (C88–94). That irritates me and it frustrates me (C100)

Participants also expressed discriminatory practices affecting their colleagues' experience of their sense of identity at work, and explained that even though the Constitution of South Africa is designed to protect woman's rights, this was not

always achieved. Furthermore, simply promoting a person without mentoring or opportunities for learning, and without the necessary skills or expertise, did not provide them with an opportunity for development and growth, and had the potential to damage their sense of self-worth and their emergent and core senses of identity:

There are so few [candidates] (B106–107)

... they are not getting positions that they are qualified for ... they are getting positions because of the [er] colour and ... having to meet the Affirmative Action quota (B111–114)

... their own worth (B118)

It must affect them (B122)

People didn't move into a managerial role unless you have... been taught [properly], tutored how to do things (A328–329)

Participant D confirmed the concerns of participants A and B, using her collective identity:

If you are promoted ... [at] face value ... it can be bad... if you feel that you are not ready, why should you accept that ...? It's something that you feel... you can't do... expect[ing] you to fill that position is also unfair (D106–111)

Participant C furthermore expressed her concern about being discriminated against in terms of age, race group and gender:

[Its] stereotyping ... [of] woman, age and also race (C130–132)

Participants also expressed unfair practices with regard to salary, from both collective and personal identities, suggesting that men employed in the same position, with the same responsibilities and job description, receive greater rewards than women, and that women were also not given opportunities for promotion:

In your career ... It's a bit unfair in the sense that I believe that for you to have the same title... even the same workload, your job description is the same, but when it comes to rewards you're not getting the same as men (D54–57)

I came through the ranks, [South Africa] was previously male dominated ... and you had to work ten times harder than your male counterpart ... you were not up for promotion (A198–200)... [even] though you're qualified for it ...so you accepted what you were told (A251–262)

Women appear to be undervalued as a result of social norms and gender inequality – a sentiment clearly expressed by the participants. What also becomes apparent from the expressions of participant A is that some women feel that conformist behaviour is required and that society dictates the behaviour to the collective:

... the norms of society, the pressure (A220)

... that's the way things were done...you act accordingly, or you are forced to act according[ly] (A220–224)

The participants were of the viewpoint that discrimination, race and gender were barriers to their success in the workplace – sentiments that detrimentally affected their experiences of their sense of identity at work. These practices are expressed as negative experiences on the participants' personal, collective, race, status, national and gender senses of identity at work. That these experiences may lead to isolation, alienation and a lack of confidence has become relevant in this discussion of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

What also becomes apparent in this study is that many theories of a female sense of identity, including those of feminist and womanist identity theory, may be inadvertently discriminating against women. Most of the women in this study have in most instances used both their social and collective identities (ie feminist) and multiple identities, to express their sense of identity at work. The participants have in fewer instances used their personal identity (ie womanist), and this observation is noted among all participants, regardless of race.

The next theme is a discussion of findings on career development factors.

Career development factors

As occupations may be linked to personal rewards (eg self-fulfilment) or social rewards (eg social status), the provision of work should provide employees with

opportunities for growth and development. Participants expressed both frustration at not being able to progress in their careers, and concerns for their counterparts. Participant D expressed a deep sense of unfairness at not being able to progress in her career of choice at work:

I don't see that changing now. I think we still have a lot of years before that can change. As women we're still treated the same (D61–62)

Participant A expressed her feelings regarding younger women's personal development and career paths:

...women in more junior positions, I don't think that they need to find their identity... Maybe they're still trying to develop [their identity], to see where they want to go in life and maybe in the next 5 or 10 years, things might be different for them, or there might be a more structured path for them to follow. I don't know (A341–345)

Participants' negative and ambivalent feelings regarding both their and their counterparts', career and personal development prospects, may indicate that younger women would benefit from career counselling and the assistance of mentors at work.

Participants also expressed positive experiences as a result of achievements in the career of their choice:

It gives your life a sense of value to say that now there's a purpose (C243–244)

... When I do well in my firm, and I want to do better and expand and become a director (C337–338)

That's working perfectly for me at the moment. I've basically gone solo (D252)

The next sub-theme discusses the findings of the participant's experiences of personal development.

Personal development

Work is seen as being able to provide an environment where individuals can achieve growth, transformation, personal development and realisation of the self (Kelly, 1995). However, in contrast to the theories of Carducci (2009) and Kelly

(1995), Participant D was experiencing negative career growth and very little prospect of realisation of the self at work. The participant explained that she had approached her employers to transfer her to another department – which transfer would provide her with opportunities consistent with her planned career path. The participant had already started an honours degree in industrial psychology, but she became disillusioned when she did not get the support that she required:

I've started [studying] ... for [employers] to give me that response was the reason [why I] drop[ped] out of ... [the honours degree] (D191–193)

The participant had approached the human resources department of her employer on two occasions, and even mentioned her disappointment at being ignored. How did this affect the personal sense of identity and emergent self of the participant?

I just said, let me do it for myself... and ... they don't need my qualification and me (D197–198)

... You have to work yourself up [in your career] (D207–208)

In line with Kelly's (1995) theory, participants expressed their positive experiences and the motivation to succeed at work. Participants used both personal and collective identities in expressing these experiences:

I was enjoying [my work] (E233)

[Work is] giving me ... [a]... sense of independence and it's also motivating (E283)

I want to earn good money, I want to be a good person... I want to be happy in myself (A350–352)

The person will know who they are, they will be comfortable with themselves and they will be happy in themselves, and they will portray that positive energy down to the people (A360–362)

Participants A, B and D expressed fewer positive experiences at work than negative experiences. This suggests that there is a need to address women's access to education, positive relationships at work, and the receipt of fair remuneration based on sound principles of equity, based on their skills and knowledge.

The next sub-theme discusses the findings of the participants' experiences of self-esteem.

Self-esteem

Identity also refers both to the dignity and self-respect of an individual. The loss of aspects of a personal identity equates to a loss of self-respect. Respect, sense of self-efficacy and self-worth, are components of self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Balabanova, 2004, 2007; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Rogers, 1957, 1979).

The participants expressed the loss of respect of self on their and their counterparts' sense of identity – thus expressing both personal and social identities:

This is not really the person I am. It makes me feel... uncomfortable ... [I] ... realise that I'm an ugly person (A229–230)

I feel that if I was only hired because of my skin and not because of my qualifications or my education and my experience ... I definitely think that would impact on my self-worth (B127–129)

Put a person in a position like a CIO ... if anything goes wrong that poor person[s] self-worth is going to mean nothing (B148–151)

Participant B expressed herein her discontent with practices associated with affirmative action, and the negative effect on her colleagues' sense of self-worth.

Participant E offered the following advice regarding respect:

If you are good, people will take you the way you are ... They will respect you ... If you don't respect yourself ... other people ... won't respect you (E100–102)

Work is considered to be a critical aspect of identity, while Chester and Grossman (1990) suggest that the experiences of women at work enhanced their sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (Bothma & Roodt, 2012). Contrary to this theory, participants expressed their concern for their counterparts' experiences at work once again, thus expressing their social identities. Participants who expressed themselves from their personal identities revealed that they had negative experiences at work, and that this affected their self-esteem and, thus, their sense

of identity. However, one participant related the following experience, suggesting an improvement in her sense of self-esteem:

I just enjoyed this talk because I felt ... I needed to talk about it, So, I think I'm more motivated now after this ... to go on (D237–238)

This moment of cathartic revelation prompted me to infer that the sample had reached a meaningful conclusion, and that the aims of this study, to discover and explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, had allowed me to achieve another milestone in my own personal development process. The analogy I used to discover this and make attributions as part of a process in work settings is how women manage to survive worsening financial economies, take care of their families and enjoy their own careers – albeit that there may be scarce resources and many immediate challenges.

Having articulated the findings of this study, a discussion of the participants' experiences follows.

DISCUSSION

Main objective of this study

The objective of this research was to describe how women experience their sense of identity at work. After conducting the interviews and explicating the data using various methods, various themes and sub-themes were explored and presented in Table 4.2. Thereafter, a diagrammatic framework (Figure 4.1) was developed to provide an understanding of this phenomenon and to provide or suggest interrelationships between the resultant themes. The framework explains what meaning the participants in this study attributed to their experiences of their sense of identity at work. It also describes interrelationships between themes and various sub-themes. It is hoped that this will assist in relationships between employers and employees.

Main contributions of this study

The main contribution of this article suggests that some women, indeed, experience a unique and profound sense of their identity at work, as has been discovered in the literature review and the interviews with the participants. The study also

revealed that there is a need to understand women in the workplace from differing identity orientations, and that feminist and womanist theory about female identities may inadvertently discriminate against women. The study shows that most of the participants expressed ideas of being discriminated against by virtue of their gender, race, national identity and occupation. The study confirms the theory that suggests that an individual's experiences at work may be affected by the demographic composition of an organisation (Ely, 1994; Shih, Young & Bucher, 2013).

Integration of findings with literature

Having discovered ideas relative to identity and a sense of identity, I proceeded to the exploration of what women's experience of their sense of identity at work is. In this study, the participants appeared slightly uncomfortable talking about their discovery or exposure of their sense of identity at work, may have shared identity conflict, identity reformulation or regeneration, and used multiple identities simultaneously (Pickens, 1982; Shih et al., 2013). This phenomenon was observed regardless of whether the participant was a confident or less confident person.

The findings indicate that the participants may define themselves and others by comparing individuals in other social categories. A negative or positive identity may indicate an individual's desired or redefined or reformulated identity (Cadsby et al., 2011). Individuals who belong to a psychological group, or a collection of people who identify socially or belong to a certain social category, may discover that social identities provide a mechanism by which groups may compare themselves to other groups described as 'in-groups' and 'out-groups' (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cadsby et al., 2011; Wilder, 1981; Wilder & Allen, 1978). The effect of the comparisons made by the biased group (in-group) may be the negative stereotyping of members of the out-group, and denial of the individuality of its members (Boon, 2008; Wilder, 1981).

Furthermore, most participants expressed feelings of being discriminated against, and some participants expressed a sense of alienation from the circumstances in which they found themselves. Feelings of alienation may occur because in some instances a women's sense of identity at work is still dependent on her family and personal relationships – which relationships may be more important than her work (Rimm, 1999). Albeit that there may or may not be truth in this statement, the

participants in this study expressed other factors affecting their sense of identity at work. Feelings of alienation may, however, be interlinked to identity regeneration, identity reformulation or identity switching (Shih et al., 2013). Some women, as the matriarchs of the family, need to work in order to experience autonomy and independence, and from which they may derive important characteristics of their identity. Without work, women may be denied the opportunity to discover an identity that may be found in a certain world (eg the world of work), including all its attitudes and roles (Balabanova, 2007; Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Participants in this study expressed their concerns regarding the 'loss' of a sense of identity and 'change' in a sense of identity.

The findings also indicate that there is a possibility that individuals may adopt strategies to manage their identities when faced with discrimination (Shih et al., 2013). These strategies are identity redefinition or reformulation and identity switching. These strategies and/or identity reformulation, regeneration and identity conflict theory may possibly describe the expressions of the 'loss' of and 'change' in sense of identity as described by some participants (Pickens, 1982; Shih et al., 2013; Trachtenberg, 2012). Whether these strategies became apparent in this study is a matter for debate. However, a multicultural or diverse policy to manage this practice may present with unforeseen challenges regarding the type of identity being utilised, whether there are multiple identities in use, or whether this is a matter of identity conflict (Shih et al., 2013).

The findings also indicated that all the participants had external or interfering factors of their experience to share in the discussion. There were measures of consistency in this observation, each situation unique to the individual, yet each participant expressed at least one or more factors that seemed to limit or prevent their growth and development at work. Factors included mentors, interpersonal skills, teamwork, and discrimination and society's norms (Ashmore, 2004; Balabanova, 2004, 2007; Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Cadsby et al., 2011; Carducci, 2009).

Mentors are generally experienced, well-educated individuals who may provide their services to others, using altruistic ideals while imputing concepts such as interpersonal skills and teamwork into groups. Given the history of employment

opportunities and the demographics in the South African workforce, and the current disparities between black and white employees, it becomes apparent that extricating possible mentors out of the workplace through processes such as BEE or Affirmative Action may lead to unforeseen negative outcomes on the development and well-being of the emerging workforce. These consequences appear to have been expressed in this study.

Women with higher personal self-definition would prefer occupations where they could be involved in career and social projects such as leading or starting companies, whereas women with higher social self-definition would prefer occupations that were typical careers women chose wherein they would experience higher indecision about the career, and higher role conflict such as work vs. home conflict (Carducci, 2009; Leary, Wheeler & Jenkins, 1986).

When there is perceived conflict between identities, these are typically resolved by shielding, separating or prioritising the identities (Laurent, 1978). This may provide the reasons for an apparent lack of empathy or 'double-standards' and forgetfulness. In utilising multiple identities at work, women may experience role conflict, and this may lead to a decline in interpersonal skills and teamwork (Leary, Wheeler & Jenkins, 1986). Furthermore, identity conflict and identity switching, reformulation or redefinition, may be interlinked. Participants' use of identities, either separately or simultaneously, could almost be described as a 'dance of the senses', continuously interchanging, yet selectively and compellingly creating a narrative of truth and toil.

The findings furthermore point to positive aspects, namely career growth and development, although some discussions were indicative of negative career growth (Kelly, 1995). Three of the participants experienced positive growth and development in their career paths (Van Manen, 1990), two participants seemed ambivalent to possible growth in their career paths, and one participant seemed almost hesitant to consider a career path.

The findings suggest that a link between employment and an enhanced sense of self-esteem was of importance in this study (Balabanova, 2004, 2007). Respect, sense of self-efficacy and self-worth are components of self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1978). Because self-esteem or self-efficacy is inextricably linked

to personal identity (Bothma & Roodt, 2012), the loss of a personal identity equates to a loss of self-respect (Fearon, 1999).

The resulting phenomenon suggests that an interrelationship exists between what women experience as their sense of identity at work, differing identity orientations and their roles in the workplace, and a few previously unexplored themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study.

A research hypothesis may be suggested from the themes, sub-themes and resulting framework, namely –

Some women may indeed experience a unique and profound sense of their identity at work, express themselves in terms of differing identity orientations, and may have adopted differing strategies in order to overcome discriminatory practices and certain necessary transitions, when they became employed.

The findings of this study (Figure 4.1) have been incorporated into a diagrammatic representation:

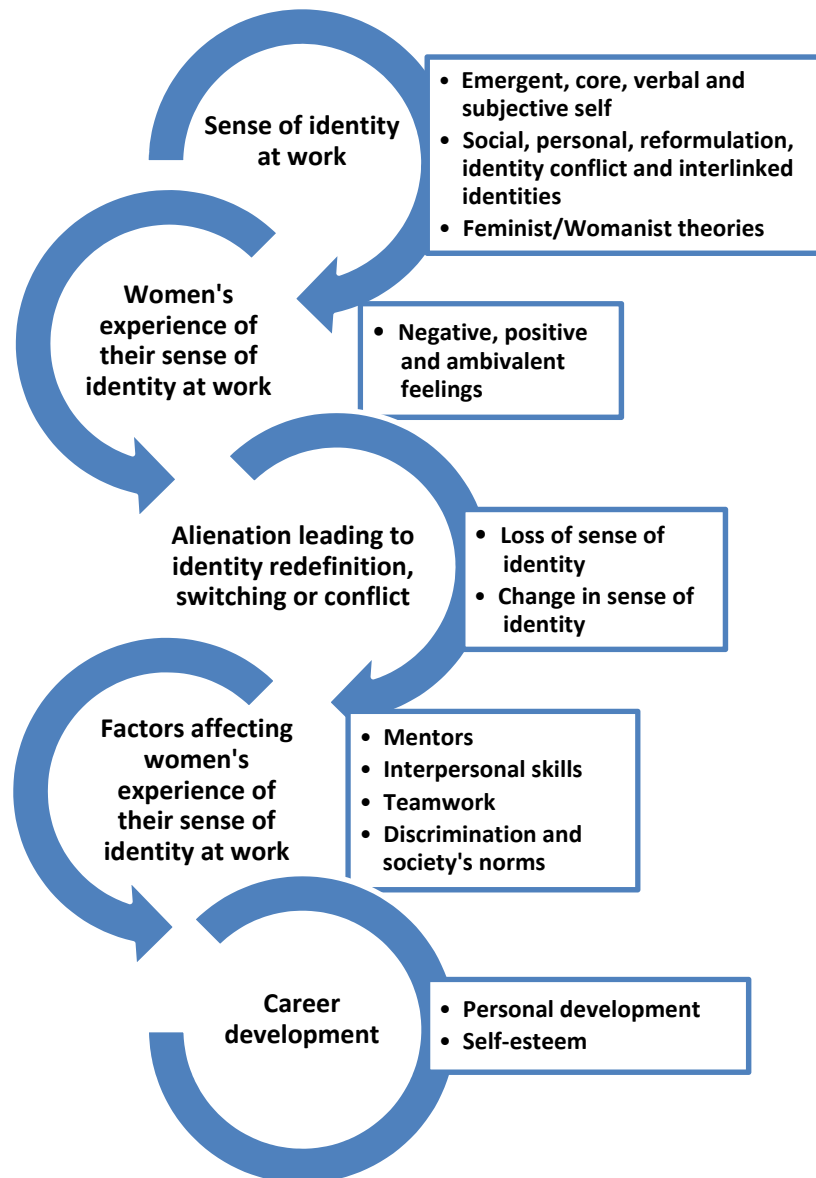


Figure 4.1: A diagrammatic framework of the findings of women's experience of their sense of identity at work (**Source:** Own research)

The framework suggests that interrelationships exist between the themes and sub-themes, which have not previously been indicated in the reviewed literature. It is therefore possible that this framework provides more insight into, and understanding of, the interrelationships between this study's complex phenomena. This may assist managers and leaders in organisations in creating positive experiences for their female employees.

This research has made a contribution to the fields of personnel, career and organisational psychology, as it was deemed possible to provide a detailed understanding of the participants' viewpoints of their sense of identity at work,

and to develop a framework as depicted in Figure 4.1. However, the study was completed on only a small sample of women, and also includes the frame of reference of the researcher.

Conclusion

The themes, sub-themes and other factors derived from both the literature review and the phenomenological study, provided insight into the approaches some women may use to define themselves to others in terms of their identities. The findings indicate that some women prefer to express themselves from differing identities, and this may possibly be because there are material possibilities that women have been predisposed to being undervalued, discriminated against, underpaid and provided limited opportunities to engage in meaningful employment within organisations. This practice may have precluded some women from the many benefits that may be afforded to them when gainfully employed, all of which would contribute to the development of the individual's experience of their sense of identity.

A contribution towards understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work, as described verbatim by the participants in this study may provide opportunities for positive experiences previously denied them. Furthermore, an interrelationship may exist between women's perception of discrimination and no prior knowledge of the concepts of identity 'switching' and 'redefinition' or 'regeneration', as proposed by Shih et al., (2013). The consequence thereof may be misunderstanding and miscommunication when conflict arises. It is also interesting to note that participants expressed both 'not yet' having experienced a sense of identity and that one could 'lose' a sense of identity, possibly suggesting suppressed identities. The suppression of an identity seems to hold many important concepts requiring further exploration and understanding, and many of the themes brought with them concerns as to women's well-being in the environment of work.

Limitations of the study

The participants in this study remained reserved, preferring to discuss their experience of their sense of identity at work from their 'social' or 'collective' sense

of self. The reasons for this phenomenon were not inquired into or disclosed; however, it is suggested that the study may be replicated so as –

- to specifically discover women's experience of their internalised 'sense of self' at work; or
- to discover women's experience of their emergent or core 'sense of self' at work, thus limiting the possibilities in the resulting discussions and improving the findings.

Furthermore, I have provided my perception of the associations made between the emergent, core, verbal and subjective identity orientations and the findings. Interpretive bias could therefore be another limitation (Mouton, 2001). Further research herein may vastly improve this suggestion.

The homogenous nature of the sample may be another limitation, as all the participants were employed in the private sector and none were employed in the public sector.

The many complexities and possibilities inherent in a study of this nature, may have led to a lack of discovery. This unintended omission may be attributed to three factors: firstly, the interview questions provided broad opportunities for discussion; secondly, there is a lack of available literature specifically oriented to a women's sense of identity at work; and, thirdly, due to the frame of reference of the researcher, as described above. Furthermore, identity conflict and identity switching, reformulation or redefinition may be interlinked, complicating the exposé of the 'dance of the senses', but ultimately revealing the complexity of this discussion.

Future research

Future research can include a more heterogeneous sample, thus broadening the field of research. The findings may be used to initiate debate as to why women have these experiences at work, and future research may continue to investigate the relevance of these findings.

Future research may also study the viability of the introduction of mentors into organisations, which may hold many benefits to younger women – two aspects of which are –

- sharing their experiences and learning from their experiences; and
- assisting younger women with positive experiences of their sense of identity, thus leading to positive self-development and career growth.

Future research could consider that managers should reflect that, historically, women have been discriminated against in the workplace, and that some women may still experience this phenomenon both at work and at home, and that this experience may negatively affect their experience of their sense of identity at work. Although some women may not have experienced discriminatory practices at work, female managers should try to reflect on the experiences of women who have experienced this phenomenon, and appreciate that this may affect women's performance at work.

Organisations that adopt multicultural or other diverse strategies to manage identity 'redefinition' or identity 'switching', may or may not gain the benefit from the strategies devised (Shih et al., 2013). The participants in this study used their identities separately or simultaneously, continuously interchanging, yet selectively and compellingly creating an intertwined and interconnected narrative of truth and toil. This may suggest that inter-cultural factors solely based on feminist or womanist theories, may prevent success in managing identity conflict, identity redefinition or reformulation and identity switching, and require further research and explanation. Addressing the many concerns women experience, either personally or as a collective, seems to hold more credence as a solution when conflict occurs.

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CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The research aims were discussed in Chapter 1, and the conclusions of the findings of both the literature review and the phenomenological study in Chapter 4, will be evaluated against these aims in this chapter.

Thereafter, I will discuss the research and hypothesis findings resulting from the phenomenological research, the contributions of this study, recommendations for future research and phenomenological studies, recommendations in the areas of career, personnel and organisational psychology, and also the limitations of the literature review and the phenomenological study.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

This section discusses conclusions relevant to the literature review and the phenomenological study.

5.1.1 Conclusions drawn from the literature review

In drawing conclusions from the literature review, I refer to the research design to answer the following general aim:

- to provide insight into an understanding of women's experience of their sense of identity at work.

And more specifically –

- to conceptualise women's sense of identity; and
- to conceptualise women's experience of their sense of identity at work in general.

I will proceed to a discussion below.

5.1.1.1 Conceptualising women's sense of identity

An individual may use multiple identities at a point in time (Shih et al., 2013); therefore, these identities may not manifest as consistent, 'whole' or cohesive

(Gergen & Gergen, 1988). When there is perceived conflict between identities, these are typically resolved by shielding, separating or prioritising the identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cadsby et al., 2011; Laurent, 1978). This may provide the reasons for an apparent lack of empathy or 'double-standards' and forgetfulness by some individuals (Leary et al., 1986).

5.1.1.2 Conceptualising women's experience of their sense of identity at work

Social identities allow the individual to define themselves and others by comparing and relating to other individuals in social categories (Ely, 1995; Wheelan, 2005). As such, a comparative process of identity could be made between male and female, or old and young, etc. This comparison is not considered absolute, as individuals may only partially identify with certain categories (eg Asian, female) and a negative or positive identity may be the individual's 'desired' or redefined or reformulated identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals may also identify with social groups partially to enhance their own self-esteem (Hogg & Turner, 1985).

Furthermore, personality theory suggests that there is a link between self-definition and situational factors (Hogan, 1976). The development of a self-identity or self-definition may be dependent on the environment in which individuals find themselves and what is expected from them (Beech, 2008; Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Ely, 1995; Watson, 2008).

Social identities are more significant in organisations, due to the incidence of social groups. Therefore, as fewer professional women are employed in positions of management, they would accordingly not benefit from the inclusion into the social setting of work, and therefore not 'assume' the identity of their counterparts (Becker & Carper, 1956). Women would also not benefit from opportunities that employment provides, such as skills development, career interests and 'immersion' into, and 'assumption' of, self-identity – thus limiting their personal development and career growth (Becker & Carper, 1956).

5.1.1.3 Exploring women's experience of their sense of identity at work

In utilising multiple identities, women may experience role conflict at work. These conflicts may place demands on the inherent beliefs, norms and values of the individual identities (Cadsby et al., 2011; Leary et al., 1986). These demands may,

in turn, lead to the expression of dissatisfaction with workplace environments and to intragroup conflict (Turner, 1982, 1984).

5.1.2 Conclusions drawn from the phenomenological study

Conclusions drawn from the phenomenological study relate to the specific aims of the phenomenological study, namely –

- to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work, to contribute to a framework that may assist in understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Figure 5.1);
- to make recommendations that may improve the experience for women at work; and
- to make recommendations for further research in industrial and organisational psychology.

5.1.2.1 Description of women's sense of identity at work

In this study, participants preferred to describe their identities as they relate to the group of 'woman', and less of their personal identities – therefore describing their social and/or collective identities (Turner, 1982, 1984; Wheelan, 2005). As has been discussed in 4.1.1 above, identity theory suggests that individuals use both a personal and a social identity, and may even use multiple identities – all of which make up the whole person (Cadsby et al., 2011). Belonging to this group does not suggest that the individual wishes to be accepted by the group or to interact with the group, but rather that the individual is so loyal as to include the status of the group into their own social identity. The group as an entity becomes the reality for the individual (Dion, 1973, 1979; Hogg & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1984).

Due to this phenomenon, the individual may be influenced by the group, in terms of intragroup cohesion and co-operation (Turner, 1982, 1984). It is also expected that association with a group would imply loyalty and pride in the group, albeit that empathy shown may not be as a result of interpersonal action. Members of a group may appear to like other group members who have negative characteristics, but may dislike them as individuals (Carruthers, 2003).

Of relevance in this study is the possibility of the existence of mechanisms of comparison reflecting bias and negative stereotyping (Horwitz & Babbie, 1982). Social identities provide a mechanism by which groups may compare themselves to other groups ('in-groups' and 'out-groups'). This is largely due to the desire to improve the dominant group's self-esteem (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Groups may even make monetary sacrifices to establish this difference (Brewer & Silver, 1978; Brown, 1978; Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979).

Of further relevance is that dominant groups may adopt extreme positions against other groups, while selectively remembering information to differentiate themselves from other groups (Boon, 2008; Cadsby et al., 2011; Wilder, 1981). When the dominant group's domain or resources are at risk, and when the group's identity is at risk, the tendencies described above will increase. The effect of the comparisons made by the biased group (in-group) may be the negative stereotyping of members of the out-group, and denial of the individuality of its members (Parks et al., 1996; Wilder, 1981; Wilder & Allen, 1978). Participants in this study expressed the effect of these risks to their group identities and to their self-esteem, as well as to the self-esteem of their counterparts.

What also becomes apparent in this study is that many theories of a female sense of identity, including those of feminist and womanist identity theory, may be inadvertently discriminating against women (Altintas & Altintas, 2008). Most of the women in this study have, in most instances, used their social and collective identities (ie feminist) (Howell et al., 2002) and multiple identities, to express their sense of identity at work. The participants have, in fewer instances, used their personal identity (ie womanist) (Ossana et al., 1992; Moradi, 2005), and this observation is noted among all participants, regardless of race.

5.1.2.2 Contributions to a framework that may assist in understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work

Themes that arose from the interviews with the participants provided a basis to gain insight into, and to understand, the phenomenon, in keeping with the aims of the literature review. The themes furthermore provided a framework to explore women's experience of their sense of identity at work in the phenomenological study, now set out hereunder.

- a) The meaning women ascribe to their experience of their sense of identity at work

The four basic senses of self are the emergent, core, verbal and subjective self, and are the foundations of the sense of self, and therefore the identity (Lachmann, 2004). Participants expressed their senses of self or sense of identity from multiple perspectives such as personal, gender, race, national, occupational, social and also other identities, thus providing access to, and detailed descriptions of the uniqueness of each individual in the context of their environments (Cadsby et al., 2011; Fearon, 1999).

Furthermore, an individual's identity may be made up of a few identities, and may possibly not manifest as consistent, 'whole' or cohesive (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). When there is perceived conflict between identities, these are typically resolved by shielding, separating or prioritising the identities, as expressed by some participants in this study. In utilising multiple identities at work, women may experience role conflict. These conflicts may place demands on the inherent beliefs, norms and values of the individual identities. These demands may lead to the expression of dissatisfaction with workplace environments and to intergroup conflict, as expressed by some participants in this study (Cadsby et al., 2011; Leary, Wheeler & Jenkins, 1986).

In expressing their collective or multiple identities, what became apparent was the formation of links between alienation and identities that may be attributed to identity redefinition, reformulation, switching or conflict (Musson & Marsh, 2007; Pickens, 1982; Shih et al., 2013; Trachtenberg, 2012; Wheelan, 2005).

Furthermore, participants expressed themselves from mostly social or collective identities, thus suggesting the use of feminist identities as opposed to womanist identities (Altintas & Altintas, 2008; Ossana et al., 1992; Moradi, 2005). All the participants expressed both positive and negative feelings, and some participants expressed ambivalent feelings of their sense of identity at work (Ely, 1995).

- b) Alienation leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict, with sub-themes of loss of, and change in, identity

Experiences of feeling alienated at work may result in feelings of powerlessness, social isolation and loneliness, lack of intrinsic engagement in work, lack of consensual order and meaninglessness and depersonalisation or a loss of identity, as described by some of the participants (Fearon, 1999; Musson & Marsh, 2007; Shih et al., 2013). Experiences of alienation may also lead to changes in the emergent and core senses of self (Lachmann, 2004).

- c) Factors affecting women's experience with sub-themes of mentors, interpersonal skills, teamwork and discrimination and society's norms

The role of collective identification in relation to absenteeism, productivity and employee turnover, became pertinent in this study (Ashmore et al., 2004; Bothma & Roodt, 2012). These considerations may relate to employee decisions to either leave or stay with a company.

Mentors are generally experienced, well-educated individuals who may provide their services to others, using altruistic ideals while imputing concepts such as interpersonal skills and teamwork into groups. Given the history of employment opportunities and the demographics in the South African workforce, and the current disparities between black and white employees, it becomes apparent that extricating possible mentors out of the workplace through processes such as BEE or Affirmative Action may lead to unforeseen negative outcomes on the development and well-being of the emerging workforce. These consequences appear to have been expressed in this study.

Participants' use of identities, either separately or simultaneously, could almost be described as a 'dance of the senses', continuously interchanging, yet selectively and compellingly creating a narrative of truth and toil. However, in utilising multiple identities at work, women may experience role conflict, and this may also lead to a decline in interpersonal skills and teamwork (Cadsby et al., 2011).

Negative and ambivalent feelings from the core 'sense of self', alienation or identity reformulation or switching from the emergent 'sense of self', and the seemingly negative effect on personal development and self-esteem from the verbal and subjective 'senses of self', may derive from women experiencing both discriminatory practices and limited opportunities to be, or to remain, gainfully employed in the upper echelons of organisations.

d) Career development with sub-themes of personal development and self-esteem

Contrary to the expectation that work is seen as being able to provide an environment where individuals can achieve growth, transformation, personal development and realisation of the self (Kelly, 1995), some of the participants in this study expressed mostly negative experiences of their sense of identity at work. Three of the participants experienced positive growth and development in their career paths, and some participants expressed positive experiences associated with mentors and group identity. Two participants seemed ambivalent to possible growth in their career path, and one participant seemed almost hesitant to consider a career path.

Self-esteem is inextricably linked to identity. Because identity also refers to both the dignity and self-respect of an individual, the loss of those aspects that make up a person's personal identity equates to a loss of respect of self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Descriptions by the participants in this study, of either a loss of, or a change in, identity, which may or may not be described as being alienation, leading to identity redefinition, reformulation, switching or conflict (Shih et al., 2013), may furthermore suggest a loss of self-esteem.

This conceptualisation provided the insight and understanding into providing a diagrammatic framework setting out women's experience of their sense of identity at work (Figure 5.1):

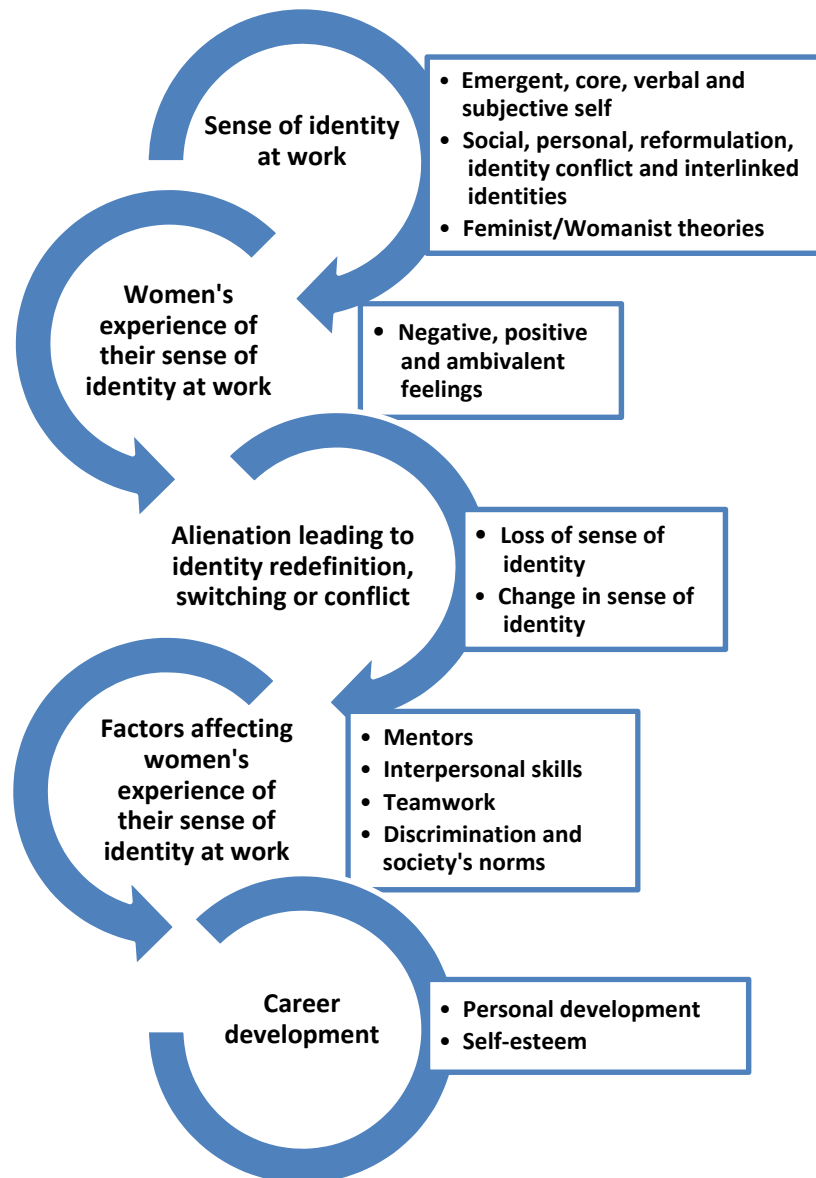


Figure 5.1: A diagrammatic representation of the findings of women's experiences of their sense of identity at work (**Source:** Own research)

This representation allowed the formulation of a hypothesis resulting from the phenomenological study.

5.1.3 Hypothesis resulting from the phenomenological study

The research hypothesis suggested by this study is the following:

Some women may indeed experience a unique and profound sense of their identity at work, express themselves in terms of differing identity orientations, and may have adopted differing strategies in order to overcome discriminatory practices and certain necessary transitions when they became employed.

In conclusion, it may be possible that a misunderstanding may exist between women's perception of discrimination and no prior knowledge of the concepts of identity 'switching' and 'redefinition' or 'regeneration'. Furthermore, interrelationships may exist between possibly interlinking concepts of alienation and identity redefinition, identity reformulation and identity switching (Shih et al., 2013; Trachtenberg, 2012). The consequence thereof may be lack of communication, lack of intragroup cohesion, intergroup conflict and incorrect interpretations being made when conflict arises (Turner, 1982, 1984).

5.2 CONTRIBUTION

The main contribution of this dissertation suggests that some women, indeed, experience a unique and profound sense of their identity at work – as has been discovered in the literature review and the interviews with the participants. The study also revealed that there is a need to understand women in the workplace from differing and multiple identities (as proposed in Chapter 4, Table 4.2). Other considerations are the contributions of the findings to the researcher, as well as for organisations.

5.2.1 Contribution of the findings to the researcher

This study intensified my understanding of women's experience of their sense of identity at work. Of relevance are the participants' experiences and the significance thereof. While researching, reading and reducing this study to the written word, I had much time to reflect on this journey – reflections that held much significance both for the research and for my own experience.

I wondered whether, once completing this research, I would have discovered truth to add to my own experiences, whether I would have discovered authenticity in my ideas, and whether this research may have had an influence on my experience. Was the method I chose appropriate for the discovery, and did I communicate my thoughts in a manner in which others could feel the intensity of these experiences? Have I been sufficiently sensitive, flexible, temperate and compassionate, and have I been tolerant of the emotions and diverse viewpoints of the participants, yet attained appropriate levels of professionalism to convey the emotive content of this study to all the participants and to those who may read this research, in a scientific manner? Did I do this in an unbiased manner and

with due regard to all? I did not wish to either create conflict, or to distance others from the research, yet found that the content allowed little scope to digress. Will those reading my study appreciate my concerns and reflections?

I relate these thoughts, from a sense of naturalistic enquiry and of confidence in the notion that I have completed this study, yet not the journey, but also for many other reasons. Some of those reasons are – the abstraction that this study is completed yet may never be done, that this study is an evolving and ongoing process, that it is a process which has been described in the definitions of identity, in the descriptions of a sense of identity, in the descriptions of differing types of, and uses of, identity, and, most importantly, is a process in the lives of the participants, and that in inquiring about this phenomenon as I have above, this may describe the essence of the study and convey that message to others.

By setting out my view that, ‘this moment of cathartic revelation prompted me to infer that the sample had reached a meaningful conclusion, and that the aims of this study, to discover and explore women’s experience of their sense of identity at work, had allowed me to achieve another milestone in my own personal development process’, I suggest that, embedded in this method of qualitative research, one can find experience, a journey and perhaps even, a measure of inner peace.

5.2.2 Contribution of the findings for organisations

It is suggested that by considering the sense of identity of female employees in more detail, managers may discover that they experience a better understanding of their counterparts. This understanding can only improve both dialogue and communication between the parties. Managers who may become aware that their female employees may be experiencing conflict or discrimination in some way, could respond appropriately, and could also suggest measures to prevent this process, or take steps to shield the employee from further conflict. This process may in turn allow the employee the grace not to experience identity conflict.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study allow for the following recommendations to be made to improve the experience for women at work, for future research therein as well as for application to organisations.

5.3.1 Recommendations that may improve the experience for women at work

The themes, sub-themes and other factors derived from both the literature review and the phenomenological study, provided material possibilities that some women experience identity conflict, and some may experience identity redefinition and switching when faced with discriminatory practices at work (Shih et al., 2013). This practice may have precluded some women from the many benefits that may be afforded to them when gainfully employed – all of which would contribute to the development of the individual's experience of their sense of identity. A contribution to understanding women's experience of their sense of identity at work, as described verbatim by the participants in this study, may provide opportunities previously denied to women.

5.3.2 Recommendations for future research and phenomenological studies

The findings of this study may provide 'thick' and 'rich' information of value (Creswell, 1998, p. 119) that may benefit women, and their associates, at work.

5.3.2.1 Recommendations that may improve women's experience of their sense of identity at work

Considering the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be made to improve the experience for women at work:

- Women may benefit from discussing their negative and ambivalent experiences of their sense of identity, with their peers or human resources practitioners at work.
- Women's negative experiences of their sense of identity at work, expressed quite candidly and emotively in this study, require positive interventions of some kind in order to improve the experience for women.

5.3.2.2 Recommendations for future research in the areas of organisational, career and personnel psychology

Considering the findings of this study, the following recommendations may be made for future research in the areas of organisational, career and personnel psychology:

- The introduction of mentors into organisations may hold many benefits to younger women – two of which being those of –
 - sharing their experiences and learning from their experiences, and
 - assisting younger women to understand their, and others', sense of identity, thus leading to positive self-development and career growth
- Managers should consider that, historically, women have experienced discrimination at work, and that some women may still experience this phenomenon both at work and at home, and that this experience may negatively affect their experience of their sense of identity at work. Managers should endeavour to discover these practices and apply workplace interventions to change the process.
- Although some women may not have experienced discriminatory practices at work, managers should try to reflect on the experiences of women's sense of identity at work, as stated by the participants' *ad verbatim* in this study, and appreciate that this may affect women's performance at work.
- Managers and senior managers should endeavour to understand the women they work with, in terms of both their personal and their social or collective and other identities, and realise that these identities may be used simultaneously.

5.4 LIMITATIONS

A discussion indicating the limitations relevant to the literature review and the phenomenological study will follow.

5.4.1 Limitations of the literature review

Limitations of the literature review conducted in this study indicate that the many complexities and possibilities inherent in a study of this nature, may have led to a lack of discovery. This unintended omission may be attributed to two factors:

- firstly, the interview questions provided broad opportunities for discussion; and

- secondly, the lack of available literature specifically oriented to women's sense of identity at work.

5.4.2 Limitations of the phenomenological study

The participants in this study remained reserved, preferring, in most instances, to discuss their experience of their sense of identity at work from their 'social' or 'collective' sense of self. The reasons for this phenomenon were not disclosed; however, it is suggested that the study may be replicated so as –

- to specifically discover women's experience of their independent sense of identity at work; or
- to discover women's experience of their emergent or core 'sense of self' at work, thus limiting the possibilities in the resulting discussions and improving the findings.

I have provided my perception of the associations made between the emergent, core, verbal and subjective identities, alienation and identity conflict, identity switching, identity reformulation or redefinition, and the findings. Further research herein may vastly improve this suggestion.

5.4.2.1 Sample size

For this research, sampling was a typical purposive case sample of professional female individuals who were employed, and who had an understanding of, and could discuss, the experience of the phenomenon being researched. Snowball sampling was of use, in that 'informants' provided access to other members of the population who were willing to participate in the research.

All the participants were employed in the private sector – ie human resources, manufacturing, finance and legal. Sampling is a theoretical process in phenomenological studies. I decided on a small sample of six women, because a small sample is sufficient when it yields a large quantity of data. However, the homogenous nature of the sample may be a limitation, as all the participants were employed in the private sector, and none were employed in the public sector.

5.4.2.2 Validity, reliability and confirmability

In order to ensure the quality of the data, the scientific rigour of the study was monitored using measures deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study. These are verification mechanisms used during the research, with which to assess or contribute to the study's rigour. Strategies employed to measure rigour in this qualitative research included the audit trail and confirmation of the research results with the research informants. I have completed member checking of the research results with three of the research informants. The remaining two informants expressed their ambivalence when asked to complete member checking, albeit that I made several attempts to make appointments with, and to encourage, these participants to assist herein (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

5.4.2.3 Emerging themes that require consideration

The exploration of women's experience of the sense of identity revealed the following three topics that required consideration:

- alienation and women's experience of their sense of identity at work;
- the application of emotive dialogue from the study; and
- bracketing out (*epoche*) of preconceptions of the researcher.

Certain limitations of this research became apparent during the data collection stage, and are now explored:

a) Alienation and women's experience of their sense of identity at work

It appeared from the interviews that some of the participants' reflections on their answers to the experience of their sense of identity at work were evoking certain aspects relevant to the answer, such as feelings of alienation, leading to identity redefinition, switching or conflict, which they may not have considered before. It also became apparent that individuals may use strategies to manage their identities when dealing with difficult concepts such as discrimination, even though they willingly chose to discuss the inequity they experienced.

b) The application of emotive dialogue from the study

When interviewing certain participants, I experienced a number of differing and profound emotions resulting from the content of the dialogue. As this

study explored women's experience of their sense of identity at work, emotive dialogue was not unexpected. The ethical principle of care should be strictly adhered to when managing interviews where participants express themselves emotively. This applies to both the participants and the researcher.

I could have improved this study, and our experiences, by setting out certain ethical rules and guidelines, as stipulated by the Health Professions Council of South Africa, before the interviews, which would have explained the ethical duty of care to the participants, thus limiting certain opportunities for broad expression and content.

c) Bracketing out (*epoche*) of perceptions of the researcher

I applied one of Husserl's (1970) concepts of *epoche* or bracketing out of my own perceptions relevant to the research study, before commencing with the semi-structured interviews, in order to listen to the participants' experiences from a fresh perspective. Bracketing one's own perceptions relevant to the research means that the researcher "must 'bracket' her own preconceptions and enter into the individual's life-world, and use the self as an experiencing interpreter" (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 24). As a member of the group of women, this aspect of the research proved the most challenging.

The researcher's frame of reference presented a further challenge, in that it may have been possible to discuss more constructs in Industrial and Organisational Psychology relevant to this study – which constructs may not have been suggested. It is, however, contended that the study provided as much of the 'essence' of the experience for all the participants as possible (Moustakas, 1994).

5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The conclusions, contribution, recommendations and limitations of this study were formulated in this chapter. Evaluation of both the literature review and the phenomenological study was based on the research aims as discussed in Chapter 1, above. Thereafter, the contributions were added, recommendations were offered for future research and phenomenological studies, and the limitations were formulated.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWER INTRODUCTION FORM

Interviewer: Thank you for offering to participate in this interview. As explained, this interview forms part of my Master's research that is entitled "Women's experience of their sense of identity at work", and I will use a qualitative methodology and a phenomenological research approach.

Do you have any questions?

Subject: Response

Interviewer: The meaning you attribute to the discussions we will have will be used as data for my research. Your identity will remain anonymous and all your responses will be treated as highly confidential.

Subject: Response

Interviewer: I would like to record the interview/s that will last for about 45 minutes, using a tape recorder. I propose to transcribe the information using Atlas-ti once completed. I will also make use of a notebook whilst we are talking so that I don't miss anything you say. Are you comfortable with this method?

Subject: Response

Interviewer: Thank you. I will require some background information from you. I have a personal data form that we can complete. Will this be in order?

Subject: Response

The Interviewer commences with the Personal Data Form.

APPENDIX B: PERSONAL DATA FORM

DETAILS OF THE PARTICIPANT	
Name:	
Occupation/Job Title:	
Age:	
Race:	

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	
Primary School	
High School	
Did you attend a College?	
Did you attend a University?	
Have you participated in Career Guidance Programmes?	

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviewer: May we proceed with the interview?

Participant: Response

Interviewer: What do you understand about women's experience of their sense of identity at work? Please describe this in as much detail as you can.

Participant: Response and probe for elucidation

Interviewer: (Reflect) and explore, then ask
How do you experience this sense of identity at work?

Participant: Response and questions?

Interviewer: It may be necessary to rephrase the question. Once completed, ask the next question.

Do you feel that this is a positive path for your personal growth and development at work?

Participant: Response

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview?

Participant: Response

Interviewer: We have concluded the 45-minute interview. I wish to thank you for your participation in this research. Goodbye.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEWER FEEDBACK FORM

Participant's name:

Date of interview: Time of interview:

Location:

Participant's behaviour during the interview:

Verbal:

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Non-verbal:

.....

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Emotional:

.....

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Notes:

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APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT

Letter of Consent

I, _____, hereby agree to participate in Beverley Anne Sterley's (Master's degree in Industrial Psychology) research project at UNISA, (University of South Africa). I have been advised that I may withdraw at any time and that my information will not be compromised, and destroyed if I withdraw.

I understand that my identity will be concealed, protected and that the information I share will remain confidential. Once the research is completed the data will be destroyed.

I accept that the information – held in data form – may be published in a journal article.

Participant


Researcher

Date

APPENDIX F: ETHICS DECLARATION

Applicant's statement agreeing to comply with ethical principles set out in the Unisa policy on research ethics.

I, Beverley Anne Sterley, declare that I have read the Policy on research Ethics of Unisa and that the contents of my application as presented to URERC are a true and accurate reflection of the methodological and ethical implications of my proposed study. I shall carry out the study in strict accordance with the approved proposal and the research Ethics Policy of Unisa. I shall maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants, and maintain security procedures for the protection of privacy. I shall record the way in which the ethical guidelines as suggested in the proposal has been implemented in my research. I shall notify URERC in writing immediately if any change to the study is proposed or if any adverse event occurs or when injury or harm is experienced by the participants attributable to their participation in the study.



Signature