

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF POSITIVE WORK IDENTITIES OF WOMEN IN MALE-DOMINATED  
JOBS**

**by**

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**Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Business Management and Administration  
in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences  
at Stellenbosch University**



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**March 2023**

Degree of confidentiality: A

## **DECLARATION: PLAGIARISM**

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Date: March 2023

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how women<sup>1</sup> build positive work identities in male-dominated jobs within a collectivist context. The exploratory nature of the dissertation necessitated a qualitative research approach, which is also commensurate with my relational orientation regarding ontology and epistemology. Three objectives, which form the basis of the three separate but interrelated studies, guide this dissertation. As such, specific research strategies, namely a systematic review and case studies, were utilised to achieve the objectives of the three studies.

The first study ([Chapter 4:](#)) explores how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. The methodological choices of 68 publications on work identity were analysed through a systematic review. The review contends that an either-or-neither approach to methodology selection is a false dilemma, and advances suggestions for complementing and integrating Western and local epistemologies. The outcome of this study shaped the methodological choices of the remainder of the research.

The second study ([Chapter 5:](#)) explored how women navigate dominant identities in the workplace and create alternative ways of existing, using the case of 15 women in blue-collar roles in three companies in male-dominated industries in South Africa. A Deleuze–*ubuntu* theoretical frame was used to conceptualise identity in a collectivist context, explore minority identities, and understand the disruption of norms towards social transformation. Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the findings show that women employ various strategies, broadly categorised as sustaining identities, divesting identities, and counterattacking negative behaviour. However, within these strategies, women balance between adopting major or owning minor identities, simultaneously rejecting and/or differentiating from elements of both. The study concluded that the identity work process does not conform to a ‘zero sum’, but, rather, a kaleidoscope of processes that offer fluid and non-linear strategies towards new pathways of being and becoming.

The third study ([Chapter 6:](#)) explored formal and informal workplace structures that support women’s upward career mobility and foster the development of positive identities. Through semi-structured interviews, 22 work colleagues of the blue-collar women workers in [Chapter 5:](#) were engaged. Through thematic and document analysis, data were analysed. The findings show that support mechanisms formally rendered by companies were identified and categorised as: commitment from management,

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<sup>1</sup> The terms *women* and *men* are used in the binary.

equality of opportunities (structures), and equality of opportunities (processes), whereas informal support was either technical, relational, or personal. Despite the positive impact of colleagues' support on women's upward career mobility, informal support tends to offer paternalistic help rather than tools that enable women to succeed in the workplace.

Although this dissertation does not claim generalisability, the findings significantly contribute to literature on identity, gender and work, and organisational behaviour. The overall contributions of the dissertation include the following: a) the either-or-neither approach to selecting a research methodology is a false dilemma, and that, researchers can benefit from a fusion of conventional and contextually sensitive epistemologies; b) identity work is a kaleidoscope of processes that present fluid, non-linear, and adaptable strategies aimed at making new pathways and alternatives for these women; and c) organisational policies on diversity and inclusion may remain aspirational if organisational culture and norms continue to perpetuate negative stereotypical views about women's competencies.

The dissertation shows that, for women in male-dominated industries in collectivist contexts, building positive work identities hinges on both interpersonal and intrapersonal identity resources. The benefits thereof enhance the individual's self-efficacy and workplace relationships, as well as organisational outcomes.

**Keywords**

blue-collar jobs, identity development, identity work, male-dominated industries, *ubuntu*, women

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie proefskrif ondersoek hoe vroue<sup>2</sup> in kollektivistiese verband positiewe werkidentiteite in manlik oorheerste beroepe bou. Die ondersoekende aard van die proefskrif het 'n kwalitatiewe benadering vereis, wat ook met my relasionele benadering ten opsigte van ontologie en epistemologie strook. Die proefskrif het drie doelwitte, wat terselfdertyd as grondslag dien vir die drie afsonderlike dog onderling verwante studies. Daarom is spesifieke navorsingstrategieë, naamlik 'n stelselmatige oorsig en gevallestudies, gebruik om die doelwitte van die drie studies te bereik.

Die eerste studie (Chapter 4:) ondersoek hoe plaaslike epistemologieë gebruik kan word om kontekstsensitiewe navorsing oor werkidentiteit in Suid-Afrikaanse verband te onderneem. Die metodologiekeuses van 68 publikasies oor werkidentiteit is met behulp van 'n stelselmatige oorsig ontleed. Die oorsig dui daarop dat 'n een-of-geen-benadering tot metodologiekeuse 'n vals dilemma is, en voorstelle vir aanvulling met én die integrasie van Westerse en plaaslike epistemologieë word gevolglik gemaak. Die uitkoms van hierdie studie was bepalend vir die metodologiekeuses in die res van die navorsing.

Die tweede studie (Chapter 5:) bestudeer hoe vroue dominante identiteite in die werkplek hanteer en alternatiewe bestaanswyses skep aan die hand van die geval van 15 vroue in bloukraagposte by drie maatskappye in manlik oorheerste nywerhede in Suid-Afrika. 'n Deleuziaanse teoretiese raamwerk van *ubuntu* is gebruik om identiteit in kollektivistiese verband te konseptualiseer, minderheidsidentiteite te ondersoek, en die ontwrigting van norme in die strewe na sosiale transformasie te verstaan. Semigestruktureerde diepteonderhoude toon dat vroue van verskeie strategieë gebruik maak, wat oor die algemeen geklassifiseer kan word as identiteitshandhawing, identiteitsaflegging, en teenaanvalle teen negatiewe gedrag. Binne hierdie strategieë probeer vroue egter 'n middeweg vind tussen die aanvaarding van hoofidentiteite en die handhawing van mindere identiteite deur tegelyk elemente van albei te verwerp en/of daarvan af te wyk. Die studie kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat die proses van identiteitswerk nie 'n 'nulsomspel' is nie, maar eerder 'n kaleidoskoop van prosesse wat vloeibare en nielineêre strategieë bied vir nuwe maniere van wees en word.

Die derde studie (Chapter 6:) ondersoek formele en informele werkplekstrukture wat vroue se beroepsopgang ondersteun en die ontwikkeling van positiewe identiteite aanmoedig. Vir dié studie is

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<sup>2</sup> Die terme *vroue* en *mans* word in binêre verband gebruik.

semigestruktureerde onderhoude met 22 kollegas van die bloukraagvrouewerke in [Chapter 5](#): gevoer. Die data is met behulp van tematiese en dokument-analise ontleed. Die studie bring aan die lig dat maatskappye bepaalde formele ondersteuningsmeganismes beskikbaar stel, wat geklassifiseer kan word as 'n verbintenis deur die bestuur, gelyke geleentheid (strukture) en gelyke geleentheid (prosesse). Daarteenoor is informele ondersteuning meestal tegnies, relasioneel of persoonlik. Al het kollegas se ondersteuning die vroue se beroepsopgang positief beïnvloed, bied informele ondersteuning meestal paternalistiese bystand eerder as gereedskap wat vroue in staat stel om sukses in die werkplek te behaal.

Hoewel hierdie proefskrif nie op veralgemeenbaarheid aanspraak maak nie, lewer die bevindinge 'n aansienlike bydrae tot die literatuur oor identiteit, gender en werk, en organisatoriese gedrag. Die hoofbydraes van die proefskrif sluit in a) dat die een-of-geen-benadering tot die keuse van 'n navorsingsmetodologie 'n vals dilemma is, en dat navorsers kan baat vind by 'n kombinasie van konvensionele en kontekstsensitiewe epistemologieë; b) dat identiteitswerk uit 'n kaleidoskoop van prosesse bestaan wat vroue vloeibare, nielineêre en aanpasbare strategieë vir nuwe roetes en alternatiewe bied; en c) dat organisatoriese beleid oor diversiteit en insluiting waarskynlik woorde op papier sal bly indien organisatoriese kultuur en norme die negatiewe stereotipes oor vroue se vaardighede laat voortbestaan.

Die proefskrif toon dat die kollektivistiese bou van positiewe werkidentiteite deur vroue in manlik oorheerste nywerhede van sowel interpersoonlike as intrapersoonlike identiteitshulpbronne afhang. Dit hou 'n aantal voordele in, waaronder groter individuele selfdoeltreffendheid, beter werkplekverhoudings, en veral ook beter organisatoriese uitkomst.

**Slutelwoorde**

bloukraagwerk, identiteitsontwikkeling, identiteitswerk, manlik oorheerste nywerhede, *ubuntu*, vroue

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## DECLARATION: LANGUAGE EDITING

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I am an accredited editor with the University of Johannesburg, University of Stellenbosch Business School, NWU, UP, UCT, and GIBS, and my clients include the United Nations, Absa, FNB, Takealot, and various other universities and organisations in South Africa and Namibia.

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Should there be any queries, please contact me on the number provided above.



**Teresa Kapp**

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## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFAM	African Academy of Management
AFDW	Africa Faculty Development Workshop
COR	conservation of resources
ETD	education, training, and development
GEM	Graduate School of Economic and Management Sciences
HR	human resources
IT	identity theory
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
PAR	participatory action research
PPIs	Positive Psychology Interventions
PRISMA	Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses
RQs	research questions
SCM	Stereotype Content Model
SIT	social identity theory

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Women<sup>3</sup> in male-dominated jobs are confronted by a myriad challenges, including discrimination and sexual abuse, and are usually viewed as not as competent as their colleagues who are men due to the physically demanding nature of such jobs (Botha, 2016; Gill, Mills, Franzway, & Sharp, 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016a). As the minority in such working environments, women, like other minorities, are confronted with the decision of behaving in ways that align with the culture of the majority or being their authentic selves (Fernando, Reveley, & Learmonth, 2020). Identity work - an agentic process that allows individuals to negotiate and regulate their identities in responding to identity tensions (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Morgan & Creary, 2011) – enables individuals to create positive identities. Positive identities refer to self-definition that the individual and/or others consider as valuable or favourable (Morgan & Creary, 2011). Individuals develop positive identities in response to negative identity threats in the workplace by infusing virtuous attributes into their work identities, or aligning with an ideal identity, or pursuing complementarity between non-work and work identities (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010)

The concept of identity is central to the identity work process and the development of positive identities. Identity is a function of both the qualities individuals uniquely possess that set them apart from others, and the qualities individuals bear due to their affiliation with a broader collective or social group (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Buckingham, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). *Identity* is a fluid term — it is conceptualised differently between societies. Within individualistic societies, particularly in the Global North, identity is premised on an atomistic ontology, while it is premised on a relational ontology in collectivistic societies in the Global South (Chilisa, 2012; Metz, 2015). Moreover, core theories on identity and diversity in the workplace were developed in Western contexts, e.g., Europe and the USA, where the idea of ‘self’ is predominantly based on self-construal. Individuals in such settings rely mostly on their intrapersonal resources to build their identities. However, interpersonal resources are also critical in identity-building for individuals in collectivist societies. This difference in identity conceptualisation signals different identity-building processes.

In this dissertation, I explore how women build positive work identities in male-dominated jobs within the context of a collectivist society. I argue that, to understand how women navigate the identity-

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<sup>3</sup> The terms *women* and *men* are used in the binary.

building process, it is useful to explore beyond the individual and consider other useful connections in the workplace. Focusing on positive identity work promotes an agentic perspective in diversity research that moves away from the ‘oppressed–oppressor’ dichotomy (Atewologun, Sealy, & Vinnicombe, 2016). Thus, the dissertation deviates from the normative perspective, i.e., a sole focus on individuals, to include individuals and their colleagues in the workplace.

## **1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Previous studies on identity work have provided significant insights into how individuals, particularly in professional or managerial roles, regulate their work identities (Barnard, 2019; Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Fernando et al., 2020; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Lepisto, Crosina, & Pratt, 2015; Srinivas, 2013; Watson, 2008). Many of these studies are also situated in and approached from a Global North perspective (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Caza, Vough, & Puranik, 2018; Kreiner et al., 2006; Lepisto et al., 2015; Walseth, 2006; Watson, 2008). Beyond the occupational and geographical dominance in identity work studies, this dissertation makes a case for exploring identity — a context-driven construct — in a non-Western and non-managerial context.

Regarding the concept of identity, core theories on identity were developed in Western contexts (e.g., Europe and the USA). Comparatively, Western societies are less communal, while non-Western societies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, are less individualistic. Consequently, Western values are centred around independence, rationality, and autonomy, whereas many non-Western societies are orientated towards communality, interdependence, and the aspiration of harmonious co-existence (Chilisa, 2012; Metz, 2020). In Western societies, the idea of ‘self’ is predominantly based on self-construal. Here, the individual’s identity in relation to their societies is ‘I’ and ‘we’, which are considered two discrete entities. This atomistic conceptualisation of identity is individualistic, linear, and materialistic (Swanson, 2012) and views the individual as a discrete entity seeking optimal distinctiveness from others (Brewer, 2003). Individuals in such settings rely mostly on their intrapersonal resources to build their identities. In collectivist societies, individuals’ identity is inextricably linked to their community (Chilisa, 2012), rendering identity a relational and interdependent construct (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, the individual’s identity in relation to their societies is ‘I am part of we’.

Context shapes how research is conducted (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). The sustained application of Western epistemologies and methodologies in non-Western contexts has contributed significantly to the ‘othering’ of non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing. At a practical level, it continuously problematises the lives and living conditions of non-Western people (Louis, 2007; Mishra, 2013),

resulting in a disconnect between research and solutions to challenges in non-Western societies (Gobo, 2011; Louis, 2007), offering only peripheral solutions to those challenges (Chilisa, 2012). Prasad (2003) highlights three main ways in which Western scientific methodologies perpetuate exclusion: ontologically (marginalising non-Western realities and problems), epistemologically (marginalising other ways of knowing), and sociologically (marginalising non-experts' rights and access to knowledge). Consequently, calls have been made for research in the Global South to prioritise local epistemologies that are sensitive to the region's particular cultural, demographic, geographical, and socio-economic realities (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013), as ways of knowing are embedded in locations (Charmaz, 2017).

However, the neat classification into Western and indigenous knowledge has been found to be problematic, due to their heterogeneity (Agrawal, 1995; Briggs, 2013). The binaries of African collectivism, Western individualism, as well as Western universalism and African localism, create a 'West versus the rest' situation in knowledge production. As such, Tavernaro-Haidarian (2018) argues that viewing subjective/objective truth and relative and absolute truth as opposite and mutually exclusive ways of knowing is limiting. The credo "all knowledge is first of all local knowledge" (Okere, Njoku, and Devisch, 2005, p. 1) puts, instead, both Western and indigenous knowledge systems on a similar footing. Within this view, Western knowledge and perspectives embody the Western conceptualisations of a phenomenon and how it is enacted (Adeleye, Luiz, Muthuri, & Amaeshi, 2020), as it is with non-Western knowledge.

It is important to stress that Western knowledge systems are not homogenous and are characterised in their totality by this approach. On the contrary, over the last half-century, a number of philosophical traditions and theoretical and methodological developments in the West departed from these norms. As an example of relational ontology, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the metaphor of a rhizome to describe how individuals build their identities through their connections with others and constantly redefine who they are under different circumstances to be their authentic selves (Colebrook, 2002).

Given that there are studies that provide contextualisation from the Western perspective, new meaning can emerge if context-sensitive epistemologies are applied in exploring identity from a non-Western perspective. The dissertation, therefore, explores how a non-Western, collectivist epistemology may provide a different meaning and understanding of the dynamic processes and the relational nature of identity and its construction.

Furthermore, Western feminists, for example, have been criticised for viewing the Global South as “male-dominated and anti-women” (Bayu, 2019, p. 57). Women in the Global South are also imagined to be “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, and victimized” (Mishra, 2013, p. 132). African women, in particular, were perceived as “always poor, powerless and invariably pregnant, burdened with lots of children” (Win, 2004, p. 6). These labels present single narratives and homogenise women's experience in the Global South as disempowered and laden with oppression. However, women in Africa and, by extension, the Global South are agentic actors who play significant roles at the household and community levels (Manyonganise, 2015; Win, 2004). The dissertation deviates from discourses of oppression to consider other ways of being that are more empowering.

The empowerment of women globally has led to a significant numerical increment in women's participation in paid employment. Women's representation in fields that have traditionally been male-dominated, such as finance, medicine, and law, has also increased (Wallace, 2014; Watts, 2009), thereby challenging stereotypical notions of gender-type professions (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Gill et al., 2008; Watts, 2009; Wright, 2016b). This numerical increase has, however, not been evident in the fields of mining (Botha, 2016; Johnstone, Bhagwanjee, & Bobat, 2016), transport (Wright, 2016b), construction (Madikizela & Haupt, 2010; Wright, 2016a), or engineering (Cadaret, Hartung, Subich, & Weigold, 2017; Gill et al., 2008; Watts, 2009). The core activities in these industries are usually manual, physically demanding, and dependent on relatively unskilled or semi-skilled (and increasingly skilled) labour, commonly referred to as ‘blue-collar jobs’ (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Due to the physically demanding nature of blue-collar jobs, these roles also tend to be male-dominated.

Previous studies on women's participation in male-dominated jobs highlight challenges women face, such as discrimination, sexual harassment, and difficulties combining work and family roles (Botha, 2016; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016b). Dynamics between the in-group (occupied by the majority) and the out-group (occupied by the minority) also contribute to these challenges. These jobs have evolved from being a male-only space to becoming male-dominated. Therefore, organisational culture and values have been built to suit the needs of the in-group members (Campuzano, 2019; Haeruddin, Pick, & Thein, 2020). Admitting members of an out-group (such as women) into the workspace may generate resistance, as diversity may disrupt the existing work culture (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016). Besides the disruption, members of the in-group usually do not consider out-group members competent, as the latter may not exhibit behaviours associated with the in-group (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). These perceptions are usually rooted in socially constructed views about the capabilities, behaviours, and values associated with both genders.



Beyond discourses of oppression, this dissertation explores the agentic processes that contribute to building positive work identities. Identity work is a process that enables individuals to explore, with agency, other ways of being through a process of differentiation rather than unitary narratives (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Morgan & Creary, 2011). Agency involves “struggles in which power and resistance are always implicated in an ambiguous and complex interplay of mutual constitution” (Van Laer & Janssens, 2017, p. 199). As such, the identity work process offers individuals pathways to defining, for themselves and others, who they are in a given context, and address legitimacy challenges, towards building positive work identities, as discussed further in [Section 2.2](#).

This dissertation is guided by several considerations based on gaps identified in the existing literature. First, the dissertation joins a few existing literature to explore identity work experiences within the context of the Global South (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Barnard, 2019; Carrim & Nkomo, 2016; Srinivas, 2013). In doing so, the dissertation responds to calls for research in developing countries by providing evidence of identity work in a collectivist context. Second, the dissertation approaches identity research based on the personal and relational dimensions of identity work. Not only does this respond to Carrim’s (2016) call to researchers to consider the individual’s community in identity research, but it also acts on Dutton et al.’s (2010) argument regarding the relational dimension of self-construal. This dissertation considers how positive identities are developed at two levels – (a) how positive identities can be created at the individual level through the process of identity work and (b) how organisations can contribute to the individual’s development of positive identities through resources available in the workplace.

Third, the dissertation advances the need for methodological innovation that accommodates relationality and contextual sensitivities to accommodate the relational dimension of identity. As such, the dissertation contributes to decolonisation debates by advancing epistemological contingency — a fusion of local epistemologies and conventional methodologies. This argument is advanced in the systematic review, which provides the methodological premise for the empirical studies of this dissertation. Furthermore, in terms of the target population, the dissertation is one of few studies on identity work that examines a non-managerial population by focusing on women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries. This group is under-represented in both identity work literature and studies on women in male-dominated industries. The insights from this dissertation contribute to the literature based on evidence of women confronted by ‘double male-dominance’ because of their roles (in blue-collar roles) and the industries in which they work (i.e., mining and logistics). Lastly, employing the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, rhizome, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation in

conceptualising social inequalities, connections, and developing new associations expands the literature on identity work and workplace interactions.

### **1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The dissertation aims to understand how women build positive work identities in male-dominated jobs within the context of a collectivist society. This goal is pursued under three objectives. Each objective is underpinned by research questions that guided the design of the three separate but interrelated studies presented in this dissertation.

#### **1.3.1 Objective I**

The study presented in [Chapter 4](#): explored how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. The study was guided by two research questions (RQs):

*RQ1: How have previous studies on identities in the workplace in the South African context been approached methodologically?*

*RQ2: How can local epistemologies shape research methodologies specific to identity research?*

#### **1.3.2 Objective II**

The study presented in [Chapter 5](#): explored how women navigate dominant<sup>4</sup> identities in the workplace and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. The study was guided by the following research questions:

*RQ3: How do identity resources available to women contribute to building positive work identities?*

*RQ4: How do individuals negotiate their minority identities<sup>5</sup> in building positive identities?*

#### **1.3.3 Objective III**

The study presented in [Chapter 6](#): explored how formal and informal workplace structures support women's upward career mobility and foster the development of positive work identities in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. The study was guided by the following research questions:

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<sup>4</sup> Navigating dominant identities refers to how women respond to ubiquity of masculinity exhibited in the workplace

<sup>5</sup> Negotiating their minority identities refers to how women manage their minority identities

RQ5: *How do formal workplace structures support upward mobility and foster the development of positive work identities?*

RQ6: *How do informal workplace structures support upward mobility and foster the development of positive work identities?*

#### **1.4 DEFINING RESEARCH BOUNDARIES**

The dissertation focuses on three companies in South Africa, two mining companies and one logistics and transport company. Due to confidentiality assurances, the names, minerals, and locations of the companies are not disclosed. These companies operate in industries that are generally described as male-dominated, as women form less than 25% of their total workforce (Campuzano, 2019) (see Table 3.3). Although this dissertation does not aim to establish truth or achieve generalisability, it is expected that new insights on building positive work identities in a collectivist context from the Global South will have an impact and relevance in organisational behaviour and identity literature.

#### **1.5 ANTICIPATED CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISSERTATION**

The dissertation is expected to contribute in three main areas: theoretical, managerial, and practical.

##### **1.5.1 Theoretical contribution**

The dissertation is expected to contribute to existing knowledge on how individuals regulate work identities and how organisations and workplace interactions influence the individual's work identities. Using the experiences of women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa, the dissertation can be considered one of the few that i) focuses on an underrepresented population (women in blue-collar roles), ii) situated in a largely collectivist, non-Western context (South Africa), and iii) considers both intrapersonal and interpersonal resources in identity building. The findings of this dissertation provide insights into how identity resources at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels are employed to support upward mobility in the workplace. The dissertation, therefore, moves beyond the individual, to explore the influence of actors within the workplace.

To accommodate contextual nuances, the dissertation contributes to the debates on methodological decolonisation by illustrating how local epistemologies can shape methodology. In doing so, it is hoped that the findings of the dissertation illustrate how a researcher can move beyond an either-or-neither choice when considering research methodologies, thus demonstrating how research can be grounded in methodologies sensitive to contextual nuances.

Based on this pursuit of methodological innovation, the dissertation utilises concepts advanced by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) (major/minor, rhizome, and discourses on territorialisation) as well as the principles of *ubuntu* (a South African epistemology) to understand identity work processes. The concepts are also appropriate for unearthing the socio-cultural complexities that shape the identity work process in a non-Western, collectivist context. The Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame may provide evidence that identity work is a continuous, complex, and non-linear process of becoming, that considers the relationality of identity of the study context.

Aside from how individuals develop positive identities at the individual level, Positive Psychological Interventions (PPIs) provide a perspective to explore how organisations contribute to the positive identity development process. As such, formal and informal workplace structures and how they support women's upward career mobility are explored. Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002), the study highlights how the workplace remains defined by hegemonic masculinities, which renders diversity management interventions ineffective.

### **1.5.2 Practical contribution**

The findings of the dissertation make practical contributions that can guide organisational behaviour, workplace interactions, and the identity-building process. First, the dissertation extends the literature on decolonising research and research methods by offering practical ways in which local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive research in a collectivist setting, particularly in the Global South. Rather than perpetuating the binary approach to decolonisation, i.e., universalist versus contextualised methodologies, the dissertation argues for a fusion between local and conventional methodologies. This fusion calls for slight methodological modification, and the dissertation offers practical ways to collect and analyse data that draw on local epistemologies and conventional Western methodologies.

Furthermore, the dissertation provides insights into organisational culture and norms that perpetuate negative stereotypical perceptions about women's competence. Although the dissertation does not undertake a diagnostic review, diversity and inclusion policies are reviewed as a way to corroborate insights shared by their employees. By doing so, the dissertation compares what the organisation seeks to do in principle, *vis-à-vis* what occurs in practice, in giving organisations an idea of how well they are performing with regard to diversity and inclusion.

Regarding workplace interaction, this dissertation makes a case for colleagues in the workplace to offer instrumental support that contributes to women's upward career mobility. As much as upward mobility is based on merit, the skills and personal attributes that determine aptitude and work performance are largely masculine —particularly in male-dominated industries. As sponsors, male colleagues, in particular, can facilitate women's entry into spaces that are difficult for women to access.

At the individual level, the dissertation highlights the importance of women taking advantage of growth opportunities in the workplace. Although organisational and relational factors can support women's upward mobility, individuals are ultimately responsible for their career growth in the organisation and industry.

## 1.6 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is organised as follows:

- Chapter 1

Chapter 1 introduces the dissertation. The chapter provides the background of the study, covers the research problem and research questions, and defines the research boundaries and the contributions of the dissertation.

- Chapter 2

The second chapter is a literature review of the theories underpinning this dissertation.

- Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides details on the research approach and methodological considerations and choices.

- Chapter 4

The fourth chapter explores how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. Through a systematic review, the study assesses how work identity research has been conducted in the South African context. The review discusses the epistemological approaches, methodological choices, and contextual dictates of three conventional Western paradigms (i.e., positivism, interpretivism, and postmodernism) and the gaps arising from applying Western methodologies in a non-Western context. The study then assesses and affirms the appropriateness of *ubuntu* as a complementary local epistemology to interpretivism in researching the South African context.

- Chapter 5

The chapter explores how women navigate dominant identities and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. Using the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, rhizome, and discourses on territorialisation, the study explores the identity work processes of 15 women in blue-collar roles in three South African-based companies, two in the mining sector and one in transport and logistics.

- Chapter 6

The sixth chapter reports the findings of the study on the formal and informal workplace structures and how they support the upward career mobility of the 15 women workers in the study reported in [Chapter 5](#). The study engaged colleagues (i.e., co-workers the women workers considered supportive in the workplace), the direct supervisors of the women workers, representatives of the human resources (HR) units of the companies, and a document analysis of organisational policies on gender and diversity. Using COR theory and the SCM, the study shows how negative behaviours and annexing valued resources sustain hegemonic masculinities in the workplace.

- Chapter 7

[Chapter 7](#): contains my reflection on my research experiences and how these shaped the research process. The chapter also discusses my academic experience as an international student pursuing a doctorate during a global pandemic.

- Chapter 8

The final chapter provides a synthesis of key findings of the three studies. Also highlighted are the theoretical contributions and practical implications to the body of knowledge on organisational behaviour, gender and work, and research philosophy. The chapter discusses the limitations of the studies, and offers recommendations on areas for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter explores extant literature on identity. The purpose of the chapter is to review theories that serve as the foundation for understanding the development of positive work identities of women in male-dominated jobs. The chapter identifies gaps in the literature to respond to research questions. The chapter begins by exploring the concept of identity, the theories of identity, positive identities, as well as women's workplace experiences. The final section of the chapter highlights the rationale for the dissertation based on the implications drawn from existing literature.

### 2.2 UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY: A THEORETICAL REVIEW

#### 2.2.1 Identity as a multifaceted phenomenon

Identity is a function of both the qualities individuals uniquely possess that set them apart from others and the qualities they bear due to their affiliation to a broader collective or social group (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Buckingham, 2008; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Identity is personal and also relational, and/or hierarchical (Spenner & Rosenfeld, 1990). Hammack (2008) posits that identity "is constructed and reconstructed across the life course and scripted in and through social interaction and social practice" (p. 223). Identity is also defined by time (based on the past, present, the future), one's life choices (for example, work or interest), what one could potentially be, what one feels obligated to be, and what one fears to be (Adams, Van de Vijver, & De Bruin, 2012; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012).

At the individual level, identity has two parts. The first is personal identity, which refers to the traits and characteristics that set an individual apart from others. This type of identity is the "individuated self" (Kreiner et al., 2006, p. 1032). Social identity is the second part of identity, which refers to characteristics individuals bear based on their association with particular categories or groups (Hogg, Abrams, & Brewer, 2017). Individuals may seek to build a personal identity that reflects their true self while maintaining the identity derived from external relations with others. Identity, therefore, is a multi-layered, complex, and simultaneous interaction of personal, social, and contextual elements that define an individual.

An individual's identity is shaped by socio-cultural elements such as values, interests, and histories shared with others, as well as biological descriptors (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Buckingham, 2008).

Therefore, an individual can belong to a particular sex, age, family, ethnicity, nationality, religious group, and profession. Adams and Crafford (2012) argue that some identities are relatively stable compared to others. Sex, for example, is relatively stable compared to profession. Despite individuals having numerous identities, the identities are organised in a coherent but flexible structure (Dutton et al., 2010). This structure comprises “interdependent and independent, mutually reinforcing and conflicting parts” (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 4). This multifaceted structure allows individuals to project, diminish, or balance specific identities in specific circumstances as they deem fit.

Different schools of thought have provided different lenses with which to understand identity, how it is organised, and how it shapes the lives of individuals. These lenses offer useful ways of viewing and analysing identity.

## **2.2.2 Classic theories of identity**

There are three main theoretical approaches to identity in organisational studies. These theories explain how individuals construct identities in fluid, positive, and broadly defined ways. The theories are social identity theory, identity theory, and narrative identity (narrative-as-identity).

### **2.2.2.1 Social identity theory**

Social identity theory (SIT) focuses on identity processes by exploring inter- and intragroup relations and dynamics (Davis, Love, & Fares, 2019; Hogg et al., 2017; Hornsey, 2008; Morgan & Creary, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SIT, described as social psychological theory (Davis et al., 2019; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995), argues that individuals derive a sense of who they are, based on the social category or group to which they belong (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Hogg et al., 2017; Hornsey, 2008; Morgan & Creary, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT proposes that individuals draw on the concepts of self and identity in deriving a sense of self. According to Stets and Burke (2000), self is reflexive and can take on a definition based on other social categories. It is through this reflexive process that identities are formed. A social category refers to a group of individuals who share a common social identification, and hence consider themselves a unit (Hogg & Ridgeway, 2003; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Both self and identity have different forms. There are three forms of self, as noted by Hogg et al. (2017):

*...individual self, based on personal traits that differentiate the self from all others; relational self, based on connections and role relationships with significant others; and collective self, based on group membership that differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’ (p. 571).*



Although the identification under this perspective is reflexive, the individual's identity "is conceived as stable, fixed, unitary and internally consistent" (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003, p. 14).

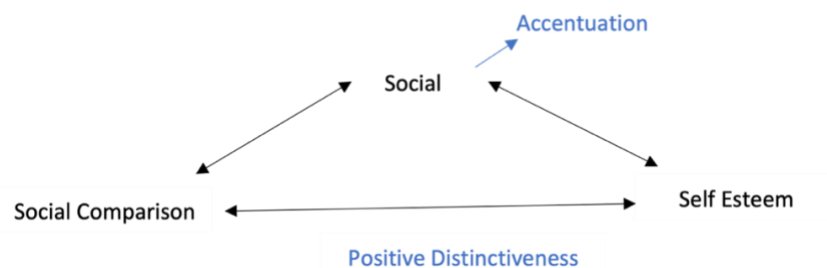
Identity is considered to take four forms (Hogg et al., 2017), namely:

*person-based social identities, reflecting internalization of group properties by individual group members as part of their self-concept; relational social identities, defining the self in relation to specific other people with whom one interacts in a group context, group-based social identities, equivalent to social identity as defined before; and collective identities, reflecting collective self-construal that is also manifested in social action aimed at promoting the group's identity (p. 571).*

It can be inferred from these distinctions that, whether self or identity, the phenomenon exists at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

Individuals' social identity hinges on their knowledge of belonging to the social category group and the meanings attached to that membership. Individuals belong to different social categories concurrently, and these categories shape the thoughts, actions, and behaviours of members of the groups. As members of a social group or category, individuals assess how compatible they are with other members of the group, a process called *social identification*. Through self-identification, individuals develop an emotional attachment to their group, which influences them to consider their group as a group with a higher status than others (Morgan & Creary, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This assessment is referred to as *social comparison*. Individuals usually strive to enhance their self-esteem by joining a high-status group (Dover et al., 2016; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Due to the group's status, the group treats its members favourably compared to those not. This favourable treatment is seen as a consequence of social categorisation. There is "an accentuation of perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members and accentuation of perceived differences between the self and out-group members" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). This accentuation of the degree of similarity enhances the self-esteem of the individuals of the in-group, as they judge their group more favourably than members of the out-group. The high-status group strives to maintain its 'positive distinctiveness' and to preserve its value and the worth members build their self-esteem on, as shown in Figure 2.1. Social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison influence how individuals self-identify, behave, and build self-esteem in relation to others. The theory holds that individuals can maintain their personal identity despite the identity they draw from their groups.

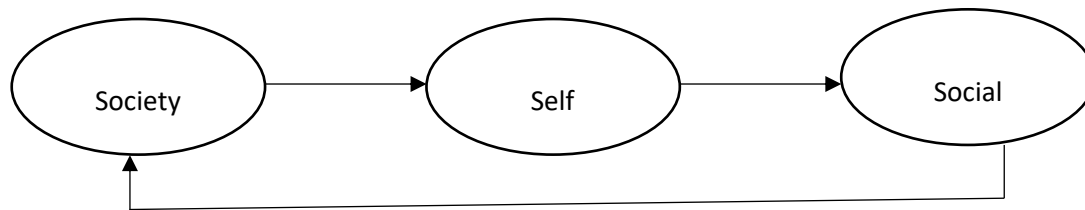
**Figure 2.1***The Three 'Legs' of Social identity theory*

*Note.* This model was developed based Durrheim's 2014, discussion of the three dimensions of the Social identity theory. From *Introduction to social identity theory*, by K. Durrheim, 2014, ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf5\\_gWa3h2g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tf5_gWa3h2g)).

**2.2.2.2 Identity theory**

Closely related to SIT is identity theory, a theory with sociological roots (Davis et al., 2019), which focuses on how the self mediates the relationship between individual behaviour and social structure (Morgan & Creary, 2011). The theory describes the multiple roles an individual plays in society, and not identity statuses based on attributes such as race or gender. Stets and Burke (2000) assert that, "in identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance" (p. 225). The theory argues that individuals act in the context of a social structure and name others and themselves based on the positions they occupy.

Identity theory encompasses two strongly related yet different strands (Morgan & Creary, 2011). The first strand relates to how social structures influence the self and how the self, in turn, affects social behaviour (Hogg et al., 1995; Morgan & Creary, 2011; Serpe & Stryker, 2011), as shown in Figure 2.2. The second strand focuses on the "internal dynamics of self-processes that impact social behaviour" (Morgan & Creary, 2011, p. 7). Identities are meanings that individuals assign to the multiple roles they perform and how those roles shape the individual's behaviour. Both strands share the belief that self and social structures are inextricably connected.

**Figure 2.2***The Identity theory premise*

*Note:* This figure is a representation of the Identity theory premise. From *The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory in Handbook of identity theory and research* (1st ed., pp. 225–248), by R.T. Serpe & S. Stryker, 2011, Springer.

In the extant literature, these strands of identity theory are used to explain how individuals' definition of self at work, for example, is drawn from their role identities, and how interpersonal interactions are shaped by relational identities (e.g., Barnard, 2019; Morgan & Creary, 2011).

Identity theory proposes that the individual's identity hinges on three overlapping bases: the person (e.g., being organised and respectful), the role (e.g., being a sister and a researcher), and the group (e.g., being a young person and a man) (Barnard, 2019; Davis et al., 2019). These multiple and overlapping identities are organised according to relative salience and prominence. Identity salience describes the likelihood of an individual activating a particular identity within a given situation (Barnard, 2019; Hogg et al., 1995; Serpe & Stryker, 2011). Identity salience also reveals the hierarchical structure of the importance of identities, the relative position of each identity, and the likelihood of invoking an identity in the context of social interaction (Barnard, 2019). However, identity prominence explains the subjective sense of value that individuals attach to the multiple identities they bear (Barnard, 2019; Brenner, Serpe, & Stryker, 2014). Although these two concepts revolve around the relative importance of identity, an identity's prominence does not necessarily have to correspond to the identity's salience (Brenner et al., 2014).

Individuals' identities comprise their self-views as a result of self-categorisation (and subsequent identification with their membership of a group) and their role in the group. Identity theory, thus, recognises how social structures shape an individual's identities and, in turn, the impact thereof on their social behaviour.

### **2.2.2.3 Narrative identity**

With roots in psychology, narrative identity postulates that identities are formed based on internalised and evolving stories that individuals construct over time to make sense of and ascribe meaning to their lives (McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Morgan & Creary, 2011). These stories provide a basis for definition for the individuals and others. Just like a narrative, the theory considers a person's life as a story with features such as themes, characters, and setting. As a story, the individual (who is the narrator) reconstructs the past, takes account of the present, and imagines the future, in order to provide a historical and anticipated account of his or her identity (Boyton, Costabile, Austin, & Short, 2020; McAdams, 2011; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Constructing these stories provides individuals with life meaning, coherence, purpose, and unity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Individuals' recollection of life events and expectations for the future enables them to develop coherence in their identity. An individual's narrative identity is not static; it evolves throughout life. Individuals' perspectives and understanding of past occurrences and future expectations are also shaped by the culture within which they are situated (McAdams, 2011). An individual's story is multi-layered, with multiple actors, and hence open to the derivation of multiple meanings.

The structure of an individual's story can be analysed based on agency (relative salience of motivational themes such as power and autonomy) and communion (focusing on topics such as belongingness and love) (Boyton et al., 2020; McAdams, 2011). Agency refers to the degree to which the narrator is autonomous and has the power to influence his or her life, and this is usually demonstrated through achievement, empowerment, and self-mastery (Boyton et al., 2020; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Communion, on the other hand, describes the individual's motives for social connectedness by building intimacy, friendships, and caring for others (Boyton et al., 2020; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Agency and communion are often regarded as the two fundamental constructs used in narrative identity (Boyton et al., 2020; McAdams, 2011). Agency and communion afford the narrators a lens through which they analyse previous life events and define central themes while making sense of their life.

### **2.2.3 Identity work**

Identity work refers "to the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1384). In doing identity work, individuals regulate and negotiate their identities (Adams & Crafford, 2012), reflect on belonging and non-belonging (Walseth, 2006), and respond to identity tensions arising from stereotyping and legitimacy challenges (Morgan & Creary, 2011), to create a sense of cohesion and distinctiveness (Watson, 2008). Identity work allows individuals to define, for

themselves and others, who they are within a specific context (Lepisto et al., 2015), which, in the case of this dissertation, is the workplace.

The identity work process can be deliberate or involuntary, and frequently happening in the workplace (Barnard, 2019) to resolve tensions between the self and workplace demands. These tactics can be employed agentically in suppressing, highlighting, or integrating personal and social identities (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Kreiner et al., 2006).

### **2.2.3.1 *Doing identity work***

Existing literature recognises different identity work strategies. To illustrate, some of the strategies include compartmentalisation, aggregation, deletion, and integration (Pratt & Foreman, 2000); experimentation, recognition, and reflection (Beech, 2011); combination, nostalgia, reproduction, and validation (Bardon, Josserand, & Villesèche, 2015); legitimacy affirming and legitimacy contesting (Brown & Toyoki, 2013); intrapsychic strategies, interpersonal strategies, and intergroup strategies (Breakwell, 2015); adding, retaining, and subtracting (Lepisto et al., 2015); adapting, avoiding, negotiating, resisting, and rejecting (Berger, Essers, & Himi, 2017); and being, engaging, performing, and accepting (Zheng, Meister, & Caza, 2021). Individuals use different modes in doing identity work: cognitive, physical, discursive, and behavioural (Caza et al., 2018). Identity work can occur at the intrapersonal level (usually through cognitive and behavioural modes) and the interpersonal level (usually through behavioural and relational modes) (Bataille & Vough, 2022; Bertolotti, Tagliaventi, & Dosi, 2022; Breakwell, 2015). Caza et al. (2018) provide a useful framework, shown in Table 2.1, that draws on dominant theoretical perspectives on identity to explain what individuals do when doing identity work.

**Table 2.1***Identity Work from Dominant Theories on Identity*

<b>Theories on identity</b>	<b>Identities worked on</b>	<b>How people engage in identity work</b>	<b>When people engage in identity work</b>	<b>Motivation for identity work</b>
<b>Social identity theory</b>	Collective identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Position themselves relative to in-groups and out-groups</li> <li>- Change how they define groups of which they are members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When collective meanings are changed or challenged</li> <li>- When in-group/out-group distinctions become salient</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-enhancement</li> <li>- Distinctiveness</li> <li>- Belongingness</li> </ul>
<b>Identity theory</b>	Role identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Change self to align with role</li> <li>- Change role expectations</li> <li>- Change self or others' perceptions of role</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- New roles</li> <li>- Self vs other expectations</li> <li>- Multiple roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-verification</li> </ul>
<b>Narrative theory</b>	Personal identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating and updating stories that draw on personal histories and available discourses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ongoing, but heightened during transitions/change</li> <li>- Ambiguous or unexpected events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coherence and plausibility</li> </ul>

Note: Adapted from "Identity work in organizations and occupations: Definitions, theories, and pathways forward" by B. B. Caza, H. Vough, & H. Puranik, 2018, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 39(7), p. 896.

In social identity theory (SIT), the core assumption about identity is that individuals are members of multiple social groups (Morgan & Creary, 2011). From the SIT perspective, individuals engage in identity work when they adjust their association by either attaching to or dissociating from their social group (Caza et al., 2018). The level of association with a social group is shaped by the dominant narrative that characterises the group, such that if one's membership affords them to be viewed positively, they align strongly, and vice versa (Johnstone et al., 2016; Kreiner et al., 2006). Beyond these adjustments, individuals further engage in identity work by providing alternative meanings to their groups (Brown, 2015), commonly seen among individuals who belong to less desirable or minority groups. In dealing with the stigma attached to such groups, individuals enhance the group's image by assigning more positive social meanings or appropriate humour (for example, making jokes about the group) (Brown, 2015; Roberts, Cha, & Kim, 2014).

Identity theory views identities as social constructs shaped by the individual's roles (Bothma & Roodt, 2012). As individual behaviour is shaped by the meaning and expectations associated with roles performed, individuals engage in identity work by shaping their behaviour to align with the expectations associated with the roles (Caza et al., 2018). In Kreiner et al.'s (2006) study, participants acknowledged the strong expectations of behaviour by virtue of their vocation. Furthermore, relational identity work stresses the interdependence between the individuals and their audience in claiming and granting identities (Morgan & Creary, 2011), shaped by the interplay of power and agency (Thompson, 2020). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) describe how leaders position themselves relative to their followers, such that leaders claim and perform in such capacities, with their followers granting them the opportunity to lead. From the identity theory perspective, roles provide essential modes for individuals to engage in identity work in defining who they are, in terms of their roles, for themselves and others.

Lastly, narrative identity theory considers identity as constructs emerging from individuals' stories of their interaction and the meanings derived from these stories (Morgan & Creary, 2011). Individuals define who they are and who they could become for themselves and others based on their understanding of their stories (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Individuals constantly negotiate situational and individual factors, which tend to cause tension (Carollo & Guerci, 2018; Kreiner et al., 2006). Carollo and Guerci (2018) found that sustainability managers in charge of addressing "multiple desirable but conflicting economic, environmental and social outcomes at firm and societal levels" (p. 250) narrated and positioned themselves as rational sustainability managers or activists. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) point out that individuals create multiple narratives, contributing to a larger narrative. With this, individuals draw on how non-work identities shape their experiences in the

workplace. Through stories, Gil et al. (2008) captured how women engineers made meaning of their experience and engaged in tactics to achieve workplace acceptance and professional recognition.

What all these theoretical approaches have in common is that (1) identity separates the *me* (or, in SIT, the *us*) from *you* (or *them*), (2) identity work processes assume the desired state to be reached, and identity work is the means of achieving this state; and (3) the identity work process means moving from one state to another. Given that these theoretical approaches tend to favour stable, fixed, and internally consistent identities (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003), this dissertation explores identity through a dynamic perspective.

The dynamic conceptualisation of identity favour relationality (Janssens & Steyaert, 2003); where identity is viewed as a fluid construct that is as personal as it is relational; such that, identity is not a discrete entity but part of a larger system. The dynamic perspective on identity is premised on the notion that identities are constructed through social interactions, experiences, and which is built over time. Ely, therefore, argues that identity is “best seen as a set of contradictory, fluid, contextual constrained positions within which people are capable of exercising choice” (Ely, 1995, p. 184). The relational and contextual nature of identity allows for the exploration of how individuals create different pathways of being, based on their social interactions and experiences.

The dynamic perspective on identity is adopted for this dissertation since the study is situated in a collectivist context where ‘I’ is part of ‘we’, and also responds to Janssens & Steyaert’s (2003) charge to researchers to consider embedding identity in the socio-cultural circumstance within which identity is constructed.

#### **2.2.4 Positive identities**

Positive identities refer to “identities that imbue the self with worth...and associated with a positive social meaning” (Jammaers, Zanoni, & Hardonk, 2016, p. 1366). Morgan and Creary (2011) explain further that individuals desire to hold positive views about themselves and have the desire for others to view them positively, which influences their decision to develop identities considered valuable or favourable. Inasmuch as positive identities focus on self-worth (at the individual level), Dutton et al. (2010) posit that the process is an evaluative process that comprises individual, relational, as well as social identities. This is because self-definition and self-worth are based not only on the individual’s sense of uniqueness but also on the value attached to the qualities they exhibit or the social categories they belong to (Lucas, 2011).



According to Dutton et al. (2010), there are four typologies of positive identity: virtue, evaluative, developmental, and structural, as shown in Table 2.2. The table summarises perspectives by explaining the bases for positivity, core assertions, and core proposition.

**Table 2.2***Perspectives on Positive Work Identity*

Bases for comparison	Virtue	Evaluative	Developmental		Structural	
			Progressive	Adaptive	Balanced	Complementary
Basis for positivity of identity	Virtuous identity content	Favourable regard for identity content	Change in identity content towards a more developed or ideal identity	Change in identity content toward a better fit with internal or external standards	Balance in identity content between inclusion and differentiation	Building linkages or connections between the various facets of the self
Core assertions	Certain virtues and character strengths are inherently good. When individuals construct an identity that contains master virtues and/or character strengths, the identity is positive.	Individuals derive self-esteem from subjective evaluations of their identity characteristics and identity groups. Identities that are favourably regarded by the self or by others are positive	Individuals naturally progress toward the “ideal” self through stages over time and/or through changes that indicate growth	Individuals create possible selves and select those that align with internal and external standards.	The structure or organization of identity content minimizes tension between human needs for inclusion and differentiation by balancing personal identity with social identity	Multiple identities are viewed as compatible with one another, in that the possession of one identity (e.g., role, cultural background) can facilitate the execution of expectations related to the other identity (e.g., task performance, engagement).

Core proposition	A work-related identity becomes more positive when it is imbued with virtuous attributes	A work-related identity becomes more positive when individuals regard the identity more favourably.	A work-related identity becomes more positive as its content changes in the direction of an ideal or more developed identity	A work-related identity becomes more positive as it develops a better fit with internal and/or external	A work-related identity becomes more positive by balancing collective identity and personal identity	A work-related identity becomes more positive as multiple identities are viewed as complementary
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*Note:* From “Pathways for positive identity construction at work: Four types of positive identity and the building of social resources” by J.E. Dutton, L.M. Roberts, & J. Bednar, 2010, *Academy of Management Review*, 35(2), 265–293, p. 269.

The virtue perspective shows that positive identities are characterised by virtues that are usually viewed as universal. These identities are “infused with virtuous qualities or character strength that correspond to the qualities that distinguish people of good character and that are defined as inherently good” (Dutton et al., 2010, p. 268). Courage, fairness, tolerance, and wisdom are examples of ‘master virtues’ (Park & Peterson, 2003). As such, a worker is viewed more favourably when they exhibit these virtues in the workplace.

From the evaluative perspective, individuals derive self-worth when viewed favourably by others. Individuals are relational beings. When the views of others reflect traits such as competence or skilfulness, individuals, in turn, construe their identity with positivity (Dutton et al., 2010). Furthermore, positive identities are also drawn from collective identities (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Individuals who feel positive about the social categories they belong to derive positive identities from their membership in that collective. This positive feeling fosters good interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing the incidence of interpersonal conflicts. The individual’s work identity becomes positive when others view their identities favourably.

The developmental perspective asserts that their work identities become positive when individuals become more aligned to the ideal identity or better fit with set standards. Within this perspective, individuals may evolve to fit the ideal image of their profession or create possible selves and choose identities that are more aligned with set standards (Carlsen, 2006; Ibarra, 1999). From a structural perspective, an individual’s identity structure is positive when multiple identities are balanced or complement one another (Dutton et al., 2010). In addition, the structural perspective centres on the individual’s attempt to build positive identities while minimising identity conflict among multiple and intersecting identities.

Given that identity is the principal construct underpinning positive identities, Morgan and Creary (2011) explore the different processes that enable individuals to develop positive identities through theories of identity, as summarised in Table 2.3. The table summarises the theories of identity based on the impetus for construction, mechanism for construction, and consequent effects on the individual’s self-view.

**Table 2.3***Positive Identity Development through the Lens of Identity Theories*

	<b>Impetus for Construction</b>	<b>Mechanism of Construction Social</b>	<b>Effect on Self-views</b>
Social identity theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group identification</li> <li>• Categorising into social groups</li> <li>• Identity devaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pursue optimal distinctiveness</li> <li>• Make favourable self-enhancing comparisons</li> <li>• Enhance social valuation of identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Positive identity structure and identity evaluation</li> <li>• More Positive identity evaluation</li> <li>• More Positive identity evaluation</li> </ul>
Identity theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role–identity mismatch</li> <li>• Identity activation/salience</li> <li>• Identity conflict</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Align actions with expectations</li> <li>• Prioritise identities</li> <li>• Segment or integrate identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Positive sense of adaptation and identity structure</li> <li>• More Positive identity structure</li> <li>• More Positive identity structure</li> </ul>
Narrative identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identity transition</li> <li>• Unexpected, untimely, involuntary, or uncertain circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate life experiences across time</li> <li>• Craft narratives of growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Positive identity structure</li> <li>• More Positive sense of development</li> </ul>

*Note:* From “Positive identity construction: Insights from classical and contemporary theoretical perspectives”, by L.Morgan & S.J. Creary, In G. M. Spreitzer & K. S. Cameron (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive organizational scholarship* (p. 4), 2011, Oxford University Press.

As explained in Section 2.2.2.1, Social Identity Theory points out how individuals define who they are in relation to the multiple social categories such as gender and race they belong to (Morgan & Creary, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). These social categories allow individuals to simultaneously experience belonging and differentiation (Morgan & Creary, 2011). In Kreiner et al. (2006), Episcopal priests employ boundaries to protect their personal identities from being subsumed by their professional identities. In the case of individuals belonging to low-status social categories, one way to achieve positive distinctiveness is to “symbolically or physically exit their devalued group in order to join a more positively regarded group” (Morgan & Creary, 2011, p. 6). For example, Gill et al. highlight that to be viewed as competent by colleagues who are men, the solution for some women “was to deny their femaleness, to make feminine subjectivity disappear in order to fit in with the masculine order of things” (2008, p. 230). These identity-enhancing tactics used at the individual level stem from their subjective understanding of how favourably or not their social category is seen by them and others.

Identity Theory explains how the self mediates the relationship between individual behaviour and social structure (Hogg et al., 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000), as explained in Section 2.2.2.2. In terms of developing positive identities, the mechanism shown in Table 2.3 suggests that individuals align their sense of self with expectations associated with their role. There are instances where there is a misalignment of the individual’s identity and role in the workplace. For example, Carollo and Guerci’s (2018) study on sustainability managers showed that due to the paradoxical relationship between sustainability and identity (i.e., meeting business and value-orientated demands), there were instances where identities misalign. In response, some sustainability managers deal with such tensions by leaning towards one side of the continuum, while others embrace the contrast simultaneously. Compartmentalisation is also used when one’s identity is threatened (Breakwell, 2015; Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Here, the individual sets strict boundaries as a segmentation tactic to highlight or diminish certain identities when identity conflicts arise. Pursuing a degree of alignment enables the individual to address identity conflicts and consequently facilitate the development of positive identities.

Narrative identity regards identity as an emergent process based on the stories and interpretations individuals form for themselves in defining who they are (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), as discussed in Section 2.2.2.3. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) use the case of career transition – where the individual uses narratives to make sense of their roles and identities associated with the old and new careers. The integration mechanism enables the individual to develop positive identities by making meaning of their life experiences and achieving coherence.

As individuals draw self-worth from their work, there is usually a strong desire to construct positive work identities in executing their duties or membership in work-based organisations (Lucas, 2011). Beyond this general desire, for individuals who belong to minority groups such as ethnic minorities, older workers, persons with disabilities, and women (Jammaers et al., 2016), developing and maintaining positive identities enable them to work through normative expectations associated with their jobs or their working environment.

### **2.2.5 Work identity**

Work remains a critical aspect of the lives of many adults. All other things being equal, an adult is expected to be engaged in a job, be it for economic or personal reasons. Jobs provide a means to live and a meaning to life. Gini (1998) asserts that we derive identity and are identified based on our work. Therefore, work identity is described as the multifaceted identities developed based on individuals' jobs, employers, and working environment, as well as how they behave in their line of work (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Bester, Roodt, & Bosch, 2012). In as much as individuals are shaped by their work, they affect and are affected by their working environment. Developing work identities involves negotiating personal values, attitudes, and work processes (Kirpal, 2004).

Work identity can be viewed at three levels: individual, relational/interpersonal, and collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Miscenko & Day, 2016). At the individual level, work identity refers to unique traits that set an individual apart from others in the workplace. At the relational level, work identity is based on one's relationship with others in the workplace. Lastly, a collective identity is derived from one's membership in an organisational or social category (Miscenko & Day, 2016). These levels of work identity show that individuals are social beings who draw on something broader than themselves in defining who they are (Kreiner et al., 2006).

Although "work ... gives us a vehicle for personal expression and offers us a means for personal definition" (Gini, 1998, p. 708), the workplace remains a social context within which individuals are confined to its dictates (Adams & Crafford, 2012). In the workplace, individuals draw on available resources to develop their identities (Watson, 2008), which may not always align with each other, and are sometimes in conflict. Individuals develop a "culturally appropriate self" (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 136) based on their experience and knowledge of ethics and conventions of their profession, organisational policies, and workplace culture (Compton & Brandhorst, 2021). Besides developing this sense of self, individuals usually present their most valued and valuable traits and skills to be viewed positively in the workplace (Morgan & Creary, 2011).

### 2.2.6 Women at work

The gender dynamics of paid employment have changed significantly over the past few decades (Damaske, 2013). Although women are becoming numerically significant in various fields, gender stereotypes and gendered organisational practices contribute to the underrepresentation of women in certain fields and roles (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wallace, 2014). Beyond gender, women's experiences in the workplace are also shaped by identities stemming from race, parental status, and age, and/or an intersection of all these identities (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Cha & Roberts, 2019; Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Working mothers, compared to unmarried women and/or those who do not have children and their colleagues who are men, are seen to have lower levels of commitment to their work (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). In addition, according to Roberts et al. (2014), women from "underrepresented, devalued racial minorities" (p. 529) are susceptible to discrimination based on race and gender.

These challenges are even more pronounced in male-dominated industries. During the recruitment phase, "sociocultural influences related to gendered perceptions of work, gender roles and the gendered expectations" (Bridges, Bamberry, Wulff, & Krivokapic-Skoko, 2022, p. 2) serve as barriers that limit women's access into these industries. These challenges are further exacerbated when they gain access to these workspaces, as they experience bullying, discrimination, and abuse, have limited opportunities for growth, and are subjected to restrictive working arrangements (Botha, 2016; Bridges et al., 2022; Gill et al., 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2014). Besides organisational culture, the roles in these industries tend to be characterised by a presenteeism culture and physically demanding tasks (Botha, 2016; Wright, 2016a), favouring masculine ideals.

Cole (2015) argues that upward mobility is more about merit and less about selection bias, but this may not be the case in male-dominated industries. The performative definition of success (i.e., skills and personal attributes) usually reflects masculine ideals (Gill et al., 2008; Wright, 2016b). Although there is a "level playing-field in that everyone is able to compete" (Cole, 2015, p. 29), the yardstick for measuring performance is configured in men's favour. This skewness may not necessarily be an intentional act to push women out, but due to these spaces having traditionally been male-only and having built a culture to suit their norms and ideals. These experiences place women in a complicated position, as they are confronted with either projecting their authentic selves or aligning their identities with established norms and values.



### **2.2.6.1 Women in male-dominated jobs in South Africa**

Women in South Africa participate in paid employment; however, these jobs tend to be seasonal and insecure, usually in the informal sector and caregiving (Naysmith & Rubincam, 2012). Like other countries, work tends to be gendered; where jobs such as caregiving, nursing, and teaching (Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim, & Mdlongwa, 2018; Kalemba, 2020; Msiza, 2020) are considered feminine, while jobs such as mining, manufacturing, and engineering (Botha, 2016; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015; Martin & Barnard, 2013) are considered masculine. Women have had limited access to historically male-only jobs due to a number of reasons, including biological, regulatory, and societal factors.

Biologically, due to the physicality associated with many of the roles in male-dominated industries, the job demands tend to favour men's physical abilities and, therefore, not an obvious career choice for women (Botha & Cronjé, 2015; Messing, Lippel, Demers, & Mergler, 2000). In line with global labour regulations as set by the 1935 International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention, which prohibited women from engaging in underground mine work. It was only in 1996 that South Africa's Mines Health and Safety Act, No.29 of 1996, denounced this prohibition (Botha & Cronjé, 2015; Nkomo & Balfour, 2022). Socially, family demands on the time of women and men differ, as women tend to be primary caregivers to other family members. These demands shape their career aspirations and trajectories (Jaga et al., 2018; Martin & Barnard, 2013). Racial discrimination also added a layer of complexity to the aforementioned factors in limiting women's access to traditionally male-dominated industries (Cruise, 2011; Jaga et al., 2018). In the specific case of mining, Cruise writes:

“Not only was mining an all-male preserve, but also in South Africa the upper echelon of mining was an ‘all-white’ bastion. This stemmed from the so-called ‘Colour Bar Acts’ of the 1911 Mines and Works Act, ... the 1926 Mines and Works Amendment Act, ... and the 1956 Mines and Works Amendment Act ... ” (2011, p. 217)

However, since the first democratic election in South Africa in the 1990s, the employment of women, especially African, Coloured, and Indian women, has been a major issue that employment equity regulations have sought to facilitate women's access to non-traditional occupations such as mining, manufacturing, transport, and engineering (Botha & Cronjé, 2015; Cruise, 2011; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015; Moalusi & Jones, 2019). Despite these efforts, women continue to experience challenges, including “a lack of gendered personal protective equipment (PPE), discriminatory practices in the hiring and promotion of women, lack of gender pay parity, physical and psychological harassment, and a built environment that is not conducive to women's safety” (Nkomo & Balfour, 2022, p. 126).

Women's experiences, particularly challenges faced, as well as perceptions of gendered cultures in male-dominated jobs in South Africa, have received decent academic attention, as shown in Table 2.4. The table presents publications, the industries their studies were situated, as well as the sample.

**Table 2.4***Examples of Publications on Women in Male-Dominated Jobs in South Africa*

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Sample</b>
Netnou, Z., & Strydom, K. (2020). Improving career advancement of women in a manufacturing firm in South Africa. <i>Journal of Human Ecology</i> , 70(1-3), 25-35.	Manufacturing	Black women
Du Plessis, Y., & Barkhuizen, N. (2015). Exploring the career path barriers of women professional engineers in a South African context. <i>South African Journal of Labour Relations</i> , 39(1), 38-57.	Engineering	Women professional engineers and managers
Naysmith, S., & Rubincam, C. (2012). Women in the driver's seat: An exploratory study of perceptions and experiences of female truck drivers and their employers in South Africa. <i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i> , 38(3), 579-599.	Transport	Female truck drivers
Martin, P., & Barnard, A. (2013). The experience of women in male-dominated occupations: A constructivist grounded theory inquiry. <i>SA Journal of industrial psychology</i> , 39(2), 1-12.	IT, mining, engineering, and energy	Women who were working in historically male-dominated occupations
Johnson, Z., & Mathur-Helm, B. (2011). Experiences with queen bees: A South African study exploring the reluctance of women executives to promote other women in the workplace. <i>South African Journal of Business Management</i> , 42(4), 47-55.	Banking	Women executives and senior managers
English, J., & Le Jeune, K. (2012). Do professional women and tradeswomen in the South African construction industry share common employment barriers despite progressive government legislation? <i>Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice</i> , 138(2), 145-152.	Construction	-female professional built environment management students  -senior persons and other interested persons within construction firms

		-16- to 18-year-old Grade 11 and 12 female learners
English, J., & Hay, P. (2015). Black South African women in construction: Cues for success. <i>Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology</i> .	Construction	Black women
Alves, S., & English, J. (2018). Female students' preparedness for a male-dominated workplace. <i>Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology</i> , 16(4), 581-595.	Construction	Female (majoring in Property Studies or Construction Economics)
Akinlolu, M., & Haupt, T. C. (2019, July). Investigating a male-dominated space: Female students' perceptions of gendered cultures in construction workplaces. In <i>Construction industry development board postgraduate research conference</i> (pp. 43-55). Springer, Cham.	Construction	Female students enrolled in civil engineering, property development, land surveying and civil engineering program
Botha, D. (2016). Women in mining still exploited and sexually harassed. <i>SA Journal of Human Resource Management</i> , 14(1), 1-12.	Mining	- management of the three mines - male and female employees working in core mining activities
Botha, D., & Cronjé, J. F. (2015). The physical ability of women in mining: can they show muscle? <i>Journal of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy</i> , 115(8), 659-667.	Mining	- management of the three mines - male and female employees working in core mining activities

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Note: Compiled by author.

Although these academic studies focus on male-dominated industries, the sample, as shown in Table 2.4, tend to favour those managerial and professional roles. However, the core jobs within these industries are usually blue-collar work.

Blue-collar roles tend to be male-dominated due to their physically demanding nature (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Fernando et al. (2020) point out that the working environment in which blue-collar workers operate may be less collaborative than others and that individuals with a minority status (such as women) are likely to experience stigmatisation and discrimination. Working in a physically demanding and gender-hostile environment can significantly affect women's physical and mental well-being (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Despite this unique case of 'double male domination', Naysmith and Rubincam point out that "there is a dearth of literature on the experiences of women in skilled blue-collar work in South Africa" (2012, p. 579).

As such, the current dissertation explores the case of women in blue-collar roles in three companies (i.e., two mining and one logistics companies) situated within a geographical context where women are stereotypically imagined as oppressed and powerless, as posited by Win (2004).

### **2.2.7 Conclusion**

The chapter summarises the theoretical and conceptual issues relating to identity, identity work, and women's identity in the workplace. The sections on identity explore the main identity theories and tease out the relevance of exploring both intrapersonal and interpersonal identity resources in a collectivist context. The discussion on the concept of identity work provides insights into the complex ways in which individuals regulate and negotiate their minority identities, especially in the face of identity tension. The stressful working conditions and gender hostility women face in male-dominated workplaces have implications for how women construct their identities and upward career mobility. The gaps in the literature, including the conceptualisation of identity as a discrete entity in a collectivist society and the dearth of literature on women in blue-collar jobs, provide an entry for this dissertation to focus on an underrepresented population (i.e., women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries) to provide a context-sensitive approach to identity and the identity work process from a Global South perspective.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

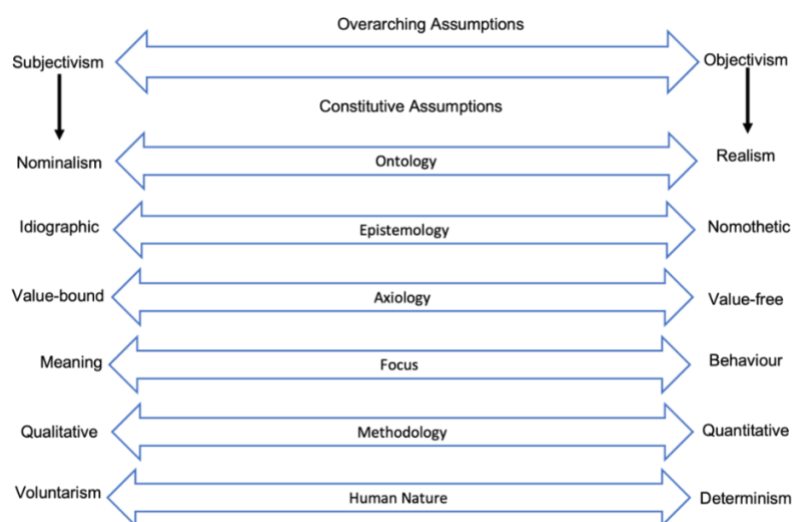
The chapter focuses on the research methodology of the dissertation. Although each study discusses the specific methodology used in detail, this chapter discusses the research philosophy, methodological choices, and strategies used. The chapter discusses the research setting, the data collection and analysis processes, ethical considerations, and strategies implemented to ensure trustworthiness.

### 3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy refers to the researcher's system of beliefs and assumptions regarding knowledge production (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). This system relates to assumptions regarding the nature of reality (ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and the role of values in the research (axiology). Figure 3.1 shows that philosophical assumptions can be viewed on a continuum with two extremes: objectivism and subjectivism. The figure also captures how ontology, epistemology, axiology, research focus, methodology, and human nature are viewed by the two extremes.

**Figure 3.1**

*Assumptions Regarding the Nature and Study of Social Reality*



*Note:* The figure is a continuum with subjectivism and objectivism at the extremes produced from

summarising assumption regarding the nature and study of social reality. Adapted from *Identity formation, agency and culture: A social psychological synthesis*, by J.E Côté & C.G Levine, 2002,. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates and *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.), M.Saunders, P. Lewis & A. Thornhill , 2016, Pearson Education.

Figure 3.1 shows that ontologically, objectivism argues that there is one true reality; epistemologically, knowledge is factual and verifiable; and in terms of axiology, a phenomenon can be studied independent of the values of the research (Côté & Levine, 2002; Saunders et al., 2016). On the other hand, subjectivism views ontology as socially constructed and multiple; epistemology views knowledge as subjective and open to attributed meanings; and on axiology, the research is value-bound (Côté & Levine, 2002; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014).

With specific reference to interpretivist research epistemologies, I was inclined towards social constructionist thinking. Social constructionism pursues an “understanding of meanings rather than explanation of phenomena” and views “the notion of knowledge as relative to a particular socio–historical situation, and the belief that meanings are multiple—no single interpretation is more authoritative than another” (Hiller, 2016, pp. 112–113). However, given that the core concept underpinning my dissertation is identity, I was cautioned by Jackson and Hogg’s assertion that “personal identity is established within the perception of self as derived from thoughtful reflection on communicative interactions between oneself and others from the societal environment” (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010, p. 740). As such, I considered a similar epistemology that considered the relationality of identity. The *ubuntu* epistemology met these considerations. Firstly, *ubuntu* views identity as an inextricable relationship between the identity of the individual and that of their community (i.e., I am part of we) (Chilisa, 2012; Mkabela, 2015). The *ubuntu* epistemology views knowledge as that which is generated and verified by the collective rather than individualistic and unitised (Swanson, 2012), and seeks interpretation and understanding, rather than rationalism and verification (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018).

In considering research philosophy for this dissertation, I was reminded of Berger’s (2015) assertion that the researcher’s worldview influences the research process. Regarding my ontology and epistemology, I reflected on my own identities as I researched the identities of others. Over three years, my identities have evolved to include: wife, mother, and early-career researcher in management. Whenever I pause to reflect on how all these identities shape my reality, I cannot ascribe it to a single source. In my own experience, I borrow the rhizome metaphor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to explain my reality: it is without a fixed and obvious pattern, and changes when circumstances change. My world during my Ph.D. study was characterised by highs (for example, a top

journal accepting my manuscript for publication) and lows (for example, disruptions brought about by a global pandemic). As such, I did expect my participants to have similar experiences – life experiences that are not fixed with an obvious pattern that changes based on prevailing circumstances. Participants' experiences may not have been fully explicated if I had approached my research as if it were a tree (i.e., with an obvious structure) or through an objectivist lens instead of a rhizome or a subjectivist lens. Closely linked to this rhizomatic ontology is an epistemology that acknowledges different ways of knowing and views knowledge as socially constructed, with multiple meanings.

I acknowledge that approaching the dissertation through an objectivist lens would have allowed for a causal relationship between women's identity work and their upward career mobility to be established. However, such explanations would be devoid of context (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014),- a critical objective of this dissertation. The dissertation aimed to contribute to the literature on research methodology, identity work, and diversity management from a Global South perspective. Accommodating contextual elements allowed for richness and nuance that existing literature may not have captured.

Given the five research philosophies Saunders et al. (2016) provided, namely: positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, postmodernism, and pragmatism, interpretivism was most aligned with my subjective assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology, and axiology.

Interpretivism emphasises an individual's subjective experiences due to differences in circumstances, socio-cultural backgrounds, and time (Leavy, 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). A major argument by one of the leading proponents of interpretivism, Max Weber, was that social actions and phenomena could be understood by exploring the subjective meanings people attach to them (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). As such, individuals are constantly engaged in the process of making and assigning meaning to events, situations, and activities. Unlike positivist social science research, which takes an objective perspective and a deductive approach to studying human behaviour within a social context, interpretivism takes a subjective perspective and an inductive approach. This stance allows the researcher to be immersed in the research and not approach it from a distance (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013) and for a shared generation of knowledge (Lindlof, 2008). Interpretivist research yields in-depth and richer insights into and interpretations of the social world within a defined context (Saunders et al., 2016).

This dissertation employed an interpretivist lens to understand how women build positive work identities in male-dominated jobs in a collectivist context. This philosophy enabled me to engage



women in understanding the identity work strategies they employ in the workplace, and also to explore the formal and informal workplace structures that support women's upward mobility and foster the development of positive identities in order to inductively construct an interpretive theory from their reality.

The interpretive research philosophy is, however, not without shortcomings. Interpretivist research is value-bound; therefore, researchers acknowledge that total objectivity cannot be achieved as their values and beliefs significantly shape the research process (Saunders et al., 2016). Similarly, the interaction between the researcher and participant can impact the research process, especially during data collection. Biographical and demographic similarities and differences between a researcher and participants can and do affect rapport (Carrim & Nkomo, 2016). Due to these shortcomings, strategies to ensure trustworthiness were built into the research process, as discussed in Section 3.3.6. The research philosophy and worldview became directive of the methodological choices made.

### **3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **3.3.1 Methodological choice**

A major methodological decision confronting a researcher is choosing to conduct quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). The selected research type provides the researcher with specific guidance on the procedures to employ throughout the research process (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Leavy (2017) also points out that due recognition has to be given to issues such as the topic and purpose of the study. This methodological choice is, however, not done arbitrarily; but requires an integration of the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and axiological beliefs (research philosophy), which then determines the methodological choice.

Quantitative research is usually employed when the research aims to explain or evaluate a phenomenon (Leavy, 2017). Such research involves deductive approaches that measure variables to test relationships in establishing patterns and causal relationships (Saunders et al., 2016). Data collection methods tend to be linear, while analyses are statistics-based. Values guiding quantitative research include objectivity (Saunders et al., 2016).

Qualitative research is used when the research aims to explore, investigate, and build an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon and examine the meaning people ascribe to the phenomenon (Leavy, 2017). Such research uses inductive approaches to build theory or provide richer insights into

existing theories (Saunders et al., 2016). Techniques used in collecting data tend to be interactive, and, therefore, the findings are value-bound (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Saunders et al., 2016).

Mixed-methods research combines the data-collection and analytical techniques used in the quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Such research harnesses the strengths of both approaches in countering their respective inherent weaknesses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Mixed-methods research is employed when the research sets out to explain and evaluate a phenomenon. Such research may prioritise either the quantitative or qualitative method, or employ them equally, depending on the researcher's preference (Saunders et al., 2016).

This dissertation is shaped by the interpretivist research philosophy, which aligns with the subjectivist worldview, hence the decision to conduct a qualitative study. The dissertation's research objectives (see Section 1.3) is best answered using qualitative research, as the questions were exploratory and inclined towards meaning-making. Undertaking qualitative research for this dissertation also aligns with extant literature on women's experiences in male-dominated industries (Botha, 2017; Gill et al., 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016b), identity work (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Barnard, 2019; Haeruddin et al., 2020; Kreiner et al., 2006; Zheng et al., 2021), and formal and informal workplace support (Collins, Hislop, & Cartwright, 2016; Kosny et al., 2013; Papafilippou, Durbin, & Conley, 2022), as shown in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**

*Research Approaches of Previous Publications*

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Research Approach</b>
Barriers to career advancement of women in mining: A qualitative analysis	Botha (2017)	Qualitative
'Oh you must be very clever!' High-achieving women, professional power and the ongoing negotiation of workplace identity	Gill, Mills, Franzway, & Sharp (2008)	Qualitative
The experience of women in male-dominated occupations: A constructivist grounded theory inquiry	Martin & Barnard (2013)	Qualitative
Women's experience of workplace interactions in male-dominated work: The intersections of gender, sexuality and occupational group	Wright (2016b)	Qualitative
Identity at work: Exploring strategies for identity work	Adams & Crafford (2012)	Qualitative

Resistance and compliance in women's academic identity work in the Global South	Haeruddin, Pick, & Thein (2020)	Qualitative
The stories that make us: Leaders' origin stories and temporal identity work	Zheng, Meister, & Caza (2021)	Qualitative
Social support in the workplace between teleworkers, office-based colleagues and supervisors	Collins, Hislop, & Cartwright (2016)	Qualitative
Buddies in bad times? The role of co-workers after a work-related injury	Kosny et al. (2013)	Qualitative
Women's formal networking: The relationship between networking activities and power	Papafilippou, Durbin, & Conley (2022)	Qualitative

Note. Compiled by author

The appropriateness of the choice to conduct qualitative research for this dissertation was also confirmed by the outcome of the systematic review reported on in [Chapter 4:](#), in which it was found that 54% of the reviewed studies were approached through an interpretivist lens; hence, qualitative studies.

### 3.3.2 Research strategies

The research strategy for each study is explicated in the relevant chapters (Study I in [Chapter 4:](#), Study II in [Chapter 5:](#), and Study III in [Chapter 6:](#)). This section justifies why these strategies were selected.

#### 3.3.2.1 Justification of a systematic review

The first study sets the tone for the rest of the dissertation by pursuing methodological innovation. The study reviews how existing research on identity in the workplace has been approached methodologically. The findings of the review provide a basis to explore how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. The outcome of this study shaped the methodological choices of the subsequent studies reported on in the dissertation.

Different types of review were considered, including a) a literature or narrative review — a descriptive piece of work that focuses on the author's selection of relevant studies on a phenomenon, which is usually flawed due to being prone to selection bias (MacMillan, McBride, George, & Steiner, 2019; Uman, 2011), b) a systematised review — a review that provides an overview to a topic, but may be flawed due to not being rigorous enough, as it may not include a quality assessment (MacMillan et al., 2019; Sataloff et al., 2021), and c) a systematic review, “a detailed and comprehensive plan and search strategy derived a priori, with the goal of reducing bias by identifying, appraising, and synthesizing all

relevant studies on a particular topic” (Uman, 2011, p. 57). A systematic review was selected due to the robustness of the guidelines prescribed by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009).

The eight stages of a systematic review recommended by Uman (2011) were followed:

- i. The review question was formulated, i.e., *How have previous studies on work identity in the South African context been approached methodologically?*
- ii. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were set. The eligibility criteria were: publications i) published between 2000 and 2020, ii) within the fields of social science/humanities/arts, iii) published in English, and iv) with a geographical focus on South Africa.
- iii. A search strategy was developed to identify studies. A search string using the key terms ((*identit\** OR *"identity research"* OR *"identity work"* OR *"work identit\*"*) AND (*workplace* OR *"work place"* OR *work* OR *organi?ation*) AND (*gender* OR *wom?n* OR *femal\**) AND (*"South Afric\*"*)) was developed and adapted based on the respective search strategies of the databases used (i.e., EBSCOHost, Scopus, and Web of Science).
- iv. The studies were selected. The search yielded 4 269 publications, as shown in [Figure 4.1](#). After removing duplicates and non-relevant publications (such as identity research pertaining to only sexual orientation or national identities and not related to the workplace), 102 publications were considered for full-text review. A total of 68 publications focused on the intersection of identity and work were selected for the review.
- v. The data were then extracted. The research question necessitated the extraction of data on methodology. As such, research findings and discussions were not extracted for analysis.
- vi. The quality of the publications was assessed. A quick search was done to ensure that none of the publications was located in predatory journals. In this regard, Grudniewicz et al. (2019, p. 211) note:

*Predatory journals and publishers are entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices”.*

For this dissertation, a journal was considered legitimate if listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) (cf. Grudniewicz et al., 2019).

- vii. The data were then analysed in Microsoft Excel. Data were organised according to the three paradigms (i.e., positivism, interpretivism, and postmodernism) in which the publications were situated. The findings and implications of the methodological choices were written up to provide a basis to explore the place of local epistemologies in methodology.
- viii. The findings were disseminated in two main ways: a) the findings served as the basis of the study reported on in [Chapter 4:](#), and b) the publication (Appendix K) was premised on [Chapter 4:](#).

### **3.3.2.2 Justification of case studies (Studies II and III)**

The second study explored the identity work strategies of women in blue-collar jobs within male-dominated industries in South Africa. In qualitative studies, the research strategies available to researchers include action research, case studies, grounded theory, and narrative research (Saunders et al., 2016). Action research is a process of enquiry undertaken to solve practical problems through a participatory approach (Punch, 2014). Case studies are in-depth examinations of a phenomenon involving a few units within their natural setting (Neuman, 2014). Grounded theory is “a research strategy whose objective is to generate explanatory theory grounded in data” (Punch, 2014, p. 268). Narrative research is an enquiry that depends on the chronological narration of events that enhances understanding and aids analysis (Saunders et al., 2016).

In selecting the most appropriate research strategy, consideration was given to the objective of Study II ([Chapter 5:](#)), which was to explore how women navigate dominant identities and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. Since the study was not geared towards solving a practical problem, action research was not selected. Grounded theory was strongly considered; however, it was not selected for the following reasons: a) there is a vast amount of literature, and the themes to be explored were known, and b) the study was not aimed at generating new theories. A case study strategy was selected as the most appropriate, as it would allow for an in-depth exploration of identity work based on the experiences of a sample, namely 15 women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa.

Similarly, Study III ([Chapter 6:](#)) explored how formal and informal workplace structures support women’s upward mobility and foster the development of positive work identities. The guiding consideration for selecting the most appropriate strategy was purposefully engaging the right actors. As such, a case study strategy was selected, as it is an in-depth inquiry into a phenomenon within its natural setting involving few units (Neuman, 2014). The case — be it an individual, organisation, or

event — needs to be clearly defined in order to determine the boundaries of the study (Saunders et al., 2016).

Case studies are used not only in interpretivist research but also in positivist research. Therefore, case studies can be employed for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). An exploratory case is used to generate hypotheses that can be used in other studies. A descriptive case study provides rich, detailed, and nuanced descriptions of the research, while an explanatory case study identifies cause-and-effect relationships to explain a phenomenon.

Regarding Study II (Chapter 5:), a case study was considered appropriate since the aim of the study was to “uncover the intricacies of complex social phenomena”, and the strategy also “embrace[s] varied epistemological orientations” (Forrest-Lawrence, 2019, pp. 317-318). Due to the complex and contextual nature of identity, the core concept explored, and the Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame used, a case study was considered most appropriate. As indicated earlier, Study II was guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ3: *How do identity resources available to women contribute to building positive work identities?*

RQ4: *How do individuals negotiate their minority identities in building positive identities?*

These questions required understanding participants’ multiple realities, considering the unique context in which these realities had been created. In addition, my relational ontological perspective was accommodated by this strategy. Furthermore, I believe that reality can be studied and understood through an empathetic process of unearthing participants’ subjective experiences.

For Study III (Chapter 6:), the selection of a case study as the overall strategy was guided by its usefulness in understanding the interactions between the case and its real-life context (Saunders et al., 2016). Case studies allow for in-depth research that generates greater insight into a phenomenon (Neuman, 2014). Another strength of case studies is that it allows for the identification of linkages between actions at the micro level (individual) to the macro level (structures and processes) (Neuman, 2014). The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ5: *How do formal workplace structures support upward mobility and foster the development of positive work identities?*

RQ6: *How do informal workplace structures support upward mobility and foster the development of positive work identities?*

These questions required a specific group of actors (i.e., colleagues, supervisors, and HR officials) to understand the formal and informal workplace structures and how they support women's upward mobility. Saunders et al. (2016) highlight that deeper insights and multi-faceted knowledge are gained when a case study research employs complementary techniques, such as archival records and documentation, focus-group discussions, questionnaires, and reflective diaries. Organisational policies were reviewed in line with the complementary techniques to which Saunders et al. (2016) refer.

Despite the usefulness of a case study, I am aware of the limited generalisability due to the engagement of small samples (Forrest-Lawrence, 2019; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). Therefore, I was cautious in generalising the findings to represent the experiences of all women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries and organisational and co-workers' support in male-dominated companies in South Africa. Using the case study strategy, I combined quotes from participants and document analysis to unearth the complexities and nuances associated with organisational and co-worker support. This combination offered an opportunity for data triangulation, as shown in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2***Methodological Schema for the Three Studies*

		<b>Study I</b>	<b>Study II</b>	<b>Study III</b>
<b>Objective</b>		To explore how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context	To explore how women navigate dominant identities and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated jobs in South Africa	To explore how formal and informal workplace structures support women's upward career mobility in male-dominated jobs in South Africa
<b>Research strategy</b>		Systematic review	Case study	Case study
<b>Sample / Source</b>		Studies on work identity in the South African context published in English	Women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa	Co-workers and supervisors of women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa
		68 academic publications from EBSCOHost, Scopus, Web of Science, and African Journal Archive (Sabinet)	15 semi-skilled to skilled women in blue-collar roles in three companies in mining and transport and logistics	22 participants (11 co-workers, 9 supervisors and 2 representatives of the HR units) and gender and diversity policies of companies
<b>Design</b>	Data collection technique	PRISMA	In-depth, semi-structured, life-story interviews	In-depth, semi-structured interviews
	Data analysis technique	Qualitative analysis using Microsoft Excel	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis Document analysis
<b>Triangulation</b>		Comparison of findings with existing literature		Comparison of participants' responses to organisational policy documents
Incorporating participants' feedback on analysis and findings				

Note. Compiled by author



### 3.3.3 Research setting

The site of investigation, South Africa, was selected based on the following: i) the social setting can be described as collectivist (van Zyl, Dankaert, & Guse, 2018), ii) the country's legislative reforms to remove institutional discriminatory laws, and iii) logistical and practical considerations.

First, like many countries in the Global South, South Africa is predominantly collectivist, as all South Africans cannot be seen as collectivist in nature (Adams et al., 2012; Van Dyk & De Kock, 2004). This collectivist orientation is captured in the South African concept of *ubuntu*. Usually referred to as a concept of humanism, *ubuntu* is based on an Nguni expression 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which, loosely translated into English, means: "One is a person through others" (Mkabela, 2015, p. 287), which shows the inextricable link between the individual's identity and that of their community. This conceptualisation of identity presents a major ontological difference between Western and non-Western societies. This relational ontology in collectivist societies leads to a positionality of the self, which is spatially and temporally connected rather than set apart, as viewed in Western societies. In researching identity work, Carrim (2016) recommends that future researchers explore beyond the individual and seek the perspectives of other connections, such as family, to gain a deeper understanding of the individual's identity work. By doing so, we expand the understanding of an individual's identity work to include the views of other actors who significantly influence the individual's conception of self.

Second, South Africa has several pieces of legislation to ensure gender equality. The country is committed to "the advancement of human rights and the principles of non-racialism and non-sexism" (Department: Women; RSA, 2015a, p. 5). With legislative backing from the Constitution, specifically, as stated by Moalusi & Jones (2019):

*"section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108 of 1996, The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 4 of 2000, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Commission on Gender Equality Act 39 of 1996 ... the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002 and the Broad-Based Socio-Economic Empowerment Charter for the South African Mining Industry (the Mining Charter)" ( p. 2),*

organisations are required to set targets to increase the employment of women. The Bill of Rights as part of the Constitution of South Africa prohibits any form of discrimination unless such discrimination leads to equality. Given the history of inequality in the country, a number of laws support such redress

such as the Employment Equity Act, and the Black Economic Empowerment Act. These Acts can be interpreted as forms of discrimination that lead to equality.

Despite this commitment, Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), in the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Quarter 2: 2021), showed that the South African labour market remains more favourable to men than women (Stats SA, 2021a). Stats SA (2022) further states that, women are more likely to do unpaid work and be unemployed. The unemployment rate among women is 36.4%, and while men's is 33.0%. Although not exclusive to South Africa, gender disparity in paid employment persists (Bosch, 2021). In The Status of Women in the South African Economy report, the country acknowledged the progress made in terms of women's participation in the labour market (Department: Women; RSA, 2015b):

*We have many more [women] in senior management positions in the public service ... women are now able to work in sectors that were previously white and male-dominated, such as mining, construction and infrastructure development" (p. 4).*

However, according to the Quarter 1: 2022 Labour Force Survey, transport, construction, and mining are male-dominated, as these employ less than 25% of women in their total workforce (Campuzano, 2019) — 18.2%, 11.9%, and 11.1% respectively (Stats SA, 2022), as shown in Table 3.3. Women are more likely to be employed as domestic workers in private households than in any other sector in South Africa. The table provides the sector representation of women in various sectors of the economy—industries with women comprising less than 25% of their workforce, as highlighted for emphasis.

**Table 3.3***Women's Representation in Sectors of Employment 2020 - 2022*

Sector	Q1: 2020 (%)	Q2: 2020 (%)	Q3: 2020 (%)	Q4: 2020 (%)	Q1: 2021 (%)	Q2: 2021 (%)	Q3:2021 (%)	Q4:2021 (%)	Q1:2022 (%)
Agriculture	33.2	33.9	28.5	30.7	28.8	29.2	28.7	26.7	29.5
Mining	14.4	16.9	18.4	16.7	17.2	21.1	13.0	11.9	11.1
Manufacturing	35.1	35.5	36.6	35.4	36.5	34.3	34.1	32.8	31.5
Utilities	31.0	31.0	34.4	32.3	31.3	31.4	29.2	24.4	30.1
Construction	10.7	12.9	10.5	11.2	11.1	13.4	12.9	14.0	11.9
Trade	46.7	46.2	44.7	45.4	44.9	45.1	44.6	43.8	46.0
Transport	17.8	19.7	16.7	19.3	16.7	17.2	16.3	17.1	18.2
Finance	42.1	40.0	43.1	40.8	42.5	39.5	41.4	42.3	40.2
Community & Social Services	61.8	60.4	59.4	61.3	61.1	62.4	61.6	61.5	63.2
Private House	74.8	74.4	77.3	74.2	74.7	73.5	76.4	74.0	77.0
Other	90.9	40.7	83.3	77.8	85.7	51.9	0	0	25

Note: % refers to the proportion of women in the employed population. Compiled from Quarterly Labour Force Survey (Stats SA, 2020, 2021c, 2022).

Third, the selection of South Africa as the site of the dissertation was also based on practical and logistical considerations. Having a limited budget for fieldwork and a bursary for three years for a three-year programme, I chose South Africa because I was resident in Stellenbosch and could have easy physical access to potential companies and respondents in the area. Although I generally consider myself an outsider in South Africa, with no immediate contacts in potential companies, my supervisors' existing networks provided useful access. Regarding access to data and studies to build upon, South Africa releases quarterly statistics of the state of the labour force based on location (provinces), gender, and sector, with a number of publications emanating from the country on themes explored in this dissertation (i.e., women in male-dominated jobs, identity work, and *ubuntu*) that confirmed the relevance of the dissertation within the context under study.

### **3.3.4 Justification for population selection**

The dissertation focuses on two major populations: i) women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries and ii) their work colleagues (direct supervisor, supportive colleagues, and representatives of the human resources (HR) department). The women were the core participants in this dissertation. Regarding identity work and management, studies have often focused on respondents in managerial roles in the Global North, creating a single narrative of what identity work is. As such, the dissertation examined the case of an underrepresented population — women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated — in a Global South context, to provide alternative insights into identity work.

Due to the roles that the population fulfil and the types of industries in which they operate, they are usually a statistical minority. Lower statistical representation and participation of women in certain sectors of employment can be attributable to gender<sup>6</sup> stereotypes. Gender stereotyping hinges merely on generalisations about attributes of men and women, which describe or prescribe who an individual is or should be (Heilman, 2012). These feminine and masculine attributes shape the nature and culture of the respective industries. Sectors with high women's representation tend to be people-oriented and require care and support, reflecting how women are socialised — to be communal and display care and friendliness (Geldenhuys et al., 2019; Heilman, 2012). Sectors that are typically masculine are characterised by independence and are sometimes physically demanding, which aligns with how men are usually socialised (Wright, 2016a).

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<sup>6</sup> *Gender* is used in the binary.

Physical strength is usually associated with masculinity, muscularity, and men's body shape (Wright, 2016a); therefore, blue-collar roles, for example, tend to be male-dominated. Blue-collar jobs are generally "defined by their physical labour component" (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 274), and are usually manual, requiring predominantly working with the hands, and are dependent on relatively unskilled or semi-skilled (but increasingly skilled) labour (Lee & Mohamed, 2006; Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004; Wroblewski, 2018). Low-skilled, blue-collar workers may perform maintenance work or cleaning tasks. On the other hand, certain trades, such as plumbers, mechanics, and electricians, increasingly require specific training, apprenticeship, and certification (Wroblewski, 2018).

Blue-collar workers in South Africa are mostly engaged in the mining, utilities, construction, and transport industries. As such, the sites for data collection were three companies: two in the mining industry and one in the transport and logistics industry. These companies were selected from the three sectors with the lowest representation of women, i.e., mining, construction, and transport (Table 3.1). Efforts were made to secure the participation of at least one company from each sector. However, due to the impact the pandemic had on the operations of companies, only three companies responded positively after about six months of communications.

Women in blue-collar roles were the primary unit of analysis. Previous studies on women in male-dominated jobs in South Africa have shown that, besides their low statistical representation, women are confronted with issues related to discrimination at work, sexual harassment, occupational segregation, and problems with combining work- and family roles (Botha, 2016; Botha & Cronjé, 2015; Madikizela & Haupt, 2010; Martin & Barnard, 2013). The lived experiences of women in such spaces stand in contrast to the nation's aspiration of removing barriers that inhibit women's full participation in the labour market.

Therefore, focusing on women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries provides an example of identity work processes in challenging work environments from a Global South perspective. As noted earlier, the dissertation explores how formal and informal workplace structures support such women's upward career mobility and foster the development of positive identities. *Sampling* from the population is provided for in the empirical chapters on the specific studies ([Chapter 5:](#) and [Chapter 6:](#))

### **3.3.5 Research ethics**

Ethics is a significant component of any research. In social research, ethics refers to “the moral deliberation, choice and accountability on the part of the researchers throughout the research process” (Edwards & Mauthner, 2011, p. 2). Ethics acts as parameters that set out appropriate terms for the interaction between the researcher, participants, and other stakeholders involved in the research. The dissertation received ethical clearance from the Research and Ethics Committee (Social, Behaviour and Education) of Stellenbosch University (17082) (Appendix B). Primary and secondary data were collected for the studies. Secondary data were gathered from academic publications, while primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with participants, as shown in Table 3.2. The research was conducted in line with ethics protocols established by Stellenbosch University and the companies, as well as the principles of *ubuntu* research ethics. The ethical issues adhered to while conducting the research were informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and harm.

#### **3.3.5.1 Gaining access to participants and informed consent**

Informed consent is when “a person knowingly, voluntarily and intelligently, and in a clear and manifest way, gives his consent” (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011, p. 4) to participate in an activity (in this case, research). Due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, all communication took place virtually (i.e., via mail, phone, and other tech-enabled platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams). I approached three companies to gain access to participants for my research. All three of these companies had both male-dominated jobs and were located in male-dominated industries. All three companies gave permission in writing (see Appendix A), after which engagement with participants began.

Similarly, all participants were initially contacted informally via telephone to solicit their participation. During these calls, I disclosed my identity as a Ph.D. student researching with permission from the companies and the university. Issues concerning the topic under study, how these were selected, the information needed, duration of the interview, the value of the research to participants and their company, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and rights and responsibilities were detailed during these calls. After obtaining their verbal commitment to participate, customised informed consent forms were sent via mail to be signed off by potential participants. Upon receipt of the signed consent form, I also signed it, binding me to the details of the form. All interviews were then scheduled and conducted based on the availability of participants.

Participants were offered the option of engaging in their preferred language (for which the research would provide a translator, if needed), in line with the *ubuntu* research ethic of acknowledging their humanity through language. All participants chose to engage in English. I remained respectful of the time and information of participants, and abided by ethics upheld by the university and the *ubuntu* research ethic.

### **3.3.5.2 Privacy and confidentiality**

As cited by Fouka and Mantzourou (2011, p. 6), Levine describes privacy as an individual's "freedom in determining the circumstance under which information can be shared with or withheld from others". Informed by the humility principle of the *ubuntu* research ethic, I, like Schrieber and Tomm-Bonde (2015, p. 660), acknowledged "the privilege of gaining access to participants' worlds". Firstly, participants were contacted after the focal persons of the companies had introduced me to them via e-mail. In soliciting their participation, participants were encouraged to propose a date and time that would be most convenient to schedule the interview. This was done to ensure that calls were respectful of participants' time, and to enable participation in an environment that was most comfortable for them. No deeply personal questions that had no relevance to the research were asked.

Furthermore, the informed consent form contained assurances of confidentiality and anonymity to companies and participants. The names and identifying descriptors of the companies (such as types of minerals mined and location) were omitted throughout the dissertation. All participants were encouraged to select a pseudonym to conceal their identity. All real names mentioned during interviews were changed into pseudonyms in the transcribed text. Anonymising the responses protects the participants by ensuring that none of the responses can be linked to a particular participant. All interviews were recorded digitally, with permission from the participants.

All data collected, including contact details of participants, audio recordings, and company documents, were securely stored on multiple platforms, including my encrypted external hard drive and OneDrive, provided by Stellenbosch University. Only I had access to these storage sites.

### **3.3.5.3 Harm**

In line with Creswell and Creswell's (2017) recommendation to researchers to respect their sites of study and leave them undisturbed, I ensured that engagement with participants did not create animosity between themselves and their colleagues before, during, or after data collection. I ensured

that issues that could create conflict among colleagues were not discussed with a third party. Being guided by my positionality as an outsider, I abided by general research ethics and principles of the *ubuntu* research ethic.

Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary. They were informed of their right to withdraw from participating in the research at any time, and in that case, their data would not be stored and analysed. Apart from one potential participant, who communicated through his junior colleague his decision not to participate, six potential participants did not explicitly communicate their decision. They had verbally agreed to participate during the initial telephone call, but ceased all communication with me, despite efforts to reach them. In the case of the third company (a mining firm), I experienced a breakdown in communication when it was time to engage the HR unit's representative. I can only deduce that, although the company had granted permission, not everyone within the organisation was always informed about such permission, making it difficult to gain access to people to get their buy-in. The company's diversity and inclusion policies were also not publicly available. Therefore, their policies could not be reviewed.

Participants were informed that if, during the interview, they faced emotional distress because of personal reflections or triggers that may not be obvious to me, they could engage the services of the company's helpline. Also, with permission from LifeLine, an emotional support helpline, I provided participants with contact numbers they could call free of charge if they were negatively affected and triggered by the interview and were uncomfortable accessing their company's helpline (see Appendix G).

### **3.3.6 Ensuring trustworthiness**

Due to the desire to obtain in-depth knowledge about a phenomenon, interpretivist research engages more deeply with the subjective meanings and interpretations individuals create in exchange for complete objectivity (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). Therefore, in ensuring trustworthiness in this qualitative research, deliberate and systematic procedures and decisions were built into the research process, guided by these criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004; Thomas, 2006).

#### **3.3.6.1 Credibility**

Credibility relates to how believable findings are, due to their alignment with participants' reality (Terrell, 2016). To meet this criterion, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with



participants for Studies II (Chapter 5:) and III (Chapter 6:). Despite the demanding work schedules of the participants, these interviews allowed them to reflect on their experiences in the workplace and the meanings they assigned to them. I used follow-up and clarifying questions during interviews to explore responses and probe meanings (Saunders et al., 2016). This approach proved beneficial during the analysis, as it provided nuance to the data.

To preserve the authenticity of the data, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were transcribed and edited using Otter.ai Version 2.3.90, as recommended by Gray et al. (2020) and used in other qualitative studies (Badawi et al., 2021; Jones, 2020; Reck, 2020). I listened to each interview multiple times, and commenced coding the data while listening to the audio. This process added emotions to the transcripts; it allowed me to become immersed in the data and re-experience the interview in its original form. The process stimulated richer insights into the data, and allowed for possible meanings to be derived after each round of listening. Clarity checks on codes were undertaken to ensure that the labels accurately captured the multiple meanings embedded in the texts (cf. Thomas, 2006).

Furthermore, member checks were achieved through follow-up interviews, where interpretations and emergent themes from the preliminary round of analysis were shared with participants for their feedback. However, a few participants found this unwelcome, due to their work schedules. That notwithstanding, the follow-up interviews provided additional insights into the initial analysis, in line with the *ubuntu* research ethic (Chilisa, 2012).

For Study I (Chapter 4:), all publications were sourced from credible sites such as Scopus and EBSCOHost. Publications were identified based on a search string developed and adapted to the respective strategies of the databases. A set of eligibility criteria was applied to include publications i) published between 2000 and 2020, ii) within the fields of social science/humanities/arts, iii) published in English, and iv) with a geographical focus on South Africa. The inclusion of publications between 2000 and 2020 was due to the limited online publications on work identity research in South Africa before the year 2000. Duplicates and non-relevant publications (such as identity research pertaining to only sexual orientation or national identities and not related to the workplace) were removed. Publications focusing on the intersection of identity and work were selected for the review.

### 3.3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability focuses on how applicable findings are in other contexts (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). I sought to conduct context-sensitive research, which guided the decision to use interpretivism complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic. Therefore, I do not claim that the findings can be applied to other contexts, as they provide a unique insight into the experiences of the context under study (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014; Seehawer, 2018).

To enhance transferability, the non-probability purposive sampling method was used in selecting participants for both Studies II (Chapter 5:) and III (Chapter 6:). In presenting the findings, thick and accurate descriptions of women's identity work in male-dominated jobs, as well as participants' experiences of working with their women colleagues, are provided. For Study II (Chapter 5:), theoretical saturation was reached by the interview with the 11<sup>th</sup> woman worker. The theoretical saturation achieved was not necessarily because there was no new data but because the data confirmed what had been found already due to the iterative data collection and data analysis relationship (Punch, 2014). However, I continued with interviews to ensure a balanced representation of participants from the three companies.

Although I had anticipated and planned for fieldwork and to fully apply the principles of *ubuntu* methodology at the beginning of my studies, the outbreak of COVID-19 did not allow for the physical collection of data. The lesson for me was that using *ubuntu* as a complete basis of methodology and ethics requires one's physical presence in the field. That notwithstanding, I incorporated *ubuntu* principles of relationality, humility, reciprocity, and contextual considerations. I viewed participants as dynamic and constantly creating meaning in their experiences (Chilisa, 2012). Guided by the humility principle, I remained respectful in my interactions with participants (including those who failed to participate).

Concerning reciprocity, I valued the cordial exchange between myself and the participants. Although participation was entirely voluntary, some participants were kind enough to wish me well in my studies and life. I also appreciated the valuable life lessons that the participants shared. In terms of contextual considerations, because I viewed myself as a 'geographical outsider', I acknowledged the contextual factors that shaped participants' experiences. During interviews, expressions in the participant's native language were welcomed, and literal and contextual meanings of the expressions were sought.

Additionally, restrictions of the pandemic did not allow for the physical observation of the working conditions of participants. However, my childhood in a mining town in Ghana served me well, especially in my interviews with participants from the mining companies. I was generally conversant with some of the operations of the mine. These prior experiences were also helpful in visualising and making sense of their descriptions in a period where in-person interviews could not be conducted. My conversations with my father, a retired industrial engineer with a mining firm, also provided useful insights into Ghana's experience of the evolution and women's involvement in the mining industry, which is comparable to that of South Africa.

During the analysis, data were transcribed verbatim. Transcription complemented listening to the audio recordings, allowing me to further immerse myself in the data. Also, coding and keeping a reflective diary enabled me to make sense of the data, allowing me to present a final output that accurately reflects participants' experiences (Cypress, 2017).

### **3.3.6.3 Dependability**

Dependability relates to the consistency and replicability of findings (Terrell, 2016). In meeting this criterion, periodic debriefing sessions between myself and my supervisors (who acted as auditors) were held to discuss emerging themes, assumptions, and biases that may influence data analysis and reporting. Throughout the dissertation (which commenced in January 2020), the research process was subjected to the interrogation and validation by the study supervisors.

Peer debriefing was accomplished through feedback from colleagues on platforms offered by the university (e.g., Graduate School of Economic and Management Sciences (GEM) Monday Meetings at the faculty level, colloquium presentations offered by Stellenbosch Business School), and other academics at conferences. These opportunities enabled me to obtain feedback, which further enriched the studies.

### **3.3.6.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability focuses on how objectivity was observed in a study and the extent to which findings accurately reflect participants' views (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability, I kept a reflective diary throughout the dissertation, in which I captured my experiences with participants; observations during coding, data analysis, and interpretation; and decisions made during the write-up. Reflexivity allowed me to self-supervise (Berger, 2015), as total objectivity is not attainable in qualitative studies.

By employing reflexivity, I was always mindful of my beliefs, assumptions, and biases, and how they influenced my engagement in the research process.

After each interview, I documented my observations, perceptions, and dominant themes. An audit trail was maintained to track how data were collected and analysed, as well as my interpretations thereof, as recommended by Cypress (2017). Also captured were challenges encountered and strategies used in ensuring that the research methods were not only responding to the ethics concerns of the university, but also responsive to *ubuntu* research ethics.

I employed triangulation to verify the findings. Triangulation requires multiple sources of data and data collection methods to confirm the credibility of the data, analysis, and interpretation (Saunders et al., 2016). Different strategies were employed in data triangulation, as shown in Table 3.2. For Study I (Chapter 4:), the analyses of the systematic review and the interpretations was compared with existing literature to bolster the argument for a fusion of conventional paradigms and local epistemologies.

For Study II, the codes generated from analysing the responses from women workers were compared with existing literature to generate insights into identity work. In Study III, I targeted three main sources of data (colleagues, HR representatives, and organisational policy documents) during data collection, to gain different viewpoints that could enrich the study. Comparisons between the experiences of colleagues and HR representatives and organisational policies were made in assessing the consistency between policy statements and participants' experiences. Further, during document analysis, I checked with HR representatives that the documents were the most recent and finished versions. The documents were reviewed to ensure that the contents matched the title and had been approved by relevant units in the company (Noble & Smith, 2015). Throughout the data extraction and analysis period, policies from the same organisation were compared to identify conflicting or contradictory stances on the same subject matter.

For Studies II and III, video clips of a summary of the dissertation's findings were sent to the three groups of participants (see Appendix L) for comment via voice notes on WhatsApp. This was done to achieve the following: a) report findings of the dissertation to participants, b) employ a data triangulation approach whereby participants validate the findings, and c) to honour their participation and time by being the first set of beneficiaries of the research. By seeking participants' feedback, I ensured that I was accurate in my portrayal of their reality (Buch & Staller, 2014) and that I pursued

interpretivism's subjective and *ubuntu's* relational epistemological basis that positions researchers as co-creators of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

## CHAPTER 4: BEYOND WESTERN METHODOLOGIES: EXPLORING *UBUNTU* AS A COMPLEMENTARY LOCAL EPISTEMOLOGY IN WORK IDENTITY RESEARCH IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

### Abstract

Given that Western paradigms and methodologies occupy a prime place in academic research, calls have been made to decolonise research and research methods in non-Western contexts. In researching work identity in Africa, researchers are confronted with the unfortunate choice of either using widely known conventional Western methodologies or applying methodologies that are more attuned to local epistemologies. Although conventional methodologies are relevant, they are not always responsive to local realities. This paper argues that the either-or-neither approach to methodology selection is a false dilemma, and advances suggestions for complementing and integrating Western and local epistemologies. This paper reports the findings of a systematic review of extant research on work identity within the South African context, conducted to determine the approach followed in carrying out the research. The data showed that all publications were situated in Western paradigms: 44% positivist, 54% interpretivist, and 1% postmodernist. As none of the publications was premised on an indigenous epistemology, the study further assessed and affirmed the appropriateness of *ubuntu* (an African concept of humanism) as a complementary epistemology to interpretivism and postmodernism for research conducted in South Africa. *Ubuntu* provides appropriate methodological options useful in generating contextual and culturally relevant knowledge. If African-based research on work identity is to make a context-specific and meaningful impact, local epistemologies and methodologies such as *ubuntu* should be strongly considered as complementary to conventional methodologies.

**Keywords:** decolonising research, indigenous epistemologies, *ubuntu*, Western methodologies, work identity

### 4.1 BACKGROUND

Work and the workplace impact the lives of many adults, such that individuals construct multidimensional forms of identification based on their job or work environment (Bothma & Roodt, 2012; Lloyd, Roodt, & Odendaal, 2011). Work identity, a significant strand of an individual's identity,

is constructed through myriad social and cultural influences. Despite the highly contextualised nature of identity, the phenomenon has been largely researched using Western methodologies, even in non-Western contexts.

Comparatively, Western societies are less communal, while non-Western societies, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa, are less individualistic. Consequently, Western values are centred around independence, rationality, and autonomy, whereas many non-Western societies are orientated towards communality, interdependence, and the aspiration of harmonious co-existence (Chilisa, 2012; Metz, 2020). In Western societies, the idea of 'self' is predominantly based on self-construal. This atomistic conceptualisation of identity is individualistic, linear, and materialistic (Swanson, 2012) and views the individual as a discrete entity seeking optimal distinctiveness from others (Brewer, 2003). According to Jackson and Hoog, "a social constructionist perspective conceives that personal identity is established within the perception of self as derived from thoughtful reflection on communicative interactions between oneself and others from the societal environment" (2010, p. 740). Here, the individual's identity in relation to their broader society is 'I' and 'we'. Individuals in such settings rely mostly on their intrapersonal resources to build their identities. In collectivist societies, individuals' identity is inextricably linked to their community (Chilisa, 2012), rendering identity a relational and interdependent construct (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, the individual's identity in relational to their broader society is 'I am part of we'.

The conceptualisation of identity goes on to shape how identity is studied. Research methodologies developed in the West tend to be responsive to this individualistic notion of identity (Chilisa, 2012). However, the sustained application of Western epistemologies and methodologies in non-Western contexts contributes significantly to the 'othering' of non-Western knowledge and ways of knowing. At a practical level, it continuously problematises the lives and living conditions of non-Western people (Louis, 2007; Mishra, 2013). Prasad (2003) highlights three main ways in which Western scientific methodologies perpetuate exclusion: ontologically (marginalising non-Western realities and problems), epistemologically (marginalising other ways of knowing), and sociologically (marginalising non-experts' rights and access to knowledge). As a result, there tends to be a disconnect between research and solutions to challenges in non-Western societies (Gobo, 2011; Louis, 2007), offering only peripheral solutions to those challenges (Chilisa, 2012).

However, the neat classification into Western and indigenous knowledge has been found to be problematic, due to their heterogeneity (Agrawal, 1995; Briggs, 2013). The binaries of African

collectivism, Western individualism, as well as Western universalism and African localism, create a 'West versus the rest' situation in knowledge production. It is important to stress that Western knowledge systems are not homogenous and characterised in their totality by this approach. On the contrary, over the last half-century, a number of philosophical traditions and theoretical and methodological developments in the West departed from these norms. As an example of relational ontology, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) use the metaphor of a rhizome to describe how individuals build their identities through their connections with others and constantly redefine who they are under different circumstances to be their authentic selves (Colebrook, 2002).

Heeding calls made for research in the Global South to decolonise research methodology by prioritising local epistemologies (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013), as ways of knowing are embedded in locations (Charmaz, 2017), this study draws on the identified gaps as an entry into how existing research on identities in the workplace have been approached methodologically and how can local epistemologies shape research methodologies specific to identity research.

In the case of sub-Saharan Africa (where this dissertation is situated), *ubuntu* is an example of a local epistemology that has been advanced as a useful lens to understand these societies (Schreiber and Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018). *Ubuntu*, which loosely translates as "one is a person through others" (Mkabela, 2015, p. 287), expresses the collectivistic way of life in many societies in sub-Saharan Africa (Chilisa, 2012; Mkabela, 2015). *Ubuntu* offers a way of knowing characterised by an interwoven knowledge-production process guided by a relational way of knowing and recognising participants' values (Chilisa, 2012). This way of knowing is viewed as collectivistic and organic, rather than individualistic and unitised (Swanson, 2012), and seeks interpretation and understanding, rather than rationalism and verification (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018). Even though it can be argued that seeking interpretation and understanding is a social constructionist thinking, Jackson and Hogg point out that "a social constructionist perspective conceives that personal identity is established within the perception of self as derived from thoughtful reflection on communicative interactions between oneself and others from the societal environment" (Jackson II & Hogg, 2010, p. 740). The difference between a social constructionist perspective of identity and an *ubuntu* identity lies in how notions of identity are conceptualised. *Ubuntu* is, however, far from being the only philosophical approach that promotes these values, or the only epistemology that holds that knowledge occurs within relations



(West, 2014). Relational ontology approaches born in the West, along with a number of local epistemologies from all over the world, follow this trend.

It is precisely because of these shared elements that the present study proposes a way forward to achieving decolonisation that is not binary but combines local epistemologies such as *ubuntu* with mainstream philosophical and methodological traditions such as interpretivism. This fusion enables researchers to gain from the rigour of conventional methodologies while approaching research from a culturally sensitive epistemological basis (Briggs, 2013). This approach to achieving decolonisation help build on indigenous knowledge in unearthing some complexities and nuances to which mainstream methodologies fail to do justice.

The study begins with an assessment of the methodologies utilised in extant research on identities in the workplace in South Africa. The second section discusses the suitability of employing local epistemologies as complementary to conventional Western paradigms in researching work identity within the South African context. This study contributes to the advancement of research methodologies in identity research by critically assessing the strengths and weaknesses of local epistemologies and conventional methodologies. The research also contributes to the dialogue on methodological decolonisation by illustrating how we can move beyond the either-or-neither choice when considering research methodologies towards ‘contextualised epistemological approaches’ (Semali and Kincheloe, 2002).

## **4.2 METHODS AND LEVELS OF ANALYSIS**

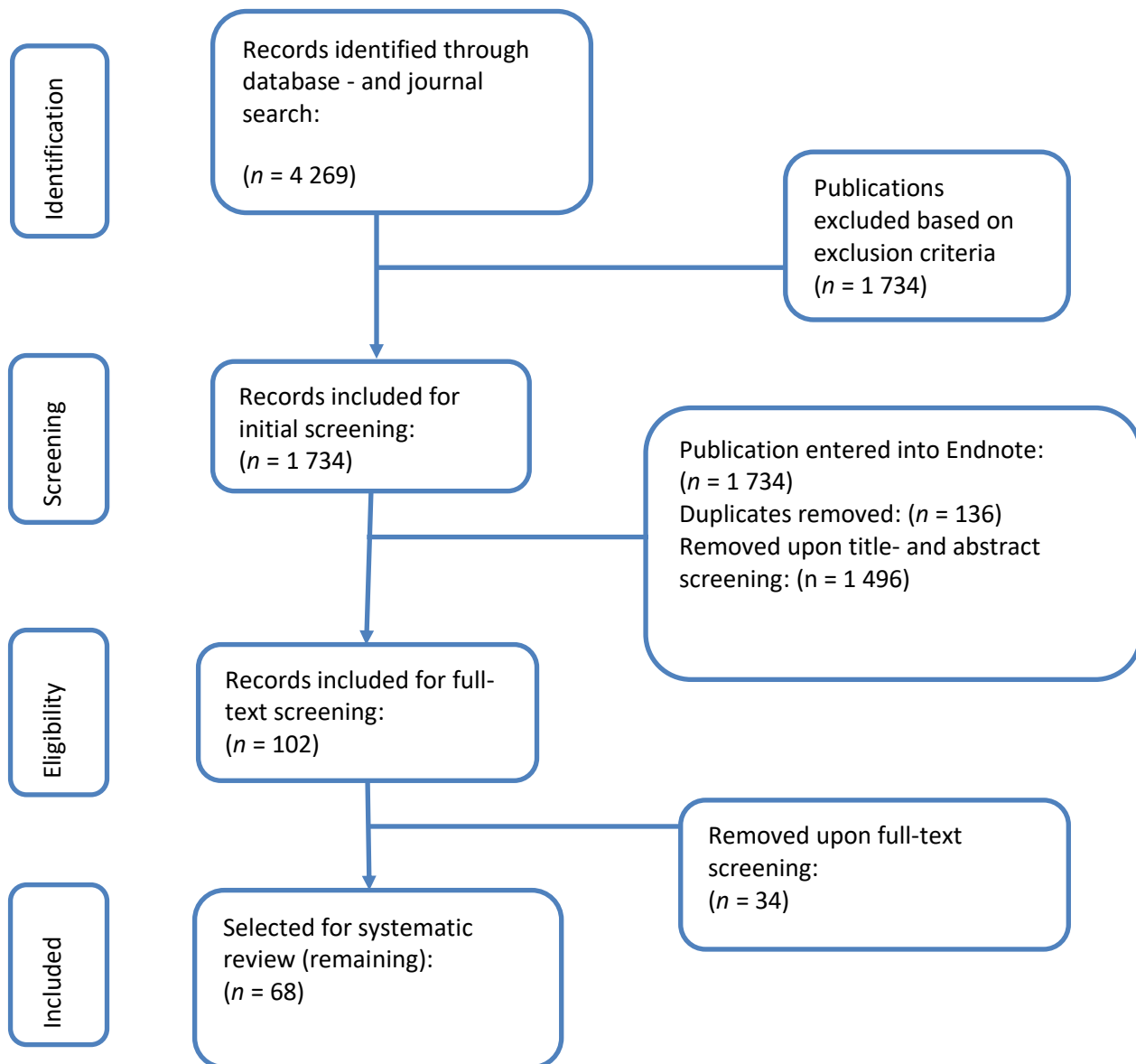
### **4.2.1 Methods**

A systematic review was selected among other typologies of reviews, such as literature or narrative review and systematised review, in meeting the objective of the study — to explore how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. This objective necessitated a review of the methodological choices of previous publications, and the lessons from these choices provided insights that informed conducting the rest of the dissertation. A systematic review is an assessment and synthesis of relevant studies on a topic under study (Uman, 2011), and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) is a tool to conduct such as systematic review (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009). The selection of PRISMA for the present study not only hinged on the assertion that “PRISMA can also be used as a basis for reporting systematic reviews” (Moher et al.,

2009, p. 2), but also the rigorous and methodical components embedded in the model. Section 3.3.2.1 provides further insights into the selection of a systematic review rather than other review typologies.

The geographical focus on South Africa was based on the country's socio-cultural setting. South Africa offers a unique multi-ethnic environment compared to other countries in the sub-Saharan African region, as the country recognises four socially constructed racial groups (Asian/Indian, black African, Coloured, and white) and 11 official languages (Stats SA, 2022). The selection of South Africa is also discussed extensively in Section 3.1.

To answer the question: *How have previous studies on identities in the workplace in the South African context been approached methodologically?*, the PRISMA Model (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & The PRISMA Group, 2009) was followed, as shown in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1***Publication Selection Process Based on the PRISMA Model*

*Note:* The selection of 68 publications was based on the PRISMA model . Adapted from “Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement,” by D. Moher et al. 2009, *PLoS Medicine*, 6(7) (p. 3).

A search string using the key terms ((*identit\** OR "*identity research*" OR "*identity work*" OR "*work identit\**") AND (*workplace* OR "*work place*" OR *work* OR *organi?ation*) AND (*gender* OR *wom?n* OR *femal\**) AND ("*South Afric\** )) was developed and adapted based on the respective search strategies

of the databases used (i.e., EBSCOHost, Scopus and Web of Science), between September and December 2020. Five<sup>7</sup> journals held in the African Journal Archive (Sabinet) that publish extensively on identity in the workplace provided additional publications, detailed in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1**

*Literature Search*

<b>Database/Journal</b>	<b>Number of Search Hits (No Exclusions)</b>
EBSCOHost	1 865
Scopus	317
Web of Science	235
South African Journal of Economic & Management Sciences	249
South African Journal of Industrial Psychology	418
South African Journal of Human Resource Management	303
South African Journal of Psychology	648
South African Journal of Business Management	234

Note. Compiled by author

The initial search yielded 4 269 publications, as shown in [Figure 4.1](#). A set of eligibility criteria was applied to include publications i) published between 2000 and 2020, ii) within the fields of social science/humanities/arts, iii) in English, and iv) with a geographical focus on South Africa. The inclusion of publications between 2000 and 2020 was due to the limited publications available online on work identity research in South Africa before the year 2000. As an illustration, publications available on the Web of Science dated from 1994, 1998, and 1999, while the SA Journal of Industrial Psychology showed publications from 1999. Aside from the SA Journal of Human Resource Management, which began publishing in 2003, the other journals provided publications from 2000. Regarding language, during the screening stage ([Figure 4.1](#)), abstracts of publications in Afrikaans were translated using Google Translate to ensure that potentially results-altering insights were not missed due to my lack of language proficiency.

<sup>7</sup> i) South African Journal of Economic & Management Science ii) South African Journal of Industrial Psychology iii) South African Journal of Human Resource Management iv) South African Journal of Psychology and vi) South African Journal of Business Management

After removing duplicates and non-relevant publications (such as identity research pertaining to only sexual orientation or national identities and not related to the workplace), 102 publications were considered for full-text review. The process is detailed in [Figure 4.1](#). A total of 68 publications focused on the intersection of identity and work were selected for the review.

#### **4.2.2 Levels of analysis and why they matter**

Three main levels of analysis were considered relevant in reviewing the methodological choices of selected literature. Some authors have identified positivism, interpretivism, and postmodernism as appropriate methodologies for conducting research on identity and organisational psychology (Côté & Levine, 2002; Doldor et al., 2017). Therefore, the first level was to consider epistemological approaches under these paradigms, which are relevant to understanding what constitutes knowledge and how knowledge can be studied. The second level focused on methods, highlighting systems, strategies, and the rationale for the use of the methods in researching identity. A review of the methods also focused on the associated challenges and ways of addressing these. The third level focused on context, specifically the contextual elements that shape identity construction. These levels were considered relevant to the conceptualisation of identity and how it is researched.

### **4.3 DOING WORK IDENTITY RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A systematic review of the 68 selected publications showed an inclination towards the three philosophical frameworks pointed out by Côté and Levine (2002) and Doldor et al. (2017). It must be noted that a significant number of the publications did not explicitly state the methodologies used. Hence, the research approaches employed served as proxies in determining their paradigmatic leanings. Of the 68 publications, 29 were positivist (representing 44%), 36 were interpretivist (representing 54%), and one was postmodernist (representing 1%). However, two publications employed mixed methods: i.e., “the research methodology for this study stemmed from both positivism and phenomenology” (Botha, 2016, p. 5). As such, the two publications were analysed under both positivism and interpretivism.

#### **4.3.1 Positivism**

##### ***4.3.1.1 Epistemological approaches***

Positivism emphasises the existence of an observable social reality in order to discover causal relationships (Neuman, 2014). Ontologically, positivism claims that reality exists independently of human experience. Epistemologically, knowledge is viewed as measurable and observable; such

knowledge can be tested, verified, and confirmed based on any of the human senses. Premised on empiricist philosophies, positivism argues that social research (including identity research) achieves scientific legitimacy and validity when quantitative approaches used in natural sciences are employed (Lindlof, 2008).

Positivist research usually seeks to establish causal laws and generalisable knowledge (Saunders et al., 2016). A total of 66% of publications sought to establish relationships among variables. For example, Herbst et al. (2007) note that “the purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between personality dimensions, sense of coherence and coping styles among working mothers” (p. 57). The remaining 34% focused on models, theories, and perceptions. For example, Jackson and Van De Vijver (2018) proposed “a model of positive features of multiculturalism in organisations and tests it in South Africa” (p. 1). Due to the aim of positivist research, quantitative methods are usually employed.

#### **4.3.1.2 Methodological choices**

Methodologically, positivism appropriates research methods from the natural sciences, which are deductive, highly structured, and quantitative. As van der Walt (2018) writes: “The study was conducted in the positivist paradigm, and it was quantitative in nature. Quantitative research was appropriate ... to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship...” (p. 5). This is, however, not always the case. Van Zyl et al. (2016) and Downes and Koekemoer (2011) employed qualitative methods, although their studies were situated in the postpositivist paradigm, contrary to the assertion by Creswell and Creswell (2017) that post-positivism leans towards quantitative research approach. Also, positivism allows for testing hypotheses by collecting and analysing empirical data (Muijs, 2013). Of the 31 publications, 15, representing 50%, tested hypotheses.

A total of 23 publications, representing 79%, were cross-sectional studies. Described as taking a ‘snapshot’ (Hall, 2011), Jackson and van de Vijver (2018) write: “This research began with a quantitative approach, followed by a cross-sectional survey design whereby a sample was drawn from a population at one point in time” (p. 6). The popularity of cross-sectional studies among academic researchers is attributable to time and budget constraints (Saunders et al., 2016). That notwithstanding, the researchers acknowledged the limitations associated with the cross-sectional design, and recommended cross-lagged, longitudinal studies for future studies. For example, Steyl and Koekemoer (2011) note that “cross-sectional studies mean that one can make no concrete decisions about the cause-and-effect relationship between the variables” (p. 12), and Geldenhuys et al. (2019),

in their study, stated: “a cross-sectional design was used, and future studies should consider longitudinal analysis” (p. 8).

As positivism aims to research in a value-free way, self-administered questionnaires were employed, albeit in different formats; that is, paper-and-pencil formats (Geldenhuys et al., 2019; van der Walt, 2018) and online platforms (Bernstein & Volpe, 2016), while Daya and April (2014) employed the InclusionIndex™ survey. Existing tools, such as the Likert scale, and measuring instruments, such as the Occupational Personality Questionnaire and Extended Personal Attribute Questionnaire-Revised (EPAQ-R), were commonly used. As an illustration, in Herbst et al. (2007), measuring instruments such as Occupational Personality Questionnaire (OPQ32n), Orientation to Life Questionnaire (OLQ), and Coping Orientations to the Problems Experienced Questionnaire were employed.

When using self-administered questionnaires, the response rate is a critical element. An average response rate of 55.3% (within a range of 10.5% to 86 %) was recorded for the 12 publications that reported the response rate. Garner (2018) points out that, as the response rate is directly linked to the study sample, an increase in response rates and sample size increases the study's statistical power. Large sample sizes, usually three and four digits, were reported. The average sample size of the 25 publications was 745 (ranging from 20 to 4 729). The format and tools adopted reflected potential participants' characteristics — they were able to use technology, with a good understanding of using these tools with minimal guidance. Therefore, it is important to remain cognisant of the type of data and potential participants to ensure that research instruments are user-friendly.

#### **4.3.1.3 Context of previous research**

All studies were situated in South Africa. All publications were sensitive to diversity in representation and inquired about participants' demographic details relating to sex, employment status (permanent, temporary, or contract, or full-time or part-time), occupation (or position), and parental status, as shown in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2***Demographic Details*

<b>Demographic detail</b>	<b>Number</b>
Age	17
Educational level	13
Employment status	6
Income level	1
Language	11
Marital status	17
Parental status	8
Position	7
Racial group	14
Religion	1
Sex	19
Sexual orientation	1
Work experience	6

Note. Compiled by author

Regarding the types of population and employment sectors, the samples were typically mid-to senior-level professionals working in a corporate environment (other than manual or blue-collar), services (i.e., finance, media, real estate, higher education), food (fast-moving consumer goods, dairy), health (nursing, pharmaceuticals), policing, manufacturing, transport (motor, aviation, logistics), mining, and engineering. The population type supported the data collection techniques (self-administered questionnaires) used. These participants are likely to be familiar with filling out a questionnaire by themselves, and to have access to the internet (in the case of e-surveys).

#### ***4.3.1.4 Challenges in using positivism in identity studies***

At first sight, positivism seems to be an ideal paradigm for research. However, situating work identity research in positivism presents significant challenges. First, social science research is distinct from natural science research, due to the complexity of the behaviour of the researched (Lindlof, 2008). Human behaviour and actions are influenced by, and also actively influence, the culture of the society. Thus, viewing individuals as distinct and unrelated beings who can be studied independently of their society is problematic.



Positivism was developed in Western cultures (Chilisa, 2012; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014), which are generally individualistic (Chilisa, 2012). Researching identity from a positivistic stance focuses on the individual: the individual's knowledge and experience of identity shape what is then known about identity. Although Côté and Levine (2002) note that social identities are increasingly becoming unstable and transient in many modern societies, it can be argued that social identity theory (SIT), a theory with a positivist lens, developed in Western cultures, recognises the mutual affectivity in the relationship between individuals and their society in identity development. The uncritical application of Western methodologies in non-Western contexts is unable to account for local nuances (Alatas, 1993). For collectivistic societies, the society represents an integral part of an individual's identity; its inclusion provides deeper meaning and understanding of their identity processes.

Additionally, the reliance on knowledge sources that are only verifiable within the scope of the five senses downplays the potency of other knowledge systems. Some knowledge systems are built on tacit or felt knowledge (Chilisa, 2012; Louis, 2007). As an illustration, in some African cultures, the spirits of ancestors are considered 'fellow humans' who play critical roles in an individual's life (Seehawer, 2018). The presence and influence of ancestors cannot be proven through scientific evidence, due to their tacit nature; yet, such knowledge and knowledge systems cannot be dismissed in social research, due to the nuance they provide in understanding a phenomenon. Acknowledging different knowledge systems not only fills gaps in knowledge on the phenomenon under study, but also legitimises such knowledge systems (Alatas, 1993).

Furthermore, quantitative methods have been criticised for not yielding nuanced findings. In discussing the study's limitations, Palo and Rothmann (2016) write, "a structured measuring instrument was used which could have limited the scope and the extent of relevant questions that could have been asked" (p. 227). Similarly, self-administered questionnaires expose the researcher to a crop of participants, those who are literate in the language of the questions, able to use technology, and have internet access. Furthermore, as argued by Gobo (2011), measuring instruments that use the Likert scale may not be user-friendly to persons familiar with binary assessments such as 'true or false'. These instruments, therefore, exclude participants who do not meet specific characteristics.

The dominant use of the English language throughout the research processes was a recurring theme of concern in the reviewed publications. Within the South African context, where 11 languages are officially recognised, de Klerk and Mostert (2010) recommend that research instruments be translated into multiple languages, as some participants may better express themselves in their mother tongue.

Although the recommendation is well-intended, researchers may not possess the logistics and financial means to collect and analyse data in 11 languages.

To conclude, positivist research tests and explains relationships between variables, or describes the occurrence of a phenomenon. Therefore, the positive paradigm is unsuited for studies of meaning-making or studies to understand a phenomenon. Such studies require immersive approaches associated with interpretivism (Chilisa, 2012).

### **4.3.2 Interpretivism**

#### **4.3.2.1 Epistemological approaches**

Interpretivism is a subjectivist paradigm that focuses on understanding how people make meaning of daily occurrences (Doldor et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). Ontologically, interpretivism views reality as complex, socially constructed, subject to varied interpretations, and bearing multiple meanings. Epistemologically, interpretivism regards knowledge as subjective and predicated on time, culture, and context (Chilisa, 2012). Due to the paradigm's emphasis on the individual's role in constructing reality, methods in the natural sciences are rendered inappropriate in explaining social phenomena. Interpretivist research is inclined towards *verstehen* (interpretive understanding), as opposed to *erklären* (causal explanation), as the former allows the researcher to gain insights into the contents and characteristics of an experience, based on the individual's recollection (Lindlof, 2008).

In the reviewed publications, few authors stated their paradigmatic leanings (i.e., social constructivism, interpretivism, or modernism). The categorisation of 38 publications under interpretivism is based on the research strategies employed. While interpretivism positions itself as a paradigm of contextual understanding, in the review of the publications, context is often absent in the description. Apart from acknowledging the study context, some publications did not discuss the dictates of their study context and how these shaped their approach to the research.

#### **4.3.2.2 Methodological approaches**

Doldor et al. (2017) identify interpretivism as best suited to conducting qualitative research in organisational psychology. The reviewed publications focused on capturing people's experiences, narratives, and meaning-making or explaining a phenomenon, as highlighted in the stated purpose of Martin and Barnard's (2013) study: "to explore the experiences of women working in male-dominated occupations to clarify the challenges they face" (p. 1).

Interpretivist research positions the researched as a co-creator of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2016). Therefore, interactive methodological approaches and strategies such as storytelling are frequently employed. Saayman and Crafford (2011), in their study, note:

*...seven fieldworkers conducted 28 unstructured interviews... They allowed the participants to give first-hand accounts of their experiences in their own words... The interviews centred on the request, 'Tell me your story' (p. 4).*

Johnstone et al. (2016) indicate that conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews gives “a voice to participants’ own representation of reality ... as it acknowledges their agency” and places “emphasis on understanding how the participants understood their experiences and the meanings they derived from their own experience” (p. 285). This paradigm acknowledges human agency and creates space for knowledge-generation and meaning-making as a collective endeavour between the researcher and the researched.

The most common data collection method was face-to-face, unstructured interviews (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Kurt, Ephraim, & Peters, 2012). Nevertheless, electronic mediums such as telephones are increasingly becoming popular. The flexibility associated with interactive techniques allows a researcher to employ “non-directive dialogue techniques like minimal verbal responses..., paraphrasing..., clarification..., reflection..., reflective summary ... and silence” (Wentzel, Buys, & Mostert, 2009, p. 4) to enable the participants to share their stories. These techniques help surface themes the researcher may not have been aware of or considered. Despite these benefits, Saunders et al. (2016) caution researchers to maintain their research focus.

The nature, sampling techniques, and data collection methods of interpretivist research favour small samples (Saunders et al., 2016). An average of 36 people (within a range of two to 211) was recorded from the 25 publications that reported the sample size. Smaller samples allow researchers to conduct in-depth and interactive interviews with information-rich participants. Some authors, however, acknowledged the challenges associated with small samples. Downes and Koekemoer (2011) warn:

*Qualitative research tends to work with smaller samples ... although one can make valuable insights into particular cases, it is not possible to make claims about trends, regularities or distributions for a whole population (p. 12).*

While this argument generally holds, generalisability may be possible when findings from a particular context are applicable in another, or when the research is conducted in a similar research setting (Saunders et al., 2016).

#### **4.3.2.3 Context of previous research**

The context within which research is undertaken should be explicitly stated. However, authors are silent about the depth of detail needed in establishing context. Johnstone et al. (2016) acknowledge the relevance of establishing the socio-political context of South Africa and the society under study. A researcher's historical, situational, and cultural awareness of the research context is paramount. This level of awareness could enable the researcher to approach the study "from a position where the researcher did not assume that she understood the work identity phenomenon in the South African context" (Lloyd et al., 2011, p. 4). While the purpose of interpretivist research is not to generate generalisable knowledge, researchers need to understand and define the context of their research in order to present and represent the researched appropriately.

**Table 4.3**

#### *Demographic Descriptors*

<b>Demographic Descriptors</b>	<b>Number</b>
Age	21
Educational level	9
Employment sector	12
Job position/level	14
Language	7
Level of experience	7
Marital status	19
Parental status	12
Race	12
Religion	2
Sex <sup>8</sup>	12
Socio-economic status	7

Note. Compiled by author

<sup>8</sup> 12 publications enquired about sex; three publications focused on men only, and 12 focused on women only.

All 38 publications were situated in South Africa, with participants from sectors such as manufacturing, mining, engineering, education, health (nursing, pharmacy), textiles, hospitality, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and financial services (accounting, auditing), with some companies described as 'male-dominated'. Participants mostly occupied white-collar and managerial roles. Similar to the positivist publications, the interpretivist research enquired about participants' demographic details, as shown in Table 4.3.

#### **4.3.2.4 Challenges in using interpretivism in identity research**

Although the interpretivist stance appears accommodating, it can pose some challenges. Just like positivism, interpretivism was developed in Western cultures. Western knowledge and modes of acquiring knowledge are usually regarded as 'universal', against which other experiences and practices are pitched (Gobo, 2011). Louis (2007) captures this imbalance based on the experience of indigenous people: "[W]e have been pathologised by Western research methods that have found us deficient either as genetically inferior or culturally deviant for generations" (p. 131). Chilisa (2012) questions the place of the realities of historically marginalised groups in academic research, as their realities usually stand in contrast to what has been presented as universally valid. Not catering to the social realities to properly contextualise the meaning-making process is not fully aligned with the assumptions underpinning the paradigm, i.e., socially constructed realities and knowledge.

Interpretivist research is value-laden. Hence, the interaction between the researcher and the researched (i.e., how questions are asked and answered, the medium and place of the interaction, and other personal biases) can impact the process and, consequently, the kind of data gathered. Carrim and Nkomo (2016) admit that biographical and demographic similarities (relating to race, ethnicity, gender, etc.) between the researcher and participants can, and do, affect rapport. In their case, the interviewer bore similar identities to the interviewees. In Kurt et al. (2012), however, interviewers interviewed "someone who was 'different' from themselves (that is, gender, nationality, age, values, religion, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic, tenure, age, workplace function, and education)" (p. 1751). Power and privilege are present in interviewer–interviewee relationships. From a postcolonial perspective, Chilisa (2012) advises researchers to be aware of and interrogate existing power relations between the researcher and the researched.

In conclusion, to interpretivists, reality is multiple and subjective, and cannot be discovered through objective means. As such, the paradigm lends itself to qualitative research. Although interpretivism

recognises that knowledge is shaped by context, the reviewed publications only discussed context sparingly.

### **4.3.3 Postmodernism**

#### **4.3.3.1 Epistemological approaches**

Postmodernism interrogates accepted ways of thinking, and seeks to amplify the voices of marginalised groups (Doldor et al., 2017; Saunders et al., 2016). Rooted in interpretivism and social constructionism (Côté & Levine, 2002; Howell, 2013), postmodernists undermine universal knowledge or truth, and argue that the idea of truth or knowledge is a collective decision that is shaped significantly by prevailing dominant ideologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Postmodernists are concerned about power relations and how dominant philosophical traditions continuously exclude, alienate, and suppress the realities of marginalised groups. Therefore, research situated in the postmodern paradigm tends to deconstruct existing imbalances. Of the reviewed publications, one study was premised on postmodernist thinking. In exploring the “subjective experiences of employment equity in South African organisations”, the research hinged “on the post-modernist premise” and applied “a qualitative research approach within the hermeneutic-phenomenological research paradigm” (Oosthuizen, Tonelli, & Mayer, 2019, p. 3). Methodological choices of postmodernist research are similar to those of interpretivists (Saunders et al., 2016).

#### **4.3.3.2 Methodological approach**

Methodologically, in-depth investigations are conducted to deconstruct language, images, and data, in order to depict biases in dominant and mainstream knowledge in postmodernist research (Saunders et al., 2016). In the case of Oosthuizen et al. (2019), the authors focused on understanding the experience and the meaning participants individually attached to post-apartheid employment equity discourse. As such, the authors noted having undertaken:

*79 face-to-face semi-structured interviews of 30 min to 60 min each... The semi-structured interviews started with the question: ‘What is your personal story in terms of your experience of EE in the workplace?’(p. 4).*

The researchers committed to projecting participants' reality and experience by presenting snippets of differing voices under the overarching themes drawn from the data. In reporting race, gender, and reverse discrimination, the authors represented the views of people bearing different intersectional

identities. For example, on gender and racial stereotyping, a participant stated: “[W]hen you are a woman and you’re black, a lot of people think that you are just here because of EE. This decreases one’s self-worth’ (black, female)” (Oosthuizen et al., 2019, p. 6).

#### **4.3.3.3 Context of previous studies**

Postmodernists contend that there is no fixed identity; identity is fluid, ever-changing, neither singular nor fixed, and is a construction that serves a role in shaping our relating to reality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Therefore, this conceptualisation of identity is sensitive to local epistemologies that address “the lack of an indigenous approach in social sciences” (Alatas, 1993, p. 308).

Although postmodernism could go hand in hand with local epistemologies, this paradigm was largely unexplored in the studies analysed. In Idowu’s (2005) work on postmodernism and the contested notion of citizenship in Africa, he argues:

*The flaw and shortcoming of postmodernism in the face of the political economy of Africa is the failure to endorse and accommodate unity in the light of plurality that it advocates for. Therefore, the application of postmodern notion of citizenship to the African situation has the likelihood of portending a negative development for Africa's political economy. This negative development is cast in the language of the possibility of threat to the idea of national citizenship in the light of the plurality of interests (p. 16).*

Postmodernism in African studies has been contested and subjected to ‘outright hostility’ (Marzagora, 2016). Lamola (2017) criticises postmodernism in Africa by stating that it “was facilitated by violent plunder and dispossession of Africans of their material and cultural wealth” (p. 122). Audu et al. (2013) regard postmodernism as the new ‘cultural domination’, as African cultures are being eroded, giving way to Western cultures — a transition made possible by globalisation. The Western basis for postmodernism, Yin (2018) argues, is “not apt to accurately and adequately capture selfhood in non-Western societies, which is predicated on radically different ontological and epistemological assumptions” (p. 193). The rejection of postmodernism as an appropriate paradigm for research in Africa (Adetolu, 2014; Audu et al., 2013; Nkomo, 2011) has been linked to its Eurocentric nature and non-African epistemologies (Lamola, 2017; Marzagora, 2016; Yin, 2018).

In summary, positivism has a place in identity research, albeit limited in its application to establishing relationships, causality, and generalisable findings. Despite not recognising the contextual dictates,

interpretivism stood out in providing nuanced insights into identity. Postmodernism, however, has been argued not to provide an appropriate paradigm for conducting research in Africa (Marzagora, 2016; Nkomo, 2011).

Despite the flexibility associated with interpretivism, applying approaches from a relatively monocultural, individualistic society without due modifications due to the multicultural, collectivist context of South Africa does not fully address pertinent context-driven factors influencing identity. In response to the call from Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019) for a fusion of Western knowledge and research tools with African knowledge and methodologies, the present study argues that work identity research will yield nuanced findings when local philosophies complement Western philosophical traditions. From a postcolonial perspective, *ubuntu* presents a complementary, indigenous concept situated in interpretivism that accommodates context-specific realities, knowledge, and ways of knowing that 'mainstream' interpretivist approaches may not fully support. The subsequent section explores the promise and challenges of applying *ubuntu* in research methodology.

#### **4.4 DECOLONISING RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: THE PROMISE OF *UBUNTU*?**

##### **4.4.1 *Ubuntu* — an African concept of humanism**

In arguing for a complementary, context-sensitive epistemology to interpretivism, it is important to position the discussion within the broader context of the concept of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* was culled from an Nguni expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', loosely translated into English as "One is a person through others" (Mkabela, 2015, p. 287). Understood as African humanism (Swanson, 2007), *ubuntu* expresses the collectivistic way of life in many societies in sub-Saharan Africa (Chilisa, 2012; Mkabela, 2015) — the communitarian principle. *Ubuntu* also explains the interconnectedness of humans to one another and their environment (Mkabela, 2015). This idea of interconnectedness holds that everything is related to another being, and even to non-humans, such as spirits, trees, and water bodies, and nothing exists on its own — the relational principle.

The collectivistic way of life, specific to many African societies, is organised around community, clan, and culture (Metz, 2020), and is underpinned by relationality and communitarianism. The relational element focuses on the connections people have with each other and the meaning that those connections carry for the individual and also the community (Chilisa, 2012; Metz, 2020). *Community* does not necessarily refer to a geographical location, but to a group of people who share common values, relationships, and interests. A community gives meaning to the relational by ascribing



importance, strength, virtue, avoidance, and reverence to social markers such as kinship and age, all of which are transferred from generation to generation.

On the other hand, communitarianism reflects a collective approach to living where there is an aspiration towards harmonious co-existence among individuals (Metz, 2020). Individuals who are communitarian are socialised to accept their community's interpretation and meaning-making concepts, and act to protect shared interests. Therefore, a community is not just a close grouping of people but an ideal of how group members relate to each other (Metz, 2013). Despite the seemingly superior status of the communal, Metz (2020, p. 49) argues that individual difference is also accommodated in *ubuntu*, as "difference is permitted but not required":

[A]lthough one may coordinate one's behaviour with others in an attempt to realize one's own goals that differ from theirs, one may instead decide to adopt others' goals as one's own."

Important, however, is that these individual interests should be aligned with the values and promote the collective interests and wellbeing of the community, which an individual can also help shape.

*Ubuntu* resonates with many cultures in sub-Saharan Africa, as its essence is recognisable in these societies, albeit bearing different labels. The essence of *ubuntu* is expressed as *muthu* in Botswana, *bato* in Cameroon, and *maaya* in Burkina Faso (Mabvurira, 2020). Ajei (2001) points to a communitarian form of social organising and humanism as cardinal tenets of the Akan culture of Ghana. The concept of *ubuntu*, some have argued, is not unique to Africa. Coghlan and Brydon-Miller (2014) point out *obshchina*, a Russian concept, *loob*, a Filipino philosophy, and *jen* in Chinese philosophy as concepts that bear similar tenets as *ubuntu*. British emergentists also reject the atomistic worldview (Santos, 2015), just as French philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari conceptualised identity as that which is premised on a relational ontological foundation and argue that individuals build their identities through connection with other entities (Colebrook, 2002).

The caution, however, is to avoid essentialism in seeing *ubuntu* not as *the* but rather *an* African way of life, not as a philosophy with a fixed nucleus, frozen in time (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019; Metz and Gaie, 2010). *Ubuntu* became widely known on the world stage with South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy in the 1990s and its nucleation:

*...cannot be divorced from the politics of forgiveness and reconciliation current at the time. Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu came to be foregrounded in ubuntu discourse, pitched against the unrefined language of Apartheid, as its nucleus* (Tagwirei, 2020, p. 399).

While some authors, e.g., Metz (2014a), see the core of *ubuntu* as harmonious relationality, others contend that relationality does not necessarily invoke harmony (Tagwirei, 2020). In this debate, we see the complexity of a decolonial African identity emerging as fluid, ever-changing, and moving with the times. Western researchers should gain an in-depth understanding of local epistemologies, such as *ubuntu*, beyond their essentialised forms, “caught in the prehistoric, stationary and unchanging web”, thus becoming “romanticised to the point of helpless innocence” (Semali and Kincheloe, 2002, p. 22).

Specifically, in the debate around *ubuntu*, some authors have critiqued the concept as one that has been subject to varying interpretations and applications. Gade (2012) points out that the term *ubuntu* is dynamic and that it “has taken on new meanings at different points in history, probably under the influence of changing social and political circumstances” (p. 487). Gade (2012) further highlights how, among South Africans of African descent, *ubuntu* is differently conceptualised as “ubuntu as a moral quality of a person” and “ubuntu as a phenomenon (for instance, a philosophy, an ethic, African humanism, or a worldview) according to which persons are interconnected” (p. 484). Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) argue that *ubuntu* has been hijacked by ‘the new black elite’ as a restorative measure in creating a new black identity. Due to its roots in indigenous African cultures, some authors argue that *ubuntu* offers little to contemporary societies, as *ubuntu*’s success has been argued to be tied to tightly knit communities and less modernised and predominantly rural societies (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013; West, 2014). However, Metz (2014b) argues that *ubuntu* goes beyond its original context, offering contemporary ethical and political philosophy core values: sharing, respect, and humanness.

#### **4.4.2 *Ubuntu* — a complementary local research methodology to interpretivism**

Although *ubuntu* is gradually becoming an acceptable basis for methodology (Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018), none of the reviewed publications was premised on *ubuntu* or any other indigenous methodology. The only mention of *ubuntu* came as a recommendation from Johnstone et al. (2016), who proposed its incorporation as a leadership philosophy in their study on women’s narrative about identity, power, and agency. That notwithstanding, *ubuntu* has been

recognised as a research paradigm that provides a worldview, a belief system, and ways of knowing, which provide the basis for a research methodology (Oviawe, 2016; Seehawer, 2018).

For this study, *ubuntu* is conceptualised as a complementary sub-Saharan African research methodology to interpretivism. As a research methodology, *ubuntu* is seen as a worldview that shapes research and practice, informed by philosophical assumptions premised on relational ontology, relational epistemology, and relational axiology. These dimensions of *ubuntu* as a research methodology also reflect the three elements critical to social research, namely i) philosophical (ontology and epistemology), ii) praxis (design, methods, and theory), and iii) ethics (ethics and reflexivity) (Leavy, 2017). Viewing *ubuntu* as a basis for research methodology does not necessarily mean that every aspect of *ubuntu* is entirely different or contradicts practices in other research methodologies, such as interpretivism and postmodernism (Seehawer, 2018). Seehawer (2018) argues that the positioning of *ubuntu* in relation to conventional methodologies depends on the researcher's motivation and perspective. The motivation for the present study was premised on the philosophical and methodological congruence between *ubuntu* and interpretivism and the potential to contribute to the research decolonisation agenda.

#### **4.4.2.1 Epistemological approaches**

*Ubuntu* is underpinned by relational ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Chilisa, 2012; Seehawer, 2018). Ontologically, *ubuntu* views reality as multiple, socially constructed, relational, and shaped by the connection humans have with others and their broader environment (Chilisa, 2012). Due to its relational approach to ethics, *ubuntu* has often been described as an antithesis of Western Cartesianism (Metz, 2014; Pérezts, Russon, & Painter, 2020). *Ubuntu's* ontological foundation is similar to that of interpretivism, where reality is complex, multiple, and socially constructed. Santos (2015) highlights that identity and behaviours are shaped and altered by specific interactions beyond the interrelatedness and connections among entities. A relational ontology allows theorising that incorporates interpersonal and cultural elements that atomistic ontology overlooks due to the emphasis on independence and autonomy (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). Some European poststructuralist philosophers argue for the relational basis in the individual's development of a sense of self (Pérezts et al., 2020). This view is comparable to *ubuntu*, which stresses the inextricable relationship between individuals and their collective (Mkabela, 2015). *Ubuntu's* roots in indigenous African culture shape the kind of knowledge that shapes its relational ontological standpoint.

Epistemologically, *ubuntu* views knowledge as that which is generated, defined, and with meaning ascribed based on communitarian and relational discourses (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018). Epistemological assumptions such as the idiographic approach to knowledge generation characterising interpretivism (Chilisa, 2012) emphasise the similitude in the philosophical underpinnings of both interpretivism and *ubuntu*. However, *ubuntu* is an indigenous knowledge system that sees knowledge as not the sole preserve of the individual, but generated and validated by the community and in community with the community. Five elements thus characterise indigenous knowledge: a) it is embedded in its community, b) it is contextually bound, c) the belief in communal values, d) it does not create a subject–object dichotomy, and e) requires a commitment to contextual dictates (Agrawal, 1995).

In terms of knowledge generation, Seehawer (2018) discusses three types: “traditional knowledge (passed on orally from generation to generation), revealed knowledge (acquired through dreams and visions) ... and the concept of indigenous science (knowledge acquired through empirical observation)” (p. 457). Indigenous knowledge is also captured in cultural experiences, which could be expressed in the local language, artistic expressions (such as music, dance, and paintings), and ceremonies (such as funerals, naming ceremonies, and festivals) (Chilisa, 2012). These cultural experiences emphasise the inextricable relationship between knowledge and the socio-cultural and historical experiences of the researched community.

Indigenous knowledge differs from Western knowledge in a number of ways. Agrawal (1995) highlights three major differences between Western and indigenous knowledge: a) substantive — as indigenous knowledge usually focuses on activities that are connected with the people’s livelihoods rather than philosophies and abstract ideas, as in the case of Western knowledge, b) epistemological and methodological foundations — both have different worldviews and employ different approaches in investigating reality and c) context — as indigenous knowledge is more rooted in context. Due to the contextual nature of indigenous knowledge, there are concerns about its limited contribution to universal knowledge (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Indigenous knowledge does not set out to achieve universality, nor is it preoccupied with verification and control. However, it seeks to provide contextual knowledge orientated towards interpretation and achieving social and moral harmony (Seehawer, 2018; Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018). Similarly, Briggs (2013) cautions that the value of indigenous knowledge — being economically and culturally situated in a specific context — will be lost in seeking general applicability in the quest to generate universalised knowledge. Indigenous

knowledge, therefore, provides perspectives and insights that universalised research methodologies may not accommodate.

#### 4.4.2.2 Methodological approaches

*Ubuntu* provides some methodological options for researchers. However, Seehawer (2018) cautions that no specific set of methods can be ascribed to *ubuntu*, as *ubuntu* research is only burgeoning. That notwithstanding, in line with the relational philosophical assumptions of *ubuntu*, procedures for enquiry tend to be relational and communal.

According to Moore (2015), methodological concerns need to be approached and placed in the context of the researched community. *Ubuntu* accommodates immersive data collection approaches, in line with Owusu-Ansah and Mji's (2013) assertion that African knowledge and its modes of acquisition tend to be practical, collective, and interpersonal. Mkabela (2005) also argues that collective ethic in African societies necessitates a spiral approach to research, which is collaborative and centred on the community and individuals. As such, participatory techniques are employed. Similar to techniques used in interpretivist research, participatory techniques position research participants as co-creators in the research process and outcomes, as shown in Table 4.4. The table summarises the suitability of *ubuntu* and interpretivism by discussing the differences and similarities between the two.

**Table 4.4**

*Explicating the Suitability of ubuntu in Interpretivism*

	<b>Interpretivism</b>	<b>Ubuntu</b>
Philosophical underpinnings	Informed by hermeneutics and phenomenology	Informed by indigenous knowledge systems
Ontology	Complex and rich Socially constructed Multiple realities	Complex and rich Socially constructed Multiple realities Shaped by multiple connections that humans have with the environment
Epistemology (nature of knowledge)	Subjective Idiographic	Relational Built on indigenous knowledge systems

Epistemology (what counts as knowledge)	Context-dependent	Informed by the set of multiple relations that one has with the universe
Axiology	Value-bound research Subjective Researchers are part of what is researched Researcher interpretation key to findings	Research guided by relational accountability that promotes respectful representation, reciprocity and rights of the researched Ethics theory informed by appreciative approaches inquiry <sup>9</sup> and desire-based perspectives
Methodology	Qualitative, phenomenology, ethnography, symbolic interactionism	Participatory, liberatory, and transformative approaches Methodologies that hinge on indigenous knowledge systems
Techniques of data collection	Narrative, stories, perceptions, and interpretations Interviews, participant observation, images, diaries, and documents	Techniques based on philosophic sagacity, ethnophilosophy, indigenous knowledge systems, and stories Adapted techniques from other paradigms

*Note:* Adapted from *Indigenous research methodologies*, by B. Chilisa, 2012, Sage Publications and *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.), by M. Saunders, P. Lewis, & A. Thornhill, 2016, Pearson Education.

Storytelling, for example, is a popular data collection method, as knowledge in collectivistic culture is usually embodied in and transmitted through performative communication modes such as folklore, taboos, totems, and cosmological beliefs (Adom, 2016; Louis, 2007; Seehawer, 2018). Not only do these techniques project the voices of participants and empower them to express and represent themselves in ways they deem fit, but they also help dissolve the hierarchical relationship between the researcher and participants (Moore, 2015).

Babbie and Mouton (2003) distinguish between Northern (Western) and Southern (non-Western) traditions in participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a research process that supports co-learning between the researcher and participants, creating an understanding of the phenomenon under study through the lens of the researched (Gobo, 2011). However, the Northern tradition of PAR is usually concerned with organisational problem-solving and efficiency and the development of social science, while the Southern tradition is committed to social equity and the reinforcement of popular

<sup>9</sup> A method employed in participatory research that promotes healing and transformation (Chilisa, 2012).

knowledge (Babbie and Mouton, 2003). More recent literature (Chilisa, 2012; Gobo, 2011; Seehawer, 2018) presents PAR in line with the Southern tradition. PAR is built on relationships, offers alternative approaches to dominant paradigms such as interpretivism, and is committed to projecting the needs and voices of communities neglected by research processes (Gobo, 2011).

Personal interactions and respect for culture are vital in negotiating access and securing consent. Gaining access to the researched is significantly shaped by the personal interaction between the researcher and the researched. From Seehawer's (2018) experience researching South Africa, the author stresses the role of meaningful personal interaction and its usefulness in gaining access to the research, such that signing consent forms becomes a formality. Similarly, researchers need to recognise and respect the culture of the researched. In black South African families, family issues are not discussed with strangers. As such, even though the researcher's target may be individuals, it is imperative to discuss "the research project with family members in the home before obtaining consent and commencing the interviews" (Moore, 2013, p. 155). As such, consent goes beyond the individual.

Chilisa (2012) mentions four types of consent: individual, community, group, and collective, which are applied under different circumstances. Seehawer (2018) refers to instances where academics researching indigenous knowledge systems have had to seek permission from spirits and ancestors to present their research findings. Seeking this type of consent affirms the relativity of individuals to their ancestors and respects the customs of the researched. In the case of Moore (2015), the author respected individual consent, but was oblivious to the importance of collective consent. The author documents how two relatives who were men were unhappy about their relatives' (women) engagement with the researcher without their (the men's) knowledge. Although in disagreement with this arrangement, Moore (2015) recognises that respecting the traditions of participants helps secure good rapport and leaves the research environment undisturbed.

*Ubuntu* and interpretivism have similar methodological options. *Ubuntu*, however, moves away from the individual as the primary source of knowledge, to the individual within their community and the relational ties and their meaning within and beyond the community. *Ubuntu* also accommodates conventional research methods insofar as these utilise culturally appropriate techniques in generating knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). Furthermore, due to the immersive approaches employed, both *ubuntu* and interpretivism require researchers to be aware of their own biases, values, ethics, and privileges in relation to the participants, their community, and their broader environment.

#### 4.4.2.3 Context

*Ubuntu* is contextually appropriate when conducting research in sub-Saharan Africa (Schreiber and Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018). Due to its relational and communitarian underpinnings, *ubuntu* serves as an appropriate complementary local epistemology to interpretivism for researching the South African context, which is predominantly collectivist, as three out of the four socially constructed racial groups are collectivist (Adams et al., 2012; Van Dyk & De Kock, 2004). In the study titled *Gender and cultural identity work of unmarried Indian women breadwinner daughters in South Africa*, Carrim (2016) recommends that future research go beyond the individual and seek the perspectives of other family members. Not only does the recommendation highlight the collectivistic nature of the Indian people, it also demonstrates the critical role of one's family (or social support system) in identity development, negotiation, and expression.

*Ubuntu* complements interpretivism by helping to ground research in, and approach it from, an African worldview. At the core, *ubuntu* places African experiences at the centre and affirms the validity of indigenous knowledge (Mkabela, 2015). The disregard for African knowledge has contributed to the detachment of research from the lived realities of people, as a significant proportion of research is premised on Western ideologies. Using local philosophies could address the disconnect between research and the reality of many African societies (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Naude, 2019).

#### 4.4.3 Challenges of *ubuntu* as a local complementary epistemology

Despite the promise of *ubuntu*, the concept and its application in research are not without flaws. This paper joins other academic efforts to offer some critique towards building its validity, based on Eze's (2010, p. 186) assertion:

*Exposing ubuntu to criticisms is another way of validating its actual significance and value. The validity of theories is dependent on its ability to withstand those criticisms on which force it gains validity or universal legitimacy.*

*Ubuntu* has been criticised for not being necessarily different from some Western concepts, and not necessarily new (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014; West, 2014), as a number of philosophical traditions share values similar to those of *ubuntu* (West, 2014). Despite these similarities with other philosophies, some tenets of *ubuntu* remain distinctly African (Lutz, 2009). The argument is not that *ubuntu* is so unique that it shares no similarities with other forms of philosophies or concepts, but



rather that *ubuntu* is unique to sub-Saharan African culture and provides a useful worldview to guide research and practice in this specific context.

As knowledge is generated, defined, and justified through communal processes, multiple and, in some cases, contradictory truths may arise (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018). Without discounting the usefulness of such community verification modes, West (2014) points out the difficulty of assessing or ensuring the reliability or validity of personal experiences and anecdotal evidence in academic research. This intersubjectivity can thus pose a challenge in constructing enduring knowledge and understanding (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014). Despite this challenge, Seehawer (2018) argues that individuals bring their unique perspectives and positions, although different knowledge or truth may arise from the same discourse. These multiple and subjective truths can be validated and triangulated through a variety of community elders, who are regarded as custodians of culture and knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). Community elders can act as gatekeepers. As such, engaging with them can facilitate the researcher's access to less powerful actors within the community.

Another significant point of consideration is the extent to which formal (Western) education shapes the individual's orientation regarding identity, as educational curricula are hardly without political or ideological inclinations (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). The educational curriculum inherited by former colonies reflects the ideological inclinations and epistemologies of former colonial powers. As values and knowledge are passed through curricula and religious bodies, Africans have been exposed to Western ideologies, and this could, in turn, shape the identities, values, and biases of both the researcher and participants. Due to exposure to Western pedagogies, many African academics are perhaps more familiar with Western methodologies. Therefore, the onus lies primarily with African scholars and researchers to be conversant with African epistemes and methodologies and explore their own knowledge in ways that enhance knowledge production and dissemination (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Okere et al., 2005; Owusu-Ansah and Mji, 2013). The present paper proposes that a more active dialogue between *ubuntu* and interpretivism would ease this onus from the shoulders of African scholars by placing more responsibility on Western researchers to immerse themselves into the tradition and the current debate of *ubuntu* as a living philosophy and methodology on African soil. This would also tackle the issue of power relations in knowledge production: as long as the onus of promoting this philosophy remains with the African researchers alone, the power imbalance issue remains. This paper proposes that Western researchers more consistently and systematically complement their methodologies with indigenous knowledge-creation frames such as *ubuntu*.

Furthermore, exposure to Western research methodologies can influence the methodological decisions of researchers, as well as the reaction of research participants to indigenous methodologies. My exposure to research methods through formal education was primarily Western. The exposure to alternative approaches to research, such as *ubuntu*, was eye-opening. My Ph.D. research experience is similar to Seehawer's (2018) reflection: "I did not originally situate the study within an *Ubuntu* framework" (p. 454). On the part of participants, they may have been exposed to a particular approach to research: hierarchical, neutral, and impersonal interviewers in highly structured interviews, and may be less comfortable with participatory approaches (Moore, 2015). Therefore, from an organisational governance perspective, education, training, and research interventions in organisations in Africa need to be intellectually and culturally attuned to the continent, as pedagogical resources are essential in decolonising research and research methodologies (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Khupe and Keane, 2017).

Finally, calls have been made to use local languages in the research process, especially during data collection (Chilisa, 2012; Louis, 2007). The local language is critical in being the language of thought and a medium through which local knowledge is stored and transmitted (Khupe and Keane, 2017). Moreover, engaging participants in their language could provide richer and more nuanced contributions (McDonald, 2000) that can unearth ideas and experiences that cannot be easily expressed in one's second language. Although well-intended, this recommendation could be daunting for researchers. Translating and back-translation not only create opportunities for errors to creep into the process (McDonald, 2000), but can also be logistically and financially taxing. Nevertheless, researchers should be as accommodative as is practical. Just as not all indigenous knowledge and concepts translate easily into Western languages, so it is with the local languages and Western concepts.

Similarly, publishing academic research papers in the local language is laudable. Taking South Africa, which recognises 11 official languages, one of which is sign language, as an example, academic publications are dominated by one Western and one Western-influenced language: English and Afrikaans. Only in 2017 was a doctoral dissertation completed in isiXhosa<sup>10</sup>, at Rhodes University (Mahlakoana, 2017). If academic research is conducted and communicated in Euro-Western academic languages, can these languages accurately capture, interpret, and communicate the experiences of

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<sup>10</sup> The language of the Xhosa and one of the official indigenous languages of South Africa

non-Western people? Attempts to translate the word *ubuntu*, for example, water down its meaning to a simplistic ‘I am because we are’, because the meaning is not easily translated (West, 2014). Also, will such academic outputs not be relevant and accessible to a limited number of people? Who, then, is the audience for academic research in the local language? Are such scholarly outputs produced for political reasons or to contribute to the body of knowledge, policymaking, and identity research advancement? The concern here is similar to that of Hamann et al. (2020), who argue that if we take “an inward-looking approach too far”, research from the Global South can “become isolated from broader scholarly conversation. Such isolation would hamper the exchange and spread of theoretical ideas, as well as methodological advances and understanding” (p. 5).

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the dialogue on methodological decolonisation in work identity research, and highlights the potential of local epistemologies. The study begins by assessing how research on identities in the workplace within the South African context has been conducted. By doing so, the paper re-echoes the limitations of the dominance and ubiquity of applying conventional Western methodologies in researching identity in non-Western societies. The potential and suitability of *ubuntu* as an appropriate local sub-Saharan African epistemology that can serve as a basis for methodology was also assessed. Therefore, the paper argues that *ubuntu* can complement interpretivism due to philosophical and methodological congruence.

In sum, the study does not argue for the elimination of Western methodologies in work identity research — an ‘either-or’ approach, nor do we present sub-Saharan Africa (and, by extension, the Global South) as a context whose knowledge and ways of knowing act as barriers to Western mainstream research, or a context with exotic customs that should be navigated with a great deal of tact to avoid offence (Chilisa, 2012) — a ‘neither’ approach. Instead, the recommendation is that work identity research will benefit from the communitarian and relational underpinnings of *ubuntu* in its role as a complement to conventional research methodologies in generating context-specific knowledge based on non-linear, contextual, and culturally relevant epistemologies.

## CHAPTER 5: EXPLORING IDENTITY WORK STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY WOMEN IN BLUE-COLLAR ROLES IN MALE-DOMINATED JOBS IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Abstract

Women's participation in traditionally male-dominated industries such as construction, mining, and transport remains low. Working in male-dominated industries, women experience a myriad of challenges that have been extensively explored in previous literature, but how do women positively navigate these challenges and become upwardly mobile? Moving beyond discourses of oppression that dominate the literature, the study adopted a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame to explore how women navigate dominant identities and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated spaces in a largely collectivist society such as South Africa. Using a case study as the research strategy and an *ubuntu* research ethic, narratives of 15 (semi)skilled blue-collar women workers were sourced and analysed. The findings showed that women employ various strategies, broadly categorised as sustaining identities, divesting identities, and counterattacking negative behaviour. However, within these strategies, women balance between adopting major or owning minor, simultaneously rejecting and/or differentiating elements of both. The study concludes that identity work is a kaleidoscope of processes that offer fluid and non-linear strategies towards new pathways of being and becoming.

**Keywords:** blue-collar roles, identity work strategies, male-dominated industries, South Africa, women

### 5.1 BACKGROUND

Women's experience in male-dominated industries has been characterised by challenges relating to inequality stemming from socially engineered gender norms (Madikizela & Haupt, 2010; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016b). A significant body of research on women in male-dominated industries has focused on barriers to women's inclusion (Gill et al., 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Rabe-Hemp, 2008; Wright, 2016b). However, beyond these discourses of oppression, it is important to explore the agentic processes women engage in to become upwardly mobile in such working environments. Identity work is a useful agentic process that stems from connection, enabling individuals to explore difference (*What I am not*) rather than building unitary narratives (*What I am*), create new social spaces, and carve new places for themselves in domains (i.e., industries, professions, and jobs) that have traditionally not been theirs. May indicates that;

“difference that is not simply the distinction between two identities (which would subordinate difference to identity) or the negation of one of them (which would think of difference only negatively). What there is is a difference in itself, a pure difference that forms the soil for all identities, all distinctions, and all negations” (2005, p. 21)

A deviation from the story of oppression to one that considers other ways of being aligns with what French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari<sup>11</sup> (1987) termed ‘becoming minor’.

Deleuze’s post-structuralist approach to identity deviates from the Western atomistic conceptualisation, which dominates identity work research and views identity as a discrete entity. Employing the rhizome as a metaphor, Deleuze argues that individuals build their identity through multiple connections with others and constantly redefine those identities under different circumstances (Colebrook, 2002; May, 2005). Deleuze’s relational ontological foundation in the conceptualisation of identity is similar to how identity is conceptualised in many non-Western societies — where identity goes beyond the individual (Metz, 2020). The South African concept of *ubuntu*, summarised as ‘I am because we are’ (Chilisa, 2012), leads to a positionality of the self, which is spatially and temporally connected rather than set apart. *Ubuntu* emphasises the inextricable connection between the individual’s identity and that of their community. Due to the ontological difference in identity conceptualisation between Western and non-Western societies, it is important to consider relatable epistemologies. For a study situated in the South African context, the concept of *ubuntu* can reveal more culturally specific and dynamic ways of being and relating in the workplace, broadening Western-based conceptualisations of relations in the workplace.

Secondly, Western feminists have been accused of viewing the Global South as “male-dominated and anti-women” (Bayu, 2019, p. 57). This lack of nuance has perpetuated the perception that women in the Global South are “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domesticated, family-oriented, and victimized”(Mishra, 2013, p. 132). Moreso, Bawa and Adeniyi Ogunyankin (2018) criticise the stereotypical image of “the so-called authentic African woman ... as irredeemably oppressed, docile, biological reproducer of children and confined to a life of the domestic” (p. 445). While these descriptions homogenise the experience of African women, they also create a sense of passiveness, disempowerment, marginalisation, and oppression. This image does not provide a balanced view of

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<sup>11</sup> Hereafter, Deleuze

the experience of African women, as the concept of *ubuntu* empowers women to occupy significant roles in the home and the community (Manyonganise, 2015).

Therefore, the present study explored how women navigate dominant identities in the workplace and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated industries in South Africa. Specifically, the study was guided by two research questions (RQs):

RQ3: *How do identity resources available to women contribute to building positive work identities?*

RQ4: *How do individuals negotiate their identities in building positive identities?*

In addition, this study sought to, first, through a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame, explore how participants, through processes of differentiation rather than definitions, engage in identity work in negotiating their minority identities. Second, in terms of geographic scope and study population, the study joins a few others from a Global South context (Adams & Crafford, 2012; Carrim, 2018, 2019; Fernando et al., 2020; Haeruddin et al., 2020; Srinivas, 2013) and studies of populations of individuals in non-managerial roles (Carrim, 2016; Kreiner et al., 2006) to understand the identity work process of such persons. Third, the study employed a case study research strategy complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic to ensure that an overtly generalised phenomenon is approached through context-sensitive methodologies. The study was aimed at decolonising research methodology by approaching identity research through a fusion of local and Western epistemologies as the basis for methodology, as argued in Section 4.4.2. Finally, the study contributes to broader power and privilege theorising by proposing conceptualisations that move away from oppression to social innovation discourses.

## **5.2 UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY WORK THROUGH A DELEUZE–UBUNTU LENS**

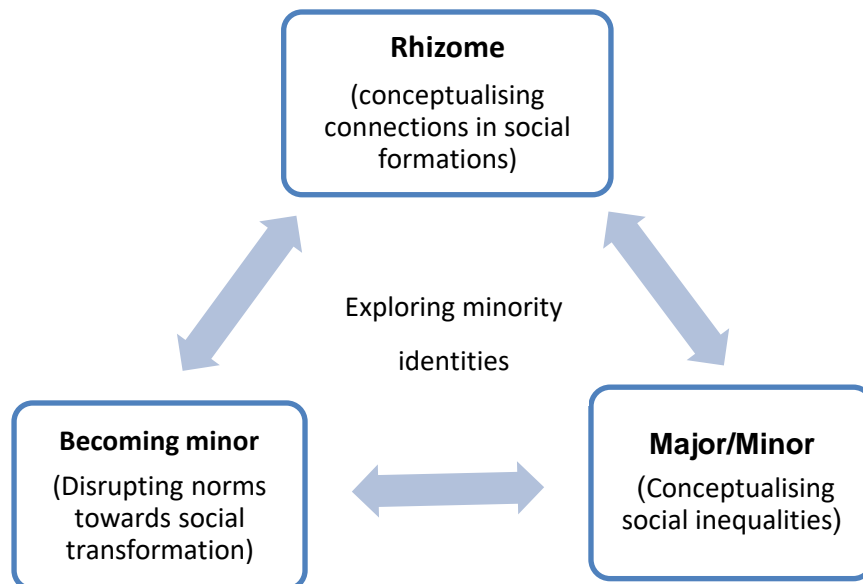
In supporting the entry of more women into male-dominated jobs, this study considers an agentic perspective on empowerment, rather than perpetuating discourses of oppression. One pitfall in diversity research and praxis in organisations is the tendency of individuals to categorise their social environment into ‘us’ and ‘them’, which creates boundaries between employees belonging to majority and minority groups (Hofhuis, Van Der Zee, & Otten, 2012). Therefore, this study explored alternative ways of problematising diversity, capitalising on what women are doing that does not create this dichotomy and opposition. The study employed a Deleuzian lens, a philosophy of non-transcendence. Transcendence suggests an ascent to a higher level (i.e., there is an ideal to aspire to, and all that is not that ideal is less than). Such a perspective easily reinforces the status quo of power structures through the very assumptions of the paradigm. Non-transcendence approaches, however,

focus on change and emergence that happens in a non-hierarchical fashion (Barlott, Shevellar, & Turpin, 2017). This change in perspective provides a nuanced approach to understanding the complexities of women's identity work.

Considering that individuals' behaviour is shaped significantly by their socio-cultural environment, the study recognises the importance of making room for the 'local' without imposing universalist theorising in the Global South. As the study was situated in South Africa, the concept of *ubuntu* was employed to provide context-specific theorising. The Deleuzian philosophy resonates strongly with the concept of *ubuntu*. Concerning the Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame, it should be noted that, as explicated by Biehl and Locke (2010), I had “no grand philosophical aspirations and [I] do not wish to reduce Deleuze’s enormously complicated venture into a theoretical system or set of practices to be applied normatively” (p. 317), but to provide a useful framework for exploring identity work in a collectivist context.

### **5.2.1 Deleuze**

Three key Deleuzian concepts anchor this study: major/minor, becoming minor, and the rhizome, as captured in Figure 5.1. These concepts are useful in a) conceptualising inequalities in society (major/minor), b) disrupting repressive orders and norms towards achieving social transformation (becoming minor) and c) exploring and understanding the interrelatedness of social formations and transformations (the rhizome) (Barlott et al., 2017).

**Figure 5.1***Deleuzian Concepts*

*Note:* The Deleuzian concepts and the interrelationships explains how minority identities can be explored. Adapted from "Becoming minor: Mapping new territories in occupational science," by T. Barlott et al., 2017. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 24(4).

The terms *major* and *minor* are used conceptually to describe how society is structured and organised. The terms are not used to denote statistical dominance, but reflect positions in power relations and function (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The major or majoritarian is established and represents the dominant systems and structures considered the norm, which serves as the yardstick against which others are measured (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The major has significance, and is regarded to be of greater value than others within the societal hierarchy. This hierarchy is exemplified in the case of sex: man is majoritarian (Barlott et al., 2017) and ideally characterised as strong, successful, rational, intelligent, white, and heterosexual (Braidotti, 2011; Colebrook, 2002). Since the major is central and all others are peripheral (Batra, 2012), the former defines and understands things relative to what is considered the norm. The major, therefore, privileges the norm and does not welcome difference.

The minor is usually associated with difference. May describes difference as "not simply the distinction between two identities (which would subordinate difference to identity) or the negation of one of them (which would think of difference only negatively)" (2005, p. 21). Difference involves



building fluid identities that move away from stable identities associated with the majoritarian (May, 2003). As society is constructed based on the values and norms of the majoritarian, the minor usually goes through a process of becoming, which normally means finding alternative relations and paths to success or satisfaction (Batra, 2012). These pathways move beyond existing values, meanings, avenues, and relations embedded in familial, political, or historical identities set within the cultural context of society (Sotirin, 2011). Through this process of becoming, the minor creates ‘lines of flight’<sup>12</sup> and ‘reterritorialises’<sup>13</sup> to disrupt molar lines<sup>14</sup> of society (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Molar lines are repressive (Batra, 2012), while molecular lines<sup>15</sup> enable the minor to create new avenues and possibilities beyond the identities of the majoritarian. To Deleuze and Guattari (1987), becoming is molecular rather than molar. Therefore, the molar and molecular concepts provide an alternative way of understanding how identity is constituted in and through difference (Batra, 2012).

Lines of flight provide room to break away from territorialisation<sup>16</sup>, the majoritarian pursuit of organising and categorising (Barlott et al., 2017). Deterritorialisation<sup>17</sup> becomes the minor’s pursuit of severing itself from the rigid frameworks associated with the majoritarian and then *reterritorialise* by creating new pathways and possibilities (Batra, 2012; Colebrook, 2002). Deterritorialisation does not occur in isolation, as the minor is characterised by connections and interrelatedness (Barlott et al., 2017; Batra, 2012). Referred to as a ‘multiplicity’ by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), each entity — human, social structure, or animal — is connected with other multiplicities. This interconnectedness shows that no multiplicity exists in isolation; it constantly redefines its environment. The minor is not defined as a minor, but is always engaged in ‘becoming minor’ (Barlott et al., 2017).

Becoming minor is a detachment from normative identities associated with the major (Barlott et al., 2017; May, 2005). This detachment involves straining “the reins of the majority identity in order to investigate new possibilities, new ways of becoming that are no longer bound to the dominant molar lines” (May, 2005, p. 150). Becoming minor pursues new ways of thinking, and does not always overthrow dominant ways of being and thinking, which Barlott et al. (2017) argue would constitute a

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<sup>12</sup> The potential to resist, defy, and create pathways of escaping categorisations (Windsor, 2015)

<sup>13</sup> Restructuring a deterritorialised space, which allows the emergence of a new structure (Batra, 2012)

<sup>14</sup> Prescriptive, rigid, and hierarchical categorisations (Windsor, 2015)

<sup>15</sup> Ruptures rigid categorisations (Stivale, 2011)

<sup>16</sup> To define, limit, and organise an entity by its parts in forming a coherent structure (Batra, 2012)

<sup>17</sup> To break away from rigidities and categorisations of the majoritarian (Barlott et al., 2017)

majoritarian pursuit. Becoming minor is process-oriented, acentred from the individual, and could be conceptualised as a rhizome.

A rhizome is a plant unlike a tree with a definite starting point and structure. The rhizome has no definite beginning, no middle, and no end. It has no definite shape, and is not bound to a particular territory (May, 2005). The root of a rhizome can sprout in any direction and make “connections with other roots, with worms, insects, rocks or whatever” (Sotirin, 2011, p. 118), forming new and dynamic associations. The concept of the rhizome hinges on the principles of connection and heterogeneity (Sotirin, 2011) and enables multiple connections to be drawn from various perspectives; it is not a single concept (May, 2005). The rhizome provides a useful lens for analysing the interconnected, non-hierarchical structure and nature of social formation (Barlott et al., 2017).

### **5.2.2 Conceptualising the workplace through a Deleuzian lens**

The workplace tends to be hierarchical, structured, and significantly shaped by patriarchal values and norms (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). The image of an ideal worker reflects the majoritarian — a “man who dedicates most of his waking hours to paid work, unencumbered by family or other obligations” (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019, p. 3). As such, organisational culture and values are built and structured to suit the needs of the majoritarian, especially in traditionally male-dominated industries (Campuzano, 2019; Haeruddin et al., 2020).

As male-dominated industries open up to different groups, such as women, an ‘in-group’–‘out-group’ dynamic is created. As occupants of the in-group status operating in a male-only environment, a particular working culture that suits the needs and behaviour of men was built. Bringing an out-group (for example, women) could disrupt that working culture, which may generate resistance in response. Some in-group members may consider opening up to diversity a threat to their group’s status (Dover et al., 2016). In-group favouritism and out-group discrimination are not necessarily unique, as in-group members usually view out-group members as less competent (Fiske et al., 2002), as the latter may not exhibit the in-group’s ‘desirable’ stereotypical attributes and behaviours. This view is even more pronounced in male-dominated industries where tasks are generally male-gender-typed, i.e., physically demanding (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016b).

The typical woman is defined by communal attributes and behaviours — being warm, helpful, and gentle, while the typical man is defined by agentic attributes and behaviours — being skilful, independent, and competitive (Braun, Stegmann, Hernandez Bark, Junker, & van Dick, 2017; Fiske,

2018). These attributes and behaviours also shape how sectors of employment and roles are designated to women and men. People-orientated jobs require communal attributes and behaviours, and are usually considered feminine, while task-orientated jobs require agentic attributes and behaviours, and are considered masculine. Similarly, gender-typecast fields are seen in the type of occupation (e.g., military — masculine, nursing — feminine), professional specialties (e.g., surgery — masculine, paediatrics — feminine), and function in an organisation (e.g., performance roles — masculine, supportive roles — feminine) (Heilman, 2012).

Historically, the gender divide at the household level was structured such that women cared for the home while men pursued paid employment (Damaske, 2013; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Hence, the minor is the homemaker, while the major is the breadwinner. These roles have different statuses and rewards. Caregiving roles, for example, have typically not been considered work and are therefore uncompensated, as they are seen as in women's nature (Damaske, 2013). With such perceptions and social structure, women's entry into male-dominated spaces becomes an exception to the norm. Also, women (the minor) are generally not expected to showcase attributes and behaviours stereotypically associated with men, and are therefore considered ill-equipped to take up male-typed tasks and roles (Heilman, 2012). This could explain why efforts to bring in difference (minorities such as women) are met with opposition and resistance.

Although gender-neutral terms such as *employee* or *staff* describe personnel, workers are expected to exhibit competence, be competitive, aggressive, and independent, which are behaviours stereotypically associated with men (Fiske, 2018; Heilman, 2012). These behaviours are essential in an employee's upward career mobility. Since women are likely to display fewer agentic behaviours — the 'desirable' stereotypical behaviours of the majoritarian — women are perceived as less skilled for male-typed roles, but are considered warm colleagues (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Fiske et al., 2002). For minorities, being warm is associated with being less competent. These perceptions shape workplace interactions and relations, as women's and men's authority and competence are not valued equally (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Wright, 2016b).

Women face contradictory and complex challenges while navigating 'traditional' roles as primary caregivers and developing their professional identities (Damaske, 2013; Wright, 2016b). The ideal worker reflects the image of the majoritarian, who has different professional and family demands. Women, especially mothers, are confronted with work–family decisions that one can hardly fully satisfy simultaneously. Employers do not expect mothers to be good employees (Damaske, 2013). In

Cahusac and Kanji's (2014) study of professional and managerial mothers in London, women were encouraged to lie about their children, as this portrays them as having a clear separation between work and home. Unlike their colleagues who are men, women need to handle their personal lives, family demands, and professional careers in an almost perfect fashion (Łaba & Geldenhuys, 2018; Vongalis-Macrow & Gallant, 2010), regardless of societal and institutional challenges. In navigating these complex and contradictory challenges, women respond by creating lines of flight that allow them to deterritorialise through identity work and engage in the process of becoming minor.

### 5.2.3 Identity work in a Deleuzian frame

Identity work refers to "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1384). In doing identity work, individuals regulate and negotiate their identities (Adams & Crafford, 2012), reflect on belonging and non-belonging (Walseth, 2006), and respond to identity tensions arising from stereotyping and legitimacy challenges (Morgan & Creary, 2011), to create a sense of cohesion and distinctiveness (Watson, 2008). Identity work allows individuals to define for themselves and others who they are within a specific context (Lepisto et al., 2015), in the case of this study, the workplace.

Although work gives the individual space for personal expression and personal definition (Gini, 1998), the workplace remains a social context within which individuals are confined to its dictates (Adams & Crafford, 2012). In the workplace, individuals develop a "culturally appropriate self" (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 136), highlighting or downplaying parts of their identities based on their experience and knowledge of ethics and the conventions of their profession, organisational policies, and the workplace culture (Compton & Brandhorst, 2021). Individuals purposefully develop strategies that enable them to showcase desirable work-related attributes, behaviours, and skills, as well as respected aspects of their non-work identities, in their work identities (Morgan & Creary, 2011). The identity work process can be deliberate or involuntary, and frequently occurs in the workplace to resolve tensions between one's self and workplace demands.

Traditional theories focused on identity work, such as social identity theory (Morgan & Creary, 2011), identity theory (Bothma & Roodt, 2012), and the identity narrative approach (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) have in common that (1) identity is seen as a static construct; (2) identity work processes assume the desired state to be reached, and identity work is the means towards achieving this state; and (3) identity separates the *me* (or, in SIT, the *us*) from the *you* (*/them*). However, the Deleuzian concept of

becoming minor shows that, firstly, for minorities, identities are not static, as individuals are in a constant process of becoming, which is greatly influenced by their interactions with other entities. Through these interactions, individuals create moments of identification by defining themselves through difference (*What I am not*), rather than through identification (*What I am*). Identity becomes a result of a continuous process of differentiation, i.e., differentiation is the primary process. Identity is thus a result of a continuous process of differentiation. Secondly, minorities create lines of flight to break away from the majoritarian's rigid frameworks and reterritorialise by creating new pathways of expressing difference. This constant interplay of creating difference is fluid, as individuals are constantly moving between asserting difference and adhering to existing norms (Haeruddin et al., 2020) to remain connected.

For women in male-dominated industries, workplace interactions are on two levels: interactions with women colleagues and interactions with men colleagues. Hence, identity work occurs within major–minor and minor–minor relationships. Wright's (2016b) study of women in the UK's construction and transport industries showed a preference for working with men instead of women, because women found it easier to work with men. Among women, their status as a gender minority can serve as either “a source of support or competition” (Wright, 2016a, p. 349). In the minor–minor relationship, women do not want to be defined only through difference from the major and similarity with the minor, as it sustains existing territories. This gives rise to a conflictual relation within women's identity — establishing difference from other women while also embracing one's gender identity and differentiating from men. This requires constantly differentiating oneself from others of the same sex against whom the minor is stereotyped. Therefore, a woman rejecting her identity as a woman is a rejection of being placed in an existing molar line (the molar line here being negative stereotypes associated with the social category based on gender).

Women's identity work is triggered by workplace interactions, which are significantly shaped by socio-cultural contextual influences (Haeruddin et al., 2020). The present study's exploration of women's identity work in male-dominated industries in South Africa thus called for an epistemological lens that adequately accounts for socio-cultural contextual influences. The Deleuzian frame, which recognises the interrelatedness and connection of multiplicities, resonates strongly with *ubuntu* — a South African concept of humanism.

#### 5.2.4 Ubuntu

The concept of *ubuntu*, taken from the Nguni expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', loosely translated into English as "One is a person through others" (Mkabela, 2015, p. 287), captures the collectivistic way of life in many sub-Saharan African societies. Collectivist societies are underpinned by relationality and communitarianism (Naude, 2019). The relational dimension explains the connections people have with each other and the meaning that those connections carry for the individual and the community, and nothing exists on its own (Chilisa, 2012; Metz, 2020). The communitarian dimension reflects a collective approach to living where there is harmonious co-existence among individuals (Metz, 2020; Mkabela, 2015). Although the communal seems to have a superior status in collectivist societies, individual difference is accommodated under *ubuntu*. Metz (2020) points out that under *ubuntu*, "difference is permitted but not required", and although one "may coordinate one's behaviour with others in an attempt to realize one's own goals that differ from theirs, one may instead decide to adopt others' goals as one's own" (p. 49). As such, the individual's interest should align with and promote the collective's wellbeing and interest.

*Ubuntu* is communitarian, an alternative to individualistic philosophies usually associated with the West (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Western philosophies hinge on Western culture, which is premised on individualistic assumptions and does not explicitly value relationships as one of its overarching tenets. Deleuze's post-structuralist approach to and deviation from the atomistic ontological foundation to identity appeals to a cultural space where the idea of a unitary and discrete self — the concept of self as advanced by the Enlightenment — does not resonate with relational ontologies. *Ubuntu* leads to a positionality of the self that is both spatially and temporally connected, rather than set apart. *Ubuntu* tells a story of differentiation and identification as a unitary process instead of a dichotomous one. The differentiation process (the '*I am*') happens *through*, rather than divorced from (the '*We are*'). This '*we*' is both spatial and temporal (referring to present others, ancestors, and those to come) (Seehawer, 2018). As such, *ubuntu* emphasises the notion of becoming (just as in the Deleuzian philosophy) in an individual's journey to becoming more human (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018).

*Ubuntu* hinges on five major values: compassion, dignity, survival, solidarity, and respect (Lutz, 2009; Mangaliso, 2001; Poovan, du Toit, & Engelbrecht, 2006). Survival describes the ability to live in the face of difficulty. In such instances, collective care (i.e., pooling community resources) is displayed when assisting the individual. Inherent in the value of survival is the solidarity spirit, where the

community shares in the glory or pain of the individual. To be able to express solidarity, one needs to be compassionate. The underlying belief here is that the individual has a bond with others, and that one has to be sensitive to the needs of others and offer help. Respect and dignity occur almost concurrently, and individuals are socialised to acknowledge authority and hierarchy in society. For example, children in many African societies are socialised to show respect to every adult.

However, despite the seeming the gender-neutral focus in projecting the idea of togetherness, Sanni and Ofana argue that *ubuntu* “falters in addressing the issues of gender and gender relations” (2021, p. 384). Manyonganise (2015) also argues that there are elements within the *ubuntu* concept that favours patriarchy, such that men usually have a higher status than women in the socio-political structure of communal societies. Manyonganise elucidates this position from the Zimbabwean experience where traditional courts, built on ubuntu principles, position men as decision makers while women are listeners, and in many case implementers of the decisions taken by men (Manyonganise, 2015). Male hegemony is not necessarily a characteristic of ubuntu, as the respect for relationality and sociality has been frame in patriarchal terms (Hall, Du Toit, & Louw, 2013; Sanni & Ofana, 2021) and used to oppress women.

The values of *ubuntu* have been studied in the context of organisational behaviour and management (Lutz, 2009; Mangaliso, 2001; Mangaliso, Mangaliso, Knipes, Ndanga, & Jean-Denis, 2018; Poovan et al., 2006; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2019), and provides a basis for conduct in the workplace that is premised on shared identity. In the work environment, the values of *ubuntu* could foster shared learning, mutual trust, and social cohesion (Poovan et al., 2006). Despite these positive impacts, there are potential challenges. *Ubuntu* can stifle individual initiative, as the collective can subsume the individual’s efforts. Excessive collaboration can also limit healthy competition — a necessary condition for individual and organisational growth (Lutz, 2009).

From the above, it is clear that *ubuntu* and Deleuze’s metaphor of identity as a rhizome, rather than a tree with roots (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), is parallel or analogous at the ontological level. Thus, the Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame is useful in envisioning and focusing on change and fluidity, and provides a dynamic systems perspective, rather than a mechanistic view of identity work and gender role changes.

## 5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 5.3.1 Research approach

The study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm, which argues that social action can be understood through the subjective meanings individuals attach to events, actions, and experiences (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). As the study aimed to explore and build an in-depth understanding of women's identity work strategies in male-dominated jobs in South Africa, the study necessitated a qualitative research approach. The choice of research approach is also confirmed by previous publications, shown in Table 3.1. The study followed the case study research strategy, as shown in Table 3.2.

The choice of a case study was based on the strategy's ability to offer an in-depth exploration and understanding of complex social phenomena while catering to different epistemologies (Forrest-Lawrence, 2019). Section 3.3.2.2 provides further insights into selecting case study among different research strategies available for qualitative research. As the study explored a complex and contextual concept, identity through a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame, a case study offered an appropriate strategy for the research.

In situating the research within a South African context and guided by the aim of conducting contextually sensitive research, the study sought to employ a fusion of conventional and local epistemologies as basis of methodology as recommended in Chapter 4. However, due to restrictions in conducting physical fieldwork, the local epistemology, *ubuntu*, could no longer be applied as a complementary methodology, and, instead, served as a research ethic. As a research ethic, *ubuntu* provides guidelines for conducting context-sensitive research, based on the principles of interconnectedness, solidarity, respectfulness, and reflexivity (Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018). An *ubuntu* research ethic does not necessarily oppose research ethics in qualitative research, but reflects ethics based on the concept of *ubuntu* (Seehawer, 2018). One of the ways the *ubuntu* research ethic was made practical was to offer participants the opportunity to participate in their preferred language (for which the researcher would provide a translator, if needed), thereby acknowledging their humanity through language.

### 5.3.2 Research setting

The study is situated in South Africa, based on the country's unique social and economic history and current efforts to empower previously marginalised populations, such as women (Department: Labour; RSA, 2004; Department: Women; RSA, 2015a). South Africa has instituted a number of Acts,



including the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and the Commission for Gender Equality Act 39 of 1996, to advance equity in women's access to employment, hinged on the principles of non-sexism and non-racialism (Department: Women; RSA, 2015a). Although these Acts are being enforced, the labour market remains unfavourable to women, evident in women's unemployment rate (36.4%) being higher than that of men (33.0%) (Stats SA, 2022).

Beyond the employment rates, some industries remain male-dominated. Based on the Quarter 1: 2022 Labour Force Survey, transport, construction, and mining are male-dominated as they employ less than 25% of women in their total workforce (Campuzano, 2019) (i.e., 18.2%, 11.9%, and 11.1%) respectively, as shown in Table 3.3 (Stats SA, 2022). Women in blue-collar roles in these industries were engaged for the present study, as they tend to experience double male dominance stemming from their roles and the industries they are engaged in.

### 5.3.3 Sampling

Participants were drawn from three South African-based companies operating in two industries: two companies in mining and one company in transport and logistics. The inclusion criteria were: women<sup>18</sup> with more than two years of work experience with the company, in a blue-collar role (see Table 5.1). Through non-probability purposive sampling, 15 women in blue-collar roles were selected for participation in the study. The study did not seek statistical representativeness of the population, but to collect differing experiences and perspectives from a small sample of women who hold blue-collar jobs in male-dominated industries. Efforts were made to obtain a diverse cohort in relation to age, role, number of years with the company, seniority, education level, marital status, and parental status.

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<sup>18</sup> The term *woman* is used based on sex. Stats SA reports employment rates based on the two sexes (male/man/men and female/woman/women).

**Table 5.1***Participants' Details*

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Highest Level of Education</b>	<b>Years with Company</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Children</b>
<b>Thando</b>	32	Semi-skilled electrician	National 3-year Diploma	3	Married	3
<b>Lovelace</b>	27	Weighbridge operator	Master's degree	6	Single	1
<b>Angel</b>	43	Electrical foreman	National Certificate Level 4	20	Married	2
<b>Mtasbi</b>	37	Rail co-ordinator	National 3-year Diploma	9	Single	2
<b>Ruvarashe</b>	47	Mechanical foreman	National 1-year Higher Certificate	22	Single	3
<b>Sharny</b>	28	Weighbridge operator	Bachelor's degree	3	Single	1
<b>Nosipho</b>	29	Semi-skilled electrician	National Certificate Level 6	3	Single	1
<b>Louisa</b>	45	Technical trainer	National 3-year Diploma	16	Married	1
<b>Hope</b>	37	Electrical foreman	National Certificate Level 4	8	Married	0
<b>Sandra</b>	34	Mining overseer	Bachelor's degree	12	Married	2
<b>Charity</b>	42	Train driver	National Certificate Level 3	3	Single	0
<b>Olwethu</b>	30	Production supervisor	Bachelor's degree	6	Married	1
<b>Naledi</b>	34	Mine overseer (captain)	Bachelor of Technology degree	7	Married	2
<b>Belle</b>	35	Safety superintendent	Bachelor's degree	7	Married	2
<b>Mpumi</b>	30	Production supervisor	Bachelor's degree	6	Single	0

Note: Data collected by author. Own work.

#### **5.3.4 Entrée and establishing researcher roles**

The research received ethical clearance from the Research and Ethics Committee (Social, Behaviour, and Education) of Stellenbosch University (17082) (Appendix B). Based on the argument of [Chapter 4](#); the initial plan was to undertake fieldwork using the spiral approach (Mkabela, 2005) to gain the full complement of interpretivism–*ubuntu* methodology. However, due to restrictions associated with

the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Appendix H, difficult decisions regarding methodology had to be taken. Plans for field data collection were suspended, and all communications, including interviews, were conducted virtually, via telephone and technology-enabled platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams.

Three companies responded positively and agreed to participate in the research. The contact persons in the companies introduced me to 20 potential participants via e-mail, who were subsequently contacted via telephone to solicit their participation. During these calls, I disclosed my identity as a Ph.D. student researching with permission from the companies and the university. Issues concerning the topic under study, how they were selected, the information needed, duration of the interview, the value of the research to participants and their company, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and rights and responsibilities were discussed during these calls. Participants were also encouraged to ask questions about the process. All agreed verbally to participate, after which customised informed forms (Appendix C) were sent via mail to be signed off. Upon receipt of the consent form from participants, follow-up calls were made to arrange the time and date for the interview, based on the participants' availability. However, after verbally agreeing to participate (and signing the consent forms, in the case of two participants), five participants did not participate in the interview and never communicated a change of mind to me, despite efforts to gain their participation in the research. During the interviews, I reiterated the research purpose and ethical considerations. Participants were also encouraged to choose a pseudonym to conceal their identities.

### **5.3.5 Data collection methods**

The study used in-depth, semi-structured life story interviews, as shown in Table 3.2, complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic. Over four months, in-depth, semi-structured life story interviews (cf. Atkinson, 2012) (see Appendix F) were conducted via telephone, due to the suspension of physical data collection. All interviews began with an appreciation to participants for participating, after which I introduced myself and the research (Chilisa, 2012; Seehawer, 2018). After reiterating the research protocols, the interview began with: *Tell me about yourself*. The subsequent questions were broad and centred on their childhood and upbringing, current job, non-work life, and future expectations, which allowed participants to reflect and discuss actions, behaviours, memories, and decisions as much as they were willing to share. The flow and duration of interviews varied based on participants' responses to questions.

Participants were offered the opportunity to participate in their preferred language (for which a translator would be provided, if needed), in line with the *ubuntu* research ethic of acknowledging their humanity through language. All participants opted to engage in English. However, expressions in the local language were welcomed, and I respectfully asked them to explain the literal and contextual meaning. Interviews lasted 45 to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews were conducted to seek clarification and further probe emerging themes from the initial interviews. Theoretical saturation was reached by the 11<sup>th</sup> participant. The theoretical saturation achieved was not necessarily because there was no new data but because the data confirmed what had been found already due to the iterative data collection and data analysis relationship (Punch, 2014). However, I continued with interviews, to ensure a balanced representation of participants from the three companies. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently.

### **5.3.6 Recording of data**

All interviews were recorded digitally, with permission from participants, and securely stored on the OneDrive platform provided by Stellenbosch University, to which only I had access. All interviews were transcribed and edited using Otter.ai Version 2.3.90, as recommended by Gray et al. (2020) and used in other qualitative studies (Badawi et al., 2021; Jones, 2020; Reck, 2020). The transcribed text documents were imported into ATLAS.ti 9.1.1. While listening to the audio recordings, the transcribed text documents were coded for further analysis.

### **5.3.7 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was undertaken, which involves identifying “patterns within and across data in relation to participants’ lived experience, views and perspectives, and behavior and practices” (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). The analytical process began with listening to the recordings repeatedly and coding in ATLAS.ti. I engaged in a mix of deductive (from existing literature) and inductive (emerging from the data) coding, assigning labels to important themes in the data that related to the research question (see Table 5.2) (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2006). Coding and memo-writing were employed in organising and synthesising the data into conceptual categories to capture themes (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Punch, 2014).

This process involved initial coding, which generated 273 codes. Relations were drawn between codes<sup>19</sup>, which yielded 23 pattern codes. With guidance from the research questions, links were made amongst the pattern codes, which generated three selective codes on identity work strategies: sustaining identities, divesting identities, and counterattacking negative behaviour, as shown in Table 5.2.

**Table 5.2**

*Example of the Coding Process*

Example of Text	Descriptive Code	Pattern Code	Selective Code
<i>I actually had to create my own way at work ... when I grew confident... I found my own voice... So the things that I did caused me respect and the authority that I have now. That I had to do myself... Now, I don't need a shadow behind me... I've proven myself ... now I know the systems, I'm entrenched. The people know me, they know what I have to offer (Belle, 35, Safety superintendent)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Owning one's space</li> <li>- Growing confident</li> <li>- Proving one's competence</li> </ul>	Affirming	
<i>My body is very petite ... and my structure is really feminine, so even if I had tried to be a bit masculine, I knew, for me, that was not right... So, I've never felt the need to lose my femininity. When I go out from underground, literally, I will put on my high heels ... the little things, putting on lipstick ... just to kill the stigma ... so, a shift of 700 people, I was the only lady. In that environment, you really want to stand out, that I'm a woman and I'm not a woman in a male environment trying to be a male. I am a woman, and I'm here in the capacity of a woman ... if I see someone is really forcing themselves to go out of their way to be masculine, natural masculinity on a woman is fine, but don't over-exert it... We are not coming in as who we are; we are letting them know that we don't have space here. We don't belong here. Therefore, we will be under your shadow. That, for me, is not okay. And it's not something that I would do (Mpumi, 30, Production supervisor)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Atypical physique</li> <li>-Embracing femininity</li> <li>-Desire to stand out</li> <li>-No need to masculinise</li> </ul>	Embracing	Sustaining identities

Note: Compiled by author.

<sup>19</sup> Descriptive codes are derived from the first level of conceptual analysis, pattern codes are derived from the second level of conceptual analysis, and selective codes are derived from the third level of conceptual analysis (Punch, 2014). This is illustrated in Table 5.2.

Throughout the analysis, the data were constantly compared. Interpretations and emerging themes were captured in memos, which served as useful references throughout the analysis. Furthermore, as the second round of interviews was conducted, the coding and comparative analysis to identify themes were performed concurrently.

The memo function in ATLAS.ti allowed for memoing and coding to occur simultaneously, which allowed me to capture interpretations, participants' emotions, and conceptual elaborations arising from the coding process (Punch, 2014). Memos complemented the reflective diary kept throughout the study, which contained my experiences during data collection, coding, data analysis and interpretation, and decisions that shaped the final output. Also chronicled were the overall challenges encountered and the strategies employed to overcome them.

*...she [Charity] almost always did not give a straightforward answer to my questions. She appeared to be more interested in telling me more about peripheral issues than the issues that were important for the research. I had to respectfully bring her back to issues by explaining in simpler terms without losing the import of the question (Reflective Diary, 15.03.2021).*

*I thoroughly enjoyed speaking with [Mpumi]. I reckon it's because we're both of the same age. She had the right vocabulary to engage on issues of gender and gender politics in the workplace, and provided very vivid examples to support her claims. She sounded very friendly. Although she had been so difficult to reach, I am so glad I persisted and spoke to her. During the analysis, I don't anticipate digging too deep to extract the themes, as in the case of [Charity]. Mpumi's level of education and awareness made the difference... (Reflective Diary, 22.04.2021).*

### **5.3.8 Ensuring trustworthiness**

Due to the highly subjective nature of interpretivist research, deliberate and systematic measures to enhance the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Cypress, 2017; Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004) were incorporated into the research process.

#### **5.3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to how believable research findings are, and whether they are a true reflection of the participants' reality (Terrell, 2016). To achieve this criterion, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviews allowed participants to reflect on and assign meaning to

experiences and key life events that had shaped their career trajectories. Due to the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews, I employed follow-up and probing questions to elicit deeper meanings and gain more detailed responses (Saunders et al., 2016). All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, to preserve the authenticity of the data. I listened to each interview multiple times, and, at the same time, coded the transcribed documents. The value of this process is that it added emotions to the transcripts, and allowed me to re-experience the interview in their original form. The process also stimulated richer insights into the data, and allowed for multiple meanings to be derived after each round of listening. Throughout the coding process, clarity checks on codes were undertaken to ensure that labels accurately captured the multiple meanings embedded in the texts (cf. Thomas, 2006).

Additionally, member checks were conducted through follow-up interviews, in which interpretations and emergent themes from the initial round of analysis were shared with participants for their feedback. These follow-up interviews provided additional insights into the initial analysis, in line with the *ubuntu* research ethic (Chilisa, 2012).

#### **5.3.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability relates to the extent to which findings are applicable in other contexts (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). The present study does not claim that the findings can be applied to other contexts; it provides a unique insight into the experiences of the community under study (cf. Johannesson & Perjons, 2014; Seehawer, 2018), due to the qualitative research approach that was followed. I also sought to conduct context-sensitive research. Therefore, a local epistemology, *ubuntu*, served as the basis of ethics in complementing the interpretivist paradigm. This fusion has been argued to provide rich details of context and nuance (Chilisa, 2012; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013).

Although plans were made for fieldwork, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted these plans. The lesson for me was that using *ubuntu* as a basis of methodology and ethics requires one's physical presence in the field. However, I incorporated the *ubuntu* principles of relationality, humility, and reciprocity into the research process (cf. Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). I viewed participants as owners of and 'experts' in their experiences and realities, who were generous enough to share their stories. Guided by the humility principle, I remained respectful in my conduct and interactions with participants (including those who failed to participate). With regard to reciprocity, I valued the cordial exchanges between the participants and me. As much as the participants shared insights into their

lives, I also shared relevant experiences. Contextually, I viewed myself as a 'geographical outsider', and acknowledged the contextual factors that had shaped participants' experiences.

In selecting participants, the non-probability purposive sampling method was used, based on a clearly defined set of criteria (i.e., a woman, with over two years' work experience with the company, in a blue-collar role). During interviews, expressions in the participant's native language were welcomed, and I asked them to clarify the literal and contextual meanings of the expressions. The data were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The transcriptions complemented the audio recordings, which allowed me to re-immense myself in the interviews. In addition, coding the data and keeping a reflective diary enabled me to make sense of the data, allowing me to present a final output that reflected the participants' experiences (Cypress, 2017). In presenting the research findings, thick descriptions of detailed and accurate accounts of women's identity work in male-dominated industries are provided. Theoretical saturation was reached by the 11<sup>th</sup> woman worker. The theoretical saturation achieved was not necessarily because there was no new data but because the data confirmed what had been found already due to the iterative data collection and data analysis relationship (Punch, 2014). However, I continued with interviews, to ensure a balanced representation of participants from the three companies.

#### **5.3.8.3 Dependability**

Dependability focuses on the consistency and replicability of findings (Terrell, 2016). In achieving this criterion, periodic debriefing sessions with my supervisors (who acted as auditors) were held to discuss emerging themes, assumptions, and biases that may influence data analysis and reporting. Throughout the study (from January 2020), the research process was subjected to the interrogation and validation by my study supervisors.

Peer debriefing was achieved through feedback from colleagues on platforms offered by the university, including the Graduate School of Economic and Management Sciences (GEM) Monday Meetings at the faculty level, colloquium presentations offered by the Stellenbosch Business School, and other academics at conferences. The feedback helped me to refine ideas and arguments.

#### **5.3.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability focuses on how objectivity was observed in a study and the extent to which findings reflect participants' views (Shenton, 2004). To ensure confirmability, a reflective diary was maintained throughout the study, in which I captured my experiences with participants, observations during

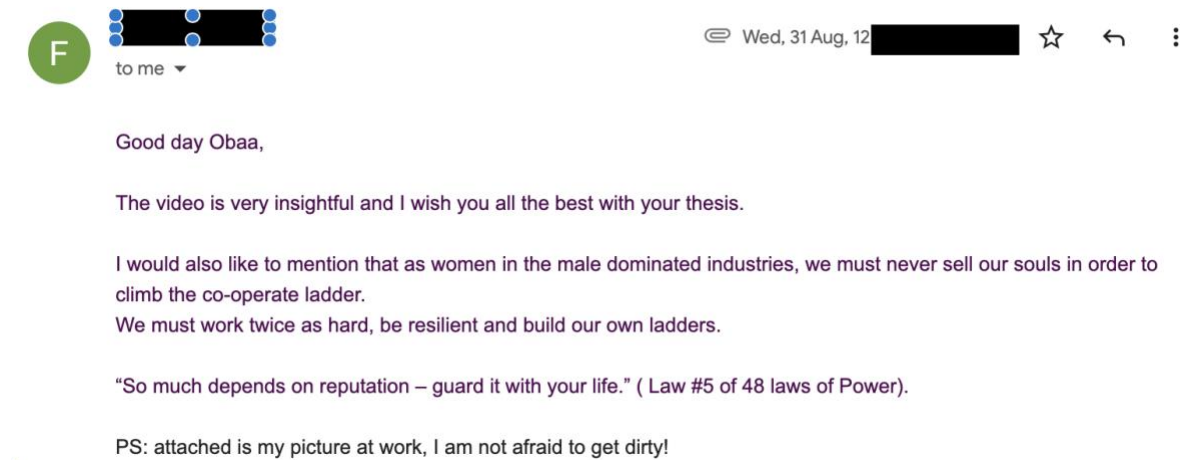


coding, data analysis and interpretation, and decisions made during the write-up. Reflexivity allowed me to self-supervise (cf. Berger, 2015), as total objectivity is not attainable in qualitative studies. I remained mindful of my beliefs, assumptions, and biases and how these may influence my engagement in the research process. After each interview, I documented my observations, perceptions, and dominant themes. An audit trail was maintained to track how data were collected, analysed, and interpreted (cf. Cypress, 2017). Also captured were challenges encountered and strategies used to ensure that the research methods used were aligned with the research ethics of the university and responsive to *ubuntu* research ethics.

To triangulate the data, a video was made to summarise the findings to participants (Appendix L). This was done to enable participants to validate findings. By seeking participants' feedback, I ensured that I was accurate in my portrayal of their reality (Buch & Staller, 2014), and also pursued interpretivism's subjective and *ubuntu's* relational epistemological bases that position participants as co-creators of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). Eleven participants reacted to the video by sending voice notes to provide their thoughts. All expressed their satisfaction with the findings and appreciation that I shared the findings with them, with one person requesting me to share the dissertation with her, noting: "*The devil is the detail, you know!* [giggles]" ([Mpumi] via WhatsApp voice note, 15.08.22). Ruvarashe also reiterated some emergent themes from the analysis: "We must work twice as hard, be resilient and build our own ladders", as seen in Figure 5.2.

**Figure 5.2**

*Feedback from a Participant*



*Note:* Screenshot of an email received from one of the participants. Own work.

### 5.3.9 Reporting

In line with qualitative research methods and the *ubuntu* research ethic, the study aimed to amplify participants' voices (Charmaz, 2017; Seehawer, 2018). Extracts from interviews are quoted verbatim to support the findings. No grammatical errors were corrected. However, for further elucidation and nuance, observations are included in square brackets.

## 5.4 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Findings are presented at two levels. The first section focuses on how participants' jobs and work experience shaped their identities, which presents a useful basis for the identity work strategies discussed in the second section. The identity work strategies employed, discussed in the second section, are categorised into: i) *sustaining identities* (maintaining identities), ii) *divesting identities* (discarding identities), and iii) *counterattacking negative behaviour* (reaction in dealing with the negative behaviour of colleagues).

### 5.4.1 Work as identity shaping

The early recruits into the mining industry indicated that, in principle, the mines were ready to embrace women into production, but this was not the case in practice, as they had experienced resistance. Participants recounted how difficult their early days in their jobs had been:

*They [men] believe that this is their place. It's a man's world; what are you [women] doing here? ...they believe a woman can't lead them, which is something that is gradually changing (Olwethu, 30, production supervisor).*

One of the early recruits at the mine shared the following:

*We [women] were treated awkwardly because we're in a male-dominated environment ... when I got there, they didn't even direct me to the foreman that I was transferred to. They said I must take a broom and sweep. And I told them, 'I didn't come here to sweep. I came here to learn electricity, and I need this particular foreman' (Angel, 43, electrical foreman).*

Olwethu's extract shows an inherent assumption that, for her colleagues who are men, leadership is the sole preserve of men. The equation of a leader to a male figure is attributable to the gender bias regarding leadership and followership (Braun et al., 2017). Manyonganise (2015) argues that there are elements of patriarchy within the concept of *ubuntu*, such that men usually have a higher status than women in the socio-political structure of society. This type of orientation could account for how

colleagues who are men perceive their women colleagues. On the other hand, Angel's extract highlights the in-group–out-group dynamics based on the stereotypical roles men expect women to undertake in the workplace, stemming from women being perceived as ill-equipped for certain roles (Heilman, 2012). Being told to pick a broom and sweep also indicates the hostile sexism women have to contend with, at least, in their early years in a male-dominated environment. These interactions and experiences depict men's stereotypical notions regarding women's competence.

On the other hand, some colleagues who are men view women colleagues as weak and needing help (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Thando describes how some colleagues who are men relate to her due to their stereotypical ideas about women's abilities:

*...you know, we're girly. So, when you get to the plant, there'll be things like, I want to pick up the toolbox, and a guy is gonna come and want to help you carry the toolbox ... the guys at the plant, they feel like, eish<sup>20</sup>, this one is fragile, [chuckles] but they give you a chance* (Thando, 32, semi-skilled electrician).

Thando's extract reveals that women experience benevolent sexism in the workplace. It could be argued that men's inclination to help women may be driven by the solidarity spirit associated with the concept of *ubuntu*, as "Africans, from early childhood, are socialised to understand that difficult goals and tasks can only be accomplished collectively" (Poovan et al., 2006, p. 18). However, since this help is directed at women and not reciprocated by women, the help offered is paternalistic. Paternalistic help and benevolent sexism affect women's self-efficacy, negatively impacting their career advancement (Jones et al., 2014). In sections 5.4.2.1 and 5.4.2.2, women show how they reject the association of fragility with their identities as women. From the evaluative perspective of positive identity development, the perception of being fragile by male colleagues is usually tied to a lack of competence. This perception can affect the individual's sense of self-worth (individual identity), create an unequal power relation and working dynamic between colleagues (relational identity), and contribute to how women are generally perceived in the workplace (collective identity).

Others experienced double dominance stemming from gender and race, as captured in Box 5.1. Due to South Africa's unique social and historical context, participants described, in exasperation, white

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<sup>20</sup> An exclamation to express a range of emotions including surprise, regret, and disapproval.

men's domination in the workplace and what that meant for black women assuming roles to which they hitherto had no access.

### Box 5.1

#### *Verbatim Extracts on Experiences Stemming from Gender and Race*

*The very early days were also quite tough because where I was going was white-dominated. Really felt out of place, and, in my level, I was the only black female who was working there ... you do feel like an outsider. You do feel like you do not belong. And when people are there, it's like, 'Who are you? And what do you want?' Like, OK, what's going on? But my integration, what made it simpler and easier was [pauses], you know, in the mines, when you're a woman, you need to have one man — and if he's white, even better — who believes in you, because the integration becomes easy (Belle, 35, safety superintendent).*

*At the shaft, I met these white guys who used to tell me that I found them there and I'm going to leave them there, and I'm going to do things their way (Ruvarashe, 47, mechanical foreman).*

*After I qualified, they sabotaged me ... it was like they wanted to push me out. They were thinking I am here to take their job ... and when I started solving the problem, they were looking at me, like, 'We want to see if she's gonna be able to do it' ... because I didn't want to take that nonsense, they sent me to the shaft that classified as the most racist shaft. They sent me there just to test the waters if the women will cope (Angel, 43, electrical foreman).*

Beyond the double dominance from the intersection of race and gender, Belle's extract in Box 5.1 touches on other themes: women's authority and the sponsorship of a majoritarian. As highlighted earlier, women's authority in male-dominated jobs is not valued equal to that of men (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Wright, 2016b). Belle's extract shows that for a woman's authority to be respected, having a sponsor is ideal. Sponsors are usually members of the majoritarian (usually with influence) who ensure that their protégés are valued and considered for career-enhancing opportunities. With sponsorship, women can assert their authority and advance their careers (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010; Warren, Bordoloi, & Warren, 2021). Belle acknowledged the impact of the sponsor's support on her confidence in her abilities and her interaction with colleagues, which affirms that becoming minor does not always imply severing all association with the majoritarian (Barlott et al., 2017).

Moreover, women's multiple identities regarding age, dominant stereotypically 'feminine' attributes and behaviours, educational level, gender, physique, and stature shape their interactions in the workplace. Sandra described how the intersection of multiple identities shaped her entrance into the mining industry:

*When I started as a graduate, coming into the work environment, it was hard, it was tough. The first thing is because I'm a woman. I was still very young, looking very small [chuckles], so that was the first judgement... 'She's a woman, she's small, she's young, can she do it?' ...the mine overseer at the time was very reluctant to give me a crew (Sandra, 34, mine overseer).*

Sandra's extract reveals how certain identities are perceived. One of the challenges of *ubuntu* is that leadership and the accompanying respect are associated with older individuals (Mangaliso, 2001). This principle makes it difficult for young people to lead a group with older members. Similarly, older employees may find it inappropriate to be instructed by a young person. Mangaliso (2001) correctly points out that this perception of leadership is even more difficult in "an environment with highly structured tasks, where compliance is expected without question and the leader is required to be directive" (p. 29). Sandra's extract shows that she did not exhibit the ideal image of a worker in the mining industry, and was therefore perceived as incompetent. She further narrated how she has been described as 'soft', based on her personality and style of interacting with colleagues:

*That's one of the things I was judged based on. They'd say, 'But you are soft.' What is the meaning of soft? Talking to people right is being soft? Treating people with respect, that is what is called 'soft' in our industry. And I wish that would change and just allow us to be the way we are, to practice what we believe in freely, free of judgment. Because I don't say the F-word the whole day, then you think I am soft. It cannot [stresses] be that I am soft. It just means I have a different view to life, a different belief—about the way I interact with people (Sandra, 34, mine overseer).*

Sandra's extracts illustrate a person who is judged based on multiple minority identities — a graduate, a woman, physically small, young, and polite — in a working environment where employees have traditionally not pursued an education at the university level, where roles are occupied by men who are physically well-built and brash in their relationships with their (junior) colleagues. It can be seen from the extracts that women are expected to build a convincing professional identity that is similar

to that of the majoritarian (men) (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). Implicit in Sandra's extract is her willingness to deterritorialise (severing herself from the culture of the majoritarian) towards reterritorialising (creating new and alternative pathways of being) (Barlott et al., 2017). These experiences, therefore, shape how women define themselves and regulate their identities in the workplace.

#### 5.4.2 Identity work strategies

Working in a male-dominated workplace creates both overt and subtle tensions for women, tensions they deal with both interpersonally (Section 5.4.2.3) in dealing with negative acts, but mainly intrapersonally, through identity work. This section highlights, not just these identity work strategies, but also how these intrapersonal tactics impact the system women have entered, as a male-dominated workplace is a molar system that marginalises women. In their identity work, they create lines of flight, whereby they not only adapt to the system, but also change the system in the process.

A range of identity work strategies was employed in structuring their identities and dealing with identity tension, as shown in Table 5.3. The table shows three overarching strategies: sustaining identities, divesting identities, and counterattacking negative behaviour.

**Table 5.3**

#### *Summary of Themes – Identity Work Strategies*

Themes	Codes <sup>21</sup>
Sustaining identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirming</li> <li>• Associating</li> <li>• Embracing</li> <li>• Integrating</li> </ul>
Divesting identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting</li> <li>• Dissociating</li> <li>• Separating</li> <li>• Suppressing</li> </ul>
Counterattacking negative behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding</li> <li>• Resisting</li> </ul>

Note: Compiled by author.

<sup>21</sup> These codes are pattern codes

Code labels for the identity work strategies were adapted from previous research, as the research process had a top-down element that allowed for the integration of existing categories while allowing for new identity tactics or forms to emerge.

Furthermore, the identity strategies are expressed through three modes, i.e., behavioural (actions), cognitive (thoughts), and relational, as shown in Figure 5.3. These strategies confirm that identity work can be done at the intrapersonal level (usually cognitive and behavioural) or the interpersonal level (usually behavioural and relational).

**Figure 5.3**

*Identity Work Strategies and Modes*

		◊ IWM-Behavioural ① 16	◊ IWM-Cognitive ① 24	◊ IWM-Relational ① 23
◊ IWS-Adopting	① 2	1	0	1
◊ IWS-Affirming	① 28	13	11	4
◊ IWS-Associating	① 7	0	0	7
◊ IWS-Avoiding	① 4	0	0	4
◊ IWS-Dissociating	① 5	0	0	5
◊ IWS-Embracing	① 3	0	3	0
◊ IWS-Integrating	① 2	0	1	1
◊ IWS-Resisting	① 2	0	1	1
◊ IWS-Separating	① 5	2	3	0
◊ IWS-Suppressing	① 2	0	2	0

*Note:* Photo of identity work strategies and modes in ATLAS.ti. Own work

#### **5.4.2.1 Sustaining identities**

*Sustaining identities* broadly refers to strategies individuals employ in maintaining parts of their identities. As shown in Box 5.2, participants sustain their identities by affirming and asserting their legitimacy as employees unequivocally, having positive working relations with other women colleagues, embracing and staying true to who they are, and drawing on other non-work identities to build better relations in the workplace.

**Box 5.2***Verbatim Extracts on Identity – sustaining Strategies***Affirming:**

*You just have to work ten times harder than men. So, there's no advantage for you. ...you always have to prove yourself, that you can. You can do what a man can do (Thando, 32, semi-skilled electrician).*

**Associating:**

*I make it a point, if one of the ladies, even if it's a junior to me, I hear has gone a step up [pauses], again, because we are few, you will know who is who and what happened, I will go to them personally and say to them, 'Well done, you are doing well, and, what you're doing, you're not doing for yourself, you're doing for all of us as women. So, where you are going now, please make us proud.' I always do that to every lady that I see who's moving forward. And I'm doing it because I need them to have the mentality that 'There are others behind me who are clapping for me, even if I'm not getting the encouragement from the colleagues I have around me', because they're going to male-dominated places... (Olwethu, 30, production supervisor).*

**Embracing:**

*My body is very petite ... and my structure is really feminine, so even if I had tried to be a bit masculine, I knew, for me, that was not right. And wouldn't work for me as a person, who I am, how I am, you know, body-wise, stature-wise... So, I've never felt the need to lose my femininity. When I go out from underground, literally, I will put on my high heels ... the little things, putting on lipstick ... just to kill the stigma... So, a shift of 700 people, I was the only lady. In that environment, you really want to stand out ... 'I'm a woman, and I'm not a woman in a male environment trying to be a male, I am a woman, and I'm here in the capacity of a woman...' If I see someone is really forcing themselves to go out of their way to be masculine, natural masculinity on a woman is fine, but don't over-exert it... We are not coming in as who we are; we are letting them know that we don't have space here. We don't belong here. Therefore, we will be under your shadow. That, for me, is not okay, and it's not something that I would do (Mpumi, 30, production supervisor).*



Integrating:

*Being a Christian, being a pastor, my whole life [pauses], my whole belief is based on the Bible. Everything [stresses] is biblical and has to be Christ-like. I have to ask myself, 'What would Jesus Christ do? What would He have done in a situation like this?' I think that is one thing that keeps me grounded, because I am surrounded by diversity at work (Naledi, 34, mine overseer).*

From the extracts in Box 5.2, it is clear that the participants assert their legitimacy in the workplace, despite their minority status(es). The phrase 'We're here, and we're here to stay' was often expressed, which was triggered by women's awareness of their minority status and how their competence is perceived compared to that of their colleagues who are men. Despite these words of affirmation, participants expressed the need to work more than expected and exceed targets to demonstrate and prove their competence:

*I had to work twice as hard just to show people that a woman can do it (Hope, 37, electrical foreman).*

There seems to be a deliberate effort to build positive identities by proving competence and be regarded favourably by the self and others – aligned with the evaluative perspective (Dutton et al., 2010). The need to prove competence is done at the individual level. At the interpersonal level, women did not want to trigger the emotions of pity or sympathy from their colleagues who are men (Fiske et al., 2002), and therefore exhibited traits of independence, as shown in Ruvarashe's extract. Also implicit in Ruvarashe's extract is a seemingly anti-*ubuntu* stance, where she does not subscribe to the communal approach to difficult tasks. To her and other participants, sympathy triggers the need to protect or offer paternalistic support, which Jones et al. (2014) argue is detrimental to women's career advancement.

*I didn't want them [men] to do anything for me. So, I always wanted to do things myself, and I would ask only when I don't understand (Ruvarashe, 47, mechanical foreman).*

Despite not wanting to trigger paternalistic support, participants also acknowledge how the sponsorship of a (senior) male colleague ensures that they (women) are given the due recognition for their authority and competence.

*“Where I was working, it was white-dominated and I really felt out of place. Because in my level, I was the only black female... So you do feel like an outsider. You do feel like, [pauses], like [pauses] you do not belong...but I think that what made my integration simpler and easier was, you know, in the mine, when you're a woman, you need to have one man, and if he is white, even better, [stresses] who believes in you, because then the integration becomes easy”* (Belle, 35, safety superintendent).

Belle’s extract reflects Cruise’s assertion “[N]ot only was mining an all-male preserve, but also in South Africa the upper echelon of mining was an ‘all-white’ bastion” (2011, p. 217) remains true even now. Having a sponsor, usually members of the majoritarian (usually with influence), ensure that their protégés are valued and considered for career-enhancing opportunities. With sponsorship, women can assert their authority and advance their careers (Ibarra et al., 2010; Warren et al., 2021). Belle, for example, acknowledged the impact of the sponsor’s support on her confidence in her abilities and her interaction with colleagues, which affirms that becoming minor does not always imply severing all association with the majoritarian (Barlott et al., 2017).

Additionally, participants used virtues and character strengths related to bravery, confidence, determination, independence, perseverance, not being easily intimidated, resilience, and strength to work through the legitimacy challenges they faced, as shown in Belle’s extracts. The strategy of building these virtues and character strengths allows individuals to construct positive work identities – aligned with the virtue perspective (Dutton et al., 2010). These words are significant in the context of this study as they are aligned with behaviours stereotypically associated with men (Heilman, 2012).

*I actually had to create my own way at work... When I grew confident, and I knew the systems, and I knew the people, I found my own voice. I made myself do what I can do. So, the things that I did caused me the respect that I have now and the authority that I have now. That I had to do myself... Now, I don’t need a shadow behind me to say... I’ve proven myself, so that is the easier path, because now I know the systems, I’m entrenched, the people know me, they know what I have to offer* (Belle, 35, safety superintendent).

The strategies evident in these extracts also indicate that women know that masculine behaviours in such working contexts are more valued and rewarded (Cardador, Hill, & Salles, 2022). These strategies also show how members of minority groups reterritorialise by mirroring some behaviours associated with the majoritarian to be considered competent (Barlott et al., 2017).

Regarding workplace relationships, clear distinctions were drawn between women workers and both their colleagues who are men and with their women colleagues. Few participants expressed satisfaction with their working relationship with their women counterparts. Due to the limited number of women in the environment, a number of participants were the only or among few women in their unit, and therefore had limited interaction with other women colleagues.

Participants described instances where other women colleagues had been of great support, as shown in Louisa's extract:

*Fortunately, there's only the two of us, as female colleagues, in our department, the mechanical department. But, really, she has been great with me, because she's been here longer; I found her here. And she's been very good. She showed me a lot of things that I didn't know, especially the administration part, because I didn't know a lot, and even my computer skills was so low [giggles]. She showed me a lot of things. Almost everything that I know now, she taught me. And we get along very nice (Louisa, 45, technical trainer).*

Women create positive and empowering connections across molar lines and define themselves both in connection with, but also as different from, both the majoritarian and minoritarian others. They craft fluid, hard-to-pin-down identities as they reject fitting into the pressures of molar lines.

Previous studies have shown that, due to the seeming pressure to conform to the masculine culture, women in senior positions tend to distance themselves and not show solidarity with other women (Cardador et al., 2022; Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). Although Olwethu did not have strong connections with her women colleagues, she explained how she supported them, as captured in Box 5.2. Her support reflects the *ubuntu* value of survival — the individual is socialised “to survive through ‘brotherly’ care and not individual self-reliance” (Poovan et al., 2006, p. 18). Her extract shows her awareness of the impact of one woman's performance on the broader collective, as her career growth seems to have been invariably tied to the success of other women, which shows how women are rewarded or punished based on the performance of one woman.

Being aware of her gender identity as a woman in the workplace, Mpumi was the only participant who admitted to embracing her feminine identity in the workplace, as shown in Box 5.2. She asserted that she “*has never felt the need to lose her femininity*” in the workplace, suggesting her rejection of molar lines. Mpumi also pointed out how her physique does not align with the majoritarian; therefore, any

attempt to pursue molar lines would be futile. Mpumi reaffirmed her agency, refusing to pursue molar lines, and claimed her legitimate space in the company. Her extract indicates one going through the process of becoming, as she recognises the need to deterritorialise and reterritorialise by rejecting the need to adopt some majoritarian identities while embracing the stigmatisable elements of her feminine identity.

Mpumi was the only one who pushed this line of flight further by redefining femininity, starting from her embodied gendered self. Other women did it too, but they did it by owning attributes that are normally rejected, while still acting as a woman. This is exemplified by: *“I work hard to prove myself”* and *“I find my own way”*. They do not reject their feminine identity; rather, the identity is repositioned. Mpumi’s stance contrasts with literature that posits that women reject or minimise their femininity (Gill et al., 2008), as minimising stigmatisable identities is a typical identity work strategy for individuals bearing minority identities (Fernando et al., 2020). The redefinition of femininity in the workplace can be seen as the individual’s approach to building positive identities by developing a sense of self that is indicative of growth over time – mirroring the (progressive) developmental perspective (Dutton et al., 2010).

Lastly, on sustaining identities, participants noted drawing on other identities in dealing with workplace challenges, such as their language dexterity and religious values. Ruvarashe, for example, capitalises on her fluency in seven languages to form new and dynamic associations, which facilitates a cordial working relationship with colleagues.

*I’m Sestwana<sup>22</sup>, neh<sup>23</sup>, and there’s this guy from Mozambique; he cannot speak English, he can’t speak Afrikaans. He speaks Tswana; it is very little. He can only speak Fanakalo<sup>24</sup>, Shangaan, and Portuguese, and here I am, I have to communicate with this guy about safety issues at work, give him instructions, and try to find a way of addressing him. And then you see the smile on his face that, ‘At least I’m being recognised. Somebody is accommodating me. She’s even trying to learn my language so that we can communicate together.’ That, for me, brings me joy, to see that. Because, at the end of the day, this guy won’t get injured, because, already, I tried to explain the hazards to him in the language that he understands. And then*

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<sup>22</sup> A person from the Tswana ethnic group

<sup>23</sup> A filler word similar to ‘right?’ in English

<sup>24</sup> A pidgin language that draws on mainly Zulu, English, and Afrikaans, and mainly used in the mining industry (Mesthrie, 2019)

*even these white guys, I speak Afrikaans with them if I realised that their English is not the one that we can communicate in. So, they feel accommodated, and then I get respect. Most of them are old, and I get their respect. I also show them respect (Ruvarashe, 47, mechanical foreman).*

Ruvarashe is able to make rhizomatic connections through language. Ruvarashe's actions lend support to Mangaliso et al.'s (2018) assertion that, "[I]n the African worldview, language and the context within which communication takes place are essential foundation blocks for establishing a sense of community" (p. 7). What her language proficiency does goes beyond creating a harmonious working relationship with her colleagues. Her acknowledgement of her colleagues' humanity through language helps mediate the age–respect dynamic in the workplace. From her extract, Ruvarashe build linkages between her fluency in language to facilitate cordial workplace relationship, and thus her work identity becomes positive as these identities are complementary (Dutton et al., 2010).

In sustaining their identities, women create lines of flight by reterritorialising masculine attributes that are valued by linking them to overtly feminine behaviours and identities. One can be brave on heels (constant repetition of not wanting to give up being feminine), which is a clever way to re-appropriate gendered attributes stereotypically associated with power-holders.

#### **5.4.2.2 Divesting identities**

Despite the inclination towards sustaining identities, participants did indicate divesting some parts of their identities by adopting masculine behaviours, dissociating themselves from women colleagues, drawing clear lines between their work- and non-work identities, and deliberately suppressing their femininity. As is clear from the quotes in Box 5.3, strategies such as adopting and dissociating reflect interpersonal identity work, as these centre on behaviours and relations. On the other hand, separating and suppressing reflect intrapersonal identity work, because these reflect cognitive-attitudinal aspects.

**Box 5.3***Verbatim Extracts on Identity-divesting Strategies*

Adopting:

*And I've seen my colleagues who are women, neh, they have now adopted to this type of culture of swearing, of being rough when you speak and all those kinds of things (Sandra' 34, mine overseer).*

Dissociating:

*I don't have that good relationship [with women], but we greet each other. And we talk there and there. I'm not good in a friend relationship, because I'm not eh [hesitates], eish [pauses], the girls have the chaos (Sharny, 28, weighbridge assistant).*

Separating:

*If I am at work, I'm at work. I have to work. I leave my personal stuff at home. When I get to work, I just work (Nosipho, 29, semi-skilled electrician).*

Suppressing:

*I had to keep that woman in me so they can't say, 'Hey! We knew it! It's a woman, and she can't lead' (Lovelace, 27, weighbridge operator).*

Due to the dominance of masculine behaviours in the workplace, the culture tends to be masculine and brash (Madikizela & Haupt, 2010). Although none of the participants admitted to masculinising to fit in, participants complained about how some women colleagues had adopted some typically masculine behaviours, as exemplified in Sandra's extract in Box 5.3. This positioning is similar to how some participants in Gill et al.'s (2008) study positioned themselves as 'one of the blokes' to feel a sense of belonging. Exhibiting stereotypically feminine behaviours, such as being emotionally sensitive, attracts criticism of being 'soft', as alluded to by some participants. Women are usually pressured to maintain molar lines, rather than challenge them (Cardador et al., 2022). Mirroring the behaviours of the dominant may yield desirable outcomes, as women may be perceived as competent (McCluney, Durkee, Smith, Robotham, & Lee, 2021) by their colleagues who are men. However, Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) caution that "[W]omen need to be aware of the danger of falling into the trap of adopting male traits and characteristics, rather than sticking to their own personal styles" (p. 54).

The affiliative choices of women were also explored. Some participants expressed their preference for working with colleagues who are men, as exemplified in Sharny's extract:

*I was afraid of working with men because it was my first time working, but they treat me well... I wasn't used to [working with men]... I have friends now. They are four men [emphasises] friends [emphasises], like friends [emphasises]. Yeah, it is good now. It's like uncles and fathers; it's nice... I don't have that good relationship [with women], but we greet each other. And we talk there and there. I'm not good in a friend relationship because I'm not, eh [hesitates], eish [pauses], the girls have the chaos (Sharny, 28, weighbridge assistant).*

These affiliative choices can be seen as a mechanism of resistance to the pressure to conform to molar lines. While previous authors have also pointed out the reluctance of women to work with other women in identity-threatening environments such as male-dominated industries (Braun et al., 2017; Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011), the present study contends that this is part of the deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation strategies of the minor. For women, the development of positive identity is not only a matter of creating a sense of self-worth at the individual level, but they "also must contend with the value attached to the social categories to which they belong" (Lucas, 2011, p. 357).

From the participants' descriptions, the workplace interaction among women did not appear as cordial as with men. Despite negative experiences with their colleagues who are men, participants appeared more comfortable working with them than their women colleagues. Many participants were the only or among the few women in their unit, with limited interaction with other women colleagues. In describing their working relationships with their colleagues who are men, many described these as 'great', and that men are 'cool' to work with. Participants also highlighted how their colleagues who are men provide and share learning and career-enhancing opportunities.

However, in assessing their working relationship with their women colleagues, pauses in their responses were longer, and the language used to express collective identity as women changed from 'we' to 'they.' Sentiments about the working relationship among women were generally not positive, with participants noting 'backstabbing', 'causing chaos', 'gossiping', 'having catfights', and 'undermining each other'. Women who engage in such attitudes and behaviours in same-sex workplace relationships only confirm the notion that success and femininity are incompatible (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). Olwethu, however, opines that these attitudes are attributable to the

competition for the limited number of high-level opportunities available in the workplace, similar to why the Queen Bee phenomenon occurs in organisations (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011).

Whether the negative values associated with women as a social category in the workplace are perceived or real, imposed by the major or minor (Lucas, 2011), refusing to 'band together' has both positive and negative consequences for women. This refusal could be viewed as a way of developing positive identities such that one differentiates themselves from the negatives associated with the collective identity (in this case, women) and project their personal identity tends to highlight competence – in line with the balanced structural perspective (Dutton et al., 2010). However, there is a lost opportunity to form a support network to collectively advocate on issues of importance to women in the workplace. They also run the risk of remaining isolated individuals who will have less influence in changing the system, and risk becoming 'extinct'. Women need to recalibrate their minority status as a source of support and healthy competition, and not territorialise and take pride in being the only woman amongst the men. Adjusting one's association with a group, whether attaching or dissociating, is shaped by the dominant narrative that defines the group (Johnstone et al., 2016; Kreiner et al., 2006).

Furthermore, participants indicated preferring to compartmentalise their work and non-work identities, especially their identities as mothers. They seemed to have drawn clear boundaries between work and home, to allow them to give their maximum attention at work or home as required, as shown in Naledi's extract. This finding is consistent with previous research that found that women are inclined towards drawing a clear line between work and home (Cahusac & Kanji, 2014; Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). The participants indicated that, through behavioural modes, they draw boundaries and strive to achieve limited interaction between their work duties and family duties, as in the case of Nosipho (Box 5.3). Participants indicated that they sought this separation at the personal level, particularly within the work environment. This is a way of building positive identities – complementary structural perspective – such that minimised personal identities facilitate the execution of work-related tasks (Dutton et al., 2010).

*You try and do as much as you can, so that, when you're at home, you're not getting phone calls, SMSs, and e-mails that you must respond to about work. And I try not to [pauses], as much as I can, not to bring work home, because, at the end of the day, I must have a balance (Naledi, 34, mine overseer).*



Participants preferred to pursue paid employment while undertaking their duties as parents (in some instances, single parents) and wives. It was apparent from the narratives that, although tough, motherhood is not constrictive. In the case of single mothers, work was considered non-negotiable as the key to their survival and that of their dependants. Participants rather sought a work–home balance, attempting to ensure that one was not elevated to the detriment of the other. This stance contributes somewhat to Mishra’s (2013) argument that women in many societies in the Global South do not view motherhood as constrictive, nor do they view their role at the household level as secondary.

Although the participants were inclined to compartmentalise their identities in the workplace, a permeable boundary was evident regarding their skills and the demands at the household level. As (semi)skilled professionals, participants did not hesitate to assume their professional identities and apply their knowledge and skills at home, as shown in Louisa’s extract:

*The fitting trade, for me, is something that I enjoy ... there’s a lot of things that I am doing at home that I couldn’t be doing if I didn’t do this trade. ...I can handle a drill, a cutting torch, I can handle almost everything — alone [stresses]. I don’t hire people to do a job for me at home, unless it’s totally different from what I am doing. Even my husband knows, if there’s a broken door or window—or something, he knows I am going to fix it (Louisa, 45, technical trainer).*

The framing used in describing how they employ their work-related skills at the household level can be viewed through the virtue and evaluative perspective. Women display virtuous character strengths such as strength and bravery – virtue perspective; and exhibit competencies that differentiate them with respect to significant others in their lives – evaluative perspective (Dutton et al., 2010; Lucas, 2011). Similar to finding in Lucas (2011), blue-collar workers construct positive identities by interpreting and positioning their jobs as dignified, contrary to the stereotypical portrayal of their work as dirty, low-status, and low-paid jobs, women develop positive work identities by positioning themselves as strong and capable in a way to counter the perception of fragility. Participants confirmed that the affirmation received from family contributes to building their self-efficacy.

The spillover of work identities to the home setting was welcomed insofar as it is not work carried home but work-related skills that are beneficial to the household. Participants took pride in undertaking tasks that men ordinarily perform in the household. The pride associated with the job

aligns with the liberating aspect of *ubuntu*, as women are valued for their role in sustaining and organising the home and community (Manyonganise, 2015). Besides their skills being cost-saving to their families, participants stated that applying work-related skills at home gives their families insights into their jobs.

Similar to identity compartmentalisation was the suppression of some parts of their identities, particularly gender identities, as a way of toning down a 'disfavoured identity' at work (Fernando et al., 2020). For such women, work identities are more salient than gender identities, as the workplace is a professional space, while gender identities can be inhibiting. These suppression efforts are proactively employed in quelling others' legitimacy- and capability concerns. This strategy demonstrates an effort to sway attention from gender identities to work identities, emphasising their professional competence. This strategy allows individuals to derive self-esteem and be regarded positively by others – which aligns with the evaluative perspective (Dutton et al., 2010).

*I make sure that I do my best in my job so that I don't feel like I am a woman, but I feel like I'm the production supervisor. Same as the next person who's sitting next to me (Olwethu, 30, production supervisor).*

*Once I enter the gates, I consider myself as a worker, not as a female, but as a worker (Nosipho, 29, semi-skilled electrician).*

The extracts suggest that the idea of being a woman is incompatible with their professional roles. There seems not to be an interest in drawing synergies between these identities, but rather to consciously elevate their professional identities. Women position themselves as professionals and suppress their gender identities to fit the masculine work culture (Gill et al., 2008) associated with majoritarian values. This identity work strategy shows that becoming minor involves pursuing alternative identities that are not necessarily majoritarian (associated with men) or minoritarian (associated with women).

Participants moderated parts of their feminine identities, especially when their legitimacy was, or was likely to be, threatened. These divesting strategies also allow participants to highlight salient work identities and diminish personal identities. By this, women are pressured to maintain and conform to molar lines for personal gain, reinforcing the credo that to survive and thrive in a 'man's world', you need to act, think, and/or be like a man.

### 5.4.2.3 Counterattacking negative behaviour

Participants indicated that they ignored or appropriated humour to deflect awkward and uncomfortable situations, and used confrontation in dealing with negative behaviour from colleagues. There was a general inclination towards ignoring and not being emotional about negative behaviour.

#### Box 5.4

##### *Verbatim Extracts on Counterattacking Negative Behaviour*

Avoiding:

*I just ignore them ... you mustn't fight back. Just do your job, do what you think it's right (Charity, 42, train driver).*

Resisting:

*You come here as a sweet little girl from the village, and then you come to this environment that you get abused, you get insulted. ...along the way, you need to grow some skin. If you don't, you will be destroyed, that I can tell you (Angel, 44, electrical foreman).*

In dealing with negative behaviour, particularly from colleagues who are men, at the personal level, participants ignore such inappropriate attitudes, as shown by Charity's extract in Box 5.4. Similarly, Sandra uses humour to deflect uncomfortable situations, a typical strategy used by members of minority groups to deal with the stigma attached to their group (Roberts et al., 2014).

*We'll just joke about it. We just brush it off and move on (Sandra, 34, mine overseer).*

The appropriation of humour is usually utilised because minorities tend not to have the power to challenge abuse while needing to stay in the system. Humour has the potential to diffuse tension and make one appear tolerant. However, Wright (2016a) asserts that women deal with such negative behaviour by pretending not to be affected, so as not to grant men the gratification of receiving the expected reaction and confirm the stereotype that women are emotional. Women carry the emotional burden of sexist interactions when they ignore inappropriate behaviour and try to prevent these behaviours from affecting their work performance (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019). Participants highlighted the need to toughen up and not take these negative behaviours to heart. For Naledi, shelving emotions is one useful approach in the workplace. She asserted:

*We [women] are emotional beings, but, most of the time, you have to put your emotions aside. Otherwise, you would crack [stresses] very quickly. This industry is certainly not for the faint-hearted or the weak (Naledi, 34, mine overseer).*

However, in Angel's experience, she had to resist and confront negative behaviour. She recounted an incident where "one of them [men] grabbed me on the butt" upon exiting the cage<sup>25</sup>. In response:

*I threw my bag on the ground and I started swearing ... they were surprised. Where did I get the courage to swear...? Ever since that day, I could go around, do my job freely. If I want to take a nap, I will, and they won't even bother me (Angel, 44, electrical foreman).*

Angel's emotional outburst was received with shock by her colleagues who are men, as they did not expect her to openly rebuke them for inappropriate behaviour. Although this event occurred about two decades ago, her reaction has served her well beyond the day of the incident. Similarly, at the relational level, Naledi admitted that there were instances where confrontation became necessary:

*One thing about me is that I deal with issues head-on. If you are gonna ill-treat me, and I see you are giving gender-based ill-treatment, I deal with you head-on; I ask you, 'What's your issue? What's your problem?' And you'd realise people start feeling embarrassed (Naledi, 34, mine overseer).*

Participants' resistance to inappropriate behaviour deviates from the popular notion that African women are silent victims (Bawa & Adeniyi Ogunyankin, 2018). Participants call out inappropriate behaviour, which indicates their awareness of their power in addressing ill-treatment meted out to them. Open confrontation of negative behaviour does not always threaten peaceful co-existence in the workplace. Rather, in the participants' experiences, confronting negative behaviour improves working relations, although one risks being labelled a difficult co-worker. That notwithstanding, pretending not to be affected by negative behaviour could sustain these negative behaviours and leave women emotionally exhausted (Gill et al., 2008). Inappropriate behaviour need not be countenanced in exchange for being likeable.

The myriad strategies available to individuals allow them to draw on salient strategies in doing identity work. These strategies allow them to deal with identity tension and define who they are in the

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<sup>25</sup> A transport mechanism used in conveying people to and from underground

workplace, for themselves and for others. These strategies appear mutually occurring and, in some instances, an involuntary response to situations.

## 5.5 DISCUSSION

### 5.5.1 Preserving molar lines

In becoming minor, participants are mindful of completely severing themselves from the majoritarian. Their narratives highlight the value of having an ally or sponsor who is a member of the majority in the workplace. Such allies could be gatekeepers to critical resources and opportunities that are usually less accessible to women (Warren et al., 2021). Networking with gatekeepers has been identified as one of the major career-enhancing activities that men take advantage of in the workplace (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2021). It is, therefore, not misplaced if women gravitate towards networks and relationships that support their career progression. The women associate with members of the in-group as a means to achieving career growth.

Despite acknowledging the usefulness of having an ally or sponsor, participants were emphatic about not succumbing to the ill-treatment meted out by some men. The tone and the choice of words (such as *I don't take their nonsense*) communicated their stance and consequent response to inappropriate behaviour exhibited by some men. It must be emphasised that participants' ability to stand against inappropriate behaviour either stemmed from their strong personality or a situation-induced, learned behaviour.

Participants build connections based on their specific needs and interests (Sotirin, 2011), and their career progression is prioritised over gender associations. The working relationship with their colleagues who are men was cordial and characterised by enriching interactions, while interactions with their women colleagues were limited and appeared less cordial. The learning- and career-enhancing opportunities arising from the interactions with colleagues who are men are instrumental in the career upward mobility of participants, as posited by Wright (2016b).

### 5.5.2 Creating lines of flight

The accounts show that women are fully aware of the major–minor and in-group–out-group dynamics in the workplace. Despite their minority status, the affirmative phrase *'we are here, and we are here to stay'* was used repeatedly by several participants, reaffirming their agency and determination to establish their presence and legitimacy in traditionally male-dominated industries and jobs.

Participants highlighted the need to put on a performance (Alves & English, 2018), which usually involves exhibiting behaviours associated with the major. Inasmuch as agency is stereotypically linked to masculine behaviour (Heilman, 2012), women's identity work defines agency differently; they create possible selves and exhibit those that align with their prevailing circumstance – aligned with the adaptive development perspective of positive identity construction (Dutton et al., 2010). For women, exhibiting character strengths enables them to be viewed positively by their male colleagues, but not necessarily portray themselves as members of the in-group (Morgan & Creary, 2011). None of the women admitted to masculinising, like some of their women colleagues, which contrasts findings in literature regarding molar lines being preserved because women actively internalise and exhibit masculine behaviours (Gill et al., 2008; Johnstone et al., 2016).

Women balance between adopting major or owning minor, simultaneously rejecting and/or differentiating from elements of both. They also vacillate between covering stigmatisable identities, such as being a woman, while emphasising less threatening identities, such as professional identities (Fernando et al., 2020; Gill et al., 2008; McCluney et al., 2021). Therefore, the identity work processes of these women do not conform to a 'zero sum', i.e., either strictly pursuing molar lines or molecular lines.

Contrary to the popular perception that African women are powerless and docile, participants are aware of their power in reducing the incidence of discrimination and marginalisation in the workplace, whether they choose to ignore it, use humour, or openly rebuke inappropriate behaviour. This strategy confirms *ubuntu's* liberating and oppressive nature (Manyonganise, 2015). Although the participants acknowledge and value the instrumental support they receive from their colleagues who are men, they do not appreciate paternalistic support. Similar to the negative consequences of paternalistic support identified by previous authors (Glick et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2014), Angel pointed out:

*...should you get special treatment, you become like the wife of a rich man, a trophy wife, and you don't learn as much (Angel, 43, electrical foreman).*

To overcome this type of paternalistic support, the participants devised less physically demanding approaches to work while achieving the same outputs. Participants consider these 'smart' approaches more sustainable and user-friendly, especially as one ages.

*"... Women, we are not as strong as men. So, when you are given a task, [pauses], you know, men do it a certain way; obviously, men will use strength. Find a way to do that job safely, perfectly, and not use more strength. Because, as you grow, you lose that toughness. I don't think I'm as tough as I used to be 20 years ago. That's why I've got tricks. Sometimes they ask me, 'how do you do it?' ... like when we are installing the overhead lines, one electrician asked me, he's taller than me, he's got muscle, he asked me, 'how can you still pick this up? when we as men struggle to pick it up?' I told him, 'I do not use strength, I use a technique that I learned for myself' (Angel, 43, electrical foreman)*

In Angel's extract, she does not merely align with how tasks in her role are to be executed based on how it has been defined by the major. She challenges the notion of the ideal image of a worker as well as the physicality associated with their roles. There is also a re-definition of processes which is more efficient and user-friendly. By challenging the status quo, she experiences admiration from her male colleagues and pride at the personal level, which contributes to the development of positive identities. This strategy exemplifies how minoritarians create molecular lines and reterritorialise by creating new pathways that support their being (Barlott et al., 2017).

In summary, examining the identity work of women in blue-collars roles in male-dominated industries within a Global South context shows that identity work is a complex process of becoming, unbecoming, and re-becoming (Barlott et al., 2017; Haeruddin et al., 2020) towards developing positive identities. For these women, identity work is a continuous process of becoming — a kaleidoscope of processes that present fluid, non-linear, and adaptable strategies to make new pathways and alternatives. The processes are broadly categorised as sustaining identities, divesting identities, and counterattacking negative behaviour. These broad categories indicate that participants do not entirely reject minor identities (by creating lines of flight) or entirely adopt those of the major (preserving molar lines).

The study also challenges the assumption that women in South Africa and, by extension, the Global South are "passive and conform to their roles as prescribed by ... socio-cultural pressures" (Haeruddin et al., 2020, p. 268). However, the present study shows that women are agentic actors who are not covered by limiting labels, stigmatisation, and discrimination associated with working in male-dominated spaces. Instead, they challenge stereotypical views about women's abilities. Beyond resolving identity tensions, this study presents women's identity work as agency in the form of mastery over one's identity, despite being in the minority.

## 5.6 IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings offer some theoretical and practical implications that can guide praxis and research on human resources management, organisational behaviour, and individual agency.

### 5.6.1 Theoretical implications

Identity scholarship is expanding to include empirical evidence of identity processes from different contexts (Barnard, 2019). The study contributes to identity work literature by providing evidence from an underrepresented population: women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries. Theories of identity work and management have often focused on respondents in managerial roles in the Global North, creating a single narrative of what identity work is. Guided by Adichie's (2009) caution about creating a single story: "Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (sec. 9.27), the present study examined the case of an underrepresented population in a Global South context to provide alternative insights into identity work. Similarly, from a postcolonial perspective, the study provides a voiceless population with a voice and representation. The study does not merely position them as research participants, but as active contributors to knowledge, whose voices are amplified (cf. Mishra, 2013; Spivak, 1988) throughout the study.

Intending to provide context-sensitive evidence, the study used a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame. Using the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, rhizome, and discourses on territorialisation and the concept of *ubuntu*, the study accommodates the relational nature of identity within a study context that previous researchers have largely overlooked. The concepts of rhizome and minor provide a multifaceted and context-sensitive approach to theorising identity work, and also reveal how the identity work process is constantly performed through connecting and distancing (paralleling Deleuze's identity-difference position). Also, the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation were not only useful in exploring the identity work process and career progression of women in blue-collar roles, but also in linking this identity work to the larger cultural and structural changes in male-dominated industries. The chosen theoretical anchoring of this study provides relevant insights into the link between the identity work of the minor and social changes.

The study contributes to positive identity scholarship by confirming the basis for positivity of identity (Dutton et al., 2010), as seen in how women drew on them to develop positive identities in the workplace. A critical contribution, however, is how women's identity work challenges the stereotypical image of the ideal worker, established norms, and pushes the boundaries of inclusion, enabling them to develop positive identities in the workplace. Positive development can also involve



“jostling the reins of the majority identity in order to investigate new possibilities, new ways of becoming that are no longer bound to the dominant molar lines” (May, 2005, p. 150).

The study also confirms that the identity work process resembles a rhizome. The women’s heterogeneous experiences in the workplace affirm that no single identity work strategy is the ticket to developing positive identities. The identity work process is fluid and constantly moving through connections and disconnections. In creating lines of flight to reterritorialise a masculine domain, not just of working, but also of being (i.e., attributes associated with men as ideals for success in the workplace, following Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruence theory), women perform fluid and complex movements. These movements comprise both instances when they do not break away from the majoritarian ideals, but instead try to either follow or appropriate them, and instances when they do not (completely) reject their identities as minorities. Instead, through connection and identification, complemented by disconnecting and differentiating, they actualise the field of the virtually possible: carving out space for themselves to exist in this environment, not just as copycats of men, nor as stereotypical women, but as women who ‘are here to stay’.

### **5.6.2 Practical implications: Organisational level**

First, organisations should challenge the status quo (including processes and resources) and explore the extent to which these constitute systemic barriers to women's entry and upward career mobility. If organisations do not mitigate implicit and systemic biases in recruitment and career mobility procedures (Cox & Lancefield, 2021), organisational targets and policy statements to attract more women could remain mere aspirations. Allowing organisational imagination in redesigning processes by changing the focus from process-driven to output-driven will present a more friendly threshold for women. Doing so will create a win-win situation: more women talents could be attracted, retained, and promoted while organisations become more agile and innovative (Cox & Lancefield, 2021). If organisations aspire to have more employee diversity, the status quo cannot remain. Attracting and fostering diversity implies structural and process changes, exemplified by the small, individual-level changes the participants made in their jobs to accommodate their way of working and abilities. By redefining an organisational culture that validates and promotes masculine values (Martin & Barnard, 2013), systemic conditions that inhibit women’s upward career mobility could be resolved and testify to the organisation’s policy commitment to increasing women’s participation.

Second, workplace authenticity should be encouraged (Cha et al., 2016; Kock, 2020). The evidence in the present study suggests that behaviours stereotypically associated with women (for example, being

called 'soft' because one is not brash with colleagues) usually do not have a place in the workplace. It is important to highlight, however, that authenticity in the workplace is:

*...a double-edged sword: Despite its potential benefits, self-disclosure can backfire if it's hastily conceived, poorly timed, or inconsistent with cultural or organizational norms — hurting your reputation, alienating employees, fostering distrust, and hindering teamwork (Rosh & Offermann, 2013, para. 2).*

As such, unfiltered authenticity is not encouraged, but rather authenticity that has relevance in the workplace and enables one to build trust with colleagues. McPherson (2021) contends that "there is no 'work self'" (para. 5); therefore, non-work identities will always permeate the workplace. To the extent that these non-work identities (personality, values, and philosophies) expressed are not detrimental to participants, their colleagues, and organisations, individuals should be encouraged to draw on such identities to enhance their workplace identities.

### **5.6.3 Practical implications: Interpersonal level**

At the interpersonal level, the social values of *ubuntu* need to be upheld by all, and not necessarily only by women in dealing with challenges. Co-workers must be aware and call out behaviours – whether rooted in organisational culture or from elements of *ubuntu* that favours patriarchy - impeding women's career mobility. They should openly criticise or praise behaviours that threaten or support harmonious co-existence. More specifically, colleagues who are men can act as allies or sponsors by linking women to career-enhancing opportunities, ensuring that junior colleagues who are men respect women's authority, and protecting women's rights in the workplace. As men currently dominate senior levels in management, their allyship and sponsorship could have a cascading effect throughout the organisation in influencing organisational values and workplace relationships (Cooke, Wang, & Bartram, 2019; Ibarra et al., 2010; Warren et al., 2021). Such visible commitment will provide psychological safety for women and enhance their self-efficacy. The caution, however, is that this kind of allyship and sponsorship should not have self-aggrandising motives in the form of paternalistic support.

Furthermore, having and building connections with women role models in the workplace could also support women's upward career mobility. Women role models in senior positions offer those in lower ranks relatable senior colleagues who can provide seasoned guidance, introduce them to useful gatekeepers and networks within the organisation and/or industry, provide grooming for personal

and professional growth, and generally boost their confidence in their abilities (Gill et al., 2008; Rabe-Hemp, 2008; The World Bank, 2021). Therefore, it is recommended that the mentoring scheme available to women at supervisory levels in one of the mining firms be extended to women in lower positions and that, it be emulated by other companies.

Organisations can foster these connections and allyship if diversity management policies focus on welcoming diversity, rather than targeting minorities. Targeting minorities can perpetuate the perception that there is a problem with the minority, thereby creating an 'us-versus-them' situation in the workplace. Diversity and inclusion must then be positioned and embedded in the core values and daily operations of the company (Cox & Lancefield, 2021), beyond positive-looking statistics.

#### **5.6.4 Practical implications: Individual level**

At the individual level, women need to own their space in the workplace. They need to be vocal about their experiences and challenges, and lead the change they desire. The level of physical and mental stress arising from a physically challenging and gender-hostile environment (Martin & Barnard, 2013) can be mediated if women specify areas of improvement. No other group can advocate for their needs better than women themselves. It is through their engagement that the challenges they face in the workplace can be known and addressed.

### **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This study contributes to the existing literature on women in male-dominated jobs and identity work studies by utilising a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame. This frame provides a multifaceted and context-sensitive approach to theorising identity work. Numerous facets of the study are regarded as salient. First, identity work is a continuous process of becoming that involves fluid and non-linear strategies that allow for new pathways of being. Second, identity tension in the workplace may not be completely eradicated. However, workplace authenticity should be encouraged to enable workers bearing minority identities to contribute to organisational values and culture. By doing so, new perspectives are introduced, enabling the organisation to be agile and innovative. Third, although men fuel women's identity tension in the workplace, they also offer women enriching workplace interactions, such as career-enhancing opportunities. Fourth, navigating a historically inaccessible terrain can be daunting; the support of the majority group is needed to change the status quo. Lastly, the single narrative of women in the Global South being passive and disempowered is inaccurate. Women are active and empowered, and take ownership of their productive and reproductive roles.

## CHAPTER 6: FORMAL AND INFORMAL WORKPLACE STRUCTURES AND WOMEN'S UPWARD MOBILITY IN MALE-DOMINATED JOBS IN SOUTH AFRICA

### Abstract

While research has extensively explored the identity work that women in male-dominated jobs engage with to become upwardly mobile, less is known about how external actors contribute to the upward career mobility of these women. With a focus on women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa, this study explored formal and informal workplace structures that support women's upward career mobility and foster the development of positive identities. The study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm, complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic, and uses the conservation of resources (COR) theory and the Stereotype Content Model (SMC) to explore workplace support. Through semi-structured interviews with 22 colleagues of women working in three companies in male-dominated industries, and a document analysis of organisational policies, support mechanisms formally rendered by companies were identified and categorised as: commitment from management, equality of opportunities (structures), and equality of opportunities (processes), whereas informal support was either technical, relational, or personal. The findings showed that, despite the positive impact of colleagues' support on women's upward career mobility, informal support tends to offer paternalistic help rather than tools that enable women to succeed in the workplace.

**Keywords:** colleagues, formal support, informal support, male-dominated jobs, South Africa, women

### 6.1 BACKGROUND

Workplace relationships affect employees' behaviour and attitudes directly and indirectly. Whether positive or negative, workplace relationships affect employee behaviour and impact organisational outcomes (Ghosh, Reio, & Bang, 2013; Van Laar et al., 2014), hence the sustained interest in building positive work relations. However, the workplace is not always friendly, particularly to employees with minority statuses, such as women in male-dominated jobs (Gill et al., 2008; Wright, 2016).

Women's integration into male-dominated jobs has been met with resistance, their competence is questioned, and they have been subjected to discrimination and harassment (Botha, 2016; Gill et al.,

2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016b). Men's perceptions about women's competence in undertaking such jobs emanate from the spillover of prevailing societal norms and gender hierarchies (Martin & Barnard, 2013), and shape in-group–out-group dynamics. When the in-group consists of men, a male-oriented working culture is developed; as such, out-group members, who tend not to exhibit attributes of the in-group, are viewed as less competent (Fiske et al., 2002). This dynamic can be examined based on the warmth and competence dimensions of the Stereotype Content Model (SCM) (Fiske et al., 2002). The model suggests that individuals' behaviour and interaction with others are significantly influenced by whether they perceive others to be warm and/or competent.

Aside from the perceptions men hold about women's competence, the working conditions of some male-dominated industries such as construction, mining, and transport and logistics can be stressful. Roles are characterised by long working hours, a presenteeism culture, tough working conditions, high pressure to perform, and physically demanding tasks (Botha, 2016; Wright, 2016a). The physically demanding nature of the jobs, coupled with a gender-hostile working environment, can trigger mental and physical stress (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Thus, the challenges women in male-dominated industries face are systemic (e.g., organisational culture), and also emanate from socio-cultural norms.

Individuals tend to reach out to resources — things of value — at the personal level and within their environment to help mitigate such stressful conditions. Kabeer (1999) identifies resources as necessary pre-conditions to catalysing women's empowerment. Utilising resources in this manner is aligned with the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory provides a useful lens to explore how individuals mediate stressful working conditions based on resources in the workplace (Rogers, Polonijo, & Carpiano, 2016; Yang et al., 2015) that create an enabling environment for the individual to thrive (Abugre, 2017; Laaser & Bolton, 2017).

A number of studies have focused on the challenges that confront women in male-dominated industries, the negative implications thereof for women's career trajectories, and the strategies women employ in coping with such challenges (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015; Gill et al., 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). These studies have focused mainly on how women utilise resources at the individual level in dealing with these challenges. Although these studies recognise the role of systemic and relational factors in the workplace and the cascading effect thereof on women's work experiences, limited insights have been offered on how these factors can serve as resources in supporting women's upward career mobility. Resources in the workplace could be institutionally driven (formal) or arise from workplace

relationships (informal) (Contreras, Abid, Govers, & Saman Elahi, 2021; French & Shockley, 2020; Leslie, 2019).

To improve employees' working experiences, organisations develop Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs). PPIs are “intentional activities or methods (training and coaching, etc.) based on (a) the cultivation of valued subjective experiences, (b) the building of positive individual traits, or (c) the building of positive institutions” (van Woerkom, 2021, p. 1) towards promoting the wellbeing of the individual or a group (Schueller, Kashdan, & Parks, 2014). These interventions also enhance the achievement of work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, leadership skills, and performance (Meyers, van Woerkom, & Bakker, 2013; van Woerkom, 2021). Within the context of stressful working conditions, not only do these interventions potentially lessen the psychological stress associated with work, but they may also provide women with the confirmation of the organisation’s support of their growth.

The present study explored how formal and informal workplace structures support women’s upward career mobility and foster the development of positive work identities in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. The study contributes in several ways to the broader literature on diversity management interventions. First, the study joins the few studies that examined the effects of supportive co-worker relations (Cooke et al., 2019; Ibarra, 1993; Sloan, 2017; Wallace, 2014) on women’s upward career mobility.

Second, the study makes a theoretical contribution by using COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) to understand the phenomenon. COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) provides a lens to explore how formal and informal workplace structures serve as resources that support women’s upward career mobility and foster the development of positive identities, and the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) is useful in understanding stereotypes and interpersonal and intergroup relations in the workplace. In adopting the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), the study applies a broad lens to explore and understand formal and informal structures in the workplace and how they support women’s upward mobility.

Third, the study provides a Global South perspective based on the experiences of women in three companies operating in male-dominated industries in South Africa. An interpretivist paradigm was used to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon by complementing existing research that relied on positivistic approaches (Contreras et al., 2021; Ibarra, 1995; Yang et al., 2015). In

addition, an interpretivist paradigm complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic (which stems from the South African concept of humanism) allowed the research to be sensitive to contextual peculiarities, as argued in Section 4.4.2.

## 6.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 6.2.1 COR theory

COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) proposes that individuals endeavour to build and retain resources that promote their wellbeing and minimise occurrences that deplete such resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resources are the things people value. Although, conventionally, resources tend to be viewed in an economic sense (material resources), they can also exist “through a multiplicity of social relationships conducted in the various institutional domains which make up a society” (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Resources can be objects, conditions, personal characteristics, energies (Hobfoll, 1989), and/or networks (Ibarra, 1993), existing at the personal level or embedded within the individual’s environment (Cha & Roberts, 2019). In addition, resources can take the form of personal, social, cultural, and economic capital (Berry & Rickwood, 2000; Jarness, 2017; Kaasa, 2019). These resources could be entities that are of value in themselves (e.g., self-esteem) or a means to an end (e.g., social support) (Cha & Roberts, 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2018). According to theory, the greater the individuals’ resources are, the less they will be susceptible to stress, and vice versa (Hobfoll, 1989; Salanova, Schaufeli, Xanthopoulou, & Bakker, 2010).

COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) is widely used in organisational behaviour and organisational psychology (Hobfoll et al., 2018), and a number of studies have leveraged the theory to understand how individuals deal with stressful situations or working conditions (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019; Hobfoll, Stevens, & Zalta, 2015). The theory has also been employed to explain how personal resources such as personality traits (which are of value in their own right) facilitate the achievement of career-related goals (Cha & Roberts, 2019). Recently, researchers have broadened the application of the theory to explore how resources within one’s environment, such as social support (a means to achieve an end), can serve as resources in the workplace (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019). For example, research by Contreras et al. (2021) shows that co-workers and supervisors are critical resources when they offer career-enhancing opportunities, which, in turn, encourage work engagement.

The focus of the present study is job resources. Job resources are the social, psychological, organisational, and physical conditions that facilitate achieving goals, reduce the stress associated with jobs, and stimulate the individual's development (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2009). These resources could be formal (policies, benefits, services, and structures provided by organisations) or informal (psychosocial or material support existing between supervisors and co-workers) (Anderson, Coffey, & Byerly, 2002; French & Shockley, 2020), and can manifest at the organisational level (e.g., career opportunities), task level (e.g., performance feedback), and interpersonal level (e.g., supervisor and colleague support) (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Salanova et al., 2010). In the workplace, these resources work together to enable individuals to build self-efficacy, deal with job demands, and improve organisational outcomes (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Cooke et al., 2019).

The present study is situated in male-dominated industries generally described as stressful, due to the physically demanding nature of the jobs (Botha, 2016; Wright, 2016a). This workspace provides an ideal space to explore how job- and personal resources mediate job demands. Beyond the nature of the work, the workplace can also be hostile to women, which exacerbates women's experiences (Martin & Barnard, 2013). Regulation of the self and behaviour through organisational and social resources helps individuals confront and cope with stressors in the workplace (Hobfoll, 2011). As many previous studies have explored how women navigate their identities in dealing with challenges faced in the workplace (Chowdhury & Gibson, 2019; Gill et al., 2008; Martin & Barnard, 2013), this study moved from the individual and explored specific resources in the workplace that support women's upward mobility.

### **6.2.2 Stereotype Content Model**

The SMC (Fiske et al., 2002) holds that the dimensions of social perception are: warmth (expressed as friendliness, trustworthiness, and sincerity) and competence (expressed as intelligence, skills, and confidence) (Cuddy et al., 2008; Fiske et al., 2002). These dimensions are orthogonal (one can be seen as high or low in both competence and warmth). SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) posits that certain attitudes and emotions are triggered by this double categorisation, such as admiration for those high in warmth and competence, or paternalistic prejudice and pity towards those seen as high in warmth and low in competence. Members of lower-status groups are seen as not real competitors, as shown in Table 6.1.



**Table 6.1***Warmth – Competence Matrix*

High		
Warmth	<i>Paternalistic prejudice</i> Low status, not competitive Pity, sympathy	<i>Admiration</i> High status, not competitive Pride, admiration
	<i>Contemptuous prejudice</i> Low status, competitive Contempt, disgust, anger, resentment	<i>Envious prejudice</i> High status, competitive Envy, jealousy
Low	Competence	

*Note:* From “A model of (often mixed) stereotype content: Competence and warmth respectively follow from perceived status and competition” by S.T. Fiske, A.J.C. Cuddy, P. Glick, & J. Xu, 2002, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(6), p. 881.

The warmth–competence dimensions are congruous with the communion and agency attributes and how these attributes shape how gender stereotypes are conceptualised (Geldenhuys et al., 2019; Heilman, 2012). Women are socialised and expected to be communal, hence displaying care, friendliness, and demure behaviours, whereas, for men, it is desirable to show agency — being forceful, independent, and dominant (Heilman, 2012). Emotions evoked based on these perceptions often translate into an individual’s behaviour towards others. For minorities, being warm triggers being seen as less competent and deemed high in warmth, which is associated with a low evaluation of the competence dimension. Men’s view of women’s competence is founded on perceptions rather than women’s innate abilities (Martin & Barnard, 2013). These views, therefore, evoke a paternalistic prejudice that incites men to subject women to benevolent sexism and ambivalent stereotyping (Jones et al., 2014).

In the present study, the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) helps explain how women in male-dominated jobs are perceived by their colleagues, the implicit biases that moderate intra- and inter-group relations, and how these workplace interactions support women’s upward career mobility. The model is regarded as a moderator of the extent and the way women are given access to or barred from resources that aid their mobility.

## 6.3 WORKPLACE RESOURCES

### 6.3.1 Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs)

Positive Psychology Interventions (PPIs) in the workplace refer to any deliberate initiative that uses positive experiences to build positive traits at the individual level, and positive institutions at the organisational level (Donaldson, Lee, & Donaldson, 2019a; van Woerkom, 2021). Beyond increasing the wellbeing of individuals and the organisation, PPIs may be implemented to enhance the achievement of outcomes such as performance and leadership skills (van Woerkom, 2021). According to Donaldson et al. (2019b), five types of interventions are commonly used as PPIs, namely: psychological capital interventions, employee strengths interventions, employee gratitude interventions, and employee well-being interventions.

Psychological capital interventions are usually human resource practices that present the individual confidence to succeed in challenging tasks (self-efficacy), positive orientation about the future of the individual's career (optimism), bouncing back from challenging situations (resilience) and redirecting career paths in the face of barriers (hope) (Donaldson et al., 2019a). These interventions are usually associated with improving engagement and job performance. Job crafting interventions are self-driven processes that enable the employee to adjust elements of their job demands and their personal growth, strengths, and personal needs, usually towards creating an optimal balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Donaldson et al., 2019a). Employee Strengths Interventions focus on character strengths such as teamwork or empathy that come to the employee naturally. As such, knowing the individual's character strengths enables organisations to place employees in a setting where they can thrive – achieving work outcomes while undertaking tasks they have the natural capacity to handle (Donaldson et al., 2019b). Employee gratitude interventions focus on expressing gratitude for positive behaviours and performance in the workplace, while employee wellbeing interventions include work-specific and general wellbeing of the employee. These interventions have been shown to improve performance and job satisfaction (Donaldson et al., 2019b).

For van Woerkom (2021), there are four types of PPIs. These four types are based on two essential components: (i) the level of outcome (target population) and (ii) the scope, as shown in Table 6.2. The author uses examples to explain how the scope and level of outcome can be leveraged in designing PPIs.

**Table 6.2***Types of PPIs*

	<b>Targeting individuals</b>	<b>Targeting groups</b>
One-off	E.g., a 4-week web-based strengths intervention	E.g., a 1-day intervention focusing on appreciative inquiry into best practices and peak experiences in a team
Structural	E.g., implementing a feed-forward interview in the performance appraisal procedures	E.g., the implementation of well-being related HR practices

*Note:* From “Building positive organizations: A typology of Positive Psychology Interventions,” by M. van Woerkom, 2021, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.769782>. p. 4.

One-off interventions targeting individuals are short-term interventions usually aimed at enhancing the skills or character strengths of the employee. Despite their short-term nature, these interventions can positively impact organisational culture. Williams et al.’s (2016) study of 69 employees’ participation in a 3-day training programme addressing individual cognitions found that employees with high emotional psychological capital focused on the positive dimensions of the organisation, and hence viewed the organisational culture as positive. Such interventions may also serve as the bedrock that can be used to prepare employees for more structural interventions (van Woerkom, 2021). Structural interventions targeting individuals usually involve systemic interventions that enhance the employee’s wellbeing. This type of intervention is exemplified in Budworth et al. (2015), where feed-forward interviews were conducted rather than performance appraisal interviews. In the feed-forward interview, managers were trained to engage employees on circumstances that stimulated their performance, rather than judge performance at the end of a period. These interventions become embedded in organisational structures.

One-off interventions targeting groups are short-term interventions that usually target improving group dynamics and interactions towards enhancing the wellbeing of employees. This type of intervention is seen in Leiter et al. (2011), where a 6-month intervention was designed to enhance civility, respect, and engagement in the workplace. Lastly, structural interventions targeting groups tend to be systemic and directed at enhancing employees’ collective wellbeing. Huettermann and Bruch (2019) established that organisational practices that promote employees’ psychological wellbeing, boost employees’ collective wellbeing.

In sum, PPIs can be quick-fixes or systemic interventions expected to create positive experiences that have positive implications for the individual employee, the employees as a collective, and the organisation as a unit. In the next section, I explore workplace relations and social support – both formal and informal dimensions.

### **6.3.2 Workplace relations and social support**

Workplace relationships — relationships between individuals and their work colleagues, be it peers, subordinates, supervisors, or mentors (Abugre, 2017), can be positive (healthy and helpful) or negative (harmful). The interactions within these relationships could either occur through formal or informal networks. Formal networks, such as relationships within teams or committees, are usually firm-determined, whereas informal networks tend to be discretionary, and may be related to work, social, or both (Ibarra, 1993). These networks offer individuals instrumental support (involving exchanging work-related resources such as professional advice and physical resources) or socio-emotional support (an exchange of friendship, usually built on trust). Studies have shown that work-related stress and its knock-on effects, such as low job satisfaction, exhaustion, and burnout, can be mediated with the support of co-workers and supervisors (Cooke et al., 2019; French & Shockley, 2020; Rogers et al., 2016). Thus, concern and support build a psychologically positive work environment that stimulates knowledge-sharing, enhances workers' self-efficacy, improves employees' well-being, and improves overall organisational performance (Laaser & Bolton, 2017; Yang et al., 2015).

Social support literature suggests gendered patterns of support. Women tend to encounter more supportive co-worker relations than men (Wallace & Kay, 2012). Women often receive emotional support, while men usually receive informational and instrumental support (Wallace, 2014). Women are also confronted by the double-bind dilemma arising from the incongruity between the gendered organisational culture that elevates attributes and behaviours associated with men (such as competitiveness and independence) and the expectation of women to be relational and warm (Burton & Weiner, 2016). The socialisation of men and women could account for the differences in the support received, as women are usually socialised to be communal, while men are socialised to be self-reliant (Heilman, 2012).

Although socialised and expected to be communal, women, rather paradoxically, tend not to be communal in same-sex (i.e., woman–woman) workplace relationships, compared to men. Women have been criticised for being disloyal and not supportive of each other in the workplace. For example,

Johnson and Mathur-Helm's (2011) study of 25 women in executive and senior management roles in five South African retail banks revealed that most participants felt women competed against each other. However, a few attributed this to general workplace competition, and not necessarily gender. In Wright's (2016b) study of women working in the construction and transport sectors of the UK, women acknowledged and appreciated the support they received from their colleagues who are men, to the extent that some expressed their "preference for working with men ... which typically coincided with negative feelings about working with other women" (p. 353). These attitudes and behaviours can be linked to the identity dilemma associated with in-group–out-group dynamics. While healthy competition is needed in the workplace, toxicity in same-sex workplace relationships can be career-inhibiting for women.

Men tend to be communal in same-sex workplace relationships. Referred to as the 'old boys' club', a network is created to allow men, especially in junior roles, to receive mentoring, formally and informally, from men in authority, escalating their upward career progression (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). The exclusion of women from these social interactions may not necessarily be intentional, as some informal interactions occur at after-work socialising and in men-only washrooms, which have been identified as avenues that allow for such social interactions among men (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2021; Wallace, 2014). Another consideration is that women bear the brunt of family responsibilities at the household level, which limits their time and opportunity to participate in informal social meetings after work (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2021; Wallace, 2014). The old boys' club, which is more apparent in male-dominated professions, is considered a major barrier to women's career advancement, because the club tends to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in the workplace (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Women in such working environments experience hostile sexism — an antipathy towards women that involves negative stereotypes about women's agency (Glick et al., 2000), where they face resistance, experience harassment, and have their authority and abilities undermined (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Rabe-Hemp, 2008).

Besides men's disregard for women's agency as seen in hostile sexism, there is the seemingly 'positive' but paternalistic view of women: benevolent sexism (Glick et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2014), which is closely associated with ambivalent stereotyping (Cuddy et al., 2009). As subtle as it may be, benevolent sexists usually view "women as weak and needing protection, support and adoration" (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015, p. 8). This view of women stems from biological and social conditions

(Glick et al., 2000) that spill over to the workplace. This view usually translates into ambivalent stereotyping, whereby women are seen as warm and friendly, and not considered skilful. Despite the seemingly positive intentions associated with ‘helping’ women, benevolent sexism is insidious and has negative implications for women’s upward career mobility: women are placed in less challenging roles, their opportunities for performance are limited, and their self-efficacy is restricted (Glick et al., 2000; Jones et al., 2014).

Previous studies explored workplace relationships between co-worker and supervisor support and stressful working conditions primarily through a positivistic lens (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2015). However, such approaches are not able to cater to the complexities and nuances that exist in relationships. The present study leveraged COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) to gain an understanding of how formal and informal workplace structures support women’s upward career mobility and foster the development of positive identities.

## 6.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 6.4.1 Research approach

The study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm to provide deeper understanding and nuance, while accommodating complexities in complementing existing literature that have relied on positivistic approaches (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019; Ibarra, 1995; Wallace, 2014; Yang et al., 2015) in investigating co-worker relations and colleagues’ support in stressful working conditions and social networks in the workplace.

As the intent was to conduct contextually appropriate research, this study is situated in an interpretivist paradigm, complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic. The *ubuntu* research ethic stems from the phrase ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ — a Southern African concept of humanism, which loosely translates as “One is a person through others” (Mkabela, 2015, p. 287). As a research ethic, *ubuntu* guides interaction with participants based on principles of interconnectedness, solidarity, respectfulness, and reflexivity (Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018). An *ubuntu* research ethic does not oppose accepted research ethics in qualitative research, but reflects these ethics based on the concept of *ubuntu* (Seehawer, 2018).

The study followed a case study strategy, as shown in Table 3.2. This strategy allows for exploring a phenomenon by involving a few units (Saunders et al., 2016). This study explored the case of

supervisors and colleagues of the women blue-collar workers studied in Study II (Chapter 5:) and representatives of the participating companies' human resource (HR) departments. The justification for this choice was discussed in Section 3.3.2.2.

#### 6.4.2 Research setting

The study is situated in South Africa, as this country's social setting is largely collectivist (van Zyl et al., 2018), and also because the country has enacted legislation to remove discriminatory laws with the aim of empowering previously marginalised populations (Department: Labour; RSA, 2004; Department: Women; RSA, 2015a). Despite such legislation, the unemployment rate of women (36.4%) remains higher than that of men (33.0%) (Stats SA, 2022). Furthermore, the Quarter 1: 2022 Labour Force Survey shows that transport, construction, and mining are male-dominated, as women form less than 25% of the total workforce in these sectors, at 18.2%, 11.9%, and 11.1% respectively, as shown in Table 3.3 (Stats SA, 2022). As the study setting was a collectivist society, it was possible to explore how connections in the workplace support individuals' upward career mobility.

#### 6.4.3 Sampling

Participants were drawn from three companies in the mining and logistics industries. Participants in Study II (Chapter 5:) were requested to nominate a supportive co-worker and their direct supervisor, as shown in Table 6.3. This study, therefore, engaged a total of 22 participants: 11 co-workers, nine supervisors, and two representatives<sup>26</sup> of the HR department of the companies. Among the 20 colleagues, two supervisors were responsible for four women workers, while two women workers nominated the same colleague. Of the twenty colleagues, two were women and were nominated as supportive co-workers, not as direct supervisors.

Throughout the study, reference is made to four different categories of actors: (a) women in blue-collar roles (women workers), (b) a supportive co-worker (indicated as 'co-worker'), (c) the direct supervisor ('supervisor'), and (d) representative from the HR department ('HR representative'). *Colleagues* is a collective term representing co-workers and supervisors. All participants chose pseudonyms to conceal their identities.

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<sup>26</sup> The HR representative for the third company did not participate. No diversity and inclusion policies were publicly available.

**Table 6.3***Participants' Details*

<b>Participant (Pseudonym)</b>	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Years with Company</b>	<b>Years of Knowing Woman Worker(s)</b>
<b>Supervisors</b>			
<b>Gad</b>	Operations engineer	15	8
<b>Alex</b>	Operations engineer	<1	<1
<b>Msuneuzi</b>	Education, training & development (ETD) supervisor	24	15
<b>Proppie</b>	Line manager (Electrical)	13	8 & 7
<b>Lucky</b>	Electrical supervisor	16	6 & 5
<b>Tsidi</b>	Line manager (Operations)	9	1
<b>Victor</b>	ETD supervisor	28	5
<b>Peter</b>	ETD supervisor	16	4
<b>Ali</b>	Mine manager	22	7
<b>Supportive Colleague</b>			
<b>Desmond</b>	Production supervisor	17	4
<b>Steve</b>	Senior HR officer	14	8
<b>Robert</b>	Boilermaker	24	15
<b>Nhlanhla</b>	Electrical supervisor	3	3 & 3
<b>Felicia</b>	Weighbridge operator	3	<1
<b>Tracy</b>	Rail co-ordinator	4	3
<b>Sly</b>	Operations supervisor	5	5
<b>Walter</b>	Senior geologist	15	3
<b>Dunga</b>	Production supervisor	17	3
<b>Mark</b>	Production supervisor	15	3
<b>George</b>	Production supervisor	4	3
<b>HR Representatives</b>			
<b>Paul</b>	HR manager	4	-
<b>Kim</b>	Group head, Talent	25	-

Note: Data collected by author.



#### 6.4.4 Entrée and establishing researcher roles

The research received ethical clearance from the Research and Ethics Committee (Social, Behaviour, and Education) of Stellenbosch University (17082) (Appendix B). Based on the argument of [Chapter 4](#), the initial plan was to undertake fieldwork using the spiral approach (Mkabela, 2005) to gain the full complement of an interpretivism—*ubuntu* methodology. However, due to restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in Appendix H, difficult decisions regarding methodology had to be taken. Plans for field data collection were suspended.

Upon completing interviews with women workers, communication with nominated colleagues began. All communications, including interviews, were conducted virtually, via telephone and technology platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams, due to COVID-19 restrictions. In line with interpretivism and the *ubuntu* research ethic, all participants were initially contacted informally via telephone to solicit their participation. During these calls, I disclosed my identity as a Ph.D. student researching with permission from the companies and the university. Issues concerning the topic under study, how these were selected, the information needed, the duration of the interview, the value of the research to participants and their company, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, and rights and responsibilities were explained during these calls. After obtaining their verbal commitment to participate, customised informed consent forms were sent via e-mail for participants' signatures. All interviews were conducted based on the availability of participants. The data collection process lasted six months, due to the participants' demanding work schedules.

#### 6.4.5 Data collection methods

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted, as shown in Table 3.2, complemented by an *ubuntu* research ethic. *Ubuntu* as a complementary epistemology for methodology requires a physical presence in the field; however, due to the suspension of physical data collection, *ubuntu* was utilised as the guiding research ethic. All interviews began with me voicing appreciation for the participant taking the time to participate, followed by an introduction of myself and the research. The research protocols, as stated in the informed consent form, were reiterated. With written permission from participants, all interviews were recorded.

A semi-structured interview format was employed (Appendix F), which allowed participants to reflect on and express their views (Cousin, 2008b) of their experience working with the nominating co-worker and women in general, the types of support offered and available to women to become upwardly mobile at work, and issues worthy of management's attention and action. Participants were offered

the option of engaging in their preferred language (for which I would provide a translator, if needed), in line with the *ubuntu* research ethic of acknowledging their humanity through language. All participants chose to engage in English, and the interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. In addition, organisational policies relating to gender, diversity, and inclusion were useful in triangulating and corroborating insights shared by the HR representatives and colleagues on formal support mechanisms offered to women workers by the companies.

#### **6.4.6 Recording of data**

All interviews were audio-recorded digitally, with permission from participants, and securely stored on the OneDrive platform provided by Stellenbosch University, which is only accessible to me. In line with Gray et al.'s (2020) recommendation, the interviews were transcribed and edited using Otter.ai Version 2.3.105 and imported into ATLAS.ti 9.1.2 for coding.

#### **6.4.7 Data analysis**

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, an analytical procedure allowing patterns to be identified, analysed, and interpreted within and across datasets (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The procedure began with repeatedly listening to the audio recordings while coding in ATLAS.ti. The coding process yielded a combination of deductive (from existing literature) and inductive (emerging from the data) codes. From the codes, labels were assigned to important themes in the data that related to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006), as illustrated in Table 6.4. Coding and memo-writing were employed in organising and synthesising data into conceptual categories, in order to capture themes in the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Punch, 2014).

The initial coding generated 178 descriptive codes. Descriptive codes focus on determining and labelling what is found in the data. Links were then created between the descriptive codes (Punch, 2014), which generated 46 pattern codes, as exemplified in Table 6.4. Pattern codes are analytic, as they interpret and interconnect data using descriptive codes. Being guided by the research questions, codes were further refined to incorporate the most important categories useful for this study. Selective coding was then performed to take the data analysis to a conceptual level by further finding and interpreting patterns in the codes. This coding process resulted in six selective codes: commitment from management, equality of opportunities (structures), equality of opportunities (processes), technical support, relational support, and personal support. The analysis involved constantly comparing and refining themes to ensure meaningful thematic relationships.

**Table 6.4***Example of the Coding Process*

Example of Text	Descriptive Code	Pattern Code	Selective Code
<i>In empowering the woman, neh, the company provides bursaries and scholarships ....and internal training (Mark, production supervisor).</i>	-Bursaries & Scholarships -Training sessions	Capacity-building	Equality of opportunities (Structures)
<i>Not too long ago, I was on leave, and then she had to take over my role. I made her to be me in my absence. She did an excellent job (Msuneuzi, EDT supervisor).</i>	-Giving women roles -Acting in supervisor's absence	Leadership opportunities	

Note: Compiled by author.

The memo function of ATLAS.ti allowed for memoing to occur simultaneously with coding. This function allowed me to capture interpretations, participants' emotions, and conceptual elaborations during the coding process (Punch, 2014). These memos complemented the reflective diary I kept throughout the study, which contained my experiences during data collection, coding, data analysis and interpretation, and decisions that shaped the final output. I also chronicled challenges encountered and strategies employed to overcome these. The reflective diary served as a useful additional reference during data analysis. Below is an example of a reflective diary entry:

*In my interview with [Tracy], I realised she spoke a lot more about her experiences as a woman in a blue-collar role than a supportive colleague of [Charity]. Despite my efforts to rephrase and redirect her focus to [Charity], she still circled back to her experience. As I went back to the initial list from [Company L], I realised she was one of the suggested women, but never returned my calls until [Charity] nominated her. I have had to filter her interview very well to be able to decipher when she was talking about herself and when it was about [Charity] (Reflective Diary, 06.08.2021).*

In line with the *ubuntu* research ethic, I conducted follow-up interviews to seek more insights and probe emerging themes from the preliminary round of analysis (Chilisa, 2012). This also served as a data triangulation tool.

Document analysis was undertaken to understand companies' commitment to gender, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace. Two of the companies had their policy documents publicly available on

their websites. During the analysis, the READ approach proposed by Dalglish et al. (2020) was employed, which involved: “(1) ready your materials, (2) extract data, (3) analyse data and (4) distil your findings” (p. 1424). All policies related to gender, diversity, and inclusion were assembled and stored on ATLAS.ti to extract data. A number of questions guided the data extraction, as shown in Box 6.1, in identifying and understanding companies’ stances on gender, diversity, and inclusion.

### **Box 6.1**

#### *Questions Guiding Data Extraction*

Is the document complete or a draft?  
 How recent is the document?  
 Who created the document?  
 Does it have the approval of relevant authorities in the company?  
 What is the purpose of the document?  
 Does the content match the title of the policy document?  
 Are there contradictions in the document?  
 Policy statements relating to gender, diversity, inclusion, victimisation, harassment, abuse, etc.  
 Are there sanctions for non-compliance?  
 How do policy statements relate to each other?  
 Do the contents of one policy contradict other related policies?  
 Are policy statements complementary?  
 How do the contents of the document compare to data from participants?  
 Do the documents support claims made by participants?  
 Do they contradict claims made by participants?  
 Are there new insights emerging from the policies?

The two companies had different sets of diversity, gender, and inclusion policies that were reviewed. The following were reviewed: for the logistics company their diversity policy; and for the mining company, a) diversity, b) gender equality and mainstreaming, c) sexual harassment, and d) harassment, bullying, and victimisation policies. The contents of the documents were coded to identify issues addressed under each policy. Policy statements were then compared with issues raised by participants to ascertain how these statements correlated with or contradicted participants’ experiences to triangulate data.

#### **6.4.8 Ensuring trustworthiness**

In ensuring trustworthiness in this qualitative research, deliberate and systematic procedures and decisions were built into the research process, guided by the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004; Thomas, 2006).

##### **6.4.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility relates to how believable findings are, based on the participants' reality (Terrell, 2016). To achieve this criterion, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants. Despite the demanding work schedules of participants, these interviews allowed them to reflect on their experiences in the workplace and the meanings they assigned to them. I also used follow-up and probing questions during interviews to explore responses and clarify meaning (Saunders et al., 2016). These approaches proved beneficial during the analysis, as participants' responses provided nuance to the data. To preserve the authenticity of the data, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I listened to each interview multiple times, and simultaneously conducted coding. This process added emotions to the transcripts; it allowed me to immerse myself in the data and re-experience the interviews. The process stimulated richer insights into the data, and allowed for possible meanings to be derived after each round of listening. Clarity checks on codes were undertaken to ensure that labels accurately captured the multiple meanings embedded in texts (cf. Thomas, 2006).

Furthermore, member checks were achieved through follow-up interviews, where interpretations and emerging themes from the preliminary round of analysis were shared with participants for their feedback. However, a few participants found this unwelcome, due to their work schedules. That notwithstanding, the follow-up interviews provided additional insights into the initial analysis. Peer debriefing was accomplished through feedback from colleagues on platforms offered by the university (e.g., Graduate School of Economic and Management Sciences (GEM) Monday Meetings at the faculty level, colloquium presentations offered by Stellenbosch Business School) and other academics at conferences. The feedback received aided further refinement of ideas and arguments.

##### **6.4.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability focuses on the extent to which findings can be applied in other contexts (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). I sought to conduct context-sensitive research, which guided the decision to use an interpretivist lens, guided by an *ubuntu* research ethic. Leveraging locally relevant concepts such as *ubuntu* as a guide to conducting research contributes to outputs with nuance and rich detail regarding

context and nuance (Chilisa, 2012; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013). The present study does not claim that findings can be applied to other contexts, as it provides a unique insight into the experience of the community under study (Johannesson & Perjons, 2014; Seehawer, 2018). Guided by the principle of interconnectedness under the *ubuntu* research ethic, I identified three main sources of data (i.e., colleagues, HR representatives, and organisational policy documents) to gain different viewpoints that could enrich the study. Co-workers, supervisors, and HR representatives were identified through non-probability purposive sampling. During document analysis, policies accessed were screened and checked with HR representatives to ensure that the documents were the most recent and complete versions. Documents were reviewed to ensure that the contents matched the title, and had been approved by relevant units in the company (Noble & Smith, 2015). Throughout the data extraction and analysis, policies from the same organisation were compared with each other to identify conflicting or contradictory stances on the same subject matter. Policies were also screened for consistency between interventions and participants' experiences. In presenting the findings, thick and detailed descriptions of participants' experiences of working with women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated jobs are provided.

#### **6.4.8.3 Dependability**

Dependability relates to the consistency and replicability of results (Terrell, 2016). To meet this criterion, I held periodic debriefing sessions with my study supervisors to discuss emerging themes, assumptions, and biases that may influence data analysis and reporting. In line with the *ubuntu* research ethic, I sought to immerse myself in the phenomenon under study, rather than viewing it from a distance (Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013), despite the restrictions associated with COVID-19. The research was conducted and written from an outsider's perspective (a non-South African), and this position guided my decision to approach the study with an open mind and a readiness to learn. I remained respectful of the time and information of participants, and abided by ethics as upheld by the university and the *ubuntu* research ethic. During the interviews, I welcomed expressions by the participants in their native language and requested that they explain the literal and contextual meanings of the expressions.

#### **6.4.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability focuses on how objectivity was observed in a study and the extent to which findings reflect participants' views (Shenton, 2004). In ensuring confirmability, data triangulation allowed for comparing data from multiple sources (i.e., colleagues, HR representatives, and organisational policy

documents). After each interview, I played back the audio-recorded interview and documented perceptions and dominant themes.

I also maintained a reflective diary throughout the study, in which I captured my experiences with the participants, observations during coding, data analysis and interpretation, and decisions made based on interactions with my study supervisors. The journal further contained challenges I encountered and the strategies I used to ensure that the research methods I used were not only responding to the ethics concerns of the university, but also upheld *ubuntu* research ethics.

To triangulate the data, a video was made to summarise the findings for participants (Appendix L). This was done to enable participants to validate findings. By seeking participants' feedback, I ensured that I was accurate in my portrayal of their reality (Buch & Staller, 2014), while also pursuing interpretivism's subjective and *ubuntu's* relational epistemological bases that position participants as co-creators of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012). A total of 13 participants reacted to the video by sending voice notes via WhatsApp. Two raised concerns about my articulation of men's roles in women's upward mobility: *"I hope this isn't one-sided, telling men to do x, y, and z for women, and not telling the women their role in all this"* (Dunga, via WhatsApp voice note, 17.08.22). I assured them that I provided targeted feedback, and that the issues were integrated into a larger dissertation. Nevertheless, following this feedback, I ensured that the reasoning and recommendations in the dissertation were not patronising.

#### **6.4.9 Reporting**

As the study aimed to amplify participants' voices, in line with interpretivism and the *ubuntu* research ethic, the findings are supported with verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts. While no grammatical errors were corrected, clarifications are noted in square brackets.

### **6.5 FINDINGS**

This section discusses the formal and informal support available and offered to women in the workplace. Beginning with the formal support, the section highlights structures and mechanisms that are institutionally provided, as well as provisions in policy documents that support women's upward mobility. The section concludes with the informal support women receive from their co-workers.

Table 6.5 summarises the themes of formal and informal structures based on the selective codes<sup>27</sup> emanating from the data.

**Table 6.5**

*Summary of Themes – Formal and Informal Structures*

Themes	Codes <sup>28</sup>
	<b>Formal</b>
Commitment from management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognising equity regulations</li> <li>• Support from individuals in top management</li> <li>• Implementing affirmative action efforts</li> <li>• Existence of diversity and inclusion policies</li> </ul>
Equality of opportunities (structures)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender-sensitive infrastructure</li> <li>• Gender-sensitive personal protective equipment</li> <li>• Communication channels</li> </ul>
Equality of opportunities (processes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development programmes</li> <li>• Affirmative action strategies</li> <li>• Fringe benefits</li> </ul>
	<b>Informal</b>
Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge transfer</li> <li>• Growth opportunities</li> <li>• Non-discriminatory tasks</li> <li>• Complementing deficiencies</li> <li>• Resources availability and resource sharing</li> </ul>
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a conducive environment for engagement</li> <li>• Managing workplace relationships</li> <li>• Problem-solving</li> </ul>
Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal development</li> <li>• Private life</li> </ul>

Note: Compiled by author.

<sup>27</sup> These codes are generated at the third level of conceptual analysis after descriptive (first level) and pattern (second level) codes (Punch, 2014). This is illustrated in Table 6.4.

<sup>28</sup> These codes are selective codes



### 6.5.1 Formal support structures

Based on the data collected, the formal support structures were categorised into the following themes: commitment from management, equality of opportunities (structures), and equality of opportunities (processes).

#### 6.5.1.1 Commitment from management

##### Box 6.2

##### *Verbatim Extracts Buttressing the Need for Management Commitment*

*A positive change for women in the mining industry must start with a mindset change of the guys who've got the powers — the executives. Don't start at the bottom, because we've got no problem at the bottom. The barriers of the progression of women in the mining industry, it's at the top (Msuneuzi, EDT supervisor).*

*We're starting to become the front runners in terms of this [increasing women's participation], because the CEO said, 'Listen, we're going to move ladies in with a big speed', and that's where it all starts off. It does not help you've set yourself targets but the head doesn't want it; it's just there because of the law. And he made a bold statement, and I appreciate that. And that's the way, and then, you know, the rest will just follow up, because they will start looking at integrating because the boss said so, and that's the way it's gonna be. So, if you want to make it easier for ladies, it must start right at the top; not halfway, not three-quarters up, right at the top [emphasis]. And if it starts there, it's all gonna be easy (Ali, mining manager).*

*I know he [the CEO] said he wanted to raise the bar up to 40. I think it was 40% or 45% women in mining, that we want to increase our ratio between men and women in a working environment. Yeah. And that's a huge jump from 10% (Ali, mining manager).*

Extracts in Box 6.2 reveal the critical role of top management in providing the necessary resources to create positive experiences for women in the workplace. The publicly available diversity policies of both companies<sup>29</sup> reflect a deliberate drive towards diversity and inclusion. Although employing women was primarily in response to government legislation in the early 2000s, Kim asserts:

<sup>29</sup> Policies of the third company were not publicly available.

*There's legislation that drives equity, our [mining company] stance is that we want to go beyond compliance, and not just achieve legislative requirements (Kim, group head: talent).*

In the case of the logistics company, Paul affirmed:

*We are an equal opportunity employer, and we also strive towards ensuring that we exceed the minimum requirements set by law, and hence our priority of women has now been put as a KPI [key performance indicator] for CEOs within our business, to make sure that they also support the issue of getting women on board (Paul, HR manager).*

Participants from the mining companies, both women workers and their colleagues, acknowledged visible commitment from top management. Although in agreement with Cha and Roberts' (2019) assertion that "organizations' ability to capitalize on the promises of diversity ultimately depends on minority employees' willingness and ability to draw on their distinctive strengths at work" (p. 1), organisational support is vital to enable employees to exhibit distinctive strengths. For the women workers, the visible commitment from key individuals such as the CEO provides psychological safety, as they feel welcome and valued, allowing them to engage confidently. Senior officials represent a critical source of behavioural standards in shaping an organisation's priorities and values regarding diversity and inclusion (Campuzano, 2019; Cox & Lancefield, 2021). A similar assertion is made by Cooke et al. (2019), who note:

*[S]upportive leadership is an important resource in complex and challenging work environments, and in accordance with the COR model, individuals may seek to draw on workplace conditions to further enhance their personal resources (p. 701).*

Commitment from management translates into efforts such as diversity training and affirmative action<sup>30</sup> in meeting equity targets:

*[F]rom time to time, we put our managers through diversity management courses; ... during induction, and also every year, when an employee has completed his annual cycle, he or she goes for a refresher induction (Paul, HR manager).*

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<sup>30</sup> The South African Employment Equity Act No.55 (1998) defines affirmative action as "measures designed to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups have equal employment opportunities and are equitably represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce of a designated employer" (2004, p. 9).

In the diversity policies of both companies, some statements reiterated the companies' commitment to being equal opportunity employers, while others focused on removing barriers to women's equal participation in the workforce while creating opportunities for all. These affirmative action efforts align with the structural interventions targeting group level interventions (van Woerkom, 2021). One participant linked the company's diversity agenda to affirmative action in favour of women:

*The company is pushing the transformation agenda in terms of empowering women... So, if you're John Walters, you're in an interview for a higher role with [Sandra], if on the merit, you guys are at par ... then the company will make a decision to give it to [Sandra] because she's a woman. So, it's not to say that the women are less competent, but it's to say that, in addition to everything else, if you guys are at par, we will take a woman for that role because she's a woman, because we are saying, 'We're serious about transformation' (Walter, senior geologist).*

Despite the company's policy commitment to supporting women's career mobility, as well as building women for leadership roles, one participant shared an instance where the company had failed to back its diversity and inclusion claims with action in supporting qualified women into higher ranks:

*We had an executive, a technical executive, resigning not long ago. According to our succession planning, there were two ladies; they were already groomed to succeed this executive. But, immediately, when that executive left, that position stayed vacant, hear me well, vacant, for three solid months [pauses after each word for emphasis]. None of those ladies was even asked to go and act. Now, give me a very sound reason or anything to think otherwise, other than the executive is just saying, 'Not a woman. The problem with ladies is not their ability; it's not their qualification, it's not their knowledge. It's only an opportunity by the powers, the guys that have got the power, the guys that have got funds, the guys who've got decision-making [powers]. These are the guys who are holding the ladies at the bottom (Msuenzi, EDT supervisor).*

These covert and overt discriminatory actions are career-inhibiting for women and affirm men's perceptions regarding women's competence.

**Box 6.3***Verbatim Extracts Confirming the Existence of the 'Old Boys' Club'*

*There are still the older folks, there are still a few left of the old generation of management who may be resistant to change and may feel that, you know, this is still a male-dominated type of work (Peter, EDT supervisor).*

*The other problem with that, the top echelon, is it's a clique or very mid-early 50s... when you talk about people of early, mid-50s, you're talking about people who always never ever regarded a woman as my equal. So, these are the guys who have got that old belief. But then you still have the other ones that are joining this old belief. And they want to adopt this old belief, too (Msuenzi, EDT supervisor).*

*So, there are these old, old, old guys with these old traditional values. You always meet them, you always have them, you know, who would be rude. But I don't think the ladies actually worry about that too much, about them, because they're getting fewer and fewer over the years. And, I think, in another ten years, we won't even be having this conversation (Victor, EDT supervisor).*

In all three companies, participants pointed out the existence of an 'old boys' club,' as shown in Box 6.3. As inferred from the extracts, the older generation of men's perception of women's abilities shapes their interaction with women workers. The extracts do not suggest that the old boys' club that exists creates unique avenues that allow younger employees who are men to network with powerful men in top management, as suggested in the literature (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2021; Wallace, 2014). However, the views of the old boys' club uphold and perpetuate hegemonic masculinity in the workplace; as some older men in leadership do not regard women as competent, they are rude to them, and they think women do not belong in such workspaces. The risk is that these stereotypical ideas could be passed on to the younger generation of management, thereby sustaining the cycle of undermining women's abilities.

One participant opined that the mining industry would not employ women were it not for government legislation. He added:

*We're training artisans in the area that I'm working on, males and females. So, from time to time, when you've got to, [pauses] say, assign them to sections where there are positions,*

*you'll find a question from a very senior person from that area saying, 'Is that a lady or is that the man?' And, sometimes, somebody will send you an e-mail requesting you to second an artisan, and he will give you that particular request: 'Can you please send me Tom or send me Sam? These are all male names. In other words, he seems to be indirectly asking ... 'Please send me a male' (Msuenzi, EDT supervisor).*

The occurrence referred to in Msuenzi's extract contradicts the company's diversity policies' aim to remove gender-based discrimination, both in practice and policy. Msuenzi's view aligns with assertions by Burton and Weiner (2016) that people in authority often provide mentoring and support to people who are most like themselves, which perpetuates cultural norms, resonating strongly with opportunities created through the old boys' club. The situation Msuenzi describes shows that "increasing the numbers of traditionally underrepresented people in your workforce does not automatically produce benefits" (Ely & Thomas, 2020, para. 5). As such, companies' commitment to promoting diversity and inclusion needs to go beyond well-articulated policy statements and be backed by real action when circumstances allow the companies to act.

#### **6.5.1.2 Equality of opportunities — Structures**

*Most of the workplaces was not really equipped for women, like change houses and toilets... And, very quickly, we had to, in the organisation, bring changes to the infrastructure to accommodate females, which was costly in the beginning ... but it is not a problem anymore (Proppie, line manager: electrical).*

The long-serving staff, particularly from the mine, asserted that, for a long time, the mining industry was a male-only environment with working conditions and a culture built around men and masculinity. One participant shared an example:

*Before women [entered] in mining, men used to just change at the waiting place. You just change your clothes there, under the tap, shower... And, when women came, we had to put in men's and ladies' toilets underground (Peter, EDT supervisor).*

Participants alluded to changes that had occurred over the past two decades, including gender-specific changing houses (including underground, in the case of the miners), and personal protective equipment (PPE) such as coveralls, boots, and gloves being customised to suit women's physique

(which the Women in Mining Forum championed, as alluded to by participants). One participant admitted:

*Even things like personal protective equipment or clothing which is tailor-made for women, we never thought about things like that. I mean, women have a different figure to the men, so we need to cater for things like that to make things a bit more comfortable for them (Gad, operations engineer).*

The changes seen over the years could be attributed to policy commitments and deliberate PPI to promote structural changes targeting women that reduce hindrances to achieving equity in the workplace. These provisions are useful shared resources that organisations make available to enrich employees' experience and ensure safety in the workplace (Cooke et al., 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Furthermore, participants alluded to the companies' commitment to reducing the incidence of abuse against women and improving women's safety. The diversity policies of both companies, as well as the mining company's policies addressing gender mainstreaming, sexual harassment, and harassment, bullying, and victimisation, reiterated the organisations' commitment to creating a safe working environment for all. With regard to women's safety underground, Tsidi pointed out:

*All women were given radios, that they will report to the control room every hour about their wellbeing, if they are safe, so that the supervisor can look for her if she's not reporting within an hour (Tsidi, line manager: operations).*

The HR representatives confirmed the existence of dedicated communication channels through which employees, especially women workers, can raise complaints. Both HR representatives noted having qualified personnel in the HR departments who treated complaints with tact, being non-judgemental of the person raising the complaints, not discussing complaints in unauthorised spaces, ensuring perpetrators are appropriately sanctioned, and ensuring the psychological safety of the person raising the complaint.

The responsibility of diversity management interventions in the companies was mixed, as these tended to be inclusive and did not necessarily target women or men specifically. However, certain emphases were evident. One HR representative asserted that the company encouraged workers, especially women workers, to explore the various channels to register a complaint, based on the severity or circumstances. The example he gave was that there are instances where the first point of

call may be one's supervisor, due to the location of a challenging situation. If the issue is not appropriately addressed, the employee can escalate the matter to other channels within the organisation, including the HR office. As mentioned in the extracts of the HR representatives, diversity training is provided for all, and is not necessarily targeted at men. This inclusive approach is laudable, as it relieves the minority of the responsibility to take action to ensure diversity.

### 6.5.1.3 Equality of opportunities — Processes

#### Box 6.4

##### *Verbatim Extracts Supporting Equality of Opportunities*

*The training they give to the men is not different from what they give to the women. The opportunity is the same (Nhlanhla, electrical supervisor).*

*Some of these women have progressed over the years because of equity requirements, because, now, they are being considered before anybody else. So they would be first in line for promotion (Gad, operations engineer).*

*We do, now, currently, try to, you know, attract more women to come in, but more on the supervisory positions now, not on the lower-level occupations, where they can be able to function as supervisors. We develop them, we send them on courses, especially for artisans. We have a couple of ladies that went for artisan training; we send them for blasting certificate to become miners (Tsiadi, line manager: operations).*

*They [the company] support them [women workers] with training. Like [Lovelace] and [Sharny], they went to the first aid training... And then we moved them on to the computer training (Lucky, electrical supervisor).*

The gender mainstreaming policy of the mining company commits the organisation to undertake affirmative action by implementing development programmes for the advancement of women, and providing bursaries and leadership opportunities to women. A participant stated:

*To empower women ...the company provides bursaries, scholarships and ... internal trainings (Mark, production supervisor).*

These bursaries support capacity-building programmes aligned with the employee's current field of work. Also, the company provides avenues for women to take more senior roles. Another participant described the company's efforts:

*The company is doing all its best to pull women to the same level where men are, in terms of position, leading people, taking responsibility... (George, production supervisor).*

The extracts in Box 6.4 suggest that all three companies provide employees equal access to training opportunities, aligned with policy commitments, to ensure progressive representation of women at all operational levels and to build women's capacity to assume leadership positions. However, despite these offerings, some women do not take full advantage of capacity-building opportunities, illustrated by the quotes in Box 6.5. Participants noted instances where women do not take up training opportunities or shy away from leadership positions. Some women attributed this to being unprepared for extra responsibilities that accompany some opportunities, coupled with the demands of non-work commitments such as schooling, running side businesses, and being primary caregivers to their children.

Another concern is women's attrition into jobs that require 'softer' skills — jobs that are stereotypically considered feminine. Although not problematic *per se*, women's inclination towards such jobs supports men's perception that women do not have the physical capacity to perform in 'masculine' roles. Furthermore, high attrition rates could potentially reduce companies' investment in women (in terms of opportunities and training) in core areas of production, which, in turn, could encourage women to take up other roles. However, the attrition could also be women's response to a work environment that does not support their upward career mobility. When companies fail to back their policy commitments regarding diversity and inclusion with real action by denying women a tangible chance to succeed, women's participation may be reduced to "numerical tokens" (Jeanes, Knights, & Martin, 2011, p. xiv). As such, they may move into fields where upward mobility may be relatively easier.



**Box 6.5***Verbatim Extracts on Women's Reaction to Opportunities*

*Management goes to them [women] and says, 'Hey, we want two employees who can do this programme', or 'We want two employees who can train on this and that'; then some of them will be declining those opportunities because they're not interested in them (Sly, operations supervisor).*

*Women tend to move towards softer skills [pauses] positions, and then we lose our artisans in that sense that they want to go into training, they want to go into safety, and things like that. That doesn't require a lot of hard labour, [pauses] manual labour type of work... Unfortunately, you get a lot of women, which are opting for these softer skills than more women opting to be in charge of people. So, it becomes a bit difficult for women to have this track record say, 'You know, women are doing this and women are ambitious, and they want and can do these things (Gad, operations engineer).*

*Production is a very intense, stressful work. Some [women] would actually veer off into the departments like geology, safety department, planning department, or HR and so on (Peter, EDT supervisor).*

Besides capacity-building opportunities, the companies offer fringe benefits, such as maternity benefits, wellness support, and interaction with the Women in Mining Forum (in the case of the mining companies). The mining company's policies on diversity and gender mainstreaming list pregnancy as one of the factors that should not account for unfair discrimination during recruitment, promotion, and decisions regarding learning and development. As pregnancy is one of the biological occurrences that women may experience, both women workers and colleagues acknowledged maternity benefits as helpful organisational support. One participant stated:

*There are maternity benefits. I think that is one of the best things that they've ever done to support women in mining ... the train doesn't really leave the woman as they go through their maternity leave (Walter, senior geologist).*

Particularly for the mining companies, once a woman falls pregnant and informs the appropriate authorities, she is exempt from going underground or engaging in physically strenuous activities to preserve the health and safety of baby and mother. A pregnant worker is assigned light duties until

declared medically fit to return to regular work duties, which is at least four months postpartum. Also, women workers are entitled to maternity leave with pay. One participant explained:

*Once the employee is on that kind of leave, the employee gets 80% of her income, whereas the other twenty, we normally issue them with the UI 19, that's an unemployment insurance fund benefits at the Department of Labour... But, normally, they go for up to a maximum four months. It is actually policy (Paul, HR manager).*

Although maternity benefits were acknowledged as a useful resource for women in navigating their reproductive and productive rights and roles, pregnancy is not always favourable to women, co-workers, and supervisors. Women “*could lose up to a year*” (Gad, operations engineer) of working experience. With regard to co-workers, another participant explained:

*...even though this is very painful to us [giggles], not necessarily as men, but as employees, but I think it's a good thing. But it's quite painful... The issue is that, in most departments, when the lady goes on maternity leave, she actually doesn't get replaced. So, it means we have a space behind, and we have to pick up the slack in a way. But, from a human perspective, I think the company is doing quite well in that regard, in terms of offering quite a good maternity leave for women employees (Walter, superintendent geologist).*

Gad pointed out that the absence of women:

*“...creates its own problems. Because, if someone has been releasing for that long, they start having expectations that they will have the job, which is not the case.”*

With regard to supervisors, Proppie stated:

*And one thing that I do struggle a bit is, unfortunately, [hesitates] it's part of life, and you cannot get away from it. You know, you've got certain tasks planned ahead for a couple of months and, all of a sudden, they come to you and say, 'Listen, I'm three months pregnant. Now I cannot do X, Y, and Z anymore. I need to go on light duties.' Then your whole planning that was set out for your short-term and long-term needs to be rethought, and it's not always easy to get somebody from outside the contract or somebody to come and take their position. Especially in our environment, you need to have a lot of skills and training with regards to*

*safety. So, it's not easy for a contractor to just walk in to fill that gap. So, that is something that is actually a bit of a problem (Proppie, line manager: electrical).*

There seem to be differences in experiences concerning how women's absence due to pregnancy is treated. Based on Walter's experience, a woman on maternity leave is not replaced by a temporary hire; her role is secured and available to her upon her return. However, Gad provided insight into the challenges women, temporary hires, managers, and companies have to contend with due to the engagement of temporary hires. The engagement of temporary hires may have the difficulties Gad pointed out due to high levels of unemployment (Stats SA, 2022). The women workers expressed their satisfaction with their maternity benefits. Medical officers assess those working in hazardous environments, such as those underground. Once declared fit, they are allowed to resume full duties. However, many women have accepted the trade-offs that accompany motherhood, as exemplified by Olwethu's extract:

*Our HR manager, who I spoke to before getting pregnant, cos I got pregnant while I was in this company, she's a white lady [errrrm] and ... when I went to her, I was like, 'You know what? I'm old. I'm married, and I want a child.' And I know, here, once you get a child [fall pregnant], you need to be put aside from production. You can't go underground, you can't do the normal job that you're supposed to do, so you are like put aside for a while, while you're getting your pay, which is fine. But then your programme, your progress stops in what you're doing, because the environment doesn't allow a pregnant woman to go underground. And, you know, people like that, when you speak to them and say, 'You know what? It's part of our journeys. As females, we need to understand that some of the places will need to catch up with men, because they can't stop; they will always be going. They won't fall pregnant, they won't have issues with the operations ... and this advice has really helped me, I'm not gonna lie (Olwethu, production supervisor).*

Olwethu's extract illustrates how individuals leverage their personal and material resources within their organisations, which creates "the sense that they are capable of meeting stressful challenges" (Hobfoll et al., 2018, p. 104). Identifying and leveraging resources within one's environment is crucial in dealing with challenging situations.

Despite the challenges, the colleagues expressed their understanding of the biological role of women and the essence of maternity benefits, as they personalised the challenges of women and empathised

based on their own experiences with their wives and daughters. The material or instrumental support rendered by the companies and colleagues at work is critical for women to have the psychological safety to pursue both reproductive and productive goals as they deem fit (O'Hagan, 2018).

Aside from maternity benefits, reference was made to the wellness support available to all employees. The wellness policy of the mining company highlights two main types of wellness services available to all: psychosomatic support and healthy lifestyle. Shaped by principles of accessibility, costs, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and security of tenure, employees have access to different support structures, including a helpline that employees and their families can call anonymously to receive assistance, at no cost. The policy also clearly delineates the roles and responsibilities of the employees, their supervisor, and the HR department in ensuring that the policy's principles are upheld. Although not captured in their policies, the logistics company also has a helpline that offers wellness services to employees, alluded to by the women workers, their colleagues, and the HR representative.

Although companies offer wellness services to employees, they tend to offer more socio-emotional support to women than men. Sly opined that such discriminatory actions are unfair to men, although he understands the rationale for doing so. He lamented:

*Sometimes I say to them, this is not fair. [Company L] gives women first priority. When a woman says, 'I have a headache', they don't even hesitate, they'll say, 'No, go home'. When she's talking about other stressful issues that can maybe cause [pauses] her not to concentrate or lead to injuries or incidents, they don't even hesitate. But when a man says, 'I have a personal problem', they'll say, 'No, that's a personal problem.' ...but with the women, they'll say, 'Oh, it's fine. [pauses] You can go home; you can come back when you are fine. And if you are not fine, extend your leave.' ... You know, women will be given presents often. There's Women's Day, Mothers' Day, and they will be popping out presents. So, I find that to be unfair to us [men] [giggles]... I understand, one, we want to keep the women employees, and, two, we want to keep them happy, and we want to make them feel that they are appreciated (Sly, operations supervisor).*

Implicit in Sly's extract is women's and men's emotionality (Martin & Doka, 2000) and how this socialisation spills over from the household level to an organisational setting. Wallace (2014) explains that:

“men tend to be socialized to be self-reliant and independent, whereas women are socialized to seek support, take advantage of that support and be a source of support when necessary” (p. 4).

Sly’s concern also resonates with Essig and Soparnot’s (2019) assertion that “men may see themselves as being unfairly overlooked in favour of women because of positive discrimination practices” (p. 380). Approaching women’s empowerment in a male-dominated workplace as a zero-sum game can create “politically weak winners” (women) and “powerful losers” (men) (Kabeer, 1999, p. 436). In the case of Sly, the HR office seems to act in contrast to the non-discriminatory provisions of the Wellness Policy, which confirms Stamarski and Son Hing’s (2015) assertion that some HR practices (i.e., decision-making and enactment) can perpetuate harmful gender inequalities.

In both mining companies, there exists a women’s forum (Women in Mining), where women “*engage and share their experiences and frustrations in the mining industry, as well as forums that women send their representatives to, to be able to learn from each other*” (Gad, operations engineer). These forums have been influential in, for example, advocating for customised PPEs for women. Despite the forum’s agency, Msuneuzi raises the issues of labelling:

*And the women's grouping, we call them Women in Mining ... when the Women in Mining is talking, somebody listens. But they normally don't talk a lot, because they're also very much, like I said, fearful of the repercussions of being labelled or singled out on all those things. So, they haven't done as much as they could have, based on fear* (Msuneuzi, EDT Supervisor).

Wright (2016b) highlights that:

*studies have found tradesmen pressuring women to avoid associating with other women to undermine women’s attempts at collective resistance, including by labelling women’s support groups as unfair or ‘special privileges’*(p. 354).

This counter-productive behaviour of men deepens women’s disloyalty to same-sex groups and weakens women’s agency to mobilise for their needs (Wright, 2016a)

Formal mechanisms and PPIs implemented in the workplace present companies as good corporate citizens that comply with South Africa’s laws by working to attract and retain more women. For women workers, such mechanisms provide the psychological safety to bring their full selves to work

and work in an environment that supports their growth and allows them to thrive. It is important to reiterate that policies work when the commitment of top leadership is ensured. Furthermore, companies have policy commitments towards diversity and inclusion; however, diversity and inclusion interventions are treated as an HR issue, and are not embedded in the company's core business. This allows benevolent sexism to thrive, stifling women's advancement in the workplace. As a collective, women have not been able to speak up for fear of being labelled as troublesome. The implications of a weakened collective front keep women in survival mode, which prevents them from reaching upwards in the hierarchy.

### 6.5.2 Informal support structures

Support classified as informal does not emanate from organisational policies, but is developed through workplace relationships. From the data, the informal support co-workers provide women workers were classified as *technical*, *relational*, and *personal*. Due to several overlaps, these categories do not necessarily fall into neat classifications; however, it is trite that resources tend to be interrelated and not discrete entities (Hobfoll, 2011).

#### 6.5.2.1 Technical

Much of the support given by the women's colleagues was work-related and centred around enhancing the technical competence of women, as shown in Box 6.6.

#### Box 6.6

##### *Verbatim Extracts on Informal Technical Support*

Knowledge transfer:

*There might be a difference between the knowledge that I've got and her, and what I like when I'm working with someone, is when they concentrate so that he or she can learn. In that way, I was pushing her in that mentality, that, one day, she will be a leader, and she must know how to handle the work and how to handle the staff... I try to teach her as much as I can (Nhlanhla, Electrical Supervisor).*

*You see, I'm basically three months away from retirement, and my main aim is a knowledge transfer to these youngsters as much as possible. And being me that employed them, I would like to see that they also get somewhere in life, that they don't stagnate in one position for the next five to ten years" (Proppie, line manager: electrical).*

Growth opportunities:

*The career progression of [Louisa] starts with me... I don't have to shield her, and I also don't have to forget her... Not too long ago, I was on leave, and then she had to take over my role. I made her to be me in my absence. She did an excellent job. In fact, she did more than I did. But, because, when I got back, I got a lot of unexpected changes, which were very much positive, which I'm still relying on (Msuenzi, EDT Supervisor).*

*...[sounding concerned] She needs someone who's gonna pull her out of the box and tell her, 'No, no, you are too relaxed here. You know all the work.' And we spoke. She agreed, because we need a lady engineer, and if we don't encourage them to start to think about that, she wouldn't think about it. Even right now, whenever there's a leave, she must start to relieve. Let me expose her to the position, so she must know exactly what she's gonna face (Steve, senior HR officer).*

Non-discriminatory tasks:

*You cannot have blinkers on and say, 'This is a woman; this is a male, and they need to be treated differently.' You have to treat everybody exactly the same. And be doing that, you also earn their respect, because, if you don't do it, and you say, 'Okay, this is a woman, she can only do X, Y, and Z, and all the males must do the heavy stuff', then they also have a sense of discrimination against them. So, you have to give them tasks that is for everybody, not only selected tasks, that they can feel that they're part of the team, because if you don't, like I said, if you give them [women] selected tasks, light-duty work, they feel neglected, they don't really feel part of the team. That is how I grow them (Proppie, line manager: electrical).*

Complementing deficiencies:

*When it comes to physical jobs, 'I'm a boilermaker, you are a fitter, both jobs fall under mechanical', so, I told her, 'We're gonna work hand in hand' (Robert, boilermaker).*

*As a supervisor, try to understand the situation and find a position where you can fit in this person who cannot work as a man, because you cannot expect a woman to lift a 50kg bag of cement, you understand? Yes, there are those who can, but not every woman can lift that, so how would you help that lady to lift a 50kg bag of cement? So, you need to have people around her who will do the 90% work, and she will do the 10% work (George, production supervisor).*

Resource availability and resource sharing:

*I'm a mine manager, so my part of enabling her would be giving her all the resources that she requires to meet her daily targets and monthly targets ... so, in terms of enabling her on her role as a mine overseer, you know, I make sure she has all the resources that will enable her to achieve her daily targets. That could be equipment for her to work underground or people working under her. I give her the necessary leave that she requires. That's how I enable her (Tsidi, line manager: operations).*

*The other thing is, we share labour ... if she's lacking somewhere, or there's somebody who's been off sick for long, then I usually say, 'You know, I've got a spare guy who can cover for that one who's off, so that you can achieve your production' (Mark, production supervisor).*

Supportive co-worker relationships are characterised by “helping each other, sharing knowledge, good working relationships, and building trust and reciprocity” (Cooke et al., 2019, p. 707), which consequently improve performance and job satisfaction (Abugre, 2017; Yang et al., 2015). Knowledge transfer, experience-sharing, and mentoring are useful to women and any employee who has the privilege of working with individuals with industry experience spanning three decades (as in the case of some participants). This transfer is also possible if women workers are open to learning, which is how many participants described the women workers, except in the case of Sly, who described his junior colleague (Charity) as one who is not open to feedback:

*She's the kind of a person that uhhmm [pauses to think], she will not want to be [hesitates], how can I put this? Most of the time, she'll argue, even when you try to advise her regarding the operational mistakes that is happening while doing her duties. She'll argue, try to explain. She won't even give you a chance to express yourself, interrupt you when you speak to her ... even some of her colleagues, they are afraid to engage her because they're afraid to say anything. She's a woman, and it will be like we are undermining her; we're treating her differently because of her gender (Sly, operations supervisor).*

Due to Charity's response to feedback, Sly further admitted:

*With the kind of person she is, sometimes it's difficult for me to approach her with such suggestions. Yes, on my side, as a supervisor, I want a commitment from an employee. She must be eager to learn, not to be comfortable to sit in her comfort zone. Because, if I will be imposing something to someone, while she's not showing any interest. For me, I see that as something that is not going to be profitable on both sides (Sly, operations supervisor).*

Although women experience harsh treatment from some colleagues who are men, attributing job-related feedback as gender-based ill-treatment is an unfortunate side effect of having experienced sexism in the workplace. Due to safety concerns, operational mistakes could have far-reaching consequences, and women should not be unnecessarily defensive. In comparing Charity's



interpersonal relationship skills and response to feedback with those of other women workers like Olwethu, her supervisor, Victor, stated:

*She [Olwethu] doesn't stand back for any man. She's been trained well... One of her mentors, I forced her to know and make herself known to this old-school manager. He never takes on mentors; that's his attitude. But he was intrigued enough to take her on as a mentor, and, from there, she grew, because I gave her the worst kind of mentor anybody can give anybody, you understand? Worst and the best... Since he's a senior manager, obviously, being connected to him would open doors for you, but, in the same breath, you'll always be in the spotlight ... and will not be easily forgiven when you do something wrong (Victor, EDT supervisor).*

In this regard, Robert, pointed out:

*There are those ladies, like the one we're talking about, [Louisa], those who are passionate about their job, who are interested in what they are doing, and others who just came in that, 'We are ladies, we have to be treated like ladies' (Robert, boilermaker).*

The supervisor – employee relationship that exists between Sly and Charity and Victor and Olwethu (based on the extracts) highlights some tenets of the COR theory “initial resource losses lead to future resource losses” and “initial resource gains lead to future resources gains” (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, & Westman, 2014, p. 1337). Performance feedback is a critical job resource, as it facilitates learning towards improving self-efficacy (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Olwethu confirmed this during her interview, and expressed appreciation for her supervisor introducing her to the mentor. She attributed her growth to the mentoring she received, corroborating Victor’s extract. When comparing Charity’s interpersonal relationship with Sly to Olwethu and her supervisor, Victor, it seems that Charity is likely to miss out on growth opportunities because her supervisor is not motivated to push her into new territories, based on her response to feedback.

Regarding extracts on complementing deficiencies bear undertones of ambivalent stereotyping and benevolent sexism, as it appears men offer paternalistic help to women, and not necessarily the tools to succeed. Jones et al. (2014), however, caution that “it may seem ‘nice’ to feel protected and to know others are concerned for your welfare; however, this type of ‘protection’ may ultimately undermine women’s career advancement” (p. 2). Despite the occurrence of benevolent sexism, the technical support given to women builds their knowledge and capacity to enhance their self-efficacy

and prepare them for higher roles. It can be inferred from the extracts that colleagues are critical allies in women's career mobility. However, the process is shaped significantly by the dynamics of interpersonal relationships.

### 6.5.2.2 Relational

Participants alluded to the importance of having good working relations with colleagues, particularly in mining companies. Steve stated:

*To be honest with you, I don't think mining is difficult because of male domination. It depends on how you treat people, how you behave with people, how you speak to them to give them work, and eventually how you communicate expectations to them (Steve, senior HR officer).*

In terms of support given to women workers, participants described their role in creating a conducive environment for women to engage in managing workplace relationships and problem-solving, as shown in Box 6.7.

#### Box 6.7

##### *Verbatim Extracts on Informal Relational Support*

Creating a conducive environment for engagement:

*I didn't want her to treat me as a superior or a person who she's gonna be scared to ask things. I told her to take me as a colleague. If she doesn't understand something, she has to ask, so that, even on my side, it's gonna be easy to just know what she knows and doesn't know. If she doesn't ask, I'm just gonna assume that, okay, she understands that, then I'm passing on that thing, while she doesn't understand (Nhlanhla, electrical supervisor).*

Managing workplace relationships:

*Your knowledge must be your biggest tool. Use your knowledge to discourage those people that undermine you. People, when they realise that you know your duties and know everything about the job, now they start giving you respect on what you know. Because they see that this person is qualified and was not brought here because she has a pretty face; she was brought here because she knows her job. And they start respecting you, and you earn your respect. Earn your respect, and*

*people will respect you after that. And I told her that, even if people criticise you, take it with a smile. Take it with a smile, and they will come around* (Robert, boilermaker).

Problem-solving:

*If there's a problem with an employee, I will normally call them and say, 'I see that there's something wrong with you. Will you be able to discuss it with me, or you want to discuss it with someone, or you want to go to HR to report?'* (Lucky, electrical supervisor).

The quality of relationships among employees determines whether the experience in the workplace is dignified or a source of suffering (Laaser & Bolton, 2017). Participants admitted that they worked in harsh conditions, and that, beyond the physically taxing nature of tasks, the work culture is very masculine. Walter said:

*A lot of people still believe that you have to shout at people for them to actually do the job, and that masculine culture still persists* (Walter, superintendent geologist).

Participants also admitted that some colleagues who are men undermine women's authority, collectively punish women based on the error of one woman, and downplay women's capabilities, which confirms that sexism in the workplace still exists. Some participants pointed out personal efforts to make their colleagues more comfortable around them, but, in the same vein, encouraged women to develop a thick skin in dealing with abrasive male colleagues. This paradoxical position brings men's allyship into question, as they pass on the responsibility to women to excuse men's unacceptable behaviour (Gill et al., 2008), rather than calling out these colleagues. Such a stance sustains the dominant masculine working culture.

Relational support is vital, as cordial working relations allow women workers to experience a healthy working environment that enables them to engage effectively.

### **6.5.2.3 Personal**

At the personal level, the support offered to women workers is mainly focused on personal development and giving them time off to attend to private (usually family-related) issues, as shown in Box 6.8.

**Box 6.8***Verbatim Extracts on Informal Personal Support*

## Personal development:

*The most important thing about such people [women like Sandra] is that we must make sure we develop them and make sure that they've got all the tools and all the ability to cause them to come to the next level... Recently, I spoke to her, she studied up to M3, if I'm not mistaken, so I was asking her why doesn't she register for M4 right now, so that when the posts are coming out for junior engineers, she can apply for one so that you can become an engineer, because she must not be relaxed where she is, because, already, she is good and must get to another level. Being at the same place, she's becoming a hero there... So, if you are so relaxed and put yourself in a box, and say, 'This is where I'm gonna be', then you are never going anywhere, and nobody's gonna see you. But when you outsource yourself and show yourself out, everybody will see this person wants to be here, and this is what we should do for her. She also agreed that, next time, she's gonna register ... she's good at that [her role], and so keeping her there is gonna waste her time (Steve, senior HR manager).*

*I've requested her to complete her degree ... because she can be my successor; in fact, she can be my boss's successor without any problem... (Msuneuzi, EDT supervisor).*

## Private life:

*I could see the morning when she [Thando] came to work, I could immediately see there's a problem in the way she behaved. And I asked her, 'Can I please speak to you? ... And I said to her, 'Please, you can talk to me. If you don't want to, it's fine, but I'm here to help you.' And she opened up and explained to me what was going on, and with that, I could help her and give some advice... And I said to her, 'If you need time off, come and speak to me, I'll give you some time. Nobody needs to know about it; it will just be between us.' And that afternoon, she came to me. She said she wanted just half an hour... And she came back the following day and said to me, 'I followed what you told me, and now, like, the kid is quite happy at school. The problem has been solved, and I'm also a happy mother' (Proppie, line manager: electrical).*

*Like [Lovelace], I remember before, when she was pregnant, I told her, 'I don't think now you'll be able to come to work. Why don't you come to HR to ask for maternity leave', just to show that I'm*

*supporting her. Yeah, because she thought that, if I'm going to ask for the maternity leave, and then she won't be able to come back* (Lucky, electrical supervisor).

*It does happen once in a while, she'll ask you that the nanny was not at home, or the nanny was not feeling well, or she's asking to take the baby to crèche, or the baby's not feeling well. So, yes, we do understand, there will be times like that, and we have an understanding, and we support them whenever they have issues at home. We don't try or myself [corrects himself], I don't try to be unreasonable when there are issues at home. I try to meet her halfway, and then, you know, let her deal with the issues at home, and as well reminding her that she has some obligations as well, too, you know, her work demands are still waiting for her to work. So, I try to strike a balance between her giving me, you know, her own problems and work demands as well* (Tsidi, line manager: operations).

Participants, especially supervisors, described efforts to encourage women workers to build their capacities further. Although capacity-building is career-related, this type of support is considered informal because the prompts arise from informal conversations with workers and not as a requirement from the HR department. Previous studies have shown that women in male-dominated industries are less likely to be mentored than men (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2021). Burton and Weiner (2016) write: "Like many male dominated professions, school leadership is often described as an 'old boys club' with males receiving formal and informal mentoring to succeed and women receiving fewer supports" (p. 2).

The confidence colleagues have in the women workers' abilities and their desire to see them become upwardly mobile shapes conversation around continuous capacity-building. The following extracts illustrate how men are mentoring their women colleagues in a personal way, thereby opening a path for them. In Steve's extract, he considers his colleague, Hope, a strong candidate for an engineering role. However, Hope, in her interview, stated:

*Like I said, I don't want to become an engineer, because being an engineer, you become responsible, more responsible for more things. I feel that engineers are not happy. Some are happy, some are not, but I feel I won't be happy* (Hope, electrical foreman).

Therefore, the decision to pursue further education and remain in the industry, or vice versa, ultimately lies with the women workers. That notwithstanding, the support colleagues provide the

women workers positions them for future resource gains (in this case, capacity-building opportunities) (Halbesleben et al., 2014).

It appears that women workers need more encouragement and push as far as capacity-building is concerned. Some participants expressed their genuine desire to see their women colleagues build their capacities further to complement their years of work experience, increasing their chances of being promoted. Despite the bursaries companies provide to support such capacity-building opportunities, many factors influence women's ability and availability, including family commitments, future career plans, and running side businesses. These multiple and simultaneously occurring roles lead to role overload, which negatively impacts women's work–life balance (Du Plessis & Barkhuizen, 2015; Martin & Barnard, 2013). In the face of these potentially limiting factors, however, all women workers from one of the mining companies were enrolled in master's degree programmes at the time of being interviewed. However, it could not be immediately established whether their pursuit of higher education is evidence of the aforementioned encouragement or proof of the consequences of colleagues' support.

The women workers under study were the primary caregivers to their children. Although they sought to draw boundaries between their work and private lives, there were instances where the lines blurred. Extracts in Box 6.8 reveal women's hesitation in asking for time off work to attend to private issues. Thando, whose supervisor is Proppie, recounted this incident during her interview. The singular act of her supervisor (she described Proppie as a "father figure") allowing her time off, without clocking out of the system, to attend to her child's needs left a lasting impression of a supervisor who cared about her wellbeing. She affirmed that the opportunity to attend to her child allowed her to return to work, be fully present, and be productive. The hesitation in requesting time off to attend to private issues could be attributed to the long working hours, a presenteeism culture, and the expectation of uninterrupted availability (Botha, 2016; Wright, 2016a) that characterise male-dominated jobs. Since performance is measured against these expectations, women are often confronted with the dilemma of having to be visibly present at work and being primary caregivers for their families. The men expressed their respect for and admiration for their women counterparts who perform this balancing act.

In sum, the findings confirm that positive interpersonal relationships build trust and enable individuals to navigate challenges in the workplace (Halbesleben & Wheeler, 2015; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resources in the workplace can potentially reduce the incidence of stereotyping.

Furthermore, it is not enough to recommend women for positions and offer them development, and then not promote them. Supervisors and co-workers have to provide women with holistic support. Colleagues offering stronger and consistent encouragement and acting as sponsors could significantly advance women's upward mobility.

## **6.6 DISCUSSION**

According to the results of the study, formal and informal structures in the workplace provide resources that aid women's upward career mobility. The results indicate that commitment from their organisations and key leaders, supportive colleagues, access to personal development opportunities, mentoring and performance feedback, and improved workplace structures and processes enable women to leverage these resources to pursue career growth. One of the basic tenets of the COR theory states that individuals with initial resource gains lead to resource gains in the future (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Hobfoll et al., 2018); as such, when organisational structures promote the employees' wellbeing and improve working conditions, these work together to enhance employees' engagement (Contreras et al., 2021). Inasmuch as the study highlight how formal and informal structures openly support and positively contribute to women's upward career mobility, there are instances of subtle prejudice.

### **6.6.1 Open support**

Companies employ gender-based affirmative action and PPI to support women workers as pathways to spaces that have hitherto been inaccessible (Khadira, 2000), and this is communicated in companies' diversity and inclusion policies. Companies implement a mix of strategies, such as promotion, tie-breaking (favouring women over equally qualified men), and lexical assessment (where non-target applicants or men are ignored, unless there are no suitably qualified women) to support women to overcome systematic disadvantages. These strategies provide resource pathways that enable employees to thrive in stressful working conditions, as alluded to by COR theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018), thus providing women opportunities that prevailing masculine hegemonic practices may not allow.

Gendered patterns of support were uncovered. However, in contrast to Wallace's (2014) view, women receive more informative and material support than socio-emotional support. The limited socio-emotional support available to women could be attributed to women's desire to draw boundaries between their work and private lives. Few participants showed a good knowledge of women workers beyond the workplace. Moreover, informative and material support given to women could reflect the

kinds of support women actively seek in the workplace. Once a woman establishes herself as capable and knowledgeable to deliver on outputs, “the whole female thing just disappears” (Gill et al., 2008, p. 230), and moves to the admiration quadrant of the SCM model (Table 6.1). As such, women are inclined to seek more knowledge to establish themselves as competent colleagues. Informative and material support offered also reflect positively on those who are willing to support their colleagues to thrive.

Unless there is a shift from numerical tokenism, a reduction (towards elimination) of sexist preferential choices to work with other men (*‘Send me Tom or Sam’*), and a reduction in systemic bias during recruitment and promotion processes (Cox & Lancefield, 2021; Jeanes et al., 2011), affirmative action efforts and PPIs will not yield the desired results. Affirmative action strategies could be phased out once unfair discrimination in the workplace has been reduced, as the women would have been given the tools and resources to thrive, rather than rely on paternalistic help.

### **6.6.2 Subtle prejudice**

Although hostile sexism is declining, ambivalent stereotyping and benevolent sexism persist. Blue-collar jobs are generally “defined by their physical labour component” (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004, p. 274), and since physical strength is usually associated with masculinity, muscularity, and the male body shape, it allows men to dominate such roles (Wright, 2016a). This orientation persists and enables managers to make specific requests (*‘Send me Tom or Sam’*). Some women workers and colleagues admitted to the differences in physical abilities between men and women and how these shape how tasks are executed, in line with Messing et al.’s (2000) assertion that “biological specificities cannot be easily dismissed from consideration, particularly in blue-collar, manual jobs. Extreme job demands may be incompatible with the physical dimensions and capacities of most women” (p. 21). Jobs should be adapted to allow women to undertake tasks without harming their health (Messing et al., 2000). This is where technology plays a critical role.

With advances in technology, biology is becoming increasingly unimportant. In this way, masculine hegemony could be reduced. In addition, anecdotal evidence provided by the women workers on their ingenuity in finding alternative ways of undertaking physically demanding tasks shows how women build their competence at the individual level to reduce their dependency on their colleagues who are men. Dismantling masculine hegemony goes beyond hiring more women; it requires that companies redefine processes and structures in order to allow women an equal chance at delivering on work targets (Ely & Thomas, 2020).



The present study further found that different dynamics play out in woman–man and woman–woman work relationships; stronger connections were found in the man–woman relationships, in contrast to how men are generally stereotyped: as independent and self-reliant, and women as communal (Heilman, 2012). This seeming contradiction between gendered behavioural expectations and workplace conduct could be attributed to women’s need to prove their competence and be seen as ‘one of the blokes’ (Gill et al., 2008; Wright, 2016b). The relationships amongst the women appear complex, and many female participants noted that they preferred working with men. Of the 20 nominated colleagues, two were women (none of whom were supervisors). This does not necessarily confirm the assertion that women do not support each other in the workplace, but confirms the women workers are the only women or among few women in their department, which aligns with the findings of previous studies (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011; Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2016).

From a dominantly male perspective, participants confirmed that some men undermine women’s abilities, while some women do not support each other in the workplace. Two issues are evident. First, although women are socialised and expected to be warm and communal, they tend to pursue independence and competition (attributes and behaviours stereotypically associated with men) in the workplace. This pursuit confirms how attributes and behaviours stereotypically associated with men subtly and overtly shape organisational values. Second, members of minority groups adjust their association as they seek to differentiate themselves from those with whom they are stereotypically grouped. As such, they are constantly redefining who they are based on the dictates of their environment, while connecting to favourable power structures in the workplace.

The data show that formal and informal workplace structures offer useful resources for, and sometimes, constitute invisible barriers to women’s upward career mobility. The study highlights the importance of high-quality relationships in the form of supportive leadership and co-workers facilitating the sharing of knowledge and resources and building mutual respect. Individuals can leverage these critical resources to build resilience in stressful conditions (Carmeli & Gittel, 2009; Cooke et al., 2019). However, the conditions and practices that serve as barriers must be mitigated to optimise job resources.

## **6.7 THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

The section discusses the theoretical implications and practical recommendations for organisations with regard to workplace relationships.

### **6.7.1 Theoretical implications**

The study contributes to the field of positive organisational psychology by affirming that PPIs contribute to building positive organisations and enhance the wellbeing and growth of individuals and groups (Donaldson et al., 2019b; van Woerkom, 2021). For women in male-dominated jobs, the study identified that companies tend to pursue structural interventions that target group level outcomes. Given that the organisational culture in the companies studied has emerged due to a history of only men being employed, a systemic approach to supporting women's upward career mobility is appropriate. This approach does not only communicate the commitment of companies to enhancing women's wellbeing at work, but also companies' efforts to push the boundaries of inclusion.

The study contributes to the literature on supportive structures in the workplace through the use of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and SCM (Fiske et al., 2002). The present study supports the importance of resources, especially in challenging working environments. However, based on women's experience in male-dominated industries and how their competence of women is perceived, based on the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), the present study contends that resources are double-edged. Resources are portrayed positively in COR literature as those conditions and factors one seeks to preserve and utilise under stressful conditions. The present study shows that the very resources one can leverage in responding to stress could also be the source of stress. Without discrediting the value of resources, the study challenges notions and recommendations surrounding resources within the context of workplace support. By having a holistic view of the promise of resources pathways (supportive co-workers and organisational support), the promise and threats embedded can be adequately explored to ensure that individuals optimally gain from them.

The SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), which links attributes with emotions and behaviours towards the target (i.e., women), and the valued resources (in COR), show that hegemonic masculinity still defines the workplace. As long as the status quo remains, there is limited opportunity to counteract (through diversity management) the exclusion, or, at the very least, the marginalisation of minorities in the workplace. The combined insights from the two theories allow for a differentiation between effective and fruitless affirmative action interventions, and explain why these work or do not work.

### **6.7.2 Practical implications: Organisational level**

The interventions organisations should consider do not relate to only a culture change through training or other interventions. As in architecture, form follows function. If structural and process changes are made to how work is performed through investments in technology that make traditional

strength attributes moot, then we can also expect a shift in attitudes. Women would believe that the efforts of organisations to become more gender inclusive are sincere when structural changes allow them more opportunities to succeed in male-dominated jobs. Equity in the workplace could start with the tools used. This would then open the way for changes to the process — how the work is done. This would allow women to apply more of their personal resources to their work by doing things in novel ways and contributing to process innovation. Becoming part of the positive performance story of the organisation would have a positive ripple effect on their legitimacy.

Companies need to ensure a progressive representation of women (and, by extension, people with minority statuses) by providing learning and development avenues for all, especially through job shadowing, career development programmes, and leadership roles. These provisions will demonstrate the companies' commitment to the provisions in their diversity-related policies, beyond having policies as a legislative requirement.

Furthermore, companies need to commit to succession that is sensitive to diversity. It must be pointed out that the succession plan of the logistics company, as captured in the diversity policy, is sensitive to gender and race. However, the extent to which this succession has been implemented could not be established in this study. The policies of the mining company whose documents were reviewed are silent on succession. Such a commitment could ensure a balanced representation of members of minority groups at various levels of operation, particularly in senior roles.

The multi-level interventions employed by the companies to retain and attract more women are commendable. In the study of women workers, those with more than three years of experience confirmed having been promoted at least once. However, women are conspicuously absent from upper levels, for example, as mine managers in production.

When companies provide avenues of growth through affirmative action, the onus is on women to take full advantage of opportunities. Some women workers interested in building and sustaining their careers in these companies, and, by extension, the industry, are also actively pursuing further studies and building their capacities in order to take up more senior roles. Women are likely to be among the few in these higher roles; therefore, companies need to provide them with the necessary tools and room to explore, learn, and grow.

In the same vein, and as mentioned by HR representatives, diversity- and inclusion training sessions delivered to employees should be intensified, made more practical, and embedded in the organisation's daily operations. Employees should know how discriminatory choices negatively influence organisational outcomes and render diversity- and inclusion policies ineffective. By doing so, diversity and inclusion will move from being a purely HR issue to being a part of the core business of the organisation (Cox & Lancefield, 2021).

Considering the inclusive language used in policy documents, the needs of men should not be neglected in favour of the pursuit of women's empowerment. HR departments must provide equally for men's emotional needs. Dismissing the needs of men could leave them feeling unsupported, which will have a negative impact on their performance and their relationships with women. Men are critical allies in women's empowerment agenda, and it is important to ensure that interventions that promote women's equal and full participation in the workplace do not compromise men's participation.

Anecdotal evidence from participants showed that when companies become sensitive to women's needs, investments improve the work conditions and standards to the benefit of all. It is, therefore, commendable that the companies have invested in making the workplace user-friendly to women by providing gender-sensitive change houses, gender-appropriate personal protective equipment, and paying attention to women's personal development and wellbeing.

### **6.7.3 Practical implications: Personal level**

The study provides a number of insights into workplace interactions and the identity-building process, which were also shared with participants (Appendix L) for their feedback. Focusing on working relationships, the findings show that interactions in the workplace could be more wholesome if premised on the principles of *ubuntu*. Acknowledging that principles guiding the discourse on success in the workplace tend to be individual-centric, for example, independence, self-promotion, and competition (Heilman, 2012), principles associated with *ubuntu*, such as harmony and respect, can enrich workplace relationships. Behaviours and cultures threatening or supporting harmonious co-existence should be openly criticised or praised.

Men need to be engaged as allies. Having men as allies enhances women's sense of belonging in male-dominated workspaces. As such, the periodic diversity training sessions run by companies should offer men ways of creating an enabling environment for women to thrive, i.e., addressing the issue of male colleagues who display inappropriate behaviours (e.g., lewd jokes, sexist comments, micro-

aggression, undermining women's authority), being aware of how they treat mistakes women make (e.g., not to generalise and punish women collectively), and providing personalised feedback (e.g., discussions on skills and knowledge gaps). Beyond these, men should also be willing to learn from their women colleagues. Men need to recognise, acknowledge, and tap from women's unique experiences and perspectives in approaching tasks. The women alluded to finding less physically strenuous approaches to increasing their effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace. Such varied perspectives enable employees and organisations to be innovative and agile (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

For women, training sessions should enlighten them on their stake in the workplace and their career path, expose them to different career options within the company and industry, teach them to trust their skills and knowledge, and encourage their active engagement (e.g., not holding back in seeking assistance, suggesting specific ways of making the workplace women-friendly), and not shield inappropriate behaviour such as sexual harassment and bullying.

#### **6.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH**

The research could have been enriched in a few ways. Future researchers could engage unionised groups such as employee associations and the Women in Mining forum, as this could unearth other types of support women receive that may not have been noted by the organisations and individuals under study. Future studies could also complement interviews with a physical observation of workplace interactions. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, personal visits to the workplace could not be undertaken as planned. Observation of workplace relations could offer additional insights that interviews may not capture. Despite these limitations, the insights of the research are useful in understanding how formal and informal support structures support women's upward mobility in male-dominated jobs in the South African context.

#### **6.9 CONCLUSION**

The study contributes to the existing literature on formal and informal structures in the workplace that support women's upward mobility. Using COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), the study presents the double-edged nature of resources with regard to women's upward career mobility. A number of issues are considered salient. First, resources are double-edged; they can serve as useful conditions that can stimulate and propel positive change while also being a source of stress. This is seen when organisations provide capacity-building opportunities but deny women more senior roles and greater responsibilities. Second, men should be mindful of the support they offer their women colleagues. Paternalistic help is not career-enriching; rather, women need to be

given the tools and room to learn and hone their skills. Third, organisations need to view diversity and inclusion as part of the core business. Merely increasing the number of women in organisations will not allow organisations to obtain the full gains of diversity. However, committing to removing systemic biases in selection- and promotion procedures and embedding diversity and inclusion in daily operations should be the focus. Finally, it is crucial that women fully explore and utilise resources in the workplace, as resources are essential in enabling them to deal with the job demands of stressful work environments positively, and they build the individual's self-efficacy.

## CHAPTER 7: REFLEXIVITY

### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides insight into my journey as a researcher and the experiences that have contributed to completing a Ph.D. dissertation in an unfamiliar field. The chapter is based on my daily musings, captured in a reflective diary my supervisors encouraged me to keep from the start of my Ph.D. studies (January 2020). In this chapter, I reflect on the challenges of pursuing Ph.D. studies in an unfamiliar field, in an unfamiliar country, during a pandemic, together with my experiences as a researcher and my research decisions.

Reflexivity is usually defined as the process of “a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2015, p. 220). The reflexive practice has become an important component of qualitative research due to the subjectivity that accompanies this research approach compared to quantitative research, which privileges objectivity. Davis points out that in qualitative research, “research findings do not naturally emerge from data collection and data analysis. They are shaped by the choices made by the researchers over the course of the research process” (2020, p. 38). As such, researchers need to reflect on their positionality throughout the research process as their positionality shapes the researcher-participant relationship, as well as how data is collected, information is processed, interpretations are given, and conclusions drawn (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020; Sultana, 2007). Reflexivity is not only considered a transparent process but also a useful strategy for ensuring trustworthiness because it addresses the notion of researcher subjectivity and potential bias in qualitative research (Davis, 2020).

The chapter begins with a background that captures my entry into Ph.D. studies as a somewhat novice researcher. This sets the tone by detailing my experiences structured according to the major mileposts of my Ph.D. dissertation: methodology, data collection, data analysis, and reporting. I conclude with an overall reflection on my Ph.D. experience. The accounts draw on biographical, economic, geographical, and societal factors and circumstances woven in expected and unexpected ways that gave me a unique Ph.D. experience. I draw on notes from the reflective diary throughout the chapter, captured in italics. The expectation is that the accounts provided in this chapter contextualise the dissertation appropriately.

### **7.1.1 Setting the background: My entry into a Ph.D. programme**

I became aware of academia as a potential career path during my undergraduate study, which motivated me to pursue a Ph.D. degree. With a bachelor's and a Master's degree in development planning from Ghana and the UK, I believed I was sufficiently prepared to undertake Ph.D. studies. Although I had hoped to progress seamlessly from my M.Sc. studies to a Ph.D., I had to wait for close to five years to begin my Ph.D.

That notwithstanding, the waiting period allowed me to reflect and be clear about the area of specialisation to which I would commit a significant part of my remaining working years. Although I could not categorise my field of interest into a neatly defined box, I knew it was an intersection of women and their participation in the labour market. On 14 October 2019, I received confirmation from the Graduate School of Economic and Management Sciences on my admission to a Ph.D. focusing on women and their participation in the labour market. At that point, everything I had experienced in the almost five-year waiting period made sense. It felt as if one opportunity had become a silver bullet containing all the elements that constitute an ideal Ph.D. programme: a fully-funded programme, an international programme offered by a world-class institution, supportive and patient supervisors, a Ph.D. programme of less than five years' duration, and, of course, researching my area of interest.

As excited as I was, self-consciousness and self-doubt set in. The questions were endless: Are you sure you are built for a Ph.D.? Are you sure about leaving a decently paying job to live on stipends? Are you sure you have the mental fortitude to engage in academic studies after five years of being a worker? Are you ready to switch from development to business management? Are you sure you want to begin Ph.D. studies in your 30<sup>th</sup> year? Stellenbosch is world-class, but are you sure about your security and safety in South Africa? (Context: In 2019, there were xenophobic attacks, where many Nigerians — Ghana's closest economic and social neighbours — were caught in the middle. I also heard about robberies and incidences of gender-based violence, which appeared more brutal than stories I would usually hear in Ghana). I allowed myself to go through these thoughts and found ways of building my confidence ahead of the new phase that would commence in 2020. When I arrived in Stellenbosch, I knew there was no turning back, and I had to give it my all.

Giving it my all was greatly tested when I had to read and make sense of what seemed like an endless list of unfamiliar theories from psychology and management that served as the foundation for my research. With major credit to my supervisors, I was the first of my cohort to successfully defend her proposal within a month after arriving at Stellenbosch. I felt even more motivated to keep that



momentum, and that is when the Ph.D. journey started properly for me. I began working and thinking through the distinct but connected studies that would eventually constitute my Ph.D. dissertation, what methodologies to adopt in undertaking my study, and preparations for data collection. Based on my research experience at the Master's and bachelor levels, I thought I had a ready-made menu of methodologies under my belt. Little did I know that identifying a suitable methodology for a Ph.D. dissertation could be a long and winding process.

### 7.1.2 Reflexivity in methodology

A critical aspect of a Ph.D. dissertation is the methodology. One's methodology is as critical as the contribution one seeks to make at the end of the research. Deciding on methodology depends, not only on the research phenomenon under study, but also on the researcher's worldview (Seehawer, 2018). I was inclined to choose conventional methodologies, due to my exposure to these methodologies through formal education, both in the Global South and the Global North. At the beginning of my Ph.D. journey, I easily passed as one with a 'captive mind' — "trained almost entirely in the Western sciences, reads the works of Western authors, and is taught predominantly by Western teachers, either directly or through their works" (Alatas, 1993, p. 308). However, in thinking about methodological innovation as one of the contributions of my dissertation, I stumbled upon indigenous methodologies, specifically *ubuntu*. My experience with indigenous methodologies was confusing, interesting, and eye-opening — all bundled into one.

*I know my study is an interpretivist, but I'm not too sure what exactly an ubuntu paradigm looks like. Is ubuntu different from interpretivism? Besides its sensitivity to context, how can ubuntu contribute to methodological innovation in my study? (Reflective Diary, 05.04.2020).*

Initially, I struggled to understand how *ubuntu* (a concept I was familiar with) is applied in a research-methodology context. Stemming from my identity as a Ghanaian and, more specifically, an Akan, *ubuntu* as a concept was not unfamiliar. Akans and, by extension, Ghanaians generally have a collectivist orientation. Although the idea of being communitarian and relational is characteristic of our traditional setup, the concept is not labelled '*ubuntu*'.

The struggle I experienced applying *ubuntu* in research methodology made me realise how differently I think about life and how I approach research (primarily because of my formal education experience). If I were to describe identity from an Akan perspective in a social conversation, I would very easily lean towards a communitarian perspective. However, as a researcher, when thinking about how to

research identity, my 'research brain' approached the concept contrary to how I would in a social, non-academic setting. As a researcher who does not come from a society where the concept of identity would mean the same, whether in an academic context or not, I realise that the culture that I have been brought up in, assumptions, and the way I think about research do not always align. However, the effort to align my predominantly collectivist assumptions about identity into my research enables me to glean the benefits of conventional methodologies as well as local epistemologies.

I began to read about the concept and its application in various fields within the South African context, to enhance my appreciation and understanding of the context of my study. With this foundation, I moved on to how *ubuntu* is applied in research. In my early days, for the most part, articles arguing for *ubuntu*-inspired research made complete sense, but, as I thought through how that could be practical in my study, it felt as though the argument for *ubuntu* in research and knowledge production was merely an academic exercise with postcolonial ambitions.

That mental struggle continued until I found academic papers on studies that had applied an *ubuntu* methodology in research in Africa. I realised that a fusion of conventional and indigenous methodologies could be useful to ensure that I am not merely making an emotional argument for using *ubuntu* as a methodology. I became comfortable with building from conventional methodologies (interpretivism) while catering to the epistemological and axiological uniqueness of the context under study. South Africa is largely collectivistic, and communitarianism and relationality are critical dimensions that influence identity processes (one of the concepts I explored in my study). *Ubuntu* provides a useful epistemological and methodological lens that caters to this uniqueness that interpretivism may not fully explore. Just like Seehawer (2018), although "I did not originally situate the study within an Ubuntu framework" (p. 454), I concluded that merging interpretivism and *ubuntu* allows for slight methodological modification:

*With ubuntu methodology, I seem to have a nuanced approach to doing research — which is still much interpretivist: interpretivism with African characteristics, it seems. I reckon a fusion gives me the best of both worlds. I get the rigour associated with interpretivism, but in terms of practically undertaking data collection and analysis, I will be guided by the principles of ubuntu. In preparing for data collection, I need to ensure that I seek the consent of all relevant stakeholders, to provide options to engage in the local language (but this can be quite difficult to do on the phone) (Reflective Diary, 12.09.2020).*

Although Berger (2015) argues that “the worldview and background of the researcher affect the way in which he or she constructs the world, uses language, poses questions, and chooses the lens for filtering the information gathered from participants and making meaning of it, and thus may shape the findings and conclusions of the study” (p. 220), I learned the importance of selecting research approaches that are not only aligned my to research philosophical stance, but are also appropriate for the topic and context under study.

### **7.1.3 Reflexivity in data collection**

#### ***7.1.3.1 Doing data collection during a pandemic***

As a travel-lover and a Ph.D. student in a foreign country, I was excited about the opportunity to visit three different companies and interact with people other than my Ph.D. colleagues. Budget preparations began right after my proposal was approved in February 2020. Although on a scholarship, my research allowance was inadequate to finance the kind of data collection I was hoping to conduct — immersive and participatory, which required recording interviews and catering for translators; I was certain I could still pull through. However, on 22 March 2020, the university issued a “Position Statement and REC Guidelines on Research in the Time of COVID-19” ([Appendix H](#)), which essentially urged a reduction, postponement, or suspension of research with higher-than-normal COVID-19 risks. With plans to conduct in-person interviews, I knew this potentially meant I needed to pause and rethink. A day later, on 23 March 2020, the South African president declared a three-week nationwide lockdown to curb the spread of the Coronavirus.

*Cyril Ramaphosa has declared a three-week nationwide lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19. This means I cannot do in-person data collection. What could be the implication for my Ph.D. in general? How do I restructure my data collection plans to ensure the full participation of participants? Do I need to apply for a new ethics approval? Will companies still be interested in participating in the research? (Reflective Diary, 23.03. 2020).*

Thrown into a circle of the unknown, nothing was certain. This delayed data collection efforts significantly. Communication with companies properly picked up in September 2020, with four companies confirming their participation in the research. This allowed me to complete my ethics application. However, a day after receiving the ethics approval to begin data collection, one company pulled out without much explanation. During the waiting period, tough methodological decisions had to be made — how to collect good-quality data in the era of social distancing while observing the

principles of *ubuntu*. These methodological decisions had to consider: i) a country-wide lockdown, ii) the university's position on fieldwork (Appendix H), iii) the safety of participants and my own, and iv) alternative approaches to data collection.

With the guidance and approval of my supervisors, I decided to use tech-enabled platforms for data collection and hold off the study on the family members of the women workers. Phone calls and tech-enabled platforms became the only safe and preferred mode of communication, considering the limitations associated with the pandemic. Although these tech-enabled platforms offer "greater flexibility in time and location of data collection" (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020), the process was both challenging and convenient. The initial proposal included a third study which focused on the role of family in the development of positive work identities. However, this grouping of potential participants had to be shelved because the study was practically and logistically taxing due to the pandemic.

Throughout the data collection period, I was cognisant of the length of interviews, scheduling, and electricity interruptions due to load shedding. On the length of interviews, participants were informed the interview would last between 30 and 45 minutes, ensuring transparency from my side and giving participants room to plan their day. Depending on the participant's level of engagement, interviews could go well beyond the anticipated length. The challenge, however, is knowing how to complete interviews and follow-up questions while not keeping participants on the phone for an unreasonably long time. To mitigate this, I gauged the tones and picked on cues such as sighs and signs of environmental distractions in order to determine how much time I could take from participants to engage further.

Not being physically present with participants also meant that participants could easily ignore my calls or reschedule interviews without advance notice, and this impacted the overall duration of the data collection phase. As frustrating as that was, digital channels also allowed me to conduct interviews based on the availability of and convenience for participants, which meant redefining my working hours to accommodate participants:

*I interviewed Hope at 6.20 am (Reflective Diary, 27.03.2020) .... I interviewed Sly at 7.30 pm (Reflective Diary, 22.09.2021).*

Load-shedding also affected data collection, as internet and cellular connections were interrupted for the two-hour period. Although checking the load-shedding timetable became part of my daily routine, there were instances where I experienced unplanned load-shedding.

*Unplanned load shedding at 2 pm threw my interview schedule off. I had scheduled an interview with Naledi at 2 pm and at 4.30 pm with Charity. At 2 pm, power was interrupted. I sent explanatory emails and text messages to Naledi about my inability to phone her, hoping that these emails and messages would be delivered (knowing very well there are network connectivity issues). I couldn't dash to campus either, because I could not order an Uber. I just had to wait, connect, and reschedule both interviews (Reflective Diary, 13.03.2022).*

There were also instances where the tables turned — participants were unavailable because of load shedding. This was equally frustrating for participants because they had very busy schedules; therefore, any interruption to their scheduled time with me meant rescheduling to a later date. However, I persisted and secured the participation of 15 women workers and 22 work colleagues.

#### **7.1.3.2 Researching people with onerous work schedules**

I experienced reluctance, willingness to participate, and outright rejection (Gokah, 2006). The majority of potential participants verbally committed to participating, which was followed by an informed consent form via e-mail. The very first interview, for example, was met with disappointment. I had travelled to my home country, Ghana, for the Christmas break. The difference between the arrival time and the interview was approximately two hours (due to the time chosen by the participant, which was impacted by the two-hour time difference). After brief pleasantries with family, I rushed to set up my laptop, all geared up for the interview. The participant did not show up. Not even the messages and calls via WhatsApp and e-mails could help me get hold of her.

*Diana [not her real name] did not show up for the interview. This was not quite how I anticipated my first interview to be. I wish she could have communicated her inability to make it earlier... (Reflective Diary, 10.12.2020).*

This 'hide-and-seek relationship' with Diana went on for about three months; she would agree to a different date and time, and would either not show up or cancel a few minutes ahead of the time of the interview. By the third month, she had ceased all communications. I read her actions as unwilling

to participate, and I ceased soliciting her participation. Due to participants' schedules and work conditions, it was difficult to secure slots for interviews.

From the tone of phone conversations, I gathered that some were ambivalent. That notwithstanding, I presented to them the study's usefulness, the time range for the interview, and assured them of making it worth their while, similar to what Gumede et al. (2019) encourage researchers to do: "Researchers have an ethical responsibility for ensuring that individuals are given all the information needed to make informed decisions about whether to participate in research or not" (p. 2). There were instances that I genuinely felt bad for calling several times in a month to secure a slot for interviews:

*This is exhausting! I feel like I am a thorn in their flesh. Yet, I can't be overly sentimental. I also need to get the process running. Finding that good balance in remaining on their agenda and being a nuisance is tricky... (Reflective Diary, 27.01.2021).*

Despite these challenges, at the end of many interviews, the participants expressed positive sentiments and apologised to me for the delays in granting the interview. In those instances, I was relieved that all that persistence had paid off and was worth the participants' time.

However, there were scattered instances where participants were rude: "*Madam, I gave you an interview and that's it. I have work to do*" (via WhatsApp 15.11.2021). This is the response I received via WhatsApp from a supervisor. I had data gaps, and I sent him an email with a few questions. The questions did not, to my mind, require deep thinking. After two weeks, I sent him an e-mail reminder, and I still received no response. I decided to follow it up with a WhatsApp message, and that was the sharp response I received. My first reaction was, "*Interesting*". Before I was aware, my tear ducts had let themselves loose. I started questioning: What did I say (or type) to infuriate him? Didn't we have a pleasant chat during our interview? (His interview was one of my most memorable — he was warm and had lots of insights). Is he just having a bad day?

As I made my trips to the bathroom to dry my tears, I assured myself I was hormonal, as I was six months pregnant. Although this was a non-verbal message, it really hit me. As I tried to stop the tears, I laughed at myself in the mirror and thought to myself: This is what Sandra, Olwethu, and Belle go through daily. They work with people who are that direct and may not exactly care how their message

ruins your day. I remembered the advice the women workers and their co-workers gave young women who wanted to build careers in male-dominated jobs; I also needed to toughen up. After all, I am researching women's experiences in male-dominated jobs. I also wondered if I indeed wanted this brutal kind of honesty from the potential participants who had earlier 'ghosted' me that they were not interested in participating in the study. I took solace in Gokah's (2006) quotation from Adler and Adler (2002), who note that rude behaviour exhibited by participants may have nothing to do with the researcher's character.

### ***7.1.3.3 Positioning myself in the 'virtual field'***

As a non-South African researching the lives of women in male-dominated industries in South Africa, I identified largely as an outsider. As a Ghanaian woman, I am aware of the challenges associated with homogenised and collective labels, such as being African (Zwangobani, 2012). Although I share a collective identity as an African with participants, I did not consider that identity enough to qualify me as an insider. As I prepared for the 'virtual field', I pondered several questions participants could ask me concerning my position: Why is a Ghanaian situating her research in the South African context? Why should they grant me audience? Do I know enough about South Africa and South Africans to study them? As expected, participants wanted to know more beyond my identity as a Ph.D. student at Stellenbosch University: "Where are you from?"; "Why this topic?"; "Why South Africa?"; "Are you married?"; and "Do you have children?" were repeatedly asked during interviews.

During my introduction, I projected my identity as a doctoral student from Stellenbosch University – and like Adams, "carefully navigating his place as an outsider deserving of their time, information, and respect" (Adu-Ampong & Adams, 2020, p. 4). I reckon this status served me well because I had limited practical insights into the lives of my participants, and this enabled me to approach data collection with an open mind and probe certain questions further. There were instances that, as a researcher, I felt some of my participants were over-sharing. I could not pin it to a particular reason for that kind of confidence to share – it could be that my identities as a non-South African woman pursuing a doctoral degree at a well-reputed institution was non-threatening, or assurances of confidentiality, or the semi-anonymous interface because most of the interviews were audio calls.

Being aware of my status as an outsider allowed me to read broadly about South Africa and pay attention to informal interactions outside the school environment (for example, at the mall, with Uber drivers, and at church). These were useful ways of learning about interactions among South Africans. I learnt from these interactions that, if a South African tells you, "I'm doing this (an activity) for you

now,” it does not necessarily mean one should expect an immediate action — it is only an assurance of getting the request done. Armed with this informal knowledge, I was more than prepared to manage my expectations if a participant told me they would speak to me ‘now’.

Regarding my research area, I have no previous employment in a mine or logistics and transport company. However, I was quite familiar with the mining environment; I spent most of my formative years in a town that hosts Ghana’s biggest gold mine. I was not totally thrown when participants talked about going underground in a cage or described the work of a rock drill operator. These prior experiences were also helpful because they enabled me to visualise and make sense of their descriptions in a period where in-person interviews could not be conducted. Prior to data collection, I had a series of conversations with my father, a retired industrial engineer with the mine, who also gave me useful insights into Ghana’s own experience on the evolution of women’s involvement in mining industries, which was somewhat comparable with South Africa’s experience.

#### **7.1.4 Reflexivity in data analysis and reporting**

##### **7.1.4.1 Coding**

Coding is a critical activity that enables qualitative researchers to analyse and interpret their data (Punch, 2014). Codes are tags or labels matched against pieces of data as a way of attaching meaning. Since the researcher does the coding, I realised that labelling data is heavily influenced by my personal philosophy, understanding, and interpretation of the data. As Cousin (2008a) points out, “Most qualitative researchers also accept that their analysis and write-up are deeply influenced by their own positionality” (p. 32).

*As I listened and went through the codes of four interviews today, I realised that a few codes needed to be refined to match the statements of participants. Not that the codes were wrong, they just needed to be refined. Finding the ‘perfect code’ seems to be an elusive quest — and I am sure someone will code this differently, given the chance. I have learned that the motive for coding is not to achieve perfection, but to have a strong basis to help me build on to achieve higher levels of abstraction. What is important is to actively listen to the interviews multiple times (but then how many times is enough; maybe at the point where you can hear the participant’s voice through reading the transcription alone) to help develop useful codes (Reflective Diary, 08.07.2021).*



I concluded and accepted that data analysis, interpretation, and reporting of my findings could never be neutral. Taking cognisance of the need to project the voices of my participants, as recommended by the interpretivism–*ubuntu* methodology, I constantly compared codes with the data to ensure that the foundation for subsequent analysis and interpretation was not overly clouded by my sentiments and biases.

#### **7.1.4.2 Reporting**

‘Everything seems interesting’ greeted me every time I began reporting my findings for the three studies. In reporting my findings, I was confronted with the challenge of what to include and exclude – which is also impacted upon by the researcher’s biases - similar to what Gokah (2006) experienced in reporting the findings of his study on child sex-workers. Although my participants were not a ‘vulnerable’ group, my commitment to confidentiality and anonymity was always confronted with what was ‘safe enough’ to share with an academic audience. There were instances where participants gave me very vivid insights into certain occurrences at work or home.

*I really enjoyed [Msuenzi’s] interview... He gave very specific, useful, and, in my opinion, non-incriminating examples of how companies pay lip service to the gender, diversity, and inclusion agenda. As much as I am not disclosing the company’s name or his actual name, I feel my research will be richer with such an example. But what if someone from the company comes across my published articles? Will they be able to point out who exactly Msuenzi is from the job title? Will they be fine with such an example being shared with an outsider? Will it be prudent to keep such examples out of my research? But then again, what will be the benefit of shelving non-incriminating pieces of information if it will yield a positive change in organisational behaviour? I need to be objective in presenting the good, the bad, and the ugly, because I am not on a praise-singing mission (Reflective Diary, 20.09.2021).*

Again, sifting through data and codes to find the most relevant issues to report on turned out not to be an easy task. Throughout the process, I reminded myself repeatedly that total neutrality or objectivity was impossible; rather, I needed to interpret and report in line with the research objectives.

*I tried typing my findings, and this was harder than I thought. I have so much interesting data that I get swayed sometimes. There are many interesting insights that have very little connection with my research objectives. I have had to oscillate between my research objectives and codes several times to begin weaving the story I am trying to put across... The way out will*

*be to develop new publications from the data I have before they become dated* (Reflective Diary, 13.05.2021).

Additionally, guided by the *ubuntu* research ethic to promote participants' voices (Chilisa, 2012), there seemed not to be a ready-made set of criteria guiding the quotes to include in my write-up.

*Including quotes in my write-up enriches the paper significantly... Whose voice counts? Whose quotes make it to the write-up? Does everyone get to be equally represented through quotes? I have decided to compare quotes transcribed and select quotes that best suit the issue being discussed, while ensuring that quotes are not extracted from only one participant* (Reflective Diary, 15.05.2021).

Indeed, deciding which quotes to include was more challenging than expected. Some participants clearly articulated their sentiments; others truncated their statements with, 'You understand' as they explained, while other ideas got drowned in providing more details. Follow-up interviews allowed for probing of those missing ideas. Hence, some quotes in the chapters were drawn from the initial, and follow-up interviews were amalgamated to make complete sense. Also, I found myself drawn to well-articulated thoughts, as they usually supported the themes very well. I had to constantly check myself to ensure that I was not clipping the voices of those who often remain voiceless in research. Throughout the reporting process, I was guided by the need for representation from diverse voices.

Videos containing summaries of the studies were prepared and shared with participants, as shown in [Appendix L](#). These videos sought to achieve the following: a) report findings of the dissertation to participants, b) a data triangulation approach that enables participants to validate findings, and c) to honour their participation and time by making them the first set of beneficiaries of the research. By seeking participants' feedback, I was ensuring that I was accurate in my portrayal of their reality (cf. Buch & Staller, 2014), and also pursuing interpretivism's subjective and *ubuntu's* relational epistemological bases that position participants as co-creators of knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

#### **7.1.4.3 Feedback from other academics**

I benefitted immensely from the feedback from other academics at conferences, colloquiums organised by the Business School, weekly presentations by the Graduate School of Economics and Management Sciences (GEM), and other colleagues who had recently completed their Ph.D. degrees. These presentation avenues were useful in helping me review my manuscripts. For example, I

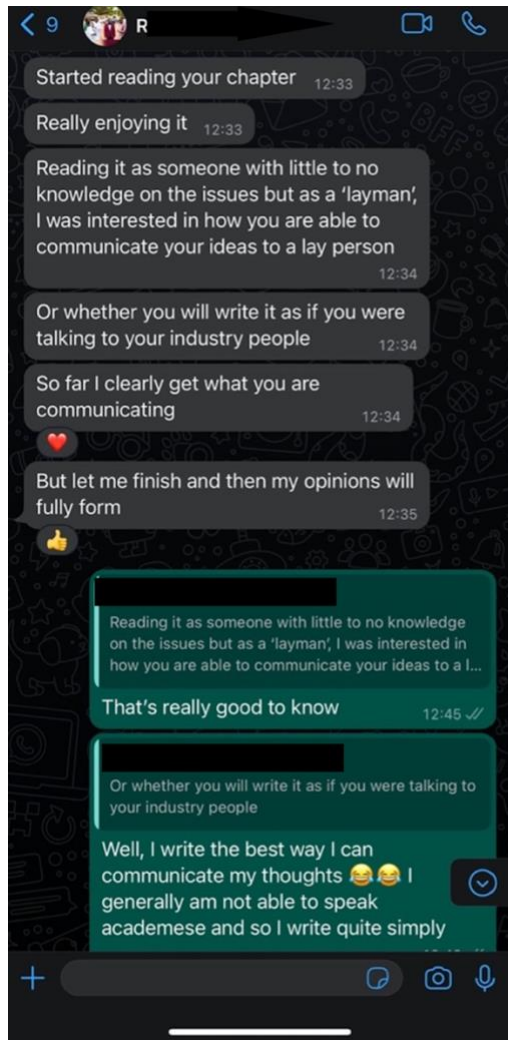
participated in the African Faculty Development Workshop (AFDW) (Appendix I) presented by the African Academy of Management (AFAM) and submitted Study II (Chapter 5:). As part of the workshop, participants had the opportunity to peer-review manuscripts. Some of the comments I received from one of the reviewers were:

- *There is clearly a potential significant contribution but the document does not fully develop.*
- *There is adequate literature review which is relevant to the study.*
- *Literature is descriptive, less integrated in most parts.*
- *Argument weak — less golden thread.*
- *Literature does not lead to logical research questions.*

This feedback (Appendix J) was similar to the comments of the faculty reviewer. Although neither was an expert in the field of the study, the feedback I received after the oral presentation was that the oral presentation was clearer and more interesting than the written manuscript. Based on their comments and suggestions, the manuscript was subjected to a total overhaul: the literature review was rewritten in an analytical manner, with established linkages between the literature review and findings from the data analysis.

The colloquium organised by the Stellenbosch Business School is another useful platform to refine ideas. The feedback I received on Chapter 4: helped clarify my stance on decolonising research methodology and be consistent with terminology usage. For example, a faculty member (the session's moderator) helped me structure an argument I struggled to capture eloquently. I was trying to make the point that interpretivism and *ubuntu* are philosophically and methodologically similar, and that a fusion makes for slight methodological modification, which triggered a counter-argument that *ubuntu* adds nothing new. The moderator asked whether my argument is that decolonising research methodology allows for data collection and analysis to be done in a manner that purposefully accommodates and integrates contextual dictates because of the *ubuntu* component. That question offered me the language to capture my thoughts concisely.

Figure 7.1 is a WhatsApp message I received from a colleague (who had recently completed his doctorate in development economics at a leading UK university) on his initial thoughts about the second study (Chapter 5:).

**Figure 7.1***Feedback from a Colleague*

*Note:* A screenshot of a WhatsApp conversation about my writing style with a friend. Own work.

Throughout the period of writing, I pondered my writing style. I do not use complicated language or 'academese' but tend to be wordy. In many instances, the need to be succinct while crafting my thoughts in an engaging manner left me stuck. What was helpful was an activity I engaged in and a comment I picked from a writing workshop (Gaining and Keeping Momentum in Writing, organised by the Stellenbosch University Library and Information Service). The activity entailed five minutes of free writing (i.e., participants wrote freely on a topic for five minutes without worrying about grammar, referencing, flow, and other academic writing requirements). After five minutes, I had written a little over half a page. Although this is not easily replicable in academic writing, the facilitator's comment:

“Write freely initially, but be brutal when editing”, saved me from several moments of writer’s block. Rather than getting stuck over how to perfectly craft my ideas, I have learnt to write in an easily digestible manner and improve flow and structure as I edit. Without wading into the ‘plain language versus academese’ debates, I tend to agree with Mark Blyth (2012): “Turn it into things people can understand, let go of the academese, and people will engage” (para. 7). I believe it is communicating in plain language that allowed my colleague quoted in Figure 7.1 to be able to give me feedback on my study despite having no expertise in the field.

#### **7.1.4.4 Publishing**

In February 2021, my supervisors suggested we turn in Study I ([Chapter 4:](#)) to be considered for publication. Their suggestion was to aim for high-ranking journals to get good-quality feedback that could be integrated into the Ph.D. dissertation. They were right. By April 2021, the journal wrote back and, among others, had this to say about the paper:

*We believe your paper has considerable potential for development towards publication at this journal; unfortunately the manuscript is not yet ready to be peer reviewed. Normally this conclusion means that a manuscript will be ‘desk rejected’ — returned to you to consider publication in another journal (09,04.2021).*

The journal connected us with a development editor, who provided useful insights into strengthening the paper's core argument. Strengthening the argument and structure of the paper necessitated re-writing significant portions of the manuscript, reading suggested bibliographies, and speaking with experts on research philosophy (Dr Atkinson) and *ubuntu* (Prof. Metz). The manuscript underwent four major rounds of revisions before it was finally accepted on 20 July 2022 (see Appendix K).

Publishing academic articles can be long and winding. Almost every time, after the first read of reviewers’ comments, I felt exasperated and overwhelmed. However, reading and digesting the comments subsequent times gave a clearer sense of what changes were required, making revision less taxing. I have learnt to trust my thoughts, but, at the same time, be confident enough to share and subject them to the scrutiny of experts. Ideas and arguments are built and sharpened through the painfully slow process of critiquing and refining.

### 7.1.5 Final thoughts: Reflecting on my Ph.D. journey

Before I began my Ph.D. studies, I was told by several people that a Ph.D. dissertation is a piece of writing that is very specific to a particular field. However, in my experience, I realised that I have to borrow from several fields to make that piece of writing come alive.

*I am currently based in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences and affiliated with the Business School. I find myself reading and borrowing from fields I did not anticipate from the start of the programme. I have been reading publications from economics, labour relations, management, politics, philosophy, and psychology. I find this rather ironic; a Ph.D. is a very focused academic venture, yet one borrows from several fields to complete that focused piece (Reflective Diary, 10.04.2020).*

The lesson learned from this experience is to be open to a wide pool of knowledge, which enriches that specific piece of focused writing. The need for reading beyond my field of study has come with reading from my least enjoyable field: philosophy. I found myself mocking myself: “*You want to get the title ‘Doctor of Philosophy’, yet you don’t want to read on philosophy.*” Getting a decent grasp on philosophy and its application in my dissertation took a while. One constant feedback from supervisors (until the final phases of the Ph.D.) was that there was little or no theoretical integration of results and no theoretical advancement. Theoretical advancement (i.e., advancement in knowledge and research processes) was one of the crucial aspects of my Ph.D. dissertation, which necessitated different ways of learning to enable me to adequately capture my contribution to knowledge. The different strategies I used included paying attention to how other authors integrate theory and findings, constant engagement with supervisors, participating in workshops, and watching YouTube videos. My understanding deepened and helped me integrate my research better.

The COVID-19 pandemic also forced me to revisit my approach to my Ph.D. studies. Within the first two months, I worked daily, leaving little room for fun activities. Although my boyfriend (now husband), a fourth-year Ph.D. student (at the time), advised me to “Take things easy”, I never quite took his advice. As the planner and the more systemised one of the two, I thought it was his usual laid-back, don’t-sweat-it, it-will-be-done side talking. However, I realised I was losing steam rather quickly during the lockdown. Being isolated and confined to a small room at Mount Simon Estate, Cloetesville, limited to my computer for work and leisure and battling with the concept of working from home (for me, home is where I rested), I began to understand how much of a balance I needed, and that I had to maintain a steady momentum to keep me going.

I realised that I was approaching the Ph.D. as a sprint, rather than a marathon. It dawned on me that the sprint approach was not sustainable, as it required so much mental effort to get so much done in so little time, which left me exhausted and finding it difficult to bounce back. Approaching my studies as a marathon gave me room to build steady momentum and incorporate rest into my routine, while still ensuring that I still delivered on outputs. What I found during this time was that it was hard for me to take breaks.

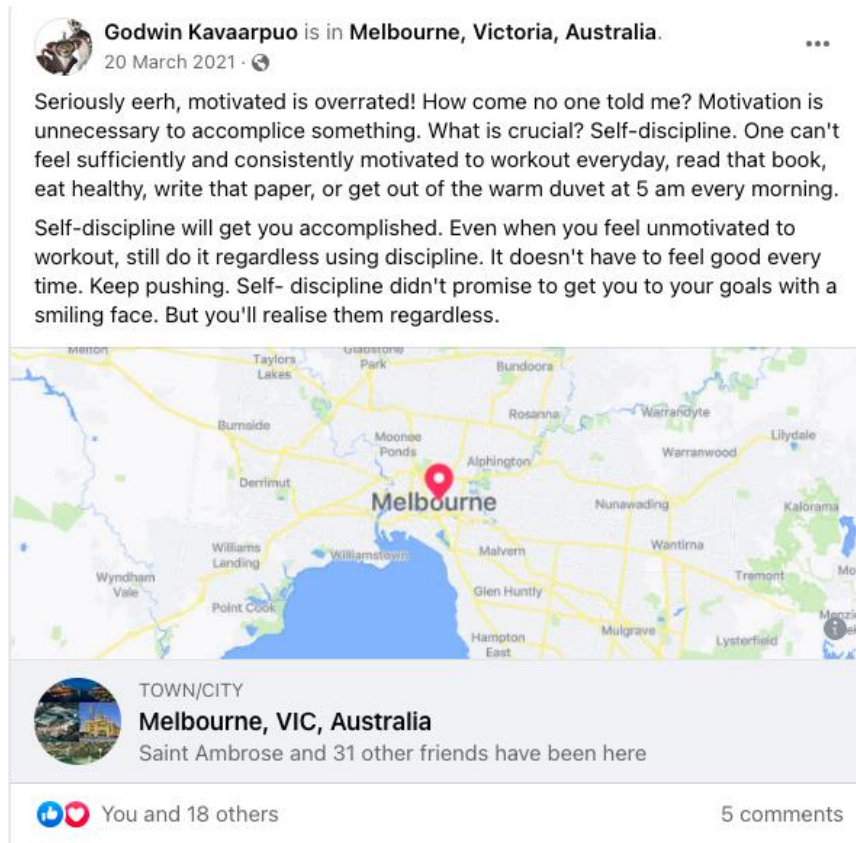
*It's hard for me to take breaks. I only seem to break when there's an activity, like meeting up with Christer, going to the mall to get groceries, cooking, or when I cannot drive myself to work. I know taking breaks is important, but I can't seem to. I feel like I'm wasting precious time, which could have been used to read an article or write a few sentences. But, for my own sanity, I do need to learn how and when to pull the plugs and when to zoom right back!*  
(Reflective Diary, 29.04.2020).

Although I am unable to associate this difficulty of actively taking breaks with a particular reason, I recognise the role of my previous life as a worker, the working lives of many Ghanaians, messages consumed from the media, particularly from so-called 'self-made' accomplished individuals, and my strive for 'perfection'. As a worker, I do not recall requesting a day off just to stay at home and rest or undertake a leisure activity. I ensured that my leave days were tied to activities or errands that demanded my full attention or required a significant portion of my day. I took leave days purposefully. For many Ghanaians, rest is a luxury. We tend to work hard — it is important to be seen working; if not, you are considered lazy. Also, due to our weak socio-economic systems, individuals in the informal economy work almost all day and week to protect their livelihoods. One of the most significant cultural shocks and lessons I learned at Stellenbosch was how shops and stalls were closed or closed early on weekends and holidays. This experience taught me that earning money is important, but so is rest. I drew parallels with my reality: working on your paper for a Ph.D. is absolutely important, but so is rest. Since I found that balance, I have been in a better place; I am more productive, well-rested, not unnecessarily stressed, and more positive about the Ph.D. experience.

One of the most important lessons learned from doing a Ph.D. during a pandemic is that motivation alone is not enough; self-discipline is key. However, this lesson was learned during my musings over a friend's (also a Ghanaian Ph.D. student in Australia) Facebook post (Figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2

## Facebook Post on Self-discipline



Note: A screenshot of a friend's Facebook post on motivation and self-discipline. Own work.

From my musings:

*Indeed, Godwin is right. Self-discipline is key. I am not always motivated to work on my paper or to make the corrections Prof or Smaranda suggest or to read articles from Philosophy, but I know those are necessary processes that will lead to the end goal. To think of it, you can be very interested in the field, but if you do not have the self-discipline to put in the hours to read, to write, to redo the work, you will not progress. This idea of self-discipline is similar to the Akan adage: Anoma entu a, obua da (If the bird doesn't fly out [in search of food], it will sleep of hunger). I need to put in the hours for it to count eventually" (Reflective Diary, 21.03.2021).*

I compared my Ph.D. experience with my experience learning how to bicycle. In May 2021, I decided to learn how to cycle and reached out to one of my colleagues, Christer. One order was constant,



“Don’t stop pedalling. To be able to move, you just have to pedal.” I was consciously trying to get my legs to pedal, but the more I approached this as a ‘science’, the more difficult it became. Needless to say, I still do not know how to cycle. However, I found similarities between this extracurricular activity and my academic journey. In my reflections, I am reminded of how I struggled to make ‘home’ a place of work and home during the lockdown. I had had a clear separation between home and work; therefore, being forced to work from home was a struggle. I could not concentrate, was easily distracted, and was easily bored. The first few days, I was lethargic. Despite the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic and what it meant for my studies, I knew I had to keep moving.

*In retrospect, it seems, since March 2020, I have just had to ‘pedal’ to help me move. I was stuck in the first few days of working from home. I had to give myself that kind of push to keep work progressing. I believe it was my resolve to work as though there was no pandemic, and, of course, the constant meetings with Prof and Smaranda really helped me to pedal to move (Reflective Diary, 4.05.2021).*

## **7.2 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I shared glimpses of my Ph.D. journey. The intention is to provide a sense of how my research studies came into being – based on my experiences as a researcher in a new field and a foreign country, as well as doing a Ph.D. in a pandemic.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the findings of each study and a synthesis of the contribution of all three studies. Beginning with a summary and overall conclusion of each study, the ensuing sections discuss the dissertation's contributions, limitations, areas of future research, and conclusion.

### 8.2 RECONCILIATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### **Study I: Beyond Western paradigms: Exploring *ubuntu* as a complementary local epistemology in work-identity research in the South African context**

Work identity is highly contextualised, as it is constructed through the influences of socio-cultural factors. To match its highly contextual nature, it is important to employ research methods responsive to contextual sensitivities. On this premise, the study explored how local epistemologies can be utilised in conducting context-sensitive work identity research in the South African context. The study explored how research on work identity has been conducted within the South African context, and extends the literature on the suitability of employing local epistemologies as complementary to conventional methodologies. The research questions (RQs) guiding this study were:

*RQ1: How have previous studies on identities in the workplace in the South African context been approached methodologically?*

*RQ2: How can local epistemologies shape research methodologies specific to identity research?*

The study (Chapter 4:) sought to contribute to the dialogue on methodological decolonisation by assessing the strengths and weaknesses of conventional and local epistemologies employed in research that focuses on identities in the workplace. The methodologies used in previous research on identities in the workplace in the South African context were assessed through a systematic review. A key finding relating to the methodologies employed was that, all reviewed publications employed conventional methodologies, especially interpretivism. It can be inferred from the findings that conventional methodologies are generally popular; therefore, such academic outputs are likely to have a wider understanding of these methodologies amongst their audiences (Hamann et al., 2020).

In catering to socio-cultural influences, the study assessed how *ubuntu* could serve as a complementary local epistemology to conventional methodologies such as interpretivism. The findings show that *ubuntu* does not entirely deviate from or contradict practices associated with interpretivism. However, *ubuntu* and interpretivism are philosophically and methodologically congruent (Chilisa, 2012; Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015). The challenges associated with local epistemologies as a basis for methodology include not offering a readily available set of methods (Seehawer, 2018) and the risk of being understood and appreciated by a geographically limited audience.

To circumvent the challenge of creating an either-or-neither choice for research when considering methodologies, Study I argues for epistemological contingency — a fusion between conventional Western epistemological approaches and local epistemologies. This fusion enables researchers to gain from the rigour associated with conventional methodologies while approaching research from a culturally sensitive epistemological basis (Briggs, 2013).

The methodology and ethics of the ensuing studies (Studies II and III) were initially premised on an interpretivism–*ubuntu* frame. However, the Coronavirus pandemic and the associated countrywide mobility restriction and restrictions instituted by the university (Appendix H) did not allow for the full application of this frame as the basis of participatory research. The lesson for me was that, using *ubuntu* as a basis of methodology and ethics requires one's physical presence in the field. That notwithstanding, the *ubuntu* principles of interconnectedness, solidarity, respectfulness, and reflexivity (Schreiber & Tomm-Bonde, 2015; Seehawer, 2018) provided the basis of ethics in the ensuing studies.

### **Study II: Exploring identity work strategies adopted by women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated jobs in South Africa**

Women's participation in some traditionally male-dominated industries, such as construction, mining, and transport remains low. Working in male-dominated industries, women experience a myriad of challenges that have been extensively explored in previous literature. However, current literature provides limited insights into how women navigate dominant identities in such professions in order to become upwardly mobile.

The second study, presented in [Chapter 5](#): was shaped by the research objective: *To explore how women navigate dominant identities in the workplace and create alternative ways of existing in male-dominated jobs in South Africa*. The study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ3: *How do identity resources available to women contribute to building positive work identities?*

RQ4: *How do individuals negotiate their minority identities in building positive identities?*

This study sought to deviate from oppressive discourses that characterise previous studies on women in male-dominated industries by pursuing an agentic perspective that explores alternative ways of problematising diversity, ways that do not create opposition, i.e., an us-versus-them situation.

One of the key methodological arguments made by this study is that identity research needs to be approached with sensitivity to the context. Recognising that identity is conceptualised in relational terms in the sub-Saharan African context (Mkabela, 2015), the study was situated in a Deleuze–*ubuntu* theoretical frame in order to produce context-sensitive research, in line with the epistemological contingency argument made in [Chapter 4](#). Adopting a local epistemology such as *ubuntu* not only ensures that the study accommodates contextual sensitivities, but also contributes to the decolonisation argument this dissertation makes. Although the Deleuzian frame is Western, it deviates from the atomistic view of society, and offers ways to conceptualise minority identities, social inequalities, and the interrelatedness of human interaction that are relational (Barlott et al., 2017). Similarly, *ubuntu's* relational and communitarian dimensions emphasise the inextricable link between the individual and the community (Metz, 2020).

In doing identity work, participants sustain or divest their identities and counterattack negative behaviour. The findings showed that, in doing identity work, women balance between adopting major or owning minor, simultaneously rejecting and/or differentiating from elements of both. Also, there is a vacillation between covering stigmatisable identities, such as being a woman, while emphasising less threatening identities, such as professional identities. Drawing on the minor lens, the identity work process shows how, at the individual level, dominant identities are deterritorialised towards creating new pathways of being (Fernando et al., 2020). However, this process of deterritorialising and reterritorialising does not conform to a 'zero sum' (i.e., either strictly pursuing molar lines or molecular lines). Thus, the identity work process is a kaleidoscope of processes that present fluid, non-linear, and adaptable strategies to make new pathways and alternatives for these women.

### **Study III: Formal and informal workplace structures and women's upward mobility in male-dominated jobs in South Africa**

Stemming from the collectivist culture within which the women studied in Study II (Chapter 5:) were situated, this study explored how formal and informal structures in the workplace support women's upward mobility in male-dominated jobs in South Africa. As discussed in Chapter 6:, the study was guided by the research objective: *To explore how formal and informal structures in the workplace support women's upward career mobility in male-dominated industries.*

The study was guided by the following research questions:

*RQ5: How do formal structures in the workplace foster the development of positive work-related identities that enable women to become upwardly mobile at work?*

*RQ6: How do informal structures in the workplace foster the development of positive work-related identities that enable women to become upwardly mobile at work?*

This study focused on how actors external to the individual contribute to the upward mobility of women in male-dominated jobs, based on the relational nature of identity in collectivist societies. The conceptual guide for this study was to view organisational structures and working relationships as resources for women.

Using the case of 22 supervisors and colleagues of core participants and HR officials of participating companies, the study found that the support given at the organisational level could be categorised as: commitment from management, equality of opportunities (structures), and equality of opportunities (processes). Participants admitted that the inclusion of women in their core business started as a response to government legislation. However, the companies had internally sustained the drive towards diversity and inclusion over time. A company's commitment to this goal can be determined by how much of a priority this is to senior management. For companies whose senior management was committed, their workers referred to management's efforts without being asked directly.

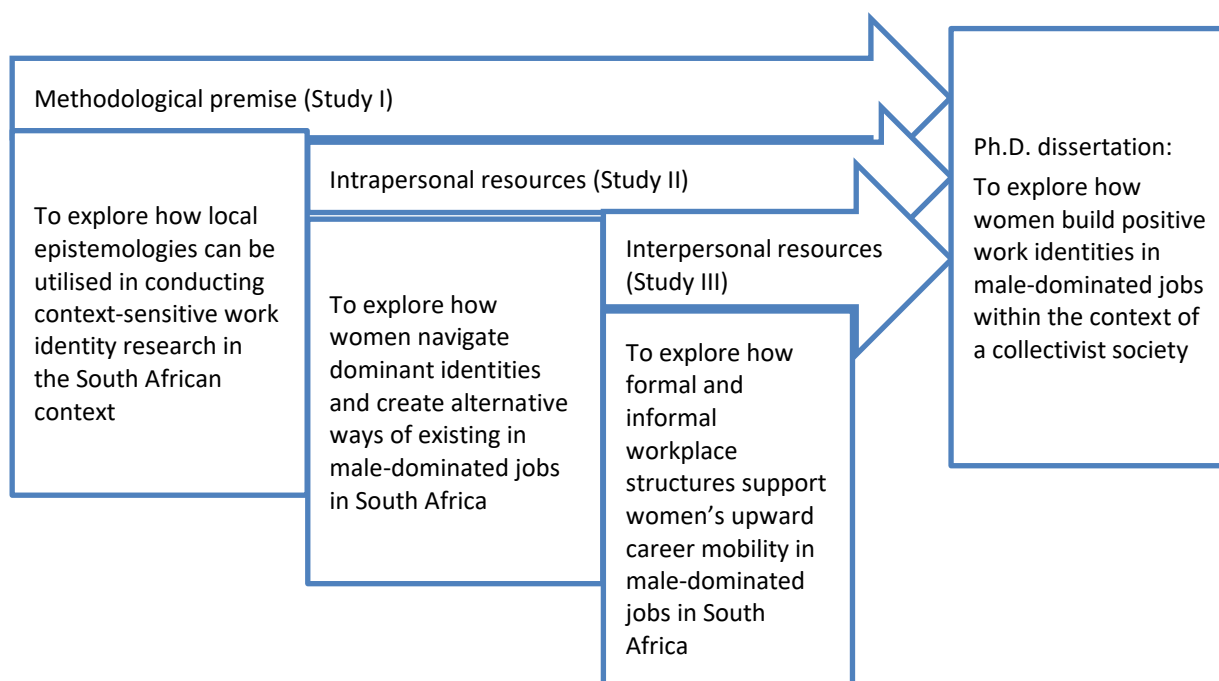
At the interpersonal level, the support provided to women workers was classified as technical, relational, and personal. Several overlaps exist in these classifications, due to the interrelated nature of resources. From the findings, it is apparent that many colleagues had workplace relationships with their colleagues, but with limited insights into their personal life, suggesting that definite boundaries

are maintained in the workplace. As such, the support received was mainly informative support directly in line with their engagement in the workplace. It is clear that the support given by the organisations and colleagues exists at the personal level. This is not to disregard the potency of systemic challenges, such as lack of growth opportunities within the organisation or hostile or ambivalent sexism from colleagues who are men, in limiting women's upward mobility. A major finding of this study is that organisational policies on diversity and inclusion may remain aspirational if organisational culture and norms continue to perpetuate negative stereotypical views regarding women's competence.

Participants were also of the view that there is a limit to what organisations and colleagues can offer. Individuals have to take full advantage of personal, interpersonal, and organisational resources to advance to higher levels in the organisation.

### **8.2.1 Reconciliation of the study's overall research question**

This dissertation sought to explore how women build positive work identities in male-dominated jobs within the context of a collectivist society. Guided by the motive of conducting context-sensitive research, the first study was aimed at identifying how previous research on identities in the workplace had been approached methodologically. The systematic review revealed a bias towards conventional Western methodologies. Since identity is conceptualised in relational terms in collectivist societies, the paper argues that a local epistemology, such as *ubuntu*, could complement conventional methodologies, such as interpretivism, to better cater to contextual sensitivities in the sub-Saharan African context. To achieve methodological innovation in this dissertation, the argument for epistemological contingency (i.e., the fusion of conventional and contextually sensitive epistemologies) provided a methodological basis for subsequent studies, as shown in Figure 8.1. This conceptual difference also supports the focus on actors external to the individual and how they shape the individual's identity-building efforts.

**Figure 8.1***Synthesis of Studies*

*Note:* The figure shows how the independent studies are set to contribute to the achievement of the overall objective of the dissertation. Own work.

With this epistemological and methodological premise, the second study explored the identity work processes of women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in a collectivist society through a Deleuze–*ubuntu* epistemological frame. This frame provides a theoretical basis that caters to a relational way of life, and also provides the major/minor concepts in exploring minority identities. Methodologically, the study employed interpretivism, complemented by *ubuntu* research ethics. In catering to the relational component of the identity-building process in collectivist societies, the third study focused on actors and structures within the individual’s workplace and how these support their women colleagues’ upward mobility. The findings of these independent but related studies have significant implications for theory and practice.

### 8.3 REFLECTING ON MY REFLECTIONS

When I began this academic process a few years ago, I thought I knew enough about research methods to carry me through the programme. However, interrogating my knowledge of research

methodologies was one of the highlights of this academic journey. Exposure to the universalist versus contextualised epistemologies/methodologies debates confirmed Ezeanya-Esiobu's (2019) assertion that "No curriculum is devoid of partisanship or ideological persuasion" (p. 15). I do believe in and argue for a fusion of conventional and local methodologies. However, it is imperative that researchers on Africa be well acquainted with local epistemologies to carry out this fusion appropriately. I thus agree with Owusu-Ansah and Mji's (2013) challenge to African researchers to:

*Persist in developing and using alternative methods of studying our reality and refrain from sticking to the research pathways mapped out by Western methodologies, within which many have been trained (p. 1).*

However, I do not seek to deepen the either-or-neither approach to decolonising research methodology but to challenge researchers to use and develop local epistemologies.

As the research explores how women build positive identities, both from intrapersonal and interpersonal identity resources, a subjectivist and exploratory view was appropriate to understand the dynamic and fluid nature of social interactions (Côté & Levine, 2002; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014). Using a qualitative research approach allowed me to understand how individuals make meaning of their experiences, rather than seeking to establish generalisable truths. Also, using a case study research strategy in Study II ([Chapter 5:](#)) was premised on the strategy's ability to offer an in-depth exploration and understanding of complex social phenomena (such as identity) while catering to different epistemologies (Forrest-Lawrence, 2019).

My interaction with participants over two years gave me a unique first-hand experience of doing qualitative research during a pandemic. In dealing with demanding work schedules, the uncertainties of a global pandemic, and whatever participants were dealing with in their personal lives, I was reminded of Schreiber and Tomm-Bonde's (2015) advice that researchers "enter the field with humility, awe and wonder at the complexity of human life" (p. 655). I honoured humility (an *ubuntu* principle) by remaining respectful of appointments, being polite during interviews, and honouring confidentiality assurances. I was also grateful for the participants' openness and willingness to share their stories, without inducement. Their stories gave me the complementary human touch to what would have otherwise been a purely conceptual dissertation.



## 8.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE DISSERTATION

The contributions of the findings of the dissertation are organised under three main sub-sections: theory, organisational management, and practice (at the individual and interpersonal levels), specifically how work-identity research can be conducted in a contextually sensitive manner, the identity work processes of individuals bearing minority statuses, and how structures in the workplace can support women's upward career mobility.

### 8.4.1 Theoretical contribution

The dissertation responds to calls to decolonise research and research methods within the sub-Saharan African context (Chilisa, 2012; Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019; Owusu-Ansah & Mji, 2013; Seehawer, 2018). Rather than perpetuating the binary view of decolonisation, i.e., universalist versus contextualised methodologies, the dissertation argues for a fusion between local and conventional methodologies. The evidence provided in [Chapter 4](#): is premised on the assessment of *ubuntu*, a local epistemology with a largely relational philosophical basis, and interpretivism, a conventional paradigm with a largely individualistic basis, and suggests a philosophical and methodological congruence that allows for this fusion to happen. What I sought to do differently from similar studies was to situate the subsequent studies in an interpretivism–*ubuntu* frame; however, this could not be fully achieved (i.e., negotiating access and managing power relations, as suggested in Konadu-Osei, Boroş, and Bosch (2022), due to limited physical interactions with participants as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, *ubuntu* did influence the research ethics.

Beyond pursuing a context-sensitive methodology, the dissertation also used theories that mirror participants' realities, to cater to the specific differences in identity conceptualisation. Recognising that identity in collectivist societies is relational rather than individualistic, the dissertation explored how individuals construct positive work identities at the intrapersonal ([Chapter 5](#):) and interpersonal ([Chapter 6](#):) levels through cognitive and behavioural (i.e., actions and interactions) processes. By doing so, this study responds to Carrim's (2016) call for future research on gender, culture, and identity to explore the perspectives of individuals and their larger community.

In this regard, Study II ([Chapter 5](#):) contributes to the existing literature on identity work and studies on women in male-dominated jobs using a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame. Using the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, rhizome, discourses on territorialisation, and the concept of *ubuntu*, the dissertation accommodates the relational nature of identity within the study context, which previous researchers have largely overlooked. The concepts of rhizome and minor provide a multifaceted and context-

sensitive approach to theorising identity work, and also reveal how the identity work process is constantly performed through connecting and distancing (paralleling Deleuze's identity difference position). In addition, the Deleuzian concepts of major/minor, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation were useful in exploring, not only the identity work process and career progression of women in blue-collar roles, but also in linking this identity work to the larger cultural and structural changes in male-dominated industries. The chosen theoretical anchoring of this study proved insights into the link between the identity work of the minor and social changes.

Closely linked to the use of Deleuzian concepts is a major contribution of the dissertation — that the identity work process resembles a rhizome. The women's heterogeneous experiences in the workplace affirm that no single identity work strategy is the ticket to success. Thus, the identity work process is fluid and constantly moving through connections and disconnections. In creating lines of flight to reterritorialise a masculine domain, not just of working but also of being (i.e., attributes and behaviours stereotypically associated with men as ideals for success in the workplace, following Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruence theory), women perform fluid and complex movements. These movements comprise both instances when they do not break away from the majoritarian ideals but instead try to either follow or appropriate them, and instances when they do not (completely) reject their identities as minorities. Instead, through connection and identification, complemented by disconnecting and differentiating, they actualise the possible: carving out space for themselves to exist in this environment, not just as copycats of men, nor as stereotypical women, but as women who 'are here to stay'.

As such, this dissertation provides evidence that identity work is a complex and continuous process of becoming — a kaleidoscope of processes that present fluid, non-linear, and adaptable strategies to create new pathways and alternatives for these women. The value this theoretical positioning of identity work brings to the larger field of identity theorising lies in the marriage of structural (i.e., sociological) and agentic (i.e., psychological) approaches to identity and identity work. In a world where social structures struggle between crumbling and becoming rigid, with clear line demarcations between social groups, it is important to gain deeper insight into how to make more fluid these territorial lines, and how to create new possibilities of being and being with each other.

The dissertation contributes to identity work literature by providing evidence from an underrepresented population — women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries. Identity work and management theories have often focused on respondents in managerial roles in the Global

North, creating a single narrative of what identity work is. Guided by Adichie's (2009) caution against creating a single story: "Show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become" (time. 9.27), the dissertation examined the case of an underrepresented population in the context of the Global South to provide alternative insights into identity work. Similarly, from a postcolonial perspective, the dissertation provides a voice and representation to a voiceless population. The dissertation does not merely position them as respondents, but as active contributors to knowledge, whose voices are amplified (Mishra, 2013; Spivak, 1988) throughout the dissertation. By focusing on this sample, this dissertation also provides answers to the reflections of the first author in Fernando et al. (2020) that:

*My experience of misidentification shared by multiple-identified incumbents of blue-collar occupations within diverse organizations that house workplaces less collaborative than universities? One might anticipate that more overt discrimination and stigmatization occurs in such contexts (p. 782).*

Indeed, women experience discrimination and stigmatisation in the form of ambivalent sexism in organisations with blue-collar roles.

Furthermore, Study III ([Chapter 6:](#)) employed COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) in exploring the supportive mechanisms in the workplace and their role in the upward mobility of women. The application of COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) deviates from how it has been typically used, i.e., explaining how personal resources facilitate career progression (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019; Hobfoll et al., 2015), and join a few studies that have expanded the theory to resources within the individual's environment (Contreras et al., 2021; Cooke et al., 2019).

Combining COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) (i.e., valued resources) and SCM (Fiske et al., 2002) (i.e., linking attributes with emotions and behaviours towards the target) shows how the workplace remains defined by hegemonic masculinities. Retaining the status quo provides limited room to counteract the exclusion or marginalisation of minorities in the workplace. The fusion of these theories also allows for a differentiation between effective and empty affirmative action interventions and explains why they work or do not work.

The study also contributes to the field of positive organisational psychology by affirming that PPIs contribute to building positive organisations and enhance the wellbeing and growth of individuals and

groups (Donaldson et al., 2019b; van Woerkom, 2021). For women in male-dominated jobs, the study identified that companies tend to pursue structural interventions that target group level outcomes. Given that the organisational culture in the companies studied has emerged due to a history of only men being employed, a systemic approach to supporting women's upward career mobility is appropriate. This approach does not only communicate the commitment of companies to enhancing women's wellbeing in the workplace, but also to steer the companies to be more inclusive.

#### **8.4.2 Practical contributions: Organisational level**

At the organisational level, this dissertation provides organisations insights into the experiences of women in the workplace. The findings suggest that organisations need to pay attention to organisational norms and culture, such as processes and structures that undercut groups during recruitment and promotions. Such occurrences not only affect diversity in terms of statistics, but also threaten the upward mobility of people bearing minority identities. It is, therefore, commendable that organisations are designing and implementing various strategies such as career development programmes, job shadowing, parental benefits, and leadership roles to increase the statistical representation of women. However, if the organisational culture allows for the authority and competence of women to be undermined, the workplace will not provide an optimal environment that supports growth and upward mobility within the company and industry. In addition, organisations will not reap the dividends of investments made in women. Organisations can do things differently by a) reviewing person specifications during recruitment (i.e., the language should not be indirectly communicating, 'We are looking for a man'), b) taking action against discriminatory practices in operations (which allow for supervisors to request Tom or Sam), c) giving visibility to members of minority groups, and by d) approaching diversity and inclusion as part of the organisation's core business and not a typically HR issue (Cox & Lancefield, 2021). A more systemic approach to diversity and inclusion management can create a more representative workforce and a psychologically safe working environment.

The interventions organisations should consider do not only belong to culture change through training or other interventions. As in architecture, form follows function. If structural and process changes are made to how work is performed through investments in technology that make traditional strength attributes moot, then we can also expect a shift in attitudes. Women would then believe in the sincerity of efforts of organisations to become more gender inclusive, mainly because structural changes would allow them more opportunities to succeed in such male-dominated jobs. Equity in the

workplace sometimes starts from the basics: the tools we use. This opens the way for process changes — how we do the work that needs to be done. This opening would allow women to bring more of their personal resources to work, in the sense of doing things their way and contributing to process innovation. Becoming part of the positive performance story of the organisation would immediately have a positive ripple effect on their legitimacy.

Similarly, organisations should support workplace authenticity (Cha et al., 2016). The evidence in the dissertation suggests that behaviours stereotypically associated with women (for example, being called ‘soft’ because one is not brash with colleagues) usually do not have a place in the workplace. It is important to highlight, however, that authenticity in the workplace is:

*A double-edged sword: Despite its potential benefits, self-disclosure can backfire if it's hastily conceived, poorly timed, or inconsistent with cultural or organizational norms — hurting your reputation, alienating employees, fostering distrust, and hindering teamwork (Rosh & Offermann, 2013, para. 2).*

As such, unfiltered authenticity is not encouraged, but rather authenticity that has relevance in the workplace and enables one to build trust with colleagues. McPherson (2021) argues that “there is no ‘work self’” (par. 5); therefore, non-work identities will permeate the workplace. While I am in no way advocating that organisations micromanage workplace relationships, it behoves organisations to support women to bring parts of themselves to work (Kreiner et al., 2006). Not exhibiting stereotypical masculine attributes does not make one less competent. As such, competence should be premised on delivering outputs, rather than individual personality characteristics. Individuals are, however, cautioned against unfiltered authenticity (Rosh & Offermann, 2013). Insofar as non-work identities expressed in the workplace are not detrimental to participants, their colleagues, and organisations, individuals should be encouraged to draw on such identities to enhance their workplace identities.

Furthermore, organisations need to trust their investment in women by providing opportunities for growth. Particularly in the core business of the companies, women are not represented at senior levels, although there was a minority of women’s representation in support functions such as administration and finance in the companies under study. It is apparent from the findings that the number of women represented declines as one looks higher up the hierarchy. Even as companies provide the necessary resources to build the capacity of women, it is also important to provide them

access to higher roles. This not only opens the leadership to different perspectives, but also shows women in junior roles as evidence that growth in the company and industry is possible and supported.

In sum, improving organisational culture, promoting workplace authenticity, providing capacity-building opportunities, and investing in structural changes can enhance women's workplace experience and enable companies to achieve true diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

#### **8.4.3 Practical contribution: (Inter)personal level**

The dissertation provides a number of insights into workplace interactions and the identity-building process, which were also shared with participants (Appendix L) for their feedback and perusal. Focusing on working relationships, the dissertation shows that interactions in the workplace could be more wholesome if premised on the principles of *ubuntu*. Acknowledging that principles guiding the discourse on success in the workplace tend to be individual-centric, for example, independence, self-promotion, and competition (Heilman, 2012), principles associated with *ubuntu*, such as harmony and respect, can enrich workplace relationships. Behaviours – whether rooted in organisational culture or from elements of *ubuntu* that favours patriarchy – that threatens women's career mobility should be openly criticised, while those that support harmonious co-existence should be duly acknowledged.

At the interpersonal level, colleagues who are men should support women's upward career mobility by acting as allies and sponsors (Ibarra et al., 2010; Prasad et al., 2021; Warren et al., 2021). As allies, men can ensure that the rights and authority of women are respected. The sponsorship of men is critical, as Ibarra et al. (2010) highlight that “without sponsorship, a person is likely to be overlooked for promotion, regardless of his or her competence and performance” (p. 84). Considering the imbalanced gender representation in top management, the sponsorship of men can contribute significantly to women's upward mobility by facilitating access to territories that have been closed off to women. This kind of support is more valuable than ‘helping’ women in a paternalistic way. Supporting women's upward career mobility does not only benefit women; men benefit too. The men participants confirmed that procedures and processes have improved because of changes companies made to accommodate women. In addition, men benefit from the different perspectives women bring in the workplace. The women participants alluded to finding less physically strenuous approaches to increasing their effectiveness and efficiency in the workplace. Such varied perspectives make both employees and organisations more innovative and agile (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

Although few women currently occupy high-status roles in the companies under study, women need to peer-mentor and serve as role models for women in junior roles. Peer mentoring is an inexpensive avenue for skills and knowledge transfer, and enables individuals to create communities of support within the working environment (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). Furthermore, exposure to successful women in male-dominated industries as role models could reduce the psychological barriers women have in pursuing higher levels in their organisations (Madikizela & Haupt, 2010).

This dissertation offers a number of valuable insights for women workers. Careers should be pursued based on one's interest areas. However, this advice may be difficult to follow when employment options are limited (Elder & Kring, 2016). In the instance where one pursues a career for survivalist reasons, women can take advantage of capacity-building opportunities to build their competence in moving upward in these industries. They can also capitalise on and apply the experience, skills, and knowledge gained in male-dominated industries in other sectors to which they may switch. It is also important that women lead their growth process. In as much as organisations provide avenues for growth, it behoves women to take full advantage of such opportunities to build their capacities further in order to assume higher roles and responsibilities. In the workplace, women also need to own their space. They need to be vocal about challenges they encounter in the workplace, and provide solutions where possible.

Finally, individuals with minority identities create lines of flight by balancing between adopting major or owning minor, simultaneously with rejecting and/or differentiating from elements of both. The strategies are also responsive to organisation-level changes that affirm or address concerns regarding their minority status.

## **8.5 LIMITATIONS AND AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH**

The dissertation is limited in a number of ways regarding generalisability, study population, and data collection efforts.

### **8.5.1 Generalisability**

First, the dissertation was situated in an interpretivist paradigm and followed a qualitative research approach. The choice of undertaking qualitative research was based on i) my worldview as a researcher and ii) the aim of the dissertation, with recognition of the associated limitations. As studies engage small samples, the findings cannot be generalised as representing the experience of all blue-collar women workers in male-dominated industries in South Africa. Strategies for success for women

in male-dominated tends to be “singularly occurring, unpredictable and difficult to replicate” (Bridges et al., 2022, p. 1). Thus, the identity work strategies employed by the studied population may not be effective for all women with similar working experiences. Although the objective of qualitative studies is not to generalise, future studies on women blue-collar workers in collectivist contexts may employ another approach commensurate with larger samples, with the aim of employing statistical analyses.

### **8.5.2 Study population**

Regarding the industries studied, it can be seen in Table 3.3 that construction has consistently had the lowest proportion of women. However, I could not secure their participation, due to limited access to construction companies and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could expand the scope and explore the experiences of women in the construction industry. The inclusion of the construction sector is important, as this could bring to the fore unique challenges that perpetuate the consistently low participation of women. Insights from the construction sector would also illuminate women's experiences in a sector that has received limited academic attention (Madikizela & Haupt, 2010).

### **8.5.3 Data collection**

#### **8.5.3.1 Language**

In considering publications for the methodological review in [Chapter 4](#), the decision to review only English publications was due to the linguistic limitations of the researcher. Publications in Afrikaans, a local South African language, could not be considered. However, during the screening stage ([Figure 4.1](#)), abstracts of publications in Afrikaans were translated using Google Translate to ensure that potentially results-altering insights were not missed due to my lack of language proficiency.

It is recommended that the findings of this review be considered with caution. Researchers with linguistic proficiency in English and the nine other official languages (if publications are so written) could expand knowledge on how work identity research is conducted in the South African context. Expanding the linguistic scope will not only contribute to decolonising research methodologies (Chilisa, 2012), but ensures that knowledge expressed and understood in a local language is duly accommodated.



### **8.5.3.2 Impact of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the methodological choices for Study II (Chapter 5: ) and Study III (Chapter 6:). As interpretivist research observes participants in their natural setting (Saunders et al., 2016), data collection for these studies was initially planned to be immersive and participatory (cf. Mkabela, 2005). The nationwide lockdown and the university's position on fieldwork due to COVID-19 in March 2020 necessitated alternative ways of conducting research without compromising quality. Therefore, all engagements with the companies and participants were conducted online. Conducting online interviews could not allow me to fully apply the lessons learned in Study I (Chapter 4:) in terms of situating research within an interpretivism–*ubuntu* frame, which required participatory and immersive techniques. To compensate for this limitation, the principles of *ubuntu* served as the basis of the research ethics.

There were also a number of challenges with online engagements: i) an inability to solicit the interest of participants in person, ii) an inability to physically observe participants in their work setting, iii) busy work schedules of participants, iv) the impact of load shedding, and v) an inability to undertake research based on the full complement of an interpretivism–*ubuntu* methodology. In accessing core participants (women in blue-collar roles), for example, I had to resort to sharing the criteria of participants with focal persons of the companies, who then linked me to potential participants. Core participant selection was quite challenging, because it was done at the height of the pandemic. There were instances where some suggested participants who did not meet the criteria, and I had to request more qualified persons.

Conducting interpretivism–*ubuntu* research from a distance also meant that participants had to give detailed descriptions of the work environment and workplace relationships. Due to their demanding work schedules, participants were interviewed at their convenience, which, practically, meant that some participated in the interviews on their way home from work or taking care of their children, or very early before work, or late in the evening. As normalcy is gradually restored to allow for in-person interviews, future researchers could benefit from insights from their observation of participants in their natural settings.

### **8.5.3.3 Internal institutional challenges**

The breakdown in communication with a company's HR representative and the non-availability of diversity and inclusion policies to the public did not allow for a comprehensive review of the policies. Similarly, the insights from women workers and their colleagues from this specific company could not

benefit fully from triangulation based on the insights from the HR representative and policy documents. However, the lesson and caution to researchers is that, while organisations may grant permission for a study to be conducted, not everyone is always informed of this decision, and securing their full participation may be difficult.

Future research could also explore the factors that drive women who pursue blue-collar roles in male-dominated jobs. Such a study could illuminate the motives and expectations shaping the career choices of such women, and the extent to which their expectations have been met. Future researchers could also conduct an integrated study to compare the experiences and expectations of women workers with those of their colleagues. Another area worthy of attention is how men negotiate their masculinity to accommodate women in a blue-collar environment. Such research could illuminate the identity work processes for men working with women in traditionally male-dominated spaces. Lastly, future research could go beyond colleagues in the workplace, to explore how worker groups and families of core participants shape the latter's identity work in a manner that makes them upwardly mobile in the workplace.

## **8.6 CONCLUSION**

The research explored how women build positive work identities in male-dominated industries within a collectivist context. The study addresses some relevant methodological considerations when conducting research in the sub-Saharan African context. Due to the region's collectivist culture, using methodologies with individualistic assumptions may not fully cater to contextual nuances. Connecting context and methodological choices could help ground research in local epistemologies, yield culturally appropriate findings, and be relevant to the lives of participants.

The dissertation also explored how individuals draw on both intrapersonal and interpersonal identity resources in building positive work identities. At the intrapersonal level, the dissertation explores theorising the identity work process using a Deleuze–*ubuntu* frame. Using concepts such as major/minor, rhizome, discourses on territorialisation, and principles of togetherness, interdependence, and solidarity, the dissertation explores how individuals with minority identities negotiate these identities in becoming upwardly mobile. Both Deleuzian concepts and *ubuntu* allude to the process of becoming, and the dissertation provides evidence that identity work is not only a process of becoming, but also of unbecoming and re-becoming. Thus, identity work is a complex, fluid, and non-linear process that provides the individual with alternative ways of being.

At the interpersonal level, the study confirmed work colleagues are critical resources in women's empowerment. Considering the stressful conditions under which blue-collar workers operate, having supportive colleagues can mediate work-related stress and contribute to the upward mobility of workers. Despite the promise of supportive organisational policies and social interaction in the workplace, gendered patterns of support also exist. From their colleagues, women receive more informative and material support than socio-emotional support, while, at the organisational level, women receive all three types of support to varying degrees. With the aid of the SCM (Fiske et al., 2002), which links attributes with emotions and behaviours towards the target (i.e., women) and the valued resources (in COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), the study found that hegemonic masculinities still define the workplace. As long as the status quo remains, there is limited opportunity to counteract (through diversity management) the exclusion or marginalisation of minorities in the workplace. The combined insights from the two theories allow for a differentiation between effective and empty affirmative action interventions and explain why they do or do not work.

Whether the researcher is in the Global North or Global South, context matters, and the collectivist nature or its absence is important. Identities are both personal and relational in collectivist societies. For women in blue-collar workers, in male-dominated jobs, in collectivist societies, to build positive identities in the workplace, intrapersonal and interpersonal resources need to be explored and leveraged. By doing so, these women can create an empowering sense of self staying true to the collective.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: EXAMPLE OF PERMISSION FROM COMPANIES




12 June 2020

  
 South Africa

Dear 


**Request to Collect Data for Research**

This letter serves to confirm that Obaa Akua Konadu (Student No: ) is presently conducting research in order to complete the PhD Business Management and Administration degree at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. The research title is: *The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs*. Prof. Anita Bosch and Prof. Smaranda Boros are supervising the research.

The intended purpose of this research is to explore how women in blue-collar, male-dominated jobs (such as artisans, truck drivers, mechanics, miners, etc.) build positive work identities, capitalising on their multiple and intersecting identities. The research will also probe organisational and social structures that validate these identities to enable women create positive work identities in male-dominated jobs. If we understand what positively shapes these women's work identities, we may be able to advise how to increase and retain the number of women in these occupations.

The study will receive ethical clearance from the Stellenbosch University. Obaa would like to conduct the research within your organisation and therefore needs your permission to:

- (1) engage with a member of staff who will be the main person at the company for her to liaise with in order for her to determine which women are viable participants, facilitate an introduction between potential participants and the researcher, and to provide participant contact details to the researcher.
- (2) Engage 10 blue-collar women who have been working at the organisation for more 2 years in non-managerial positions, as well as
- (3) 5 women who recently resigned from the organisation, who bear similar characteristics as aforementioned.
- (4) The researcher needs access to the head of Human Resources of the organisation, the
- (5) direct supervisors of the 10 women as well as other individuals in the company that will be recommended by the 10 women.



UNIVERSITEIT-STELLENBOSCH-UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvenoot-jour knowledge-partner

Universiteit van Stellenbosch Bestuurskool - University of Stellenbosch Business School  
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 Epos / Email: [usbcom@usb.ac.za](mailto:usbcom@usb.ac.za) Webwerf / Website: [www.usb.ac.za](http://www.usb.ac.za)

**Participant protection**

All interviews will be conducted via telephone. All information gathered will be treated as confidential and the names of your employees will remain confidential. The researcher will solicit the voluntary consent of participants (which they will sign-off) to participate in the study before data is collected from them.

**Protection of the organisation**

The research is being conducted for academic purposes. Findings will be disseminated with the necessary discretion not to cause harm to individuals and the organisation. The identity of your organisation will remain confidential throughout the thesis and in any future publications derived from it.

The results from the research will be published in academic journals and platforms to advance knowledge on the attraction and retention of women to male-dominated work. The research is considered relevant in providing useful insights for practice in your organisation and therefore the researcher will present a summary of the findings to your organisation.

Please feel free to suggest any additional restrictions you may deem necessary in respect of the research to protect the interests of the organisation.

**Conclusion**

Your support is important for the study and it will be highly appreciated if you are willing to allow this research project to commence at your organisation. Please do not hesitate to contact the researcher or supervisor on the numbers listed below should you require any additional information.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Kind Regards



Prof Anita Bosch  
Research Supervisor  
University of Stellenbosch Business School

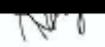
	Researcher	Supervisor
Name	Ms Obaa Akua Konadu	Prof Anita Bosch
Institution	University of Stellenbosch Business School	University of Stellenbosch Business School
Contact No:	061 805 2910	083 635 4493
E-mail:	<a href="mailto:akonadu@gmail.com">akonadu@gmail.com</a> / 23931965@sun.ac.za	abosch@sun.ac.za

**Permission granted**

This serves to confirm that [REDACTED] provides permission for Obaa Konadu to commence with data collection according to the stipulations outlined above as well as the additional points made in the block below:

--

I am signing this document on behalf of [REDACTED] as I am able to represent the organisation in this manner.

Signature	[REDACTED] 
Full name	[REDACTED]
Designation	[REDACTED]
Date	18 June 2020



5 October 2020

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
South Africa

Dear [REDACTED]

Re: Request to Collect Data for Research

Following feedback from the Stellenbosch University's Ethics Committee, I write to request the following:

- (1) Permission for the participants in the study to be confidentially serviced by the employee wellness programme of your organisation, should they require such services, and that Obaa may provide these employees with a specific contact number for such assistance. Please also provide the contact details that she can supply to the participants.
- (2) Permission for Obaa to access your organisation's policies on diversity and inclusion. This will enable her to understand your commitment towards making the workplace more inclusive and conducive for women to thrive in a male-dominated working environment.

These requests were not captured in our initial request but have come up as relevant, if the University is to provide the final ethical clearance for Obaa to begin her data collection. Please be assured that all documents accessed will be treated confidentially. Please feel free to suggest any additional restrictions you may deem necessary in respect of the research to protect the interests of the organisation (such as, signing a non-disclosure agreement etc.).

We will appreciate a prompt response to this request. We look forward to hearing from you soon and thank you for your kind consideration of this request.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anita Bosch', is positioned above the typed name.

Prof Anita Bosch  
Research Supervisor  
University of Stellenbosch Business School

	Researcher	Supervisor
Name	Ms Obaa Akua Konadu	Prof Anita Bosch
Institution	University of Stellenbosch Business School	University of Stellenbosch Business School
Contact No:	074 673 6820	083 635 4493
E-mail:	obaakonadu20@gmail.com	abosch@sun.ac.za

Permission granted

This serves to confirm that [REDACTED] provides permission for Obaa Konadu to commence with data collection according to the stipulations outlined above as well as the additional points made in the block below:

I am signing this document on behalf of [REDACTED] as I am able to represent the organisation in this manner.

Signature	[REDACTED]
Full name	[REDACTED]
Designation	[REDACTED]
Date	15 October 2020

2

## APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



### NOTICE OF APPROVAL

REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (SBER) - Initial Application Form

27 November 2020

Project number: 17082

Project Title: The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs

Dear Miss Obaa Konadu

#### Co-investigators:

Prof Anita Bosch

Your response to stipulations submitted on 27 November 2020 was reviewed and approved by the REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research (REC: SBE).

Please note below expiration date of this approved submission:

#### **Ethics approval period:**

Protocol approval date (Humanities)	Protocol expiration date (Humanities)
15 September 2020	14 September 2023

#### **GENERAL REC COMMENTS PERTAINING TO THIS PROJECT:**

##### INVESTIGATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Please take note of the General Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

**If the researcher deviates in any way from the proposal approved by the REC: SBE, the researcher must notify the REC of these changes.**

Please use your SU project number (17082) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your project.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

##### CONTINUATION OF PROJECTS AFTER REC APPROVAL PERIOD

You are required to submit a progress report to the REC: SBE before the approval period has expired if a continuation of ethics approval is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

Once you have completed your research, you are required to submit a final report to the REC: SBE for review.

#### **Included Documents:**

Document Type	File Name	Date	Version
Budget	Annexure 11 Budget for Three Studies_OA Konadu	11/07/2020	Final
Investigator CV (PI)	Obaa A. Konadu_Short CV	11/07/2020	Final
Co-investigator CV	CV S.Boros_OA Konadu's Supervisor	11/07/2020	Final
Non-disclosure agreement	Annexure 6 NDA Translators_OA Konadu	11/07/2020	Final
Data collection tool	Annexures 7-10 Questions for Three Studies - OA Konadu	12/07/2020	Final
Proof of permission	Annexure 12-Signed [REDACTED]	12/07/2020	Final
Proof of permission	Annexure 13-Signed [REDACTED]	13/07/2020	Final
Proof of permission	Annexure 14 - [REDACTED]	13/07/2020	Final
Proof of permission	Annexure 15 - [REDACTED]	13/07/2020	Final



Informed Consent Form	Update Informed Consent Forms Annexure 1-5-12.11.20	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Proof of permission	Additional Request_Response from [REDACTED] df	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Proof of permission	Additional Request_Response from [REDACTED]	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Proof of permission	Additional Request_Response from [REDACTED]	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Proof of permission	Additional Request_Response from [REDACTED]	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Research Protocol/Proposal	Updated Obaa A. Konadu - PhD Proposal	12/11/2020	Approval Edits
Default	Response to REC - O A Konadu	12/11/2020	Approval Edits

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at [cgraham@sun.ac.za](mailto:cgraham@sun.ac.za).

Sincerely,

Clarissa Graham

REC Coordinator: Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioral and Education Research

*National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number: REC-050411-032.*

*The Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Education Research complies with the SA National Health Act No.61 2003 as it pertains to health research. In addition, this committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research established by the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) and the Department of Health Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.) 2015. Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.*

## Principal Investigator Responsibilities

### Protection of Human Research Participants

As soon as Research Ethics Committee approval is confirmed by the REC, the principal investigator (PI) is responsible for the following:

**Conducting the Research:** The PI is responsible for making sure that the research is conducted according to the REC-approved research protocol. The PI is jointly responsible for the conduct of co-investigators and any research staff involved with this research. The PI must ensure that the research is conducted according to the recognised standards of their research field/discipline and according to the principles and standards of ethical research and responsible research conduct.

**Participant Enrolment:** The PI may not recruit or enrol participants unless the protocol for recruitment is approved by the REC. Recruitment and data collection activities must cease after the expiration date of REC approval. All recruitment materials must be approved by the REC prior to their use.

**Informed Consent:** The PI is responsible for obtaining and documenting affirmative informed consent using **only** the REC-approved consent documents/process, and for ensuring that no participants are involved in research prior to obtaining their affirmative informed consent. The PI must give all participants copies of the signed informed consent documents, where required. The PI must keep the originals in a secured, REC-approved location for at least five (5) years after the research is complete.

**Continuing Review:** The REC must review and approve all REC-approved research proposals at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk but not less than once per year. There is **no grace period**. Prior to the date on which the REC approval of the research expires, **it is the PI's responsibility to submit the progress report in a timely fashion to ensure a lapse in REC approval does not occur**. Once REC approval of your research lapses, all research activities must cease, and contact must be made with the REC immediately.

**Amendments and Changes:** Any planned changes to any aspect of the research (such as research design, procedures, participant population, informed consent document, instruments, surveys or recruiting material, etc.), must be submitted to the REC for review and approval before implementation. Amendments may not be initiated without first obtaining written REC approval. The **only exception** is when it is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants and the REC should be immediately informed of this necessity.

**Adverse or Unanticipated Events:** Any serious adverse events, participant complaints, and all unanticipated problems that involve risks to participants or others, as well as any research-related injuries, occurring at this institution or at other performance sites must be reported to the REC within **five (5) days** of discovery of the incident. The PI must also report any instances of serious or continuing problems, or non-compliance with the RECs requirements for protecting human research participants.

**Research Record Keeping:** The PI must keep the following research-related records, at a minimum, in a secure location for a minimum of five years: the REC approved research proposal and all amendments; all informed consent documents; recruiting materials; continuing review reports; adverse or unanticipated events; and all correspondence and approvals from the REC.

**Provision of Counselling or emergency support:** When a dedicated counsellor or a psychologist provides support to a participant without prior REC review and approval, to the extent permitted by law, such activities will not be recognised as research nor the data used in support of research. Such cases should be indicated in the progress report or final report.

**Final reports:** When the research is completed (no further participant enrolment, interactions or interventions), the PI must submit a Final Report to the REC to close the study.

**On-Site Evaluations, Inspections, or Audits:** If the researcher is notified that the research will be reviewed or audited by the sponsor or any other external agency or any internal group, the PI must inform the REC immediately of the impending audit/evaluation.

## APPENDIX C: EXAMPLE OF SIGNED INFORMED CONSENT FORM (WOMEN WORKERS)

Informed Consent Form – [REDACTED] Core Participants



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jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH – WOMEN WORKERS

<b>Title of research project</b>	: The development of positive intersectional work identities of women in male-dominated jobs
<b>Researcher</b>	: Obaa Akua Konadu
<b>Research supervisor</b>	: Prof. Anita Bosch and Prof. Smaranda Boros
<b>Department</b>	: University of Stellenbosch Business School
<b>Qualification</b>	: PhD Business Management and Administration

Dear [REDACTED]

I am a PhD student with the University of Stellenbosch Business School, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled "The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs".

You have been selected to participate in this research because you are a woman, working in a job that is usually male dominated. I would like to take a few minutes to explain the details of this project – whilst doing so, please feel free to ask any questions you might have about the study, or your proposed participation in the study. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Stellenbosch University and will be conducted according to accepted and applicable national and international ethical guidelines and principles.

#### 1. Purpose and benefits of the study

This study seeks to understand how women are able to perform well in jobs that generally considered as 'jobs for men'. As a woman who is doing work with many other men, I would like to know how you are able to maintain your presence as a woman at work and to understand what your experience has been (a woman working with a lot more men than what normally happens). I would also like to know how your colleagues, both men and women, have supported you in your work that has enabled you to stay in this job. It may be that family has played an important role in shaping you into becoming

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who you are today. I would like to know how your family responded when you decided to do a 'job for men'.

This study is an academic study that wants to find ways of making your type of job easier for other women to get into. Your participation in this study will help achieve this aim. It will also help you to assess yourself and your work life, and also give companies ways of shaping their policies on the inclusion of women at work. Your participation in this study will also encourage young women and girls, who wish to pursue certain careers that have been tagged as jobs for men, the confidence to pursue these jobs, because they will take inspiration from your experiences.

## 2. Procedures

Should you volunteer to participate in this study, I would request the following from you:

- I will ask you about your work, why you chose this job and your experience so far.
- The interview will last about 45-60 minutes.
- The interview will be on the phone.
- I will record your interview. Afterwards, I will write down exactly as was recorded to ensure that I capture your inputs correctly.
- I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (false name) so that your identity is protected during the interview and publication of the study. You can choose any name that you like.
- The interview will be in the English language. However, if you prefer to speak in a different language, let me know ahead of the interview so I can make arrangements for an interpreter to join us.
- I will call you ahead of time to arrange a date and time that will be most convenient for you to have the interview.
- I will also ask you to refer me to a colleague who has been supportive of you as well as your direct supervisor at work.
- I will ask you to refer me to two of your friends and family. One of these people should be a female figure who knows you very well (like your mother, aunt, grandmother or godmother).
- I will come back to you after the interview so that you can give input to the findings that I make.

## 3. Potential risks and discomforts

- The likelihood of questions triggering negative emotions is low.
- In case you suffer any emotional distress as a result of this interview, kindly inform me. I have requested the services of your company's wellness programme to provide support, in case you suffer any emotional distress. Kindly call the number of the company's wellness

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programme. You may also call **Lifeline** on **011 422 4242** or **0861 322 322** to speak to a counsellor. Since the interview will be over the phone for about 45-60 minutes, you are encouraged to be in a comfortable space where you are free to express yourself and free from distractions.

#### **4. Confidentiality and protection of participants**

- Everything that you share with me will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.
- Your company's identity will not be disclosed at any point in the research process.
- Your name will not be disclosed at any point in the research process. The name you choose will be used throughout the research.
- Your interview will be stored on OneDrive; a very secure data system provided by the Stellenbosch University.
- The data collected is purely for academic research purposes.
- Your participation in this research and the information you will share with the research will not interfere with your work.
- The results from the research will be published in academic journals and platforms for academic audiences to advance knowledge on the work experience of women who are similar to you.

#### **5. Payment for participation**

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no payment given to you.

#### **6. Participation and withdrawal**

- If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time and there will be no consequences. Your data will not be stored or analysed.
- You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and we can skip those and you can remain in the study.
- I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. These circumstances could include you not being respectful towards the researcher as she undertakes being respectful towards you.

#### **7. Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu on 074 673 6820 or [obaakonadu20@gmail.com](mailto:obaakonadu20@gmail.com) and the Researcher's University Supervisor at [abosch@sun.ac.za](mailto:abosch@sun.ac.za).

KC

**8. Rights of research subjects**


Should you decide to withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation, you do this without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the University of Stellenbosch Division for Research Development.


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**DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

The information above was explained to me by Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu in clear terms. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of subject or participant: 


Signature: 

Date:

08/03/2021

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**DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information provided in this document to  She was encouraged, and given ample time, to ask me any questions.

Signature: 

Date: 08/03/2021

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## APPENDIX D: EXAMPLE OF INFORMED CONSENT FORM (COLLEAGUE)

Informed Consent Form – [REDACTED] Colleagues at Work



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### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH – SUPPORTIVE COLLEAGUE/DIRECT SUPERVISOR

<b>Title of research project</b>	: The development of positive intersectional work identities of women in male-dominated jobs
<b>Researcher</b>	: Obaa Akua Konadu
<b>Research supervisor</b>	: Prof. Anita Bosch and Prof. Smaranda Boros
<b>Department</b>	: University of Stellenbosch Business School
<b>Qualification</b>	: PhD Business Management and Administration

Dear [REDACTED]

I am a PhD student with the University of Stellenbosch Business School, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs”.

You have been contacted to participate in this research because you are a colleague/supervisor of [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] I would like to take a few minutes to explain the details of this project – whilst doing so, please feel free to ask any questions you might have about the study, or your proposed participation in the study. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Stellenbosch University and will be conducted according to accepted and applicable national and international ethical guidelines and principles.

#### 1. Purpose and benefits of the study

This study seeks to understand how women are able to perform well in jobs that generally considered as ‘jobs for men’. As a colleague/supervisor of [REDACTED] I would like to know how her colleagues at the workplace relate with her in enabling her to stay at the job. I will ask you about her experience at the workplace as well as the support you provide her that enables her to do well at work.

This study is an academic study that wants to find ways of making your type of job easier for other women to get into. Your participation in this study will help achieve this aim. The study will also give companies ways of shaping their policies on the inclusion of women at work.

## **2. Procedures**

Should you volunteer to participate in this study, I would request the following from you:

- I will ask you about your working relationship with [REDACTED] her experience at the workplace and the support you give her.
- The interview will last about 45-60 minutes.
- The interview will be on the phone.
- I will record your interview. Afterwards, I will write down exactly as was recorded to ensure that I capture your inputs correctly.
- I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (false name) so that your identity is protected during the interview and publication of the study. You can choose any name that you like.
- The interview will be in the English language. However, if you prefer to speak in a different language, let me know ahead of the interview so I can make arrangements for an interpreter to join us.
- I will call you ahead of time to arrange a date and time that will be most convenient for you to have the interview.

## **3. Potential risks and discomforts**

- I will ask questions about your work. It is not a formal assessment of your company or your colleagues.
- Since the interview will be over the phone for about 45-60 minutes, you are encouraged to be in a comfortable space where you are free to express yourself and free from distractions.
- The likelihood of questions triggering negative emotions is low.
- In case you suffer any emotional distress as a result of this interview, kindly inform me. I have requested the services of your company's wellness programme to provide support, in case you suffer any emotional distress. Kindly call the number of the company's wellness programme. You may also call **Lifeline** on **011 422 4242** or **0861 322 322** to speak to a counsellor.

## **4. Confidentiality and protection of participants**

- Everything that you share with me will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.
- Your company's identity will not be disclosed at any point in the research process.



- Your name will not be disclosed at any point in the research process. The name you choose will be used throughout the research.
- Your interview will be stored on OneDrive; a very secure data system provided by the Stellenbosch University.
- The data collected is purely for academic research purposes.
- Your participation in this research and the information you will share with the research will not interfere with your work, and that of [REDACTED]
- The results from the research will be published in academic journals and platforms for academic audiences to advance knowledge on the work experience of women who are similar to [REDACTED]

#### **5. Payment for participation**

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no payment given to you.

#### **6. Participation and withdrawal**

- If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time and there will be no consequences. Your data will not be stored or analysed.
- You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and we can skip those and you can remain in the study.
- I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. These circumstances could include you not being respectful towards the researcher as she undertakes being respectful towards you.

#### **7. Contact details**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu on 074 673 6820 or [obaakonadu20@gmail.com](mailto:obaakonadu20@gmail.com) and the Researcher's University Supervisor at [abosch@sun.ac.za](mailto:abosch@sun.ac.za).

#### **8. Rights of research subjects**

Should you decide to withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation, you do this without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [[mfouche@sun.ac.za](mailto:mfouche@sun.ac.za); 021 808 4622] at the University of Stellenbosch Division for Research Development.

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**DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT**

The information above was explained to me by Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu in clear terms. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of subject or participant:

[Redacted]

Signature:

[Redacted]

Date:

11/2/2021

**DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information provided in this document to [Redacted] He was encouraged, and given ample time, to ask me any questions.

Signature:

[Redacted]

Date:

11/02/2021

## APPENDIX E: EXAMPLE OF CONSENT FORM (HR)

Informed Consent Form – [REDACTED] HR Official



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH – HR OFFICIAL

<b>Title of research project</b>	: The development of positive intersectional work identities of women in male-dominated jobs
<b>Researcher</b>	: Obaa Akua Konadu
<b>Research supervisor</b>	: Prof. Anita Bosch and Prof. Smaranda Boros
<b>Department</b>	: University of Stellenbosch Business School
<b>Qualification</b>	: PhD Business Management and Administration

Dear [REDACTED]

I am a PhD student with the University of Stellenbosch Business School, and I would like to invite you to participate in a research project entitled “The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs”.

You have been contacted to participate in this research because you are an HR Official at [REDACTED]. I would like to take a few minutes to explain the details of this project – whilst doing so, please feel free to ask any questions you might have about the study, or your proposed participation in the study. This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Stellenbosch University and will be conducted according to accepted and applicable national and international ethical guidelines and principles.

#### 1. Purpose and benefits of the study

This study seeks to understand how women are able to perform well in jobs that generally considered as ‘jobs for men’. As an HR Official of [REDACTED] I would like to know about the company’s stance on diversity, how diversity initiatives have been implemented and the support you provide employees bearing minority statuses.

This study is an academic study that wants to find ways of making your type of job easier for other women to get into. Your participation in this study will help achieve this aim. The study will also give companies ways of shaping their policies on the inclusion of women at work.

## 2. Procedures

Should you volunteer to participate in this study, I would request the following from you:

- I will ask you about your company's stance on diversity and the avenues of support for employees bearing minority statuses.
- The interview will last about 45-60 minutes.
- The interview will be on the phone.
- I will record your interview. Afterwards, I will write down exactly as was recorded to ensure that I capture your inputs correctly.
- I will ask you to choose a pseudonym (false name) so that your identity is protected during the interview and publication of the study. You can choose any name that you like.
- The interview will be in the English language. However, if you prefer to speak in a different language, let me know ahead of the interview so I can make arrangements for an interpreter to join us.
- I will call you ahead of time to arrange a date and time that will be most convenient for you to have the interview.

## 3. Potential risks and discomforts

- I will ask questions about your work. It is not a formal assessment of your company or your colleagues.
- Since the interview will be over the phone for about 45-60 minutes, you are encouraged to be in a comfortable space where you are free to express yourself and free from distractions.
- The likelihood of questions triggering negative emotions is low.
- In case you suffer any emotional distress as a result of this interview, kindly inform me. I have requested the services of your company's wellness programme to provide support, in case you suffer any emotional distress. Kindly call the **EPP Call Centre on 080 11 22 550**. Alternatively, **you can send a 'please call me' to 079 094 7096**.

## 4. Confidentiality and protection of participants

- Everything that you share with me will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.
- Your company's identity will not be disclosed at any point in the research process.
- Your name will not be disclosed at any point in the research process. The name you choose will be used throughout the research.
- Your interview will be stored on OneDrive; a very secure data system provided by the Stellenbosch University.
- The data collected is purely for academic research purposes.

- Your participation in this research and the information you will share with the research will not interfere with your work.
- The results from the research will be published in academic journals and platforms for academic audiences to advance knowledge on the work experience of women who are similar to your female colleagues.

#### 5. Payment for participation

- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There will be no payment given to you.

#### 6. Participation and withdrawal

- If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time and there will be no consequences. Your data will not be stored or analysed.
- You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and we can skip those and you can remain in the study.
- I may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so. These circumstances could include you not being respectful towards the researcher as she undertakes being respectful towards you.

#### 7. Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher, Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu on 074 673 6820 or [obaakonadu20@gmail.com](mailto:obaakonadu20@gmail.com) and the Researcher's University Supervisor at [abosch@sun.ac.za](mailto:abosch@sun.ac.za).

#### 8. Rights of research subjects

Should you decide to withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation, you do this without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact Ms Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the University of Stellenbosch Division for Research Development.

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#### DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

The information above was explained to me by Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu in clear terms. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of subject or participant:

[REDACTED]

Signature:

[REDACTED]

Date: 15/09/2021

**DECLARATION AND SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER**

I declare that I explained the information provided in this document to [REDACTED]. He was encouraged, and given ample time, to ask me any questions.

Signature:

[REDACTED]

Date: 15/09/2021

## APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Obaa Akua Konadu

PhD Business Management and Administration

Interview guide for empirical studies

### Paper 2:

**Objective:** How do women navigate dominant identities and create alternative ways of existing in traditionally male-dominated industries within the South African context?

The life story interview will be employed to understand the life trajectory of the participants. There will be six main areas of focus in the interviews:

#### Core Participants

- i) Growing up:  
How was your childhood like? What is your most vivid memory of your childhood through teenage? Describe your happiest moment as a child. Why is it memorable? Describe one of the unhappiest moments as a child. Why is it an unhappy moment? How have these moments influenced your life?
- ii) Work:  
Tell me about your career trajectory. Tell me about your current job. What has been your experience in your job? What do you like about your job, and why? What do you not like about your job, and why? How has your gender shaped your experience at the workplace? Describe your working relationship with your colleagues. To what extent does your company support you to do well at work? To what extent do your colleagues support you to do well at work?
- iii) Non-Work Roles:  
Tell me about your life outside of work. How do you balance your work and non-work roles? How do you relax?
- iv) Family:  
Tell me about your family. How did your family react when you told them about your current job? To what extent does your family support you to balance your work and non-work roles?
- v) Values:  
What values guide you through life? Why do these values matter to you? In what do you live out these values? What principles/values guide you at the workplace and why?
- vi) Future:  
What does the future look like for you? Describe your plans or dreams for the future? Do you have a life project? (Something you intend or are working on – by

yourself or with others- in the future). Describe what the project is about? Why is this project important to you?

### **Women Who Quit**

- i) Growing up:  
How was your childhood like? What is your most vivid memory of your childhood through teenage? Describe your happiest moment as a child. Why was it memorable? Describe one of the unhappiest moments as a child. Why was it an unhappy moment? How have these moments influenced your life?
- ii) Work:  
Tell me about your career trajectory. Tell me about your previous job in Company XXX. What was your experience working there? What did you like about that job, and why? What did you not like about that job, and why? Did your gender shape your experience at the workplace?? Describe your working relationship with your previous colleagues. To what extent did the company support you to do well at work? To what extent did your colleagues support you to do well at work? Why did you leave that job?
- iii) Non-Work Roles:  
Tell me about your life outside work. How do you balance your work and non-work roles? How do you relax?
- iv) Family:  
Tell me about your family. How did your family react when you told them that you were taking up your previous job? How did your family react when you told them you were leaving the job? How does your family support you to balance your work and non-work roles?
- v) Values:  
What values guide you through life? Why do these values matter to you? In what do you live out these values? What principles/values guide you at the workplace and why?
- vi) Future:  
What does the future look like for you? Describe your plans or dreams for the future? Do you have a life project? (Something you intend or are working on – by yourself or with others- in the future). Describe what the project is about? Why is this project important to you?

### **Paper 3:**

**Objective:** How do formal and informal structures in the workplace support women's upward career mobility in traditionally male-dominated industries?.



Semi-structured interviews will be conducted, with follow up questions using the critical incident technique in some instances, when interviewing the HR Official and Direct Supervisor.

**HR Official:**

1. Describe how diverse the company is
2. Does the company have a diversity policy?
3. Have the company's diversity initiatives been internally driven or externally driven?
4. Describe the turning point(s) at which the company designed policies and/or took actions towards embracing diversity.
5. In what ways has the company implemented diversity initiatives?
6. How are diversity interventions welcomed by staff?
7. Has there been any incident of abuse based on their minority status that the participant brought to your attention? If yes, describe some of the incidents
8. What punitive measures have been put in place to ensure that staff respect people from minority statuses?
9. What channels are available to individuals to report abuses suffered because of their minority identities?
10. In what ways does the company support individuals at lower levels of employment to become upwardly mobile in their careers?

**Direct Supervisor:**

1. How long have you known the core participant?
2. What has been the relationship like with her?
3. Describe the core participant
4. How does the core participant fit in at the workplace? How is she similar to her colleagues? How is she different from her colleagues?
5. How does the core participant relate with others?
6. How do the colleagues of the core participants relate with her?
7. Has there been any incident of abuse based on their minority status that the participant brought to your attention? If yes, describe some of the incidents
8. In your interaction with the participant, how does her non-work role(s) influence her work?
9. In what ways do you think you have contributed to supporting the participant to do well at the workplace?

**Supportive Colleague:**

1. How long have you known the core participant?
2. What has been the relationship like with her?
3. Describe the core participant
4. How is her life at the workplace? How is she similar to her colleagues? How is she different from her colleagues?
5. How does the core participant relate with others?
6. How do the colleagues of the core participants relate with her?
7. What are some of the difficulties she has encountered in the workplace?
8. What support systems at the workplace helps her to do well at her job?

9. In your interaction with the participant, how does her non-work role(s) influence her work?
10. In what ways do you think you have contributed to supporting the participant to do well at the workplace?

## APPENDIX G: SUPPORT FROM MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDER



5 October 2020

Lifeline  
South Africa

The Manager,

### **Request for counselling services for research participants**

This letter serves to confirm that Obaa Akua Konadu (Student No: 23931965) is presently conducting research in order to complete the PhD Business Management and Administration degree at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. The research title is: *The Development of Positive Intersectional Work Identities of Women in Male-Dominated Jobs*. Prof. Anita Bosch and Prof. Smaranda Boros are supervising the research.

The intended purpose of this research is to explore how women in blue-collar, male-dominated jobs (such as artisans, truck drivers, mechanics, miners, etc.) build positive work identities, capitalising on their multiple and intersecting identities. The research will also probe organisational and social structures that validate these identities to enable women create positive work identities in male-dominated jobs. If we understand what positively shapes these women's work identities, we may be able to advise how to increase and retain the number of women in these occupations.

In the event of the necessity for counseling of the participants of Obaa Konadu's study participants, the Stellenbosch University's ethics committee has requested that we reach out to Lifeline to confirm that your telephonic services, the same as what is offered to the public, will also be available to her participants. Although the likelihood of the research triggering negative emotions is low, she would like to ensure that all participants who are emotionally triggered, may perhaps make contact with Lifeline and receive counselling.

The public service that Lifeline offers is accessible to all her participants and would therefore meet the requirements of the ethics committee in ensuring that the research participants are afforded support should they need such. We therefore request written confirmation from Lifeline that these services are available.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your kind consideration to this request.

Kind Regards  
Prof. Anita Bosch  
**Research Supervisor**  
University of Stellenbosch Business School



1

	Researcher	Supervisor
Name	Ms Obaa Akua Konadu	Prof Anita Bosch
Institution	University of Stellenbosch Business School	University of Stellenbosch Business School
Contact No:	074 673 6820	083 635 4493
E-mail:	obaakonadu20@gmail.com	abosch@sun.ac.za

**Permission granted**

This serves to confirm that Lifeline commits to supporting participants in Obaa Konadu's study with counselling support.

I am signing this document on behalf of Lifeline as I am able to represent the organisation in this manner.

Signature	
Full name	H 
Designation	Social work Supervisor
Date	09/10/20

## APPENDIX H: EMAIL FROM STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY TO SUSPEND PHYSICAL FIELDWORK DUE TO COVID-19

30/06/2022, 21:15

Gmail - Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19



Obaa Akua Konadu-Osei

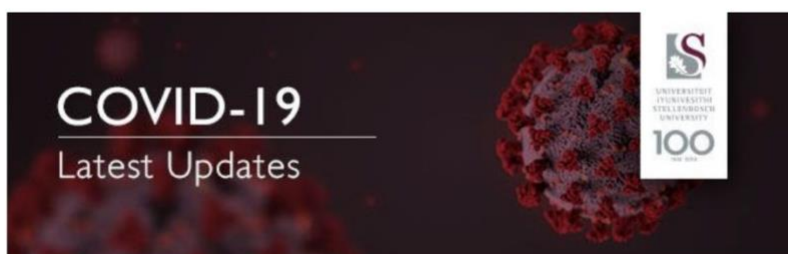
### Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19

Prof Eugene Cloete <noreply@sun.ac.za>  
Reply-To: noreply@sun.ac.za  
To: [REDACTED]

22 March 2020 at 15:22

View in web browser

22 March 2020



*Die Afrikaanse weergawe van hierdie inligting sal binnekort op die US se webblad oor die COVID-19-virus beskikbaar wees.*

#### Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19

Dear Colleagues and Students

We anticipate widespread and rapid community spread of COVID-19 in South Africa. In line with recommendations to practice social distancing, we want to minimise the risk of transmission in research offices and laboratories, at research sites and in the context of studies where research participants, research staff, students, or other personnel are brought together for research purposes.

All precautions to prevent transmission and reduce risk need to be urgently implemented and we encourage researchers to act within the spirit of an 'ethics of responsibility'. Limiting COVID-19 infections and protecting the welfare of research participants, research staff, students, and other personnel should be the priority.

Research activities where people are brought together for research purposes may pose COVID-19 transmission risk to research participants, research staff, students, or other personnel present in research environments, for example, by virtue of the nature of data collection, requiring research participants, research staff, students or other personnel to work in the same office or laboratory, to travel on public transport or where specimen collection poses transmission risk.

We recommend that each research study or study site:

- Urgently assess the risk of COVID-19 transmission for research participants, research staff and students;

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=9c5370c1da&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207&siml=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207> 1/4

30/06/2022, 21:15

Gmail - Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19

- Reduce, postpone or suspend all research which can be reduced, postponed or suspended and all research with higher than normal COVID-19 transmission risk, until such time that this instruction is recalled by the Vice-Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies;
- Any contractual implications and amendments required should be discussed as soon as possible with project leaders, project partners and the Division for Research Development's Research Contracts team;
- If it is not possible to reduce, postpone or suspend a specific study, develop a plan to continue with minimum participant contact, preferably only those study activities or study visits where participant welfare and/or the prospect of direct participant benefit outweighs the potential harm of COVID-19 (e.g. safety visits, dispensing of medication);
- In the case of continued research as mentioned under point 4, the project leaders will be required to keep a register of contacts with the required information of contacts (name, ID, contact details, alternative contact details, date and time of contact);
- No staff member/student/etc. can be compelled to engage in a research project if such a member does not want to participate due to concerns about his or her health or safety related to the pandemic;
- Any amendments to protocols of REC-approved research would require additional approval and needs to be submitted to the relevant REC. Kindly peruse the attached guidelines for specific instructions from the Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and the Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Educational Research (REC: SBE).
- The prospect of direct participant benefit applies primarily to certain types of clinical research and is less likely to apply to laboratory-based research, and research in the social, behavioural or educational research context. Research without anticipated direct benefits should be suspended or postponed, wherever possible, until further notice unless there are very exceptional reasons to not do so;
- Research studies with the prospect of direct participant benefit (e.g. where treatment is provided) should also attempt to limit their study participants' contact with, and burden on, clinics and hospitals so as to avoid further exposure and burden on public services and facilities;
- If at all possible and in the best interest of all parties, pause enrolment and refrain from recruiting new study participants until such time that this instruction is recalled by the Vice-Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies;
- Potential exceptions to this recommendation may be discussed with the respective research ethics committee (REC);
- Immediately implement recommendations for hand hygiene, cough etiquette, facial touching and social distancing at all study sites with continuing study activities.

These recommendations are made with the current situation in mind. The current threat of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa is likely to change/escalate, including the possibility or eventuality of a lockdown in the Western Cape. In the case of a lockdown, a revised communication will be issued by the Vice Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies.

Please see the attached documents (or click on the URL below) for more detailed guidance and requirements from Stellenbosch University's:

- [Health Research Ethics Committee \(HREC\)](#) and
- [Research Ethics Committee: Social, Behavioural and Educational Research \(REC: SBE\)](#).

We realise that there might be numerous additional uncertainties related to your research at the present moment – in particular as international collaboration and human interaction form the basis of a large number of our institution's research projects. We sincerely appreciate all the measures already put in place or prepared by the research community.

Kindly note that it is each research project leader's responsibility to pro-actively maintain contact with their funders, research partners and collaborators, postgraduate students, postdocs,

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=9c5370c1da&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207&simpl=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207>

2/4

30/06/2022, 21:15

Gmail - Position statement and REC guidelines on Research in the time of COVID-19

research participants, institutional gatekeepers and other stakeholders to put project-specific contingency measures in place, and to ensure that in the spirit of what we aim to achieve, in other words stopping spread of the virus, we keep people as far away from each other as possible. Where assistance, advice or facilitation is required, you will be supported by my office and the staff of the Division for Research Development.

We actively encourage research that can help address the COVID-19 pandemic (category of "emergency research") and will endeavour to provide accelerated administration and approval of such research, based on scientific and public health benefit, consistent with other institutions.

We would furthermore like to remind you of your continued obligation to the Postgraduate students and Postdocs in your research group. Kindly encourage everyone to remain productive and engaged with you and their research topics – possibly using the time to analyse existing data, do literature reviews, and write thesis chapters and articles.

We would furthermore like to request that you kindly contact the Senior Director: Research and Innovation, Dr Therina Theron, directly ([ttheron@sun.ac.za](mailto:ttheron@sun.ac.za)) to highlight any broad research-related concerns that you feel should be put on the agenda of the Research Contingency Committee that is currently active under the auspices of the Institutional Committee for Business Continuity (ICBC). This will help us with the early identification and mitigation of risks and challenges that we may not yet be aware of.

Should any research participants, research staff or students develop signs or symptoms suggestive of COVID-19, please follow the recommended institutional protocol and contact:

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) hotline: 0800 029 999 (number operational Monday to Friday from 08:00 until 16:00)

Campus Health Services:

- Stellenbosch Campus 021 808 3496/3494
- Tygerberg Campus 021 938 9590

After hours emergency number: 076 431 0305

Provincial Hotline: 021 928 4102

Where this pertains to REC-approved research studies, the relevant REC must also be informed. Please visit [SU's COVID-19 webpage](#) regularly for institutional updates as well as information on the health protocols and guidelines relating to the pandemic.

Staff and students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the following documents:

- HREC: FMHS Position statement on Research Ethics in the time of COVID-19
- REC: Social, Behavioural and Education Research: Position statement on responsible research conduct during COVID-19

Sincerely,

Prof Eugene Cloete  
Vice-Rector: Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Studies

SAAM VORENTOE | MASIYE PHAMBILI | FORWARD TOGETHER

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ik=9c5370c1da&view=pt&search=all&permmsgid=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207&simpl=msg-f%3A1661874560542242207>

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## APPENDIX I: AFAM ACCEPTANCE



27<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Ms. Obaa Akua Konadu-Osei



Dear Ms. Konadu-Osei:

Congratulations, you have been accepted to attend the Virtual Africa Faculty Development (AFD) Workshop from 21<sup>st</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021 sponsored by the Africa Academy of Management (AFAM) and hosted by the University of Stellenbosch Business School (South Africa). We are very pleased to accept you and hope that you will have an enriching experience.

**To proceed with your attendance, the following administrative details are required from you:**

1. If you are no longer able to attend, please inform me by **30<sup>th</sup> April 2021** via email: [m\\_acquaa@uncg.edu](mailto:m_acquaa@uncg.edu).
2. The virtual workshop will commence on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 with an opening plenary. The closing plenary will be held on Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021.
3. Send a Microsoft Word Document copy of your research paper or doctoral proposal **by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021**.
4. More details about the workshop programme will be sent prior to 21<sup>st</sup> June 2021 as well as the necessary virtual links.
5. You need to pay the \$50 administrative fee to AFAM by Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2021 to confirm your place in the workshop. The banking details are as follows:  
Bank Name: Bank of America  
Bank Address: 3303 Battleground Avenue, Greensboro, NC 27410, USA  
Account Name: The Africa Academy of Management (AFAM)  
Account Number: 237022389886  
Swift Code: BOFAUS3N  
Routing Number: 053000196

You can also make the payment by credit card by using the donation link at: <https://www.africaacademyofmanagement.org/civCRM/contribute/transact?reset=1&id=5>

6. If you're not a member of AFAM, you must register as a member of AFAM and pay your membership dues before you can participate in the Workshop.

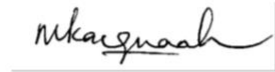
*"Advancing Knowledge and Research in Africa"*





We will keep you informed of all logistics. If you need assistance with meeting the administrative requirements, please don't hesitate to contact me.

On Behalf of the AFDW Organizing Team

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Acquah', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Professor Moses Acquah  
Professor Stella Nkomo  
Professor Dorothy Mpabanga



## **APPENDIX J: PEER FEEDBACK ON MANUSCRIPT FROM AFRICAN FACULTY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP (AFDW) PARTICIPANT**

**Title of Paper:** From Eve to Sisyphus: Exploring identity work strategies by women in blue-collar roles in male-dominated industries in South Africa.

**Author:** Obaa Akua KONADU-OSEI

**Originality:** Does the paper or proposal contain new and a significant contribution to the topic? Suggestions for improvement?

There is clearly a potential significant contribution but the document does not fully develop.

Needs to clarify what the research question in the introduction.

Definition of blue collar needed in this case since most participants have post matric qualifications?

**Literature Review:** Does the paper or proposal demonstrate an adequate understanding of the relevant literature in the field and cite an appropriate range of literature sources? Is any significant work ignored? Suggestions for Improvement?

There is adequate literature review which is relevant to the study

Literature is descriptive, less integrated in most parts

Argument weak – less golden thread-

Literature does not lead to logical research questions

You have identified above - Strategies, Tactics, Processes and Narratives frames- but no in-depth discussion on these. What is your focus? Have not done justice in discussing literature on strategies.

Thus, the reader is not convinced that there is a real Gap.

No theory explicitly discussed.

**Theoretical Framework:** Is the paper's or proposal's argument built on an appropriate base of theory, concepts, or other ideas? Suggestions for improvement?

Theoretical lens discussed not clear-

Refers to In-group-outgroup- Social identity theory – but does not discuss it as a theory to use as a lens

**Methodology:** Are the methods employed appropriate? Suggestions for improvement?

Appropriate

Sampling criteria clear and defended

Good angle of ubuntu approach given the context of the study

Grounded theory: need to be more detailed in the analysis phase

Quality and rigour?? Not explicit.

Wondering if a narrative approach could not have done a better job??

**Results:** Are results presented clearly and analysed appropriately? Do the conclusions adequately tie together the other elements of the paper or proposal? Suggestions for improvement?

Clear presentation

Analysis relatively done (has drawn themes and categorised them) - but mostly descriptive findings- further synthesis of the finding could improve this section. For example, a conceptual model/framework derived from the findings of hat strategies how these occurs both at personal and interpersonal level could improve the presentation of your findings.

Discussion section could be improved in bring the literature elements together with the findings confirm or disconfirm.




## APPENDIX K: PUBLICATION IN JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS

Journal of Business Ethics  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05220-z>

ORIGINAL PAPER

Check for updates

## Methodological Decolonisation and Local Epistemologies in Business Ethics Research

Obaa Akua Konadu-Osei<sup>1,2</sup>  · Smaranda Boroş<sup>1,2</sup>  · Anita Bosch<sup>1,2</sup> 

Received: 2 March 2021 / Accepted: 20 July 2022  
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**Abstract**  
 This paper contributes to the discussion on methodological decolonisation in business ethics research by illustrating how local epistemologies can shape methodology. Historically, business ethics research has been dominated by Western methodologies, which have been argued to be restrictive and limit contextually relevant theorising in non-Western contexts. Over the past decade, scholarship has called for more diversity in research methods and epistemologies. This paper regards arguments founded along neatly divided universalist versus contextualised methodologies as a false dilemma. Instead, we explore how *ubuntu*, a sub-Saharan African epistemology, can contribute as a complementary epistemology and methodology to interpretivism when conducting business ethics research in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper discusses four aspects—research agenda, access, power relations, and context-sensitive methods—that highlight practical ways in which *ubuntu* epistemology, with its communitarian and relational underpinnings, can enhance business ethics research. We illustrate that methodological decolonisation can be achieved by fusing relevant elements of local epistemologies and methodologies and conventional methodologies to generate context-relevant research approaches.

**Keywords** Business ethics research · Decolonising research · Governance research · Interpretivism · Local epistemologies · *Ubuntu*

**Background**  
 Business ethics research has embraced a diverse array of scholarship relating to geographical, disciplinary, and methodological diversity. The role and dominance of Western epistemologies and methodologies in business ethics research in non-Western contexts continue to be challenged by sustained advocacy for local epistemologies and methodologies (Adeleye et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2021). In line with calls for deepening methods in business ethics research (Freeman & Greenwood, 2020), this paper joins others (Adeleye et al., 2020; Bell et al., 2021; Lutz, 2009) who interrogate epistemological and methodological underpinnings of business ethics research in non-Western contexts, and offers more inclusive and potentially relevant ways forward. In this spirit, we tackle three gaps in business ethics research: epistemological blind spots, mechanisms of marginalisation of non-Western epistemes, and the potential and challenges of local<sup>1</sup> epistemologies such as *ubuntu* in the production of scientific knowledge. Contributing to the dialogue on methodological decolonising from a Global South perspective, we propose an example of integrating research methodologies and research ethics protocols premised on the epistemologies of research participants. In this way, we answer the call of Adyanga (2012) to “engage with indigenous knowledge discursive frameworks and anti-colonial and transformative learning theories to pave a way for a clear understanding of the process of knowledge production” (p. 605).

**Footnotes:**  
<sup>1</sup> Local here connotes self-organising principles (such as language, history, religion, and ecology) unique to a group of people, and not necessarily a geographical label (Okere et al., 2005).

✉ Obaa Akua Konadu-Osei  
 oakonadu@gmail.com  
 Smaranda Boroş  
 smaranda.boros@vlerick.com  
 Anita Bosch  
 anita.bosch@usb.ac.za

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<sup>2</sup> Present Address: Vlerick Business School, Avenue du Boulevard 21, 1200 Brussels, Belgium

Published online: 14 August 2022

Springer

Konadu-Osei, O. A., Boroş, S., & Bosch, A. (2022). Methodological decolonisation and local epistemologies in business ethics research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 1-12.

## APPENDIX L: FEEDBACK TO PARTICIPANTS

Women workers: <https://youtu.be/CRS68DNCzpk>

Colleagues: <https://youtu.be/ceddsq9sZwQ>

HR representatives: <https://youtu.be/knKX7iY086M>